

Our Lady Catholic Primary School

Woodhall Lane, Welwyn Garden City AL7 3TF

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 23 September 2021



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is good

- The school has strong procedures in place for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in RE.
- There is a clear structure across the school, the key stages and the year groups which shows progression in learning.
- A drive on extended writing has led to increased opportunities for children to explore topics and ideas in more depth.
- Standards in RE are in line with those of other core subjects.
- The senior leadership team and governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development in RE.
- Learning in RE continued during recent lockdowns and maintained a high standard.
- Learning in RE is clearly linked to all areas of the curriculum and the recent addition of a focus on Catholic social teaching has reinforced this.
- RE is well resourced and displays around the school show that the children engage with their work.
- Scripture is used to support learning in lessons and is evident around the school, adding to the religious literacy of the children.
- Children work well together and show enthusiasm in their learning.
- Moderation in school and across the local area has had a positive impact on the teachers' understanding of assessment.

Classroom religious education is not yet outstanding because

- Not every opportunity is taken to give the children a high challenge in their learning.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- It is clear from the moment of entering the school that religious education is at the heart of the community.
- Religious displays highlight the learning taking place and the values which are shared by all.
- The grounds of the school have been developed to provide further scope for group prayer.
- A rich variety of prayer and worship is made available to all the pupils and full use is made of the local parish church.
- The parish priest is a regular visitor to the school, supporting the children in their learning as well as in their spiritual lives.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and welcome the opportunities to participate in worship and prayer as well as celebrations.
- Close links have been developed with local Catholic primary and secondary schools and families no longer see Catholic education finishing at the end of primary school.
- Pupils participate in deciding how to promote Catholic social teaching with groups like the 'Minnie Vinnies' and the school council.
- Many charities are supported at local, national and international level.
- Children lead prayers in class on a regular basis and are beginning to take a more active part in whole school events now that lockdowns are over.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

A thorough review of the leadership and management in classroom RE has led to a great improvement in standards of teaching and learning. RE is described as the 'core of the core' and this is reflected in the time given to it by leaders and the budget which has been allocated to it over the last few years.

Rigorous procedures are in place and are monitored closely by the subject leader and senior leadership team, meaning that improvements have been rapid and sustained.

The content of classroom religious education is good

The scheme of work used by the school is mapped against the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory* and meets all its requirements. Staff supplement this with other material, including Catholic social teaching and learning based on the liturgical year. Opportunities are taken to bring a creative approach to learning: one class acted out the story of the call of Abraham, and another celebrated God's creation through song. Each class has an eye-catching RE display which is also a 'working wall' of information and questions about the topic. The curriculum has been planned to provide clear progression across the key stages and year groups. Pupils are taught about other faiths each year, with visits to enhance learning where appropriate. One pupil said, 'This is important so we can learn to understand other people's beliefs and be tolerant'.

Pupil achievement in religious education is good

Standards in religious education are in line with other core subjects and pupil achievement is monitored and reported on in the same way. Progress data is used to inform teaching and to track trends across cohorts. Pupils' religious literacy is good, and frequent opportunities are taken to introduce them to scripture. This is evident in many displays around the school, especially those linked to the 'Year of the Word'. Scripture also played a large part in the provision for RE teaching during the recent periods of lockdown. Work is planned to match the ability of most pupils. Support through scaffolded work or extra classroom support is used for those who need it. Work with higher challenge could be given to more able pupils to move them on in their learning. Marking is used to help pupils improve their work or deepen their understanding. Pupils work with enthusiasm in RE lessons. They are keen to answer questions and work collaboratively to achieve answers. In several lessons pupils were able to share their ideas in groups and feedback to the rest of the class.

The quality of teaching is good

The quality of teaching has been rigorously monitored by the RE coordinator and leadership team so that all lessons are planned and delivered to a good standard.

Teacher subject knowledge has been improved through targeted support and well-planned training. In the best lessons, teachers showed confidence in their understanding of what they were teaching, which meant that dialogue with pupils was challenging. Marking and oral feedback is consistent and helps pupils identify their next steps.

Pupils say that they find RE 'exciting'. Teachers are supportive, with pupils eager to contribute and confident that their work will be valued. One said, 'RE is a moment of peace to think about God', and another remarked, 'It's important He's (God's) there and guiding me'.

Homework plays an important part in RE lessons and parents appreciate the chance to be involved in their children's work. Work set in RE during the recent lockdowns maintained a high standard and was well planned to move the pupils forward in their learning.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education is good

Leaders have ensured that RE is at the heart of the school and the curriculum. The RE coordinator now has time to implement the monitoring and support needed to keep standards in this subject high. There is a strong, shared focus on improving standards in RE.

The coordinator is able to support staff, as well as hold them to account. Access to training from the Diocese has helped the RE coordinator in her role, and provided targeted support for staff.

Systems are in place across the school to ensure that staff are more confident in assessing religious education and the school has worked with other primary and secondary schools in the local area to help benchmark these judgements. The scheme of work now shows a clear progression in skills and knowledge from Foundation Stage to Year 6. The RE coordinator and senior leadership team have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in RE and these are reflected in the school's self-evaluation. Governors are active in supporting and challenging the leadership team to show how RE influences all aspects of the school.

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

- Provide consistent high-quality challenge and engagement in all RE lessons to deepen the pupils' learning.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

The RE coordinator is now part of the senior leadership team and is given time to carry out her role.

The school and governors have all contributed to the school self-evaluation and it is an accurate summary of the strengths and areas for development.

Pupils are able to articulate the theology behind 'The Common Good'. One said, 'God wants us to care for each other and love each other just as he loves us'.

