



St Dominic Catholic Primary School

Southdown Road, Harpenden, Herts AL5 1PF

Date of inspection: 11th September 2014

A. Classroom Religious Education

What is the overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy?

Overall Grade I*

Classroom religious education is outstanding in developing pupils' religious literacy. The majority of pupils in an age appropriate way can communicate knowledgeably about their faith. They attain and surpass the religious literacy skills appropriate for them as proposed in the Curriculum Directory. The school maintains records of each pupil's progress in their levels of attainment in RE and their abilities to articulate the meaning of what they are learning. The pupils have positive attitudes to learning as a result of the outstanding ethos that encourages them to do their best. The school is involved in diocesan and area moderation meetings and is confident about the benchmarks it sets for RE achievement. The school is characterised by effective differentiation in teaching schemes for pupils of differing abilities, ensuring each pupil reaches their potential. The leadership and management of RE is outstanding. The staff enjoy clear guidance, focussed INSET, and a vision for very good religious education which inspires them, and through them the pupils. The diocesan policies and guidelines for religious education are embedded in the school's religious education programme.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?

Overall Grade I*

The pupils experience a quality of Catholic education at St Dominic's that is unsurpassed. The Catholic life of the school is outstandingly effective in developing the pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing. Pupils are able to put into words what their faith means to them and what they should do to live it in their daily lives. Their confidence in and love of praying indicates they have been well introduced to the prayer and liturgy of the church. Their participation in both assemblies and classroom prayer indicates the effectiveness of the staff in introducing them to prayer. There are close links with the parents, the local parishes and diocesan education provision and staff. The school goes to special lengths to ensure the pupils hear about the breadth and diversity of other cultures and religions. The pupils are generous in their respect for each other in the school community and in their giving for those in need in the wider world. There is good understanding of the Common Good and the Church's social teaching. The headteacher, together with the Governors and teachers, is outstanding in promoting the vision of Catholic life and learning.

Introduction

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspectors spent 1 day in school, visited 10 lessons and 3 assemblies, and carried out 7 interviews with school staff, pupils and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, discussion with local clergy, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

The Inspection of St Dominic, Harpenden was carried out under the requirements of the Canon 806 and Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Framework for Section 48 Inspections approved by the Archbishop of Westminster. The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the school is in providing Catholic education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation.

Inspection Team

Deacon Anthony Clark
Mr Daniel Keane

Lead Inspector
Associate Inspector

Description of School

The school is a one form entry with two bulge years, in the LA of Hertfordshire and the locality of Harpenden. The school serves the parishes of Our Lady of Lourdes, Harpenden; St John Fisher, Redbourn; and St Thomas More, Wheathampstead. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 95.9%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 3.5% from other Faiths 0.3% and from no faith background 0.3%. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 60%.

There are 289 pupils on roll, with one pupil with a statement of Special Educational Need. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is well below average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is well below average. There is a well below average rate of families claiming free school meals. Six pupils receive the Pupil Premium.

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Headteacher: Mrs Elizabeth O'Brien
Chair of Governors: Mr Joe Duddy

Date of previous inspection: March 2009

Key for inspection grades:

<i>Grade 1*</i>	<i>Outstanding</i>
<i>Grade 1</i>	<i>Very Good</i>
<i>Grade 2</i>	<i>Good</i>
<i>Grade 3</i>	<i>Requires improvement</i>
<i>Grade 4</i>	<i>Causing Concern</i>

A. Classroom Religious Education

How religiously literate are pupils in the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith and how well do they know, understand and appreciate the importance of religious faith and practice in everyday life?

What has improved in classroom religious education since the last inspection?

The last inspection recommended that the school should embed the levels of attainment into the RE teaching with the emphasis on teacher assessment. The school has fully complied with this recommendation, especially in the implementation of the new RE programme 'Come and See' which it has adopted. Teachers are involved in discussions with each other as they prepare the benchmarks for the different levels that pupils achieve. This was evidenced in last year's pupil books which were made available to the inspectors, as the inspection took place at the very beginning of the autumn term.

How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?

