

Westminster Diocese Inspection Report

St Vincent de Paul Catholic School

Bedwell Crescent, Stevenage, Herts SG1 1NJ

Date of inspection: 26 May 2016



A. Classroom Religious Education

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

Overall Grade 2

The previous inspection found that the school required improvement in the areas of quality of teaching, pupil achievement and the leadership and management of religious education. All these areas have been successfully addressed and are now good, with leadership and management being outstanding. New religious education resources, linked to the Bishops' Curriculum Directory are effective in developing pupils' religious literacy. Pupils enjoy their learning in religious education and are articulate in describing their progress. In-service training is in place to ensure all teachers are fully conversant with the religious education curriculum. The school has put in place a good system of monitoring and provides continuous professional development for staff. Pupil attainment is properly assessed and moderation meetings with other schools and the diocese ensure that teachers are sound in their judgements of levels of achievement. The governors, headteacher and school leadership team have shown exceptional initiative and focus in bringing up the standards in religious education.

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 1

The Catholic life of the school is outstandingly effective in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing. The school has fully involved them in the search and development of initiatives and approaches to realise the important place of Catholic living and believing in their lives. It has actively adopted the child initiated prayer initiative, and pupils embrace opportunities to lead prayers during special times such as Lent, May and October. The whole school was involved in the review of its mission statement and the revised statement brings together well the strands of belief and action in the name of Christ arising from them 'We are the hands and face of Jesus'. The pupils' understanding of the Common Good is served very well with a proper theological and faith basis, and was especially helped by the 'Laudato Si' week where the Pope's encyclical was reflected on across the curriculum. The local priest is fully involved in the life of the school, celebrating Mass with different classes on a weekly basis. The governors have been unstinting in their support of the school's initiatives to develop its Catholic life, and have generously assisted the headteacher and the leadership team in their steps to build up the school's Catholicity.

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 one day in school, visited 14 lessons and 2 assemblies, and carried out 6 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 Vincent de Paul, Stevenage 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
Mrs Lisa Barton
Mrs Nikki Kane

Lead Inspector
Associate Inspector
Associate Inspector

Description of School

This Voluntary Aided school is a two form entry in the LA of Hertfordshire and the locality of Stevenage. The school serves the parishes of Stevenage and surrounding area, principally St Joseph's, Bedwell and the Church of the Transfiguration, Old Stevenage. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 92% The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 4.5%, from other Faiths 1%, and no declared faith background 2.5%. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 73%.

There are 460 pupils on roll, with 3 pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health & Care Plans (EHCP). The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is well above average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is well above average. There is an average rate of families claiming free school meals. Thirty seven pupils receive the Pupil Premium.

Telephone:	01438 729555
e-mail address:	admin@stvincent.herts.sch.uk
DFE Number:	919 3977
URN Number:	117498
Headteacher:	Mr Peter Keane
Chair of Governors:	Mr John Sloan
Date of previous inspection:	15 February 2013
Previous Inspection grades:	Classroom RE - 3; Catholic Life – 2

Key for inspection grades:	<i>Grade 1</i>	<i>Outstanding</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 previous inspection found that overall classroom religious education required improvement, and specifically required improvement in the areas of pupil achievement, the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education. The school has made very good progress in improving all these areas, so that both pupil achievement and the quality of teaching are now good, while leadership and management of religious education is outstanding.

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

Grade 2

The content of classroom religious education meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory well. The school has purchased a new RE scheme and has devoted substantial professional development time in introducing it to the teachers, ensuring they understand its approach and how it delivers the four strands of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory (RECD). Weekly lesson plans indicate the RECD reference being covered. Teachers have become familiar with the scheme and are confident to be creative in its delivery. Additional resources are being accessed to provide a broader palate to both the teachers and the pupils in their research. Appropriate resources are being built up for teaching about other faiths in line with the RECD expectations. The senior leadership team has worked closely with the diocesan RE advisory team to ensure they are in step with the RECD vision and coverage.

