

St Albert the Great Catholic Primary School

Acorn Road, Hemel Hempstead HP3 8DW

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 2 November 2016



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is good

- The headteacher and governors show a strong commitment to driving forward standards in religious education (RE).
- Teaching is good in almost all classes seen and support staff play an important role in assisting pupils with special educational needs.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and are committed in their approach to RE.
- Pupils get a good start to their learning in early years through an appropriately structured environment.
- Pupil interviews show they are interested and enjoy their learning in RE and are happy to talk about their faith experience.
- Pupils understand that religious beliefs and spiritual values are important to many people and they show an interest in the religious life of others, both of the Catholic faith and of other faiths.
- The learning environment, both indoor and outdoor, is of a high standard and provides a rich resource for learning.
- The school provides opportunities for pupils to engage creatively in RE such as the 'Epiphany Wow' day.
- Outcomes for pupils are broadly in line with other core subjects.

Classroom religious education is not yet outstanding because

- The quality of teaching and learning is not consistent across all classes.
- Marking is not developmental, giving pupils next steps for learning.
- Tasks are not always appropriately matched to pupil ability and need to be differentiated.

B. The Catholic life of the school is good

- The school motto, 'The more I learn about the world in which I live, the closer I grow to God', permeates life at St Albert the Great.
- Leadership and management of the school are good with a strong drive to further development from the headteacher and governors.
- Daily prayer is central to the school's commitment to its Catholic faith.
- Pupils value and respect one another and have a strong sense of their Catholic identity.
- The staff are excellent role models and have developed a culture of care, concern and mutual respect, which results in some good learning and teaching.
- Pupils learn and are taught the understanding of a range of traditional prayers, beginning in EYF (Early Years Foundation).
- Pupils in classes and assemblies participate with reverence and respect. They sing well and are able to use the silent opportunities given as an extension to their own prayer focus and meditational skills.
- The school works in harmony as part of the local parishes and local community.
- The school has strong links with local parishes and other diocesan schools.

The Catholic life of the school is not yet outstanding because

- Pupils are not yet able to articulate the theology that underpins the Common Good.
- Pupil led worship is not yet established within the school.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

The main area of improvement has been the now stable leadership after several years of interim leaders and of budget difficulties. This, along with the introduction of a new syllabus, has led to an improving teacher confidence in the teaching of RE. Staff training in the use of social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) materials to support pupils' spiritual development and areas for reflection are now established throughout the school.

The content of classroom religious education is good

The content of the religious education curriculum fully meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory (RECD). There is one scheme from Early Years Foundation to Year 6. The school marks events in the liturgical calendar as a community through attendance at Mass, assemblies and other opportunities for collective worship. Key vocabulary is highlighted very well for pupils to encourage them to talk and write about their knowledge and understanding of their faith. There is a dedicated area for reflection in the school building and a prayer garden in the playground.

Pupil achievement in religious education is good

Achievement in religious education is broadly in line with that for other core subjects. Good achievement is evident where pupils were challenged to think deeply and to reason through a range of strategies. There is some evidence to show creativity in the teaching and learning of RE but this needs to be developed across the school. Pupils are taught about other faiths with evidence of Judaism being taught in an age appropriate way. Pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning in RE and this impacts on the progress that they make. They are keen to give their best and do well. The pupils see RE as an important part of the school curriculum and appreciate its importance in their lives. Marking strategies, such as the 'pink/green' system, are not consistently applied and developmental marking used in other core subjects should now be applied to RE. Behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils' religious literacy is good and they are confident in their use of religious language. This is supported through displays of religious vocabulary throughout classrooms. Termly moderations take place for RE and these are strengthening teachers' interpretation of the Agreed Understandings and assessment in RE. The school fully participates in both the deanery and diocesan moderation process. The school has recently invested in resources linked to the RECD such as Bibles.

The quality of teaching is good

The school's motto, 'The more I learn about the world in which I live, the closer I grow to God,' permeates the new building and creative outdoor areas, providing a rich environment for learning. The teaching of religious education observed across the school is variable. In those lessons where teaching was most effective, pupils were encouraged to develop their thinking through the higher order questioning. There are clear expectations and strong modelling, which supports children and leads to them achieving good outcomes. In the lessons that required improvement, opportunities were missed and this led to limited progress. Opportunities are missed in guiding pupils on how to improve their written work as marking does not include developmental comments in the teacher-pupil responses and this should be seen as an area for development. Differentiation is variable across classes and not always reflected in outcomes and is seen as a further area for development.

Children enjoy their RE lessons and speak positively about their teachers and how they are supported in their learning. One child stated that, 'the teachers work hard to make sure our lessons are fun and interesting.' The role of other adults in the learning process was notable particularly for pupils with significant additional needs. Non-Catholic teachers are supported by the RE leader in the planning and assessment of RE.

