



Our Lady Catholic Primary School

Old Hale Way, Hitchin, Herts SG5 1XT

Date of inspection: March 27th 2014

A. Classroom Religious Education

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

Overall Grade I*

The overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy is outstanding. This is because of the example shown by the hard work, dedication and commitment of the headteacher who is also the RE co-ordinator. Of equal importance to the success of the school is the leadership of the governing body personified by the work of the Chair and Vice Chair of governors who provide a rigorous balance of challenge and effective support. The curriculum is planned to be comprehensive and creative in equal measure and is quite exemplary. Pupil achievement and progress are both judged to be outstanding. The curriculum does succeed in being both thorough and creative, and art is used particularly effectively to enhance learning. Pupils leave in Year 6 with very high standards of religious literacy and are very well prepared for secondary education. Quality of teaching is very good with some outstanding examples seen across the school. It is not yet typically outstanding as there are inconsistencies in areas such as the tasks set during lessons and marking. Leadership of classroom education is outstanding again because of the example set by the headteacher. The school does need to develop middle leaders to support the head and ensure sustainability for the future.

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 school's overall effectiveness in this area is not just outstanding it is exceptional. The rich Catholic life and tradition of the school is evident from the moment one enters the school. This is a school that offers the pupils, parents and staff the richest experience one could wish for of the Catholic way of living and believing. Prayer and worship are integral to all that the school does and the school makes a very powerful statement of its commitment to the Common Good which is highlighted in this report. Relationships are very good at all levels and pupils have plentiful opportunities to serve both the local and wider community. Good sustainable overseas projects have been established and pupils expressed a keen desire to do even more in this area. Parents are very supportive of the school and its work and the parish priest is a frequent and welcome visitor to the school. The governing body are equally strong in this area and the Vice-Chair and Pastoral Well-Being governor's contribution is worthy of special note. The Catholic life of the school is judged to be outstanding in every aspect.

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 7 lessons and 1 assembly, and carried out 5 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 Our Lady, Hitchin 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

Mr Sean Flood	Lead Inspector
Mrs Jackie Cox	Associate Inspector

Description of School

The school is a one form entry Catholic primary school in Hitchin, Hertfordshire. It is part of the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust. The school serves the parish of Our Lady Immaculate and St Andrew, Hitchin. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 96%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 1% and from other Faiths is 3%. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 64%.

There are 217 pupils on roll, with 1 pupil with a statement of Special Educational Need. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is above average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is above average. There is a well below average rate of families claiming free school meals. 6 pupils receive the Pupil Premium. The mission statement of the school states:

Together at Our lady School we are living, learning and growing, through Jesus Christ and his Church.

Telephone:	01462 622555
e-mail address:	head@ourladys.herts.sch.uk

DFE Number:	919 3399
URN Number:	117476

Headteacher:	Mrs S Brown
Chair of Governors:	Mr Ian McBain

Date of previous inspection:	10 th 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?

There were no key issues highlighted in the previous inspection. The main area for development has been around the content of the curriculum. The school has designed and is refining its own comprehensive religious education curriculum. The school has maintained a constant drive to move forward by developing the use of interactive resources, new ideas and technologies to further enhance classroom education.

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

Grade 1*

The content of Our Lady Catholic School Religious Education curriculum fully meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. The curriculum is meticulously tracked and planned by the headteacher. It is both comprehensive and rigorous and gives the pupils an outstanding opportunity to learn about their Catholic faith. The school uses the units of work provided by Margaret Carswell as its core curriculum and uses the Come and See scheme as an extra resource. The school also integrates the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools initiative into its curriculum in an exciting way. The programmes of study, Revelation, Church, Celebration and Life in Christ for each key stage and in provision for the under fives, illustrates where, when and how key aspects of content are taught and assessed. Lessons are carefully planned and resources are used creatively to further enhance and inspire pupils' learning. Pupils are taught about other faiths in an appropriate and well planned way.

The structure planning and content of this school's RE curriculum is quite exemplary and deserves to be disseminated to a wider audience across the Diocese.

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

Grade 1*

Pupil achievement overall is quite clearly outstanding and is a hallmark of this school. The evidence is contained in an annual booklet called "Trends over Time" produced by the headteacher and governors. This evaluates progress and standards over a year and then further analyses and benchmarks pupil data over preceding years.