The school website provides up to date information about the RE curriculum through newsletters as well as many reports of worship events in school. During lockdown this was used to involve the pupils and parents at home in reflections. The school uses social media effectively to promote the Catholic life of the school.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

It is clear that religious education is at the heart of this school. One pupil said 'RE helps me to be closer to God'. The timetable gives the full 10% of time allocation to the subject, supplemented by acts of worship and prayer opportunities. This was maintained during the recent lockdown periods. RE is well resourced and the environment inside and outside reflects the Catholic life, with statues of Our Lady and links to work done to support the 'Year of the Word' and Catholic social teaching. School leaders, including the governors, share the commitment to make this an outstanding Catholic school, ensuring that investments in resources and staff training support this ambition. A parent commented that Catholic values are 'positively incorporated in every aspect of school life', and another said, 'It (RE) is not seen as a single subject - faith is part of their everyday being'.

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

is outstanding

The school offers rich and varied prayer and worship opportunities for pupils and parents. Many choose to give up time before school alongside their parents or during breaks to join in prayer sessions like the rosary. The close proximity of the school to the parish church means that pupils are able to experience worship opportunities such as Benediction as well as Mass. The parish priest is a regular visitor to the school, joining in and leading prayer and worship.

The school ensures that events during the liturgical year are marked, with May processions, stations of the cross and nativity plays. Children in Year 6 have recently begun making a class retreat to Aylesford Priory. National and international events like the 'Year of the Word' are also marked. Children are involved in the planning and delivery of class acts of worship and conduct these with reverence and confidence. They have begun to take a more active part in whole school liturgies, with house captains helping deliver on-line assemblies during lockdown.

A pupil commented, 'I can pray to God when I'm going through a rough time and it makes me happier'.

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

is outstanding

The leadership team have worked hard to instil in the children a real understanding of what 'human flourishing' means. The introduction of Catholic social teaching has made an impact in this area. One

pupil was able to explain, 'There is opportunity today to make the world a better place. We can set a role-model, get people back on track'.

The school presents its pupils with many opportunities to take on responsibilities including: head boy and girl, team captains, 'Minnie-Vinnies', school council, reading buddies, playground buddies and sports leaders. The pupils are elected to many of these roles and have to apply for others. They take their responsibilities very seriously and talk with pride about the work they do. One said, 'We're using our talents of leadership skills to show our values'.

The school supports a variety of charities locally, nationally and internationally with the pupils suggesting some of them, such as Year 6 running a cake sale to raise money for 'Mary's Meals'. Positive behaviour and positive relationships between pupils and staff act as a visible reminder of how we treat each other.

The partnership with parents, school and parish, and collaboration as an integral part of the diocese through its relationship with the diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

is outstanding

The leadership team has worked hard to develop the partnership with parents, consulting with them, inviting them into the school and communicating clearly with them. The newsletter provides a good conduit for information alongside the RE newsletter. A parent commented that the school now 'feels like a close family'. Sixty-eight parent questionnaires were returned to the inspection team, all of which 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with all the statements on it.

The parish priest is a regular visitor to the school as well as being an active member of the governing body. This provides a visible link which helps pupils and parents see the school as an extension of the parish.

The school has worked extensively with the diocese in order to raise standards and support the experience of Catholic education for its pupils. It has improved its links with other Catholic primary schools in the area in order to share and improve practice and has also worked with local Catholic secondary schools to promote Catholic education from 4-18. Pupils have taken part in diocesan events at Westminster Cathedral and on-line.

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

is outstanding

The headteacher has set out a clear vision for how pupils should experience the Catholic life of the school. He is well supported in this by his senior leadership team and the governing body, and together they have created a community where pupils are able to experience the full richness of the Catholic faith. 'The strong Catholic ethos is reflected throughout the whole school community', said one parent.

Staff act as role models for the pupils, and those who are new to Catholic education or who are not Catholic are given the induction and training they need to contribute to the Catholic life of the school.

There is a strong solidarity between the school, governors and other stakeholders who recognise the hard work that has got the school to where it is today, but no complacency as shown in its self-evaluation. Instead, they are already looking forward to what else can be done to further improve the school.

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

- Further develop the prayer life of the school by providing pupils with opportunities for planning, preparing and delivering whole school celebrations, including Masses, liturgies and reflections.

Information about this school

- The school is a one form entry Catholic primary school in the locality of Welwyn Garden City.
- The school serves the parishes of Our Lady, Queen of Apostles, St Bonaventure and Holy Family, Welwyn Garden City.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 88%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 9% and from other faiths is 1%. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 69%.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 2.
- There are 8% of 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 average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is average.
- There is a below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 13 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (7%).

Department for Education Number	9193382
Unique Reference Number	117464
Local Authority	Hertfordshire

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	4 -11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	184
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Kelly Donkor
Headteacher	Mr Richard Curry
Telephone number	01707324408
Website	www.ourlady527.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@ourlady527.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 October 2017
Grades from previous inspection:	
Classroom religious education	Requires improvement
The Catholic life of the school	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 a number of acts of worship.
- 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 Catherine McMahon	Lead Inspector
Mrs Norah Flatley	Associate Inspector
Ms Nicola Kane	Associate Inspector
Mrs Jennifer O'Prey	Associate Inspector
Mrs Liz Keane	Associate Inspector

Information about inspection

The purpose of Diocesan inspection is to report to and advise the Archbishop on the quality of classroom religious education and the Catholic life of the school. The inspection report is also used to inform parents and carers, and the wider Catholic community. Inspection provides an opportunity to support, challenge, evaluate and promote the work of Catholic schools. It also assists schools in the work of self-evaluation and improvement, and enables the Diocese to celebrate with schools their sense of identity and their strengths as Catholic schools.

Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

This report is published by the Diocese of Westminster and is available at:
<http://rcdow.org.uk/education/schools>

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