



INSPECTION REPORT

St. Gildas Catholic Primary School

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URN: 123857

Head teacher: Mrs Deborah Evans

Chair of Governors: Mr Colin Young

**Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Clifton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005**

Date of inspection: June 15-16th 2017
Date of previous inspection: 9-10th July 2012

Reporting Inspector: Mr Joseph Skivington
Additional Inspector: Mrs Sarah Wembridge

Description of the school

St. Gildas is a single form entry Catholic primary school with 210 pupils on roll, 54% of whom are Catholic. The school serves the parishes of The Holy Ghost, Yeovil and St. Michael, South Petherton. The percentage of White British (39%) is well below the national average, and the main ethnic minority group is Eastern European. Approximately 59.5% of pupils have English as a second language. There is a recent growth in the number of pupil premium children. Approximately 12% of pupils have been identified as having special educational needs. The level of prior attainment on entry to the school is below national expectation. The present head teacher is retiring and a new acting head of school has been appointed for September.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

Grade 2

This is a good school because:

- it is an open and welcoming school where pupils and their families, from all faiths and none, are warmly invited and integrated. The school has good leadership, which has sustained a good quality of Catholic life, although it needs to take further steps to improve provision and outcomes in RE;
- the pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding. They demonstrate thoughtful care and respect for each other, and they have a positive attitude to learning;
- the quality of teaching and learning across the school requires improvement, in order that the pupils can make better progress towards good achievement over time;
- the pupils, particularly in the chaplaincy team, make a good contribution towards Catholic life and pupils' response to the prayer life of the school is also good.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop is good

- The school has successfully identified its strengths and weaknesses and has drawn up plans to improve practice and outcomes. There has been a significant turnover of staff in recent years, with challenges regarding teachers' prior experience and subject knowledge. The school has employed effective strategies to sustain the teaching of RE.
- The head teacher and governors have clear and effective processes for the monitoring of Catholic life through the Education and Welfare committee which reports back regularly to the full governing body.
- The two areas for improvement noted in the last inspection have been addressed, although not yet been fully secured. The school has done much good work in improving the use of assessment and recording to support pupils' self evaluation skills, and helping teachers to establish 'Next Steps' formative feedback, but its best efforts have been too often stymied by the unavoidable turnover of staff.
- The development of the skills of staff and pupils in planning and leading worship independently has been successful, and has led to more ownership of, and involvement in, collective worship by the pupils.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality and effectiveness of all teaching up to the level of the existing best practice, particularly through the development of teachers' subject knowledge and understanding
- Ensure that the RE curriculum, particularly the lesson learning objectives, reflects more clearly the levels of pupils' attainment, so that tasks engage and challenge, and meet pupils' abilities and learning needs more effectively.
- Develop the critical and challenging role of the governing body, in order to ensure more rigorous monitoring and detailed knowledge of the provision and outcomes of RE.

How good are outcomes for pupils, taking account of variations between different groups?

Grade 2

a) The extent to which pupils understand, contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school