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

Grade 2

Pupil achievement in religious education is good. Presentation of work is consistently high and is a concrete example of pupils living out their mission statement through their work and actions 'We are called to be the hands and face of Jesus as we learn, love and grow together.' Consistent high standards and expectations are followed for the main part, however there are some deviations when it comes to feedback marking. The school continues to work hard in moderating work through their own internal processes and in collaboration with others through diocesan moderation and that of their deanery. Pupils have a very positive attitude to their learning and could be heard on many occasions throughout the course of the inspection to voice this in discussion with inspectors and indeed to their teachers. Pupils' religious literacy is good and their progress is evident in the many diverse ways in which they apply their learning to their everyday lives and their own contribution to the school's work. In Year 3, a group of children took great pride in explaining about how their 'Cafod Club' originated through the ideas of a group of children and the value that the school places on it. Pupils worked well during observed lessons with some good examples of group work where the positive 'can do' approach was clear.

The quality of teaching

Grade 2

Lesson observation and work book scrutinies evidence that teaching is consistently good with some outstanding lessons which results in most pupils making good progress and achieving well. Teachers have high expectations of pupils, and plan and teach lessons that build well on prior learning, enabling pupils to deepen and developed their religious literacy. That was evident in both their written and their oral responses. In house and diocesan continuing professional development has enriched teachers' subject knowledge and this could be seen in their confidence and strong subject knowledge in lessons. Although some feedback to pupils is detailed and there is evidence of development questions, this is inconsistent within and across year groups. It is not always clear what pupils must do to improve their work and this should be more clearly linked to the Agreed Understanding of the Levels of Attainment. Pupils' religious literacy is good and they are confident in their use of religious language.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade 1

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education is outstanding. Within the space of little more than a couple of years, the school has achieved outstanding improvement in religious education. The governors and the senior leadership team focussed on an unswerving campaign to bring up the standards of teaching in religious education, focussing on support and development of the teachers. Using help from all quarters, specialist governors, retired staff, bought in RE expertise, diocesan experts, the staff went forward to solid levels of confidence and creativity in lesson planning and delivery. Regular monitoring and reviews ensured all staff were progressing and that pupil knowledge and achievement were rising. It is not logical in ordinary circumstances to find the effectiveness of leadership and management of RE to be outstanding when teaching and pupil achievement haven't also reached that same level, but the inspectors' judgement was that the leadership of the headteacher, subject leader, staff and governors was exceptional and therefore outstanding.

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

- Continue the progress of improvement of teaching and learning in RE, with particular emphasis on staff development
- Embed consistent marking practice that is developmental
- Provide further inset opportunities for staff to develop their insight into the relationship between the two Attainment Targets

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?

The last inspection identified that pupils need to be more actively involved in preparing and leading acts of worship and Mass. The school has taken substantial steps to involve pupils in preparing for acts of worship and Mass, including pupil initiated prayer. The local priest says Mass once a week with a class, and the class whose turn it is prepares all aspects of its class Mass. The governors have generously assisted the headteacher and senior leadership team to build up very effectively the Catholicity of the school.

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

Grade I

The school is outstanding in ensuring the place of religious education as the core of the curriculum. The school allocates at least 10% of curriculum time to religious education and fully complies with the expectations of the Bishops' Conference. In a creative move, a week in the autumn term was devoted to the Pope's Encyclical 'Laudato Si' and all subjects were taught through its perspective and text, touching on language, maths, geography, history as appropriate. CAFOD representatives assisted the school to situate the themes in a global context. Humanitarian issues arising from this week were constructively followed up in the context and light of the Pope's call to the church for the Year of Mercy. The share of the school budget for RE is generous and significant and the resources are in place for regular ongoing in-service training. Generous opportunities are given to new and non-Catholic staff to learn more about the school's Catholic life and RE programme. Performance management for all staff includes a target for developing the religious life of the school.