Grade I*

The school is fully compliant in meeting the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. In both the term plans and the more immediate lesson plans there is careful matching of lesson outcomes to the themes and content of the Curriculum Directory. The inspectors considered the school had shown initiative in the imaginative and creative elements in its lesson plans making the Curriculum Directory relevant to the lives of the pupils. The pupils make good progress in having a deeper understanding of four main areas of the Directory over the years, evidenced by the quality of pupils work and responses to questions. The resources made available and the ICT skills and content that the teachers employ are all indications of the focus of the school on ensuring the directory is fully followed. The mapping of the directory to the 'Come and See' programme both in its overall design and the teachers' individual lessons were evidence of how well the requirements are met.

Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education

Grade I*

Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding as measured against the levels of attainment, the schools own internal systems and the wide range of portfolios seen. Attainment at St Dominic's is at least good or better than other core subject, both at the end of KS1 and KS2. Pupil Progress each year is very good. Few learners under-perform. Secure moderation is in place both within the school and in other settings outside. Pupil enthusiasm, enjoyment and engagement for learning during lessons is a noteworthy feature of St Dominic's. Most pupils take care and pride in their religious education work. The main displays seen in classrooms in Key Stage 1 and 2 were of a very high standard. Pupils are enthusiastic with their learning. They are informed clearly about how to take the next steps to make progress in their work. Religious literacy is outstanding as seen in the samples of classwork, learning walks and talking to pupils.

The quality of teaching

Grade I

Teaching of RE at St Dominic's is very good. In the course of the inspection, lessons observed ranged from good to outstanding. All teachers have high expectations and very good subject knowledge. This was evidenced in the range of class work seen and, for example, work on Abraham, creation, and forgiveness. Teachers successfully engage the pupils in their learning. Lesson

observations confirm the quality of teaching in RE to be very good. Teachers plan accurately and check pupils' work for understanding. Religious education time is well used. Marking and constructive feedback is given. Pupils enjoy religious education and the standard is very high. The close monitoring of the teaching by the senior leadership team, headteacher and religious education subject leader supports and ensures that religious education and teaching is at the centre of school life. Religious literacy has a high priority. Pupils, age appropriate, know what to complete and what needs to improve. The Curriculum Directory, Come and See, the Wednesday Word, other associated textbooks including bibles, all support and deepen the teaching of high quality religious education. There was also a great deal of respect shown between pupils and teachers in classes, who took time and care to answer what were some quite searching questions from the pupils. Teaching and learning assistants were very effective in all lessons seen and play a vital role in this school to help many pupils learn.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade 1*

The leadership and management of religious education is outstanding even though, at present, the quality of teaching is judged to be very good. The subject leader has established sound systems of support, monitoring and challenge, and these are well on course to influence the quality of teaching overall. The headteacher is the religious education subject leader and she devotes significant time and focus on resourcing and improving the teaching of religious education in the school. Religious education is seen as the front subject in this Catholic school and the teachers are effectively involved in planning and taking forward the subject in the overall curriculum. As well as ensuring that the content of the subject is known and understood, its implications for how it affects how teachers and pupils live out their lives are highlighted. The mission statement of the school is a pivot for this 'If we live by truth and in love we shall grow in Christ'. There are procedures in place to monitor all staff in their religious education delivery as well as support to help them develop it. It was noticeable the wide variety of teaching elements and styles that were employed at various stages in each class, eg drama, sculpting, speeches, singing . This variety was specifically noticeable in the activities devised for different ability groups following a plenary topic introduction. The teachers evidently have the confidence to try out various activities and evaluate them for effectiveness.

What should the school do to improve further in classroom religious education?

- Continue to induct new and non Catholic teachers into the religious education programme and its delivery
- Continue to become proficient in analysis of attainment levels and their application to classroom teaching and activities, especially for Levels 4 and 5.

B. The Catholic life of the school

How well do pupils experience the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing through all areas of school life?

What has improved since the last inspection?

There were no specific recommendations to the school in this area in the last inspection. However the school has made significant strides forward in building up the Catholic life of the school in a number of ways including the building of a prayer garden which is very accessible to the pupils, a comprehensive buddy system for pupil support and initiatives along with local parish priests to help parents in the task of developing the faith and practice of their children.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget

Grade I*

Religious Education is the core subject in the curriculum of the school. The school ensures that pupils and parents are welcomed into an educational community where faith in God's revelation and the gift of creation shines through in all aspects of the school's life. The requirement of the Bishops' Conference that 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education is met in all classes. Teachers receive regular and sustained support in developing their schemes of work, with further support being given to those who are new to teaching or are not Catholic. The school has a notable complement of TAs (teacher assistants) and in all classes they make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning and experience. The school has invested in significant resources for religious education, whether in the form of teaching materials, ICT provision, library books, or wall displays. The budget is generous reflecting the priority of the Governors for the Catholic life of the school.

