

Our Lady Catholic Primary School

Old Hale Way, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1XT

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 10 May 2019



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is good

- Despite a recent period of challenging circumstances for the school, leaders have been clearly focused on keeping religious education at the heart of the curriculum.
- The headteacher has been instrumental in ensuring the content of the curriculum meets the requirements of the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory*.
- Pupils are articulate in sharing their learning and are evidently proud of their achievements. They have good attitudes to learning and are religiously literate.
- Teaching is typically good across the school. Systems for demonstrating pupil attainment and progress are beginning to become more familiar to all staff.
- The influence of religious education permeates all aspects of the learning environment and is evident throughout the school.
- Teaching is monitored rigorously and good systems are being established by the leadership team to support teachers.
- There is strong and committed support for religious education from the governing body who share the vision of the headteacher and the leadership team.

Classroom religious education is not yet outstanding because

- There are limited opportunities for pupils to show independence in their approach to learning and to take responsibility for their learning outcomes.
- Teaching needs to become consistently inspiring through a wider range of teaching strategies to actively engage pupils in their learning.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The Catholic life of the school permeates the whole community in the outstanding opportunities it provides on a daily basis.
- 10% of curriculum time is given to religious education, as required by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
- The school's mission statement – 'Together at Our Lady School we are living, learning and growing through Jesus Christ and his Church' is lived out in a very real way and contributes to the way the school expresses itself as a vibrant Catholic community.
- The range of opportunities for worship, prayer and liturgy continue to develop in a variety of exciting and engaging ways.
- Pupils' engagement with the Common Good is exemplary, with one pupil commenting, 'We raise money for charity because our job is to live like Jesus and follow his path.'
- The school has developed excellent partnerships between parents, school and parish.
- Excellent systems are being established to ensure both the induction and development of new staff are rigorous and effective.
- The headteacher has been the driving force in the school's commitment to ensuring the Catholic life of the school is always kept at its heart. Governors play an active role in the school and make a significant contribution to its success.
- Despite turbulent times, this is a school that celebrates its Catholic life in an authentic way. It is clearly outstanding in this respect.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

Due to a complete change in staff personnel within the last two academic years, the development of middle leaders to be able to take more responsibility for delivering and monitoring the religious education (RE) curriculum has been difficult. Going forward, this is something the headteacher is very aware of and will address as soon as staff develop the necessary experience. Training and coaching opportunities for teachers to become outstanding in their practice is being modelled regularly and improving steadily by way of moderation and training within the local deanery and in the diocese. Consistency in marking so that all teachers are following best practice is now firmly in place and feedback to pupils continues to improve as experience in the teaching of RE becomes increasingly secure.

The content of classroom religious education is good

The content of Our Lady's RE curriculum fully meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. The headteacher has ensured that units of work are clearly becoming embedded and are a solid foundation on which to deepen the pupils' religious literacy. Staff have been supported exceptionally by leaders to develop their knowledge and understanding. There is some evidence to show creativity in the teaching and learning of RE in some classes and this will continue to be developed as staff become increasingly confident in teaching the scheme of work. An example of this creativity was a homework project where pupils were asked to work with their families on creating a design of a monstrance as part of their work on Adoremus. The Eucharistic Congress theme of Adoremus has been woven into the curriculum in a very spiritual way and includes a whole school Adoration each Friday with the parish priest. The school continue to develop the teaching of Judaism in every year group, and their work on other faiths is well embedded and includes visits to other places of worship.

Pupil achievement in religious education is good

Pupils are proud of their achievements in RE at Our Lady's and they were able to articulate this clearly to inspectors. They are religiously literate and can talk about the range of topics they have covered. When asked challenging questions related to scripture, their level of religious literacy is clearly apparent. Some teachers are more confident in asking challenging questions, for example, in the lower part of the school one pupil, when asked about how Jesus went back to heaven, replied, 'I think God lifted him up.' Similarly, in discussion with the pupils, one of the older pupils said he felt challenged when given activities which applied their knowledge, for example, when being asked to agree or disagree on whether the story of the Ascension was an important event. They know how well they are doing and how to improve their work by way of feedback from teachers as well as through assessment criteria in their books. As new staff become increasingly confident in teaching the RE curriculum, standards in assessment will show developing rigour and challenge. Individual pupil assessment is not accurate or secure at present and this is an area leaders are working on in line with diocesan expectations. Pupils are learning to self-assess and this is supporting their progress. Pupils are keen to become more independent in their learning and told the inspectors they would like to increase the use of ICT, for example, to research and prepare presentations on various RE areas of study. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary; pupils are kind, courteous and polite.

