

St Agnes Catholic Primary School

Rainhill Way, Bow, London. E3 3ER



Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 17 January 2018

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is outstanding

- The religious education curriculum is very well planned to allow all pupils to grow in their faith.
- The content of the curriculum meets all the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory.
- Pupils are afforded the opportunity to live out the school's motto 'With Jesus beside us we do our best' on a daily basis.
- Pupils' attainment and progress in religious education are outstanding.
- Pupils' exemplary attitudes to learning are testimony to their thirst for learning and their desire to do well.
- Accurate monitoring and moderation inform planning in religious education.
- Pupils' religious literacy is impressive. Pupils from Nursery to Year 6 are confident in their use of religious language.
- Teaching is a real strength of the school. Lessons are lively, engaging and challenging.
- Teaching assistants and support staff are deployed well to maximise their impact on supporting learning for all pupils.
- There is a clear vision for the school amongst all school leaders, a commitment to continued improvement and a drive for excellence.
- The leadership and management of religious education ensure staff are well supported to develop their expertise and knowledge.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The school's motto 'With Jesus beside us we do our best' permeates life at St Agnes School.
- Beautiful displays and iconography reflect the school's Catholic identity and enrich the learning environment.
- Religious education has 10% of the curriculum time as required by the Bishops' Conference.
- Senior leaders, governors and all staff share a common vision and ambition for the school and are fully committed to the Catholic education mission of the Church.
- Religious education receives high priority in terms of funding and resources.
- Worship and prayer are central to the life of the school and underpin its vision, ethos and commitment to its Catholic faith.
- Prayers are woven into the fabric of the school day. Pupils have the opportunity to participate in traditional prayers as well as ones of their own making.
- Participation in the prayer life of the school is exemplary.
- Pupils are provided with excellent opportunities to serve others through a range of activities.
- Pupils respond effectively to the call to social justice and the Common Good.
- The partnership with parents, school and the parish is very strong and highly effective.
- School leaders and governors are fully committed to the Church's mission in education.
- Governors ensure the school's leadership team is fully supported, but are also able to challenge leaders when necessary.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection a number of improvements have been made to classroom religious education. Religious education is now only taught by Catholic teachers. The senior leadership team take an active role in overseeing the teaching and learning of religious education and all teach in classes. Assessment practice has been developed and is now more accurately used to aid planning. Regular accurate tracking and monitoring is in line with other core subjects and so can identify areas of strength and areas to address. Staff have taken full advantage of extensive continuing professional development opportunities to improve their practice.

The content of classroom religious education is outstanding

The content of curriculum fully meets all the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. All four areas of the Curriculum Directory are effectively mapped across the key stages. In addition to a published scheme, the school uses other resources to enhance the learning of the pupils and develop further aspects of Catholic Social Teaching. Religious education is very well resourced and teachers are highly creative in the way resources are used to support children's learning and provide for a range of learning styles, needs and abilities. Progression across the school is clearly evident in well-presented pupils' workbooks, in discussions and during lessons. Well maintained classrooms and the school environs demonstrate the importance placed on religious education, for example the individual class saints researched by the pupils and 'The Big Question' board. Pupils have the opportunity to study the other world faiths of Judaism and Islam at designated points throughout the year.

Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding

Outcomes for pupils are excellent. Pupils' achievement across the school is outstanding and in line with and in some cases better than that of other core subjects. Assessment of pupils' work is robust and rigorous. Work is assessed and moderated regularly both within the school and at deanery and diocesan moderation meetings. Accurate assessment is an important feature in ensuring pupils make rapid and sustained progress and receive appropriate support when necessary. The increasing number of pupils achieving the higher levels is the result of the high expectations teachers set, continued accurate assessment systems, pupils' lively enthusiasm and their real thirst for learning. Pupils' religious literacy and language are particularly impressive and a real strength of the school and testimony to the importance placed by the school on their development from Early Years through to Year 6. This was clearly evidenced in Year 3 where pupils were discussing the notion of 'heaven on earth' in relation to the Our Father; in the Early Years' classrooms when introducing the notion of 'sin' and in Year 2 during discussions on religious orders, where pupils were able to discuss terms such as scripture and gospel correctly and ask such questions as 'Why did you want to become a nun?' and 'What would you be if you hadn't become a nun?' In Year 1 the teacher skilfully explained faith and scripture so that it was understood by all.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