- Catholic life and the pupils' contribution to it are a real strength of the school. The pupils can articulate the distinctive nature of the school well, because they have been closely involved in reflecting on, and contributing to the mission statement. This they do at the start of every year on a formal basis, with each class taking a section of the statement to discuss, reflect on and then express in their own words.
- Pupils can articulate the impact that the prayer life of the school has on their view of life and their relationship with others, understanding the links between faith and action, reflected also in British values. In particular, the older pupils have the opportunity to ask the Big Questions of life and value this challenge. The school prayer is said every day and the values promoted by the school kept very much to the forefront of the children's lives.
- The chaplaincy team, representing every year group, take the lead in promoting the prayer life of the school, and are developing the skills of planning and organising their own liturgies. They are also excellent role models for the other pupils. They have taken responsibility for assessing aspects of the leaders in Faith award at Key Stage 2. The involvement of all pupils in the programme is progressing successfully with many bronze and silver awards.
- Older pupils increasingly take on a range of responsibilities. They mentor the younger children, and are alert to the needs of others. Their feedback through Pupil Voice helps the school to make improvements. They play an important role in raising money for charities both locally and globally, such as Children in Need, St. Margaret's Hospice, and Shoeboxes for the Homeless. These are directly inspired by the chaplaincy team's selection of 'Feeding the Hungry' as their continuing corporal work of mercy, and focus for 'Making a Difference'.
- Pupils have a genuine respect for those from different backgrounds. This is due to a growing understanding of different faiths, which they have studied and reflected on in RE. There is a real sense of belonging and respect for others, regardless of faith or none, which is an outstanding aspect of this warm, inclusive school. The pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding, and they demonstrate real care and concern for their peers, be it helping someone who is struggling in lessons, or the simple courtesy of bringing a chair for another, without being asked. In this they live out the values of Care, Courtesy and Consideration displayed prominently around the school.
- The links with the parish are strong. Pupils are involved in parish liturgies and the sacramental preparation programme is led from the parish with the school.

b) How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

- The quality of pupils' learning and achievement requires improvement in order to be good. Pupils come from a variety of faith backgrounds and practice. Most enter the school with levels of knowledge and understanding of RE below expectation. They

make steady progress in the Early Years where the children have a good introduction to RE through story, prayer and reflection. This early progress is not consistently maintained through Key Stage 1. In the written work in Year 1, for instance, there is not enough evidence of progress over time, and a similar picture emerges in Year 2. Scriptural knowledge is weak, often limited by the schemes of work. There is some extended writing in the pupils' books, but more often there are 'stuck-in' worksheets which are not always differentiated and not always completed. By the end of Key Stage 1 there is evidence of progress but this is below expectation given the pupils' starting points.

- By the end of Key Stage 2, many pupils have not made the expected progress relative to their starting points. Attainment data is not sufficiently reliable to make dependable and accurate measures of progress because written tasks are short, with little challenge or opportunity to make any real intellectual effort. Again, it is difficult to assess progress because of the lack of work, the depth of pupil response, and progression through the key stage. There are good examples of more extended writing in the upper years but these are produced by a minority of the pupils. The low level of tasks that pupils are given, and the low expectation in the learning objectives, effectively block any progress or improvement.
- Other groups such as those with SEN, and disadvantaged pupils, make similar but sometimes better progress because of planned interventions and the pro-active support of learning assistants. Not all tasks, however, are differentiated to meet their learning needs.
- Pupils' ability to learn independently, and with others is not yet embedded. They are not encouraged sufficiently to actively seek to improve their knowledge, and there is not a sufficiently academic approach to RE as a subject, to explore and to provide the pupils with insights into the scriptures. It is clear, however, that most can make the connection between what we believe and how we think and act.
- Pupils' ability to understand and critically reflect on our faith story, and that of others also needs to be further developed. They do enjoy their learning, but become disengaged when there is repetitive teaching, too much re-telling of stories, and too much time spent on the same task.

c) How well pupils lead, respond to and participate in the Prayer Life of the School

- All pupils irrespective of faith background participate fully, and feel included, in the prayer life of the school. They show reverence, attentiveness, and willingness to play their part. They are ready and eager to be more involved in the organising, and presentation of their liturgies and assemblies. Pupils of other faiths are given the opportunity to worship as appropriate.
- Pupils already have the examples and role modelling of the chaplaincy team, with their high profile around the school. The implementation of Leaders in Faith has enabled more pupils to plan and lead worship in Years 3 to 6. They make good use of class and school reflection areas for personal prayer, such as the Prayer Fence, the Prayerful Petals, and the new garden prayer area. The pupils have formed a voluntary Rosary Club, and they make the 14 Stations of the Resurrection around the school.
- Pupils value the many prayer opportunities during the school day. They have a good, progressive knowledge of the traditional prayers and have some understanding of the

ritual and prayer different from their own through their study of Islam and Judaism. They compose their own heartfelt prayers and reflections, displayed on the prayer tables and in their books.

