

St Joseph Catholic Primary School

North Road, Hertford SG14 2BY

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 15 November 2018



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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A. Classroom religious education is outstanding

- The school's religious education curriculum fully meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory.
- The school has successfully followed up and achieved the recommendations of the previous report.
- The religious literacy of the pupils is very effectively developed.
- The quality of teaching of religious education at St Joseph is outstanding.
- The teaching is inspiring, challenging and engages the pupils very well.
- A characteristic of classroom religious education is to ask challenging questions of the pupils, encouraging them to think matters through.
- Pupils make very good progress in religious education.
- Attainment is as good as and sometimes better than other core subjects.
- Pupils enjoy their learning in religious education and speak of it with enthusiasm.
- The leadership and management of the school is very effective in promoting religious education.
- The governors take a keen interest in the teaching and assessment of religious education.
- The religious education coordinator is very effective in the organisation and support of the teaching of religious education.
- The leadership of the headteacher, together with the two assistant heads, provides for very good development of religious education.
- The parish priest serves the improvement of religious education as the religious education link governor well.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The school is a close community, which witnesses to the teachings of Jesus Christ.
- Pupils speak with confidence about what St Joseph's being a Catholic school means to them.
- The school devotes 10% of classroom curriculum time to religious education and thus fulfils the expectations of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
- The school has made outstanding progress in developing opportunities for pupils to engage and take the lead in classroom and assembly prayer.
- Beginning the afternoons with a period of quiet meditation and prayer has been achieved very successfully.
- The use of the chapel, the prayer garden and the forest enclosures as integral to the spiritual life of the school has proved to be very effective.
- The partnership with the local parish and the regular visits of the parish priest to the school contribute very well to the Catholic life of the school.
- The pupils are generous in their efforts to raise money and goods for local and wider charities and indicate clearly they understand they are following the teaching of Jesus in so doing.
- Parents are integrated very well into the home/school/parish partnership.
- The governors are committed and effective in their role of promoting and guarding the Catholic life of the school.
- The school is active in its close cooperation with the diocesan officers and advisers of the Diocese of Westminster Education Service.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

The previous report recommended that the school should continue their links for cross-deanery and diocesan moderation to improve the confidence and skills of all staff to assess levels of attainment. It also recommended that the school empower the leader of religious education to develop her role through regular participation in diocesan training and deanery networks. The school has fully responded to these recommendations.

The content of classroom religious education is outstanding

The school has adopted an approved religious education (RE) scheme written in conformity to the Religious Education Curriculum Directory (RECD). This scheme is used in conjunction with the Diocese of Westminster 'Agreed Understandings'. These schemes are conjoined very effectively and result in increased pupil engagement in religious education. The programme of study excellently provides a systematic study of God, the teachings of Jesus and teachings of the Catholic Church. The leadership of the school has decided on a clear initiative to encourage creativity and challenging teaching styles in religious education. This has resulted in the teachers being confident to try new, relevant and sometimes experimental ways of engaging pupils in the topics in hand. This creativity in delivering the content of classroom religious education was a notable point that was consistently evident in classroom teaching at all levels in the school. Planning for lessons is underpinned by careful analysis of pupils' cultural background, personal experience and prior attainment, thus ensuring that the content offered is both appropriate and challenging. The school is blessed in having a forest area of its own and this is used effectively as an outdoor environment to engage and inspire children, especially in relation to climate change and green issues. Such resources, as well as links to other areas of the curriculum, ensure that the link between faith and life are substantially embedded in the curriculum. One world religion is taught in the course of the year for each class, thus ensuring that a coherent and specific knowledge of the particular religion is learned.

Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding

Pupil achievement is outstanding when evidence of progress is measured against appropriate benchmarks. 'Target Tracker' is used as an assessment and tracking tool in religious education and is monitored rigorously by the RE lead with the leadership team. The tracking is centred on the National Levels of Attainment as well as the school's internal moderation, enabling pupils to actively engage in setting targets for their own learning. Observations show that the children excel through high teacher expectation and demonstrate that all pupils are given the opportunity to achieve to the best of their ability during their RE lessons. Tracking also shows that different groups of pupils make excellent progress in RE. The data confirms that attainment in RE is in line with other core subjects. This is also evidenced by work scrutiny, parent questionnaire and the subject leader file. The pupils are proactive in their learning and approach challenge with enthusiasm and a willingness to 'have a go'. The pupils' books demonstrate effective next step marking which enables them to access higher levels of attainment and this is consistent throughout the school. The pupils are confident users of religious vocabulary and respond confidently to a wide range of questions which challenge and stretch their learning.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