Teaching across all key stages and year groups is outstanding. It is creative and inspiring and is a real strength of the school. Teachers plan and deliver stimulating lessons which pupils enjoy. This was clearly seen in a Year 4 lesson using a gingerbread man model to explain how and why the Lord's Prayer shapes a believer's life. Detailed and thorough planning further ensures pupils fully engage with their learning and includes many opportunities for creative activities which allow pupils to explore and apply their learning within their everyday lives. Teachers know their pupils very well and have high expectations ensuring all pupils are consistently challenged to make excellent progress.

High order and targeted questioning is used highly successfully to extend and challenge pupils' knowledge and understanding and helps them think deeply and reflect on what they have learnt. Pupils' books demonstrate careful, precise and detailed marking and feedback which provide pupils with the opportunity to grow in confidence whilst developing their ideas and knowledge. Pupils are consistently encouraged to strive to further develop their religious literacy. Talk for Writing is yet another strength of the school. It is used to great effect throughout the school, being particularly successful when used to teach the Our Father using words and actions in Reception class. Cross curricular links and the consolidation of previous learning is a significant factor in developing confident enthusiastic learners. Additional adults are used highly effectively and are confident in supporting pupils' learning to ensure all pupils are successful learners and achieve high outcomes. The school is fully inclusive and ensures that all pupils have the necessary resources and materials required to maximise their learning.

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

The quality of leadership and management of religious education is outstanding. There is a clear vision for the school amongst all school leaders, a commitment to continued improvement and strive for excellence. The newly appointed religious education coordinator is well supported by school leaders and in turn is supporting colleagues well in developing their subject knowledge and appreciating the centrality of religious education in the mission of the church. Professional development opportunities are well managed and allow for both whole school and individual training. Very effective systems and structures are in place to regularly monitor and track pupil progress including lesson observations and regular work scrutinies.

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

- To encourage pupils to take greater ownership of self-evaluation through target setting procedures.
- To continue to support and mentor the newly appointed religious education coordinator as she grows in her role.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

Links with the parish have been further enhanced. School values are prominently displayed around the school and are integral to the daily life of St Agnes school. Class prayer books have been introduced and are a beautiful reminder of the diverse nature of the school and the importance of prayer in the daily life of the pupils. Children enjoy and are encouraged to write their own prayers with their families in their home languages. The Sunday Gospel is linked to class acts of worship and enables pupils to make the link between scripture and their own lives and actions.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

Religious education is at the heart of the school community as demonstrated by its 10% on the timetable. The status of religious education is also evidenced by high quality vibrant classroom displays including a prayer table reflecting the liturgical life of the church and the beautiful iconography displayed around the school. The religious education budget is in line with other core curriculum subjects reflecting the importance placed on the subject. The support of staff in the teaching of religious education is focused and generous with regular time being made for continuing professional development. The additional support of the parish priest is encouraged and welcomed. The current blocking of religious education on the timetable does not however always provide enough opportunity for some pupils to reflect on and consolidate their learning.

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

is outstanding

Worship and prayer are central features of life at St Agnes and provide pupils with a rich and varied prayer life. Prayer is woven into all aspects of school life, morning prayer, assemblies, a communal dedicated prayer board and suggestions for leading prayers at home, play a significant role in developing pupils' understanding of their faith and on their personal, social and spiritual development. Pupils are proud to serve the school community as chaplains and as such are highly active in planning and leading a vibrant child centred liturgical life for the school. Participation in all aspects of these celebrations is exemplary. Opportunities to celebrate Mass, special assemblies and the service of reconciliation during Advent and Lent are plentiful. The Crowning of Mary service is a very special time in the school year to celebrate the role of Mary. Pupils enjoy writing their own prayers and class prayer books are a beautiful record of these prayers. Translations of the Lord's Prayer into the pupils' many community languages powerfully celebrate the rich diverse nature of the school. This is further celebrated on the feast of St Agnes when pupils dress in the costumes of their communities at Mass.