- The sacramental and liturgical life of the school is reflected in the assemblies, the class and whole school Masses, and the celebrations throughout the Church's liturgical year of the life of Jesus, and the saints. The Children's liturgy has been re introduced to the parish Sunday Mass.

How effective are leaders and governors in developing the Catholic Life of the school?

Grade 2

a) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils

- Leaders and governors effectively promote, nurture and sustain the Catholic ethos of the school as their primary concern and care, and are able to articulate it and share this with the staff and parents.
- The governing body is a positive influence in the life of the school. They meet all the statutory, canonical, and diocesan requirements fully. They are acquainted with, and have reflected on the People of Hope document, how it can influence the school. This has been successfully implemented.
- Reliable processes of self evaluation ensure that judgements on Catholic life are accurate. There are frequent monitoring visits by the Education and Welfare committee, who, together with the head teacher, report to the full governing body. The school also asks parents, staff and pupils, through discussions and questionnaires, their views and suggestions for improvement, and consequently it has a realistic view of what has to be done to improve and grow.
- Provision for staff induction and in service training to develop staff understanding and commitment to the Church's mission is good. Staff spirituality is well supported with staff taking time to pray together regularly. Links with the parish are strong and the parish priest is a supportive and welcome presence in the school. There is at least one Inset day annually devoted specifically to Catholic life and spirituality. The governing body funded and supported a very successful and fruitful School Mission in September 2016, working in partnership with the parish, which also ran a mission led by the Sion Community.
- Leaders are open to advice from outside agencies, including the diocese, and share a renewed determination to move the school forward in close collaboration with the other Dunstan partnership schools. There has been recent joint partnership training run by the diocese.
- Formal and informal strategies have developed excellent links with families, especially those with little experience of the life and work of catholic schools in UK. The Catholic teaching assistants from the Polish and Keralan communities contribute much to this work.

b) How well leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the curriculum for Religious Education and relationship education, and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils

- Leaders and governors have not yet used the existing RE data and monitoring information fully and effectively to evaluate the school's performance in order to plan future improvements. This is an area which requires improvement and which the school recognises as a priority.
- Governors receive regular RE reports through the head teacher. They recognise that the RE coordinator has made sterling efforts to keep the subject running despite the recent turbulence caused by persistent staff turnover, and the need to give significant support to often less experienced teachers with limited RE subject knowledge. The governors' own level of rigorous challenge and detailed knowledge of RE is unclear from the governor's minutes, and also what the impact of individual governors being assigned to each year group has been.
- Learning walks around the school, lesson observations, and book scrutinies have correctly identified the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning, and these are fed into provision for staff induction and in service training. There is not yet a consistent impact on pupils' learning or teachers becoming more confident in assessment and in setting learning objectives. This is due to the high turnover of teaching staff and the need to train new staff.
- A new and welcome staff stability, however, is developing and morale is positive. Leadership is very helpful and supportive especially in inducting the new teachers with training such as the New to Catholic Education programme, and a staff reflective retreat. New teachers are paired with more experienced teachers, providing a more collegiate approach to lesson observations and peer assessment. This is beginning to make a difference in increasing teacher confidence.
- A subject development plan has been drawn up and used as an annotated working document, which is added to or otherwise amended during the course of each term. Assessment skills are a key area identified by the school and leadership has drawn on valuable diocesan and Dunstan partnership support.