The quality of teaching is good

Teaching across the school is good. It is very evident that teachers plan the RE learning journey together collaboratively, and this is reflected in the effective delivery of lessons as well as the

supportive environments that the teachers create for and with the children. Relationships are built on mutual respect and the children generally engage well in lessons. In the most effective lessons observed, pace of teaching was good and children were thoroughly captivated either through vibrant storytelling, the use of 'hot seating,' or when visually stimulating experiences were used. In Reception, where this was very evident, the teacher made use of a gold helium balloon to demonstrate Jesus' ascension into heaven. During discussions with inspectors, a pupil spoke about a lesson that the class particularly enjoyed which was delivered by the headteacher on her experience of the 'Via Dolorosa.' This sense of 'awe and wonder' is something the headteacher is encouraging across the school.' Lessons which were overly teacher directed were clearly less engaging for the children and pace and challenge slowed. In some lessons observed, differentiation through 'pre-determined' groupings stifles children's creativity, independence and access to more challenging tasks. Homework is valued by both children and parents alike. They are particularly encouraged by the family projects which enable them to discuss learning together.

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

The school has recently experienced very challenging circumstances and, due the recruitment of an almost entirely new staff, the headteacher has had to ensure she maintained a very clear vision and focus for religious education. She has been unswerving in the direction of travel she has set out to achieve. She identified from the outset that teachers of RE needed to have the required knowledge of the RE curriculum in order to be able to deliver increasingly exciting and challenging content to the pupils. Alongside her leadership team, she has successfully prioritised areas for development and focused clearly on these. This has resulted in good teaching in RE across the school due to her high expectations for both staff and pupils alike. There is strong and committed support from the governing body and parish priest who share the vision of the leadership team.

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

- Provide increasing opportunities for pupils to show independence in their approach to learning and to take responsibility for their learning outcomes.
- Teaching needs to become consistently inspiring through a wider range of teaching strategies to actively engage pupils in their learning.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

The school continues to explore ways to include the use of ICT within the RE curriculum. The school has made excellent strides including the theology that underpins the outstanding work the pupils are doing for the Common Good. Pupils can clearly articulate the Church's call to serve.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

The headteacher has ensured that, despite recent challenges, the place of religious education has remained at the heart of the school. A pupil who showed the inspectors around the school, read out the mission statement in bold letters in the hall saying, 'I didn't actually even have to read that from the wall, all the children at the school know it off by heart.' Not only do they know it, but they are able to apply it to their actions around the school. Classroom displays and the school learning environment proudly profess the richness of religious education across the school. It is evident that pupils, staff and parents have contributed to the displays and they are proud of their contributions. Governors play an active role in supporting both RE and the Catholic life of the school and are regular visitors. The school's SEF provides an accurate evaluation of the strengths and areas for development of the Catholic life of the school.

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

is good

The experience of Catholic worship for the whole school community is continuing to improve as new staff become increasingly familiar with Catholic prayer and liturgy. It is the vision of the headteacher that this is modelled by herself during whole school assemblies and by the Year 6 class who are having an excellent impact on the prayer life of the school by leading all year groups in collective worship. The pupils in Year 6 talked animatedly about their involvement in preparing and leading worship and have clearly gained invaluable experience from this. As part of the growing experiences of worship in the school, children are beginning to lead a reflection after every RE lesson. Reflections observed were exceptionally prayerful. Pupils are encouraged to contribute to assemblies and Masses by way of playing instruments, leading the readings, intercessions and offertory procession. Pupils attend Mass regularly and can avail of the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Advent and Lent. Every class holds assemblies for parents, reflecting their current RE theme. Displays are of a high standard and reflect the prayer life of the school.