Work in the Reception Year shows evidence of children beginning to develop religious literacy and understanding symbols. RE work is very much adult led and directed in this setting. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils are beginning to show real understanding of the Gospels. In Key Stage 2 some fine work was seen analysing paintings and religious art. By Year 6 pupils are learning in depth about the Psalms and also the Catechism of the Church. A work scrutiny carried out during this inspection showed clear evidence of very high attainment in the upper Key Stage 2 classes. Pupils leave in Year 6 with exceptionally high standards of religious literacy.

Targets are challenging and mostly understood by pupils, thereby enabling pupils to stretch their understanding and knowledge even further. Some good evidence of research was seen among the older pupils. Pupils do develop a broad range of skills and appear confident when applying them in matters relating to RE. They are encouraged to ask questions and they are assisted in finding out

answers. They are also adept at talk and discussing the importance of connecting faith to the ordinary events of everyday life, according to the Catholic Faith.

Pupils enter the school broadly in line with national averages and leave in Year 6 achieving above the national average, therefore progress is deemed to be equally outstanding in this school.

The quality of teaching

Grade I

The quality of teaching seen across the school is judged to be very good.

The children get a sound and secure start in the Reception class of the school. Some examples of very good and outstanding teaching were seen during this inspection right across the school. By combining the lessons observed with a work scrutiny, quality of teaching is judged to be very good. It is not yet outstanding because there are inconsistencies in the quality of the teaching, appropriateness of tasks set in lessons and also in the marking of pupils' work. Where teaching was outstanding there was clear evidence of engagement, enthusiasm and challenge for pupils. In some classes the learning was passive and the tasks set, such as copying passages of scripture lacked sufficient challenge. Teachers do mostly have high expectations of pupils and appear to enjoy teaching RE lessons. Teaching assistants were very well used and are deployed effectively in lessons thus ensuring equality of access for all pupils. Planning is a key feature of this school and all lessons are very well planned for and all abilities are catered for. Teachers use assessment for learning as seen in good questioning and task set in many classes. Marking is very good in this school where teachers give developmental feedback in pupils' books enabling them to extend learning and improve their progress. This very good marking is not yet being consistently applied. Homework is regularly set in the school and this encourages pupils to become independent learners and to develop their knowledge and understanding of religious concepts and meaning.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade I*

The leadership and management of religious education is outstanding. The headteacher is an exemplary role model for her staff and leads by example. It is her drive and enthusiasm for the subject that comes across to all visitors to the school. The headteacher is also the subject leader for RE and somehow manages to find the time to combine both roles in an outstanding manner. Her design of the curriculum is both meticulous and creative and shows a fine attention to detail. The head also teaches RE and during this inspection was seen leading a dynamic modern Easter Good News - Passion Play which was being eagerly awaited by parents, staff and pupils. School self-evaluation is thorough, well written and is mostly accurate with the exception of quality of teaching where more perspective and discernment needs to be shown. The work of the governing Body is also noteworthy in this school. An experienced Chair of the Governing Body leads a highly effective and proactive team. He is ably assisted by a Vice-Chair who also plays a key and pivotal role in the classroom education of this school. Governors provide both challenge and support in school demonstrating their own passion for the nurturing of the Catholic faith in school.

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

- Develop middle leaders to be able to take more responsibility for delivering and monitoring the RE curriculum in the future and ensure sustainability in the school
- Provide further training and coaching opportunities for teachers to become outstanding in their practice
- Ensure greater consistency in marking so that all teachers are following best practice

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 issues identified in this area during the last inspection. Some of the areas most obvious that have been developed include the school documentation such as the Catholic Life of the School booklet which is of a very high standard.

Another key feature developed had been the raised profile of social justice issues, Eco-Council work and global responsibility. The school has also improved its outdoor provision for prayer and worship.

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

Grade I*

10% of curriculum time is devoted to the teaching of religious education across all key stages every week. This is planned, tracked and meticulously monitored by the headteacher. The school views RE as a core subject in the curriculum and as such, time, money and resources are given in accordance with its status. In this current year a generous budget has been allocated for the subject.