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

is outstanding

Pupils have a strong understanding of the Common Good and what it means in their daily lives. One example of this is expressed by the enthusiasm they show in supporting local, national and international charities including Bow Road Food Bank, MacMillan cancer support and the NSPCC. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the theology underpinning their actions and are encouraged to see themselves as part of a community with responsibility for other people. They are proud to actively engage in acts of service to each other and to the wider community. Their commitment to respond to social injustice and needs is evidenced by the seriousness and dedication they show to their roles on the school council and as chaplains and their response to the recent

Grenfell tragedy. Pupils immediately donated the funds they had collected to buy equipment for their own playground to the Grenfell appeal. A real ethos of pupils helping and caring for one another exists across the school, pupils are genuinely welcoming and polite to each other and to visitors alike. The recent introduction of class saints further allows the pupils to learn about people who act as role models on how to live out their faith.

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

Outstanding partnerships between parents, school and the parish are testimony to the importance placed on all those involved in pupils' lives working together to support pupils to grow in their faith. Vibrant links with the parish are a particular strength and contribute greatly to the religious experiences of the children. The parish priest serves on the governing body and is a regular and welcome visitor to the school. Pupils benefit greatly from first-hand knowledge of vocational life through these visits and from those of two Columban sisters. The parish supports parents by arranging bespoke training for them during Advent and Lenten periods. School staff support the parish by acting as catechists for the parish First Holy Communion programme. School leaders consistently strive to forge and maintain highly positive relationships with parents consulting them and reviewing their approaches regularly. Parental links are therefore strong as evidenced by the overwhelmingly positive responses to the recent parental questionnaire. Parents are welcomed to join the school on special occasions such as class assemblies, services and Mass. They are encouraged to participate in 'The Big Question' along with their children by offering their own thoughts on the question and these are prominently displayed around the school. There is a wealth of information for parents in the regular newsletters and on the school's website. Links with the deanery and diocese through attendance at conferences, courses and hosting hub training days for other schools are strong.

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

is outstanding

The school's motto 'With Jesus beside us we do our best' and principles such as 'believe to achieve' permeate all aspects of school life. They are shared and embraced by all in the community and are an integral part of all school policies. School leaders and governors are fully committed to the Church's mission in education in a very humble way. Governors ensure the school's leadership team is fully supported, even taking a stint on the school gate at the end of the day, but are also able to challenge leaders when necessary. Pupils are offered rich opportunities to flourish and grow in their faith for example in the Year 6 residential retreat. The behaviour of pupils is of the highest standard and this reflects highly on the leadership and management displayed by all members of the school community. The judgments arrived at on the school self-evaluation form however whilst accurate are not fulsome enough in the celebration of the school's many achievements.

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

- To review and make explicit in the timetabling of religious education the opportunities given for developing and consolidating learning

Information about this school

- The school is a one form entry Catholic primary school with nursery in the locality of Tower Hamlets
- The school serves the parish of St Catherine of Sienna, Bow.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 95%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 5% and from other faiths is 0%.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 72%.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 3.
- There are 21.8% of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 8 have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well above average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is above average.
- There is an above average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 31% pupils receive the Pupil Premium.

Department for Education Number	3397
Unique Reference Number	100949
Local Authority	Tower Hamlets

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary
Age range of pupils	3 -11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	223
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Enda Austin
Headteacher	Ms Brid McDaid
Telephone number	020 8980 3076
Website	www.st-agnes.towerhamlets.sch.uk
Email address	office@st-agnes.towerhamlets.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 September 2012
Grades from previous inspection:	
Classroom religious education	Very good
The Catholic life of the school	Outstanding

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 14 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended 1 assembly and 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 Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

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