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community.

Grade I*

Prayer and worship are central in the life of the school. The children experience a broad range of prayer opportunities and their response is respectful and reverent. The charism of the school reflects its Dominican foundation and both the school mission statement and the introduction in each year to the life and teaching of St Dominic mean that pupils can talk about the pictures of St Dominic to be found around the school. Assemblies are well planned and linked to both gospel priorities and current ecclesial issues – the whole school assembly attended during the inspection was devoted to the topic of the family, partly in preparation for the Synod in Rome next month. The pupils are engaged in preparation for the school and class Masses – they informed the inspectors on many occasions in the course of the inspection day that the Bishop had come to celebrate Mass just two days before to start the school's year and to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the school buildings. The setting up of a pupils' Liturgy Group has led to greater involvement of the children in the liturgical celebrations. Classrooms all have a prayer table or corner and the pupils were evidently used to being part of classroom prayers. The newly built Prayer Garden is becoming part of the prayer focus of the school though there needs to be further development of its use. Resources are in place to help pupils, teachers and parents in developing the prayer life of the school. The priests from the surrounding parishes are regular visitors.

The commitment and contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice.

Grade I*

Pupils know and understand the gospel call to justice and service as witnessed in the international, national and local school activities. They collect and raise money for a wide range of charities. These include Cafod, the Westminster's Children's Society, Keech Hospice and Great Ormond street as worthy examples. Within the school there is real respect and support for every individual child. Every pupil matters in the school. There is a real sense of purpose. The pupils do recognise their responsibility as members of a catholic community to the poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged. The outstanding music and voices of the school choir further contributes to the common good and the shared values of the school. Pupils are encouraged to develop their gifts and talents, both in class and around the school. This was expressed and evidenced firstly at the headteacher assembly, with a pupil playing a special piece of music on the piano (on entry to the hall) and later with pupils from year six, who were talking about the school year theme of Choose to Shine. "If we live by truth and in love we shall grow in Christ". The Mission Statement is used both as prayer and a reference point. The school gives witness as a Catholic community to the rule and life of St Dominic.

Enabling the authentic partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf;

Grade I*

The school is committed to the real partnership between parents, school and parishes as an integral part of the diocese. It puts into practice this partnership with the diocese through the attendance of Governors, the leadership and the teaching staff at diocesan conferences and courses. The priests from the three linked parishes are welcome visitors and the parish priest of St Thomas More is both a foundation governor and the link governor for religious education. In the course of the inspection there was clear evidence of his involvement and contribution, though he himself was unable to meet the inspectors as he was away recuperating. The school receives particular counsel from the diocese on admissions as it is the only Catholic school in its area of Hertfordshire and is not able to give places to all Catholic children. The headteacher is involved in religious education moderation with neighbouring Catholic schools and is part of the Herts headteacher consortium. There is strong partnership with the parents, as evidenced by the questionnaire, the invitation to attend assemblies and the happiness of the parents with the school.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school.

Grade I*

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding in their promotion of the Catholic life of the school. The chair of Governors and the Governing body are focussed in their role to ensure that the school is faithful to the vision of Catholic education, instilling Gospel values into the ethos of the school. Some of the governors are parish catechists and both governors and parents comment on how the teachers witness to what they teach. The mission statement underpins all aspects of the school curriculum. The Governors and staff are focussing particularly this year on developing the role of TAs in the life of the school. The leadership of the school is fully supportive of the many charity events, commitment to working cooperatively with local schools and the local environment. Staff development, in-service and induction on the religious nature of Catholic education are recurrent each year – this year a Dominican priest is coming to talk on the Dominican charism.

What should the school do to develop further the Catholic life of the school?

- Develop the ways in which the Prayer Garden is used in the life of the school.
- Promote opportunities for parents to develop their theological understanding of themselves as believers and parents.