



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL THAME, OXFORDSHIRE

Inspection dates 22nd - 23rd May 2012
Reporting Inspector Mr Joseph Skivington

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4-11 years
Number on roll	184
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mr Darren Baker
School address	Brook Lane Thame Oxfordshire OX9 2AB
Telephone number	01844 214278
E-mail address	admin.3826@st-josephs.oxon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	June 2007
DFE School number	932 3826
Unique Reference Number	123209

Headteacher Mrs Claire Kerr

DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Evidence

The inspection was carried out by 1 Diocesan Inspector. The focus of the inspection was on the effectiveness and use of the school's self evaluation of religious education (RE) and Catholic life. To validate the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation of teaching and learning, the inspector observed 5 RE lessons. In addition the inspector completed a work scrutiny and held a discussion with pupils to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time. He held meetings with the chair of governors, staff, and parish priest. He observed a Mass, a hymn practice/assembly, prayers in the Mary garden, the presentation of the Catholic life of the school, and pupils' behaviour. He looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self evaluation such as RAISEonline, the development plan and teachers' planning. Alongside the validation of school self evaluation, the inspector gathered evidence about assessment for learning, evidence which will be shared with other diocesan schools.

Information about the school

St Joseph's is a smaller than average size Catholic primary school serving the parish of St Joseph in Thame in Oxfordshire. The number of Catholic pupils is currently 70% of the total. The proportion of ethnic minority pupils is low, as are the number of pupils eligible for free school meals and the percentage of those with special needs and/or disabilities. Attainment on entry is in line with the national average. The close relationship and involvement with the parish is a strong feature.

Main Finding

In its self evaluation, St Joseph's judges itself to be a good school and the evidence from the inspection confirms this to be the case. All pupils benefit from and contribute to its vibrant Catholic ethos and their response to the excellent provision for collective worship is outstanding. The provision and outcomes from the religious education programme are good. The hands-on support from the governors is consistent and effective, while inspiring leadership has proven its effectiveness and ability to move the school on. The senior leadership team knows the school well and has clear plans, which have their origin in increasingly effective procedures for monitoring provision and outcomes.

School self evaluation

The school uses effective self evaluation procedures through frequent reviews and reflection on its current practice, which are however not always formally assessed, but do lead to articulated aims and measurable objectives which are incorporated into the school development plan, such as improved assessment and tracking and the need for more multi faith experiences. The school recognises the advantage of a revisit and reflection on the school's mission, which will be included in its short term plan and involve all the pupils as well as staff and parents.

The solidly good teaching and learning of RE is monitored regularly through subject review, lesson observations, and book trawls. These are programmed and timely carried out, with discernible impact on improved performance and outcomes although not always consistently in all years, such as building in more accessible tasks for the less able, or spreading the outstanding practice which does exist. There is a good balance between the content of RE and the pupils' grasp of what it means in their daily live, evident in some very remarkable poetry, psalms and prayers composed by the pupils themselves, for instance, moving empathetic accounts of Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane.

The curriculum is broad, balanced and accessible to all pupils, based on *Learning and Growing as People of God*. The excellently planned and presented liturgical life of the school is enriching as the Church's calendar unfolds and is celebrated. Evaluation of impact is being made an integral aspect of reviewing the quality of collective worship. The relationships education programme is likewise well planned, as is the sacramental preparation programme run by the school closely with the parish.

There is a continuous focus on self evaluation and review which touches every area of Catholic life and RE, and which is beginning to make a real difference to outcomes. There is a real sense that leadership is, and has been since the last inspection, on a mission to make this school the best possible, and the school is correct in judging its capacity to improve as good.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

Outcomes for pupils in RE are good, with variation closely linked to the quality of the teaching they receive. Pupils' base assessment in RE indicates prior knowledge and religious experience to be in line with expectation. By the end of Key Stage 1 attainment is above expected levels, and by the end of Year 6 the most able achieve above, and in some cases well above expectation. This represents good achievement. Pupils with particular learning needs are well catered for and make the same good progress as the others, although in some cases written tasks are clearly beyond their capabilities so that work is left unfinished. Extra challenge is provided for the more able pupils, where they can delve deeper into a topic and have to make real intellectual effort, as well as being encouraged to voice their own questions. Examples of these include confronting the problem of evil in God's world, or what will happen to people at the end of time who have not had the chance to learn about God and Jesus. Pupils are unanimous in saying they enjoy RE lessons and appreciate that they have the opportunity to feedback to their teachers on how best they learn in lessons. For example, one pupil writes: '(Teacher) gives us the opportunity to expand our learning through drama activities and music. We really enjoyed writing our own verses to a song about Mary which we all sang. I was very proud when my verse was chosen to be sung'. Their positive behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent and this contributes much to their learning.