All lessons started promptly and with very effective classroom management ensuring that no time was lost. An outstanding ethos for learning was evident with pupils at the ready for moving forward. The teaching was exciting, inspiring and with the school's emphasis on creativity welcomed with curiosity and interest. All the teaching seen was good with many outstanding elements in most

classes. A great variety of teaching strategies were employed across the various years but the pace and focus were never allowed to flag. Pupils make excellent progress in their religious education, evidenced both in their ability to describe to the inspectors their paths of learning and in their written work. Pupils had high expectations of their own success in religious education and reflected well the expectations they received from the school ethos and their teachers. They were given regular feedback on their progress and knew what their next steps were. Noteworthy was the frequency of higher order questioning of the pupils, challenging them to understand more deeply the truths at hand and to make connections with other areas and subjects in the school's curriculum. In a Year 6 class there was interesting discussion on whether the belief in the 'big bang' theory of creation was in line with or against the Biblical teaching that God is the creator of all that exists. Using the tracking system that is embedded in the teaching arrangements at the school, the teachers showed excellent judgement correlating what was taught to the needs of specific small groups of pupils. This high quality of differentiation was greatly enhanced by the work of the teaching assistants who provided excellent focused follow-up activities to individuals or small groups. There is a culture as well as opportunity in the school for the teachers to share ideas and strategies. Good practice was well dispersed among the staff.

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

The leadership team provide a focused way forward in the leadership and management of religious education with great confidence and clarity. The mantra of the headteacher that 'good is not good enough', along with the detailed guidance and vision of the religious education coordinator ensure that all are caught up in the improvement of RE at all levels. The enterprise of ensuring that religious education is at the core of the curriculum and that every pupil is making good progress is the daily commitment of the head and the two assistant heads, of whom one is the RE coordinator. The climate has been created that staff are happy to be involved in self-monitoring and assessment, able to share what didn't go so well as well as what did. The structures are well in place for the RE link governor to have both sight of and be able to make contributions to RE. The governing body receives regular reports on the progress of RE in the school and ensures the subject receives the resources and support needed to allow the leadership team to achieve the progress that has been planned. This was evidenced by the support given to the tracking system which provides such good knowledge and insight into the progress that pupils make in RE as well as in other subjects. It was also evidenced in the regular professional development provided for all staff. The RE lead who ensures she remains abreast of developments in RE is very actively involved in the peer to peer challenge in the Lea Valley deanery with neighbouring schools. The high quality of the school's SEF indicated the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation.

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

- Ensure staff are confident in the move away from levels in RE to the new national assessment framework.
- Continue to promote the introduction and use of 'Godly Play' throughout the school.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

The previous report made no recommendations for improvement in the Catholic life of the school. However, the school itself has developed new areas for improving the Catholic life of the school. These include pupils being encouraged to lead class and assembly prayer, the distribution of the 'Wednesday Word' to improve the liturgical awareness of pupils and their parents regarding the Mass readings of the following Sunday, and the setting up of the 'chaplains team' made up of pupils drawn from Years 5 and 6.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

The school ensures that religious education is at the core of the curriculum in ways that are effective and thorough. From every angle it is clear that this characteristic of the school is unmistakable and bedded in. Pupils enjoy it; parents appreciate it; governors support it. Pupils spoke with pride about religious education being the central subject in the school and that it informs all the other parts of their learning. The RECD is fully in place as the groundwork document of RE. The school devotes 10% of classroom curriculum time to RE and thus fulfils the expectations of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in this important respect. The cycle of continuing professional development of the staff includes on a regular basis one or other aspect of religious education. New staff are well inducted into the RE curriculum and benefit from the common vision it provides. The RE lead contributes to decision making in the school through her attendance as assistant head in all the senior leadership team meetings. The governors ensure that the resources are in place for RE to take its place at the core of the curriculum.