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

is outstanding

The contribution to the Common Good is outstanding. Pupils know and understand the school's mission statement and live it out through their actions, words and deeds. Central to the life of the school is the school's core values of care, concern, compassion, respect and self-worth which were all evident through the behaviour and attitude of the pupils. These values are the epitome of the headteacher about whom one parent commented, 'I know I can speak to the headteacher about any concerns I have and they will be listened to in a compassionate way and dealt with.' Pupils feel that their ideas are valued and as a result they have a deep sense of belonging to the school and of service to others. The school's chaplaincy team, made up from an elected group of Year 6 pupils, are instrumental in encouraging charitable fundraising efforts. They are developing an understanding of some of the moral issues of the day and are eager to do good works in the world and to be of service. This has an excellent impact on the rest of the school and the pupils talked very passionately

about the numerous fundraising projects they have undertaken. Pupils said, 'We want to make RE fun and at the same time our job is to live our lives as Jesus would wish.' The pupils have some excellent plans, for example, for a school prayer garden. The school has a long standing relationship with the Kanyike project and Fr Kakuba in Uganda. Fr Kakuba has visited the school. Throughout the year, pupils realise the Church's call to serve through raising money for various charities such as the Catholic Children's Society, Hitchin homeless centre, the parish Bethany club, UNICEF and most recently for a young boy in the local area, Seraph, who has neuroblastoma. As a result of all these efforts and the centrality of the Catholic life of the school, there is clear evidence of an understanding of the call to 'human flourishing' and this provides opportunities for pupils to celebrate their gifts and talents. All staff are deeply committed to the pastoral care of pupils and relationships in the school are exemplary.

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 school, through recent turbulent times, has relied on the support of parents, parish and the diocese. The recent RE survey was testament to the fact that the majority of parents support the school wholeheartedly and are committed to the vision of the headteacher. Comments from parents included:

'Our school is grounded in community and that is what we love about it.'

'I know my child is safe, feels she has a purpose and a sense of belonging at Our Lady.'

'The Catholic ethos has kept parents and staff together as a bond.'

The school works closely with parents to develop a shared understanding of the mission of the school and the parents feel they are well informed about what their children are learning in religious education. The parish priest has an integral role within the school and staff and pupils talk highly of his involvement. Staff are increasingly availing of the opportunities for moderation within the deanery and the diocese and they will continue to benefit from moderation with staff from a variety of schools to inform their assessment judgements.

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

is outstanding

The headteacher's relentless approach, through a very difficult period for the school, in ensuring all pupils have an enriching Catholic experience is to be commended. She has been an inspiration; she has been steadfast and committed to driving the school forward and this enables all their pupils to experience the richness of a Catholic education and prepare them to embrace a life of service to others. The voice of the pupils articulate clearly how much they enjoy being at Our Lady's and how they continue to grow in their faith. Governors share in the strategic leadership of the school with commitment and resilience. This is exemplified in the vision of the headteacher and her leadership team, who drive the school's commitment with a clear vision of discipleship.

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

- To ensure prayer and worship is prepared and planned by staff as well as pupils across all age ranges.
- To continue to develop middle and senior leaders to take increasing responsibility for the Catholic life of the school.

Information about this school

- The school is a one form entry Catholic primary school in the locality of Hitchin.
- The school serves the parishes of Our Lady Immaculate and St Andrew, Hitchin.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 92.3%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 4.1 % and from other faiths is 1.8 %. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 60 %.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is one.
- There are 12 % of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom one has a statement 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 well below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 17 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (77%).

Department for Education Number	9193399
Unique Reference Number	117476
Local Authority	Hertfordshire

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	4 -11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	221
The appropriate authority	The governing body and academy trust
Chair	Mr Neil Adams
Headteacher	Mrs Ciara Nicholson
Telephone number	01462 622555
Website	www.ourladys.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@ourladys.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	March 2014
Grades from previous inspection:	
Classroom religious education	Outstanding
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 7 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended 1 assembly and an act of worship.
- Meetings were held with school staff, pupils, parents 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 Monica McCarthy

Lead Inspector

Miss Liz Doonan

Associate Inspector

Mr Daniel 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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