The pupils through their time at St. Joseph's absorb and internalise the attitudes and values inspired by the message of Jesus. They well understand the connection between these and how they should act towards others and behave in their own lives. They are quick to praise, to thank and to forgive. Every pupil regardless of faith, or none, feels a valued member of the school community, and participates eagerly and reverently in prayer and liturgy. They are increasingly taking the lead in planning and presenting their own class assemblies, as well as being willing servers, readers and singers at Mass. Attendance and participation in the Sunday parish Mass is remarkably high, in some year groups up to 60% of the pupils and their families. At Mass in the parish church the Year 6 pupils lead and sit with the younger children in a real celebration and active liturgy.

Pupils' response to prayer invitations and the excellent provision is very impressive, with an enthusiastic response to the prayer bags ('I chose to create a prayer focus area in my own bedroom') and the frequent visits to the Mary Garden. Prayer becomes part of their daily lives. Pupils write: 'I like quiet time to talk to God', and again, 'I like being a prayer leader and helping my friends to say their prayers'. They pray well and their own compositions reflect their growing maturity and understanding. They sing with tremendous enthusiasm and obvious gusto. This excellent response sits well with the school's own

¹ As the quality of the school self evaluation has been affirmed, the judgements in this section of the report conform to those of the school.

self evaluation and demonstrates the value of pupils' evaluation and their contribution to Catholic life and the school's life of prayer and worship.

Provision is good overall, with both good and outstanding teaching observed. The best teaching involves the pupils fully in their own learning and encourages independent and peer work. Teaching assistants give good support displaying their own initiative. Planning is effective although it does not always take account of prior learning particularly in the case of setting lesson objectives, which target the learning needs and abilities of individual pupils. The marking of written work varies in terms of impact on progress over time, but overall good practice is making a real difference in creating a formative dialogue between teacher and pupil. This is well led in the first instance by the RE co-ordinator.

Assessment for learning is developing well with teachers becoming increasingly adept at assessment using the level indicators. They find these descriptions and band levels very helpful because they give meaning and focus to what they are trying to teach, and in this respect the school is well ahead of many others. Although the school is gathering relevant information on levels of attainment and progress, this data is not yet informing teaching strategies and lesson planning consistently and effectively across all classes. One effective strategy used to determine the level of learning is the basketball game, which entails every pupil holding the ball at the end of a lesson and explaining what they have learned. This both reinforces learning, and uncovers areas of misunderstanding and confusion, which can then be corrected subsequently. The well balanced curriculum meets the needs of all pupils and allows them to become acquainted with other world religions. They themselves express a great interest in learning more about other beliefs and cultures and would like to have more time to explore these. The school is working on developing extra opportunities to see these religions at work and witness in real life.

Recommendations

- Ensure that the quality of written work is more closely monitored, particularly in terms of differentiated tasks pitched well to meet the learning needs of the less able pupils.
- Ensure that assessment of pupils' work does not stop at the information gathering stage, but rather leads to smarter lesson planning, and the shaping of teaching strategies to meet the individual learning needs of all the pupils.



June 2012

Diocesan Education Service,
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Dear Parents and Carers

Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St Joseph's Primary School, Thame

I am writing this letter to share with you the findings of the diocesan inspection of your children's school. Diocesan inspection now explores in detail the school's own view of itself as expressed in its self-evaluation. For this reason, much of the report is more technical than used to be the case. You are still entitled to have a copy of the full report should you want one and it will be available on the school website or by request from the school office.

The school has a good and distinctive Catholic ethos which informs all that it does. The present leadership is making a significant impact on developing its Catholicity, based solidly on clear vision and self evaluation, which will sustain and move the school forward. Pupils speak very highly of the school and are using the opportunities to become involved and take ownership of their own education well. Their attainment and achievement is good. The pupils enjoy their work in RE and are eager and valued members of the school community. Their response to the excellent provision for collective worship is outstanding. Teaching in RE is good and I observed some outstanding as well as good lessons.

I have recommended that the school should keep a closer eye on the quality of the written work of the pupils, and in particular that the tasks are better matched to their individual abilities and learning needs. In addition, I have suggested that the assessment data on pupils' levels of attainment and achievement be more creatively used by all teachers, in order to shape their lessons and their teaching strategies to meet the needs of all pupils.

I met and talked with many of the pupils, whom we found were invariably welcoming and courteous, and was impressed by the contribution they make to the school community and their own education. They are a credit to the school and to their families and those who care for them.

It was a pleasure and privilege to inspect St Joseph's and I wish it every success on its road to excellence.

Yours sincerely

Joseph Skivington
Diocesan Inspector