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

is outstanding

The school provides an outstanding experience of Catholic worship, prayer and liturgy for the whole school community. Each day the pupils experience three moments of prayer and it becomes a normal part of their school life and experience. Of special note is the period of meditation and quiet that the pupils have at the beginning of the afternoon classes. It leads to an atmosphere of calm and focus on the work in the classroom after the lunch break is over. Pupils are involved in preparing prayers for class and year assemblies. The 'chaplains team' provides an excellent example to model by their leading of whole school prayer on certain occasions. Parents are invited to attend class liturgies and school Masses. The parents feel involved in the Catholic life of the school and their children in this way. Pupils are given an outstanding introduction to Catholic spirituality in their time in the school, including retreats, reconciliation services and confession, stations of the cross, prayer in the school's chapel and in the prayer garden, advent and lent services as well as special liturgies for occasions such as a bereavement. Pupils spoke with confidence of turning to God in prayer. Parents said how much the pupils were growing in the sense of God being present. The prayer displays round the school and the outstanding prayer tables in each classroom contributed to the experience of prayer that the pupils gain.

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

is outstanding

The gospel call to justice and service is highlighted and lived out at St Joseph's in a variety of ways. The school council and 'chaplains team' work strongly together as a team aware of the importance of following the Gospel values in their school, their community and in the wider world – Malawi in

particular. There are outstanding systems in place that illustrate that the respect and value of each individual are central to its vision each and every day. A culture of respect is actively cultivated. Every opportunity is taken to recognise and celebrate others and the children are encouraged to share with others ways they are called to serve; fundraising, prayer etc. Celebration assemblies are just one way achievements and good deeds are recognised and celebrated. This is a school where acts of kindness are constantly praised. The pupils are actively engaged in supporting those in need and are extremely enthusiastic to all they can to help others locally, nationally and globally. The school actively encourages the pupils to engage in acts of kindness (Malawi, Christmas boxes) and they can articulate why they do this; to follow the teaching of Jesus. In the meeting with the Year 5 pupils, one child said, 'We are proud to wear our badge and love being part of this special school'.

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 partnership of the school with the parents and parish is outstanding. Through their welcome in the school for prayer occasions, the good relationships with staff and leadership team, the active school website, the parents indicate how positive and confident they are about their children's progress in the school. The parents are encouraged along with their children to know and live the school vision 'Together we grow in God's love, learning to be the best we can be.' There is an active parent association which creates regular occasions for parents to enjoy events at the school and thus build community bonds yet further. The relationship with the parish is excellent. The parish priest is closely involved in the life and governance of the school, and is a regular visitor. He allowed himself to be put under the microscope in a recent class when they asked him questions about his vocation as a priest. There is good cooperation in respect of preparing pupils for the sacraments. There is a close partnership with diocese, and diocesan training events and celebrations are always attended. The school is contributing well to building links with other Catholic schools in the Lea Valley deanery.

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

is outstanding

The leadership and management of the school is outstandingly effective in promoting the Catholic life of the school. In a recent exercise the school involved both the pupils and the parents in reviewing and finding practical next steps in respect of the school vision mentioned above. In this way it demonstrated its fundamental commitment to ensuring that the promotion of the Catholic life of the school is its priority. The displays throughout the corridors and classrooms of the school eminently proclaim its Catholic identity. Rigorous monitoring and regular evaluation are in place on the part of both the leadership team and the governing body regarding maintenance and development of the school's Catholic life. Governors keep well up to date, attending both diocesan and county in-service training. All new staff are carefully inducted into the Catholic values and ethos of the school. In talking with the pupils they displayed a clear understanding of the central role of discipleship and service, reflecting the teaching of Jesus and its embodiment in the life of the school.

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

- Take forward its plans to introduce a 'Spirituality week' into the annual school cycle.
- Improve awareness of the foundation and charism of the school, ensuring the pupils know the school's history and roots.

Information about our school

- The school is a one-form entry Catholic voluntary aided school in the locality of Hertford.
- The school serves the parishes of The Immaculate Conception and St Joseph, Hertford
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 95%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 1% 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 50%.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 2.
- There are 4% of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 0 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 below average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is well below average.
- There is a well below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 9 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (4 %).

Department for Education Number	9193341
Unique Reference Number	117436
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	223
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sharon Jordan
Headteacher	Mrs Justine Page
Telephone number	01992583148
Website	www.stjosephs255.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@stjosephs255.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 October 2013
Grades from previous inspection:	
Classroom religious education	Good
The Catholic life of the school	Very 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 Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

Deacon Anthony Clark

Lead Inspector

Mrs Mary Ainger

Associate Inspector

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Vaughan House
46 Francis Street,
London
SW1P 1QN

T: 020 7798 9005

E: education@rcdow.org.uk

W: <http://rcdow.org.uk/education>