Teachers have mostly very good subject knowledge of religious education in accordance with the Religious Education Curriculum Directory for England and Wales. New teachers to the school are being well supported in learning about the teaching of religious education.

The accommodation of the school is of a very high standard both indoors and outdoors too.

Displays are of a very high quality and one immediately knows that this is a Catholic school upon entry.

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

Grade I*

Prayer and worship are central to the Catholic life at Our Lady School and Liturgical dance is also a strength. Liturgies, Masses and celebrations are open to all parents and parishioners and planned jointly from the start of the year with the parish priest, a foundation governor and the vice chair and head teacher who is also the RE co-ordinator)

Pupils actively participate and support parish life for example as Acolytes and Readers. Years 5 and 6 supported by teacher and Foundation Governor, plan and prepare Services of the Word and Communion which they lead in the local parish Church. Every fifth Sunday of the month the school plays a lead role in the 10.30am Mass. The headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and teachers do the readings, the pupils write Intercessions and parents, governors and pupils bring up the Offertory. Pupils of other faiths are actively encouraged to participate fully and are given opportunities to participate in prayer and worship and bring their openness, traditions and spirituality to the school. The Wednesday Word has been adopted by the school encourages and supports faith sharing among families. The 'Lectio Divina' is used with Y5 and 6 children.

Evidence was seen in books and around the school of pupils writing their own prayers, analysing psalms and sharing prayers with others outside of the classroom.

Whole school planned meditations take place each week and also at the end of school days.

Governors and parents work in harmony leading liturgies and praying the rosary. The strong partnership between school and parish enables outstanding opportunities for prayer and worship. The Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, who is also the Pastoral and Well-Being governor plays a crucial role in ensuring that prayer and worship is outstanding in this school.

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

Grade I*

The school's own self-evaluation of this area states that:

“The school is fully committed to action for social justice and has achieved Rights Respecting L2 status (July 2012) this is based on the UNICEF articles and Rights of the Child. There is a clear understanding throughout the school by all stakeholders that the poor and disadvantaged must be our primary concern. They understand the difference between ‘need’ and ‘want’”.

This inspection affirms this powerful statement and also the school's commitment to this key area and judges it to be outstanding.

The school supports a wide range of activities in the local area such as supporting a club for the elderly, the local foodbank and also in cooking for the elderly. In a lovely initiative the school has also involved the elderly in teaming up with pupils as prayer partners.

Pupils get plentiful opportunities to serve in school as monitors, school council, Eco-council and also as lunchtime supervisors and chefs. During this inspection some pupils cooked for the inspection team a delicious vegetable soup and also baked some perfect warm bread which was greatly appreciated by everyone.

Internationally the school supports sustainable projects with Father Kakuba in the Kanyike project, Uganda. The pupils are very proud of the work they do in this area and are eager to get even stronger links forged. They are less certain of the theology underpinning their work and the school needs to highlight this area more.

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*

This is a major strength of the school in every area. The school has a strong and living commitment to evangelisation and strives to meet the call to spread Christ's word in a variety of ways in the local community. Pupils are strong ambassadors for the school, and the Catholic faith, as they become more active and visible in the wider community. This was exemplified by the coming together of school, parish, diocese and other school friends and partners following the tragic death of the assistant head teacher last year.

The parish priest, the head and Chair of Governors are actively engaged in the work of the Hertfordshire Catholic Partnership. The Catholic partnership and the school works closely with the Diocese. The school has converted to academy status under the Diocesan trust.

Staff regularly attend Diocesan training and the RE adviser is a welcome visitor to the school.

Parents in a questionnaire were very supportive and appreciative of the work and life of the school.

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

Grade 1*

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school is not merely outstanding but is exceptional.

The school mission statement is at the heart of all that is done as a Catholic school and the “Call to Serve” is exemplary.

The headteacher, governing body, parish priest all play key and unifying roles in ensuring that the Catholic life of the school is so exceptional. Senior leadership at all levels is deeply committed to excellence and achieves this by rigorous monitoring and a sensible balance of challenge and support. Catholicity pervades all areas of school life without exception and is taken into homes, parish and the wider community in a quite outstanding way.

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

- Use ICT more effectively in its overseas development work to provide more opportunities for young pupils to communicate and support each other in the modern world
- Further develop the theology that underpins the outstanding work the pupils are doing for the Common Good