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

Grade I

Prayer and worship are an integral part of the school's life and deeply enhance the provision offered to pupils. The high quality of creative and meaningful experiences are abundant throughout the school's year. Prayer opportunities are planned and delivered using not only the strengths of staff and pupils but also other external providers with whom the school has established strong links, for example, the Stevenage Bridge Builders. Children are actively encouraged to lead and deliver opportunities for prayer, for example the 'Apostles of Mercy' and the 'Religion Club'. The children take their roles very seriously and can creatively articulate the importance of such opportunities and its relevance to each individual pupil. On a rota basis, Key Stage 2 pupils attend Mass on a weekly basis, and make a focussed contribution to preparing readings and the bidding prayers. The school works hard to establish a strong rapport with other faith communities involving them through visits and workshops to promote and foster a deeper understanding and knowledge of other faiths and traditions.

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

Grade I

There is a clear and very successful focus on the Common Good evident throughout the school and this came through in discussions with pupils. They have an excellent understanding of the church's call to action for justice and peace. Pupils are actively engaged in acts of service and also have an excellent grasp of the theology underpinning their actions. This was very evident in their responses to the 'Laudato Si Week', and their explanations of our call to be stewards of Creation and why the school supports CAFOD. The rich and diverse opportunities offered to pupils by the school to develop their personal and thoughtful response to current world challenges at an appropriate level were exemplary. Their engagement with the 'Big Questions' relating to the right to clean water shows that they are grappling with social issues and responding to Pope Francis's call. Respect and value of the individual are central to the school and this can be seen in the way that the diversity of cultural backgrounds is celebrated.

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 outstanding in its commitment to authentic partnership with all those involved with it, including parents, local parishes and clergy and diocesan advisory staff acting on behalf of the Bishop. The local parish church is being renovated and the school temporarily hosts the parish Masses on Sundays. The presbytery is next to the school and there is mutual benefit and active cooperation arising from this proximity. The school actively participates in local and diocesan education service meetings, hosting local meetings and giving of its expertise at diocesan conferences eg it presented its 'Laudato Si Week'. The governing body benefits from having a number of retired headteachers in its ranks as well as chair of governors who was recently awarded 'Governor of the Year' by Hertfordshire County Council. Both the parents' questionnaire and the parents who met with the inspectors evidence this positive and close partnership. The excellent school website has been instrumental in engaging and involving the parents in the life of the school and their child's progress. The school works closely with other local schools, both those in the Catholic family and community schools. Notable is the close collaboration with its neighbouring secondary school, The John Henry Newman School, and the excellent progress in joint moderation leading to smoother transition. The Wednesday Word is distributed to promote active involvement in following the Sunday readings at Mass by the whole family.

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 outstandingly effective in promoting the Catholic life of the school. Their unblinking focus on developing the Catholic life of the school both by ensuring that religious education was central to curriculum of the school and that prayer and worship were at its heart has led to its present outstanding position as a Catholic school. The inspired focus for this progress has been the decision to ensure that Catholic Social Teaching has been the driving force in the school. The school's mission statement was rewritten to encapsulate this focus 'We are called to be the hands and face of Jesus'. The encyclicals incorporating this teaching are highlighted in corridor displays across the school. All staff are both expected to and do get involved in seeing how their teaching and involvement can take forward this focus. There is a strong and effective corporate bond between the governing body and the headteacher and

leadership team, ensuring there is both vision and support along with critical evaluation in the leadership and management of the school. The charism of the school found in its name, St Vincent de Paul, characterises the leadership even among the pupils to look to the needs of poor.

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

- Continue to develop support for its third world projects such as that in Kanyike, Uganda.
- Take forwards its plans to become a Unicef 'Rights Respecting School' and a Fairtrade School in cooperation with CAFOD.
- Carry on with the good start already made with child initiated prayer.