The leadership and management of religious education

are good

Leadership and management of RE are good. The headteacher is instrumental in driving school improvement and is fully committed to the improvement of RE. She is supported by the RE leader. The RE leader manages planning and assessment and the support of non-Catholic teachers and newly qualified staff. The RE leader attends diocesan moderation meetings and has recently visited a local school to observe pupil led worship, which is an area for development in the school. Teaching is monitored regularly and developmental feedback provided to teachers. This now needs to be rigorously followed up to ensure that it is having an impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Leadership in the school ensures that religious education is part of staff appraisal and all staff have an RE target. The governing body are kept informed through a combination of reports and visits to the school and provide a good balance of challenge to the school. The RE curriculum receives a budget allocation in line with other core subjects, reflecting its importance to the school. The school recognises its areas for development and are committed to moving the school further forward.

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

- Embed the use of developmental marking and ensure its consistency across the school
- Provide appropriately challenging learning experiences through clearly differentiated tasks
- Review the assessment process throughout the school
- Ensure a greater coverage of RE in books, in line with other core subjects

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

The new school premises provide a rich learning environment. The 'Forest School' initiative and the dedicated prayer garden provides pupils with an appreciation of God's creation and places the school motto, 'The more I learn about the world in which I live, the closer I grow to God' at the heart of the school community.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is good

The Catholic identity and ethos at St Albert the Great can be seen and felt around the school. RE receives the 10% of curriculum time that is required by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and religious education has a high priority across the whole school. The budget allocated is in line with other core subjects reflecting the importance of it as a subject. Staff are well supported in their professional development and support staff are strategically deployed to ensure that all pupils are aided to make at least good progress.

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

is good

Prayer is central to the daily life of the school and is both varied and matched to the ability, language and needs of the pupils. Pupils learn and are taught the understanding of a range of traditional prayers, beginning in Early Years Foundation. Pupils in classes and assemblies participate with reverence and respect. They sing well and are able to use the silent opportunities given as an extension to their own prayer focus and meditational skills. Pupils compose their own prayer books, which mark the liturgical year, and these are displayed in classrooms. The school prayer garden and 'wildwood den' are appropriate reminders of the miracle of God's creation along with a quiet prayer area inside the school that children are encouraged to use to aid their spiritual and faith development. The school is aware that pupil led worship and the introduction of pupil RE chaplains are the next steps in developing prayer and liturgy to even greater depths.

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

are good

The pupils at St Albert the Great respect and value one another and have a strong sense of their Catholic identity. They are actively engaged in activities that help others by raising money for those who are less fortunate. The range of charities supported is wide, including Children in Need, the unit for premature babies at the local hospital and the Loreto Day School in Kolkata. The school is rightly proud of its support for such a range of charities and children can clearly explain why they are taking part but the theology underpinning the Common Good is not yet embedded in pupils' understanding. This is an area for further development for the school.

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**is good**

There are strong links with parish and other schools in the diocese. The school fully understands its role within the diocese and its responsibility to the Bishop. The staff work with the diocese making full use of training opportunities and regularly attend deanery meetings and work moderation meetings with other Catholic schools. Key Stage 2 pupils attend Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the church and have a termly Mass. Links with the parish are strong and fruitful at all levels. This enhances the religious education providing first hand quality experiences of the liturgical life of the church. Wednesday Word is sent home weekly to encourage parents to discuss the gospels with their children. Parents are informed termly about the upcoming themes in religious education and the school website provides additional information about the Catholic life of the school. The questionnaire sent home as part of the inspection indicated that a small minority of parents are unhappy about communication and some recent changes within the school. This is an area for development for the school to address.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school**is good**

The school mission statement is at the heart of the school community and is shared by all stakeholders. There is a growing commitment at all levels to promote the Catholic life and ethos of the school. The leadership of the headteacher is reflected in the support for the Catholic mission of education. Her dedication to school improvement and development is evident from discussion with her and members of the governing body throughout the inspection process. Governors understand their role and provide challenge and support to the school in their judgements. The Catholic life of the school should now form a regular part of the discussion to inform school self-evaluation.

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

- Develop an understanding in pupils of the theology that underpins the Common Good.
- Empower pupils to plan, prepare and lead worship including opportunities for spontaneous and reflective prayer.
- Ensure that parents are kept fully informed about the content of religious education by developing stronger communication links.

Information about this school

- The school is a one form entry Catholic Primary school in the locality of Hertfordshire.
- The school serves the parishes of Our Lady Queen of All Creation, Adeyfield, and Saint Mary and Saint Joseph, Boxmoor, Church of the Resurrection, Grove Hill and St Marks', Warners End
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 86%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 9% and from other faiths is 4%. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 64%.
- There are 54 pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 3 have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is above average.
- There is a below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 34 pupils receive the Pupil Premium

Department for Education Number	9193391
Unique Reference Number	117471
Local Authority	Hertfordshire

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	3 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	239
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Debra Gee
Headteacher	Mrs Kathryn Little
Telephone number	01442 264835
Website	www.albertthegreat.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@albertthegreat.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	01 July 2011
Grade from previous inspection	Good

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out (i) under the requirements of the Canon 806 and (ii) in accordance with the Framework for Diocesan Inspections 2015 approved by the Archbishop of Westminster and (iii) under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

- The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection.
- During the inspection 8 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended one assembly.
- Meetings were held with school staff, pupils and governors.
- Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

Mrs Ann Staunton

Miss Robina Maher

Mrs Louise Wilson

Lead Inspector

Associate Inspector

Associate Inspector

Diocesan inspection has four grades:

- outstanding
- good
- requires improvement
- causing concern

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