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Grade 2

a) The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education

- The quality of teaching in RE requires improvement. There are examples of good and better teaching, but also more teaching which does not promote purposeful learning, engagement, enjoyment and the best progress that the pupils are capable of making. The subject knowledge of teachers is not always secure and this prevents them from leading their pupils to a deeper understanding and insight into the topics covered in RE.
- Learning assistants are closely involved in planning lessons with the teacher, so that interventions have a positive effect on progress. On occasion, the less able pupils have the same whole class tasks without the much needed differentiation.
- Teachers need to encourage more independent learning through challenging tasks, which better meet the pupil's individual abilities. The school is also aware of the

constant need to encourage pupils to write more reflectively and at length. They could achieve this by looking at examples of levelled work to guide and inspire them.

- The school has identified weaker areas where there is insufficient challenge in terms of questioning or lower expectations of pupils' written work and presentation. Where teachers have high expectations of pupils' presentation of work and intellectual effort, the pupils rise to the challenge and are able to contribute their own arguments and opinions. This latter good practice needs to be shared across the school.
- More effective systems for the tracking and monitoring of pupil progress over time have still to be evolved and then embedded. The assessment and marking policies are in place. However, the school's own scrutiny of pupils' written work reveals inconsistencies in both, and discrepancy between the over generous attainment levels given, and the quality of the actual work in their books. The school is working hard to increase the accuracy and reliability of moderation.
- The marking of pupils' work is often helpful in showing them how to improve, but is not consistent in all classes. The impact on progress over time would be enhanced enormously by more challenging teacher comments, which elicit a more extended, thoughtful response from the pupils and requires real intellectual effort.
- Assessment is not yet consistently informing the learning objectives in lessons. Greater attention needs to be placed on the learning challenges inherent in the lesson objective.

b) The extent to which the Curriculum promotes pupils' learning

- The curriculum does not always provide continuity and progression between key stages to ensure that pupils whatever the starting points are able to make consistent progress. The syllabus needs more attention especially to shaping relevant learning objectives which engage and challenge all pupils in their learning.
- The RE curriculum meets all Bishops Conferences requirements. It is broad and balanced so that students can explore and develop their own values and beliefs. They explore themes such as fairness, compassion and injustice, which they then link to their charity fundraising, and their outreach to needier members of society.
- The study of other world faiths is given great importance in this inclusive school because it promotes tolerance, understanding, and respect for others, especially cultural and religious differences. Provision for sex and relationship education is in place and approved by the governors adhering to diocesan guidelines.
- The curriculum design promotes spiritual, moral and vocational development and is taught through the lens of the Faith.
- The sacramental preparation programme for First Holy Communion is run in the parish in close collaboration with the school.

c) The quality of the Prayer life provided by the School

- The prayer life of the school is good. It is fully inclusive and joyful. Prayer punctuates the school day and is part of every celebration. There is an ongoing plan to encourage more pupils to organise and lead collective worship, starting with the older pupils led by the chaplaincy team.
- Pupils experience the regular Masses and the celebration of the feasts in the Church's calendar, as well as the special seasons of Advent, Lent, Easter and Pentecost. There are

also opportunities to learn the traditional Catholic devotions such as the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross. The prayer methods and styles used by the school are age appropriate. There are retreat opportunities for the older pupils.

- There are colourful and thought provoking displays around the school which remind the whole community of the liturgical cycle, the topics the pupils are currently studying, and are supportive of the school's vibrant Catholic life. They are attractive, and reinforce the mission and values of the school.
- Parents and carers attend Mass and assemblies when they can, and the provision for the engagement of parents, local parishes and other faith communities is good.
- The school's prayer life is closely monitored and evaluated and leads to action for improvement, such as the Prayer Fence, the garden prayer area, and the 14 Stations of the Resurrection, all of which have enriched the prayer life of the whole school community.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

All 70 returned parental questionnaires were very positive about the school and the quality of their children's education. Some typical responses included:

'I chose this school because it is a faith school. I like that it is a small school, its diversity, and the well behaved, respectful children'.

'It is a warm and welcoming school....my daughter feels safe and she is really happy. It is Catholic and promotes Catholic values'.

'We chose it because we are Catholic and want our son to be brought up in a Catholic environment. This school offers great education in a more focussed environment'.