

# St Dominic Catholic Primary School

Southdown Road, Harpenden, AL5 1PF

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 6 November 2019



## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### A. Classroom religious education is good

- The curriculum is based on the Religious Education Curriculum Directory, it is effective in engaging pupils in their learning.
- Progression is mapped out to ensure continuity and development and, as a result, most pupils make good progress in religious education. Their religious literacy is strong as is their knowledge of scripture.
- Pupils' attitude to learning is positive and this is reflected in the progress they make. St Dominic's participates regularly in moderation at deanery level as well as internally ensuring that pupils' work is evidencing good progress.
- Typicality of teaching is never less than good and during this inspection some outstanding lessons were observed. Pupils are engaged and good support is provided for pupils with additional needs.
- The head has a clear vision for the part the school plays in the educational mission of the Church. They have adopted a team approach to the leadership of religious education; there are good systems to ensure religious education lessons are of high quality and staff are well supported. Induction processes are highly effective. Governors are actively involved with strategic purpose in the support of religious education.

### Classroom religious education is not yet outstanding because

- There are not yet enough opportunities for independent learning and learning at greater depth to enable pupils themselves to identify accurately their next steps in learning.

### B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The school excels at being a community based on Catholic tradition and practice. The contribution of all to the Catholic life of the school is strong and clearly in evidence in all aspects of the school environment.
- Religious education is at the heart of the school and pupils receive their entitlement of 10% curriculum time in religious education as required by the Bishops' Conference.
- Worship and prayer are central to life at St Dominic's; pupils are actively engaged in planning and delivery of collective worship and can use a wide range of prayer to enhance the spiritual experience.
- St Dominic's provides opportunities for pupils to develop and celebrate their gifts and talents as individuals and as part of a community.
- This school demonstrates vibrant, creative relationships with parents who very much enjoy being part of the school community.
- Pupils clearly understand their mission as Catholics; they can reflect and act upon their own responses to ensure that the school community is active and vibrant.
- There are excellent systems for induction of new staff thereby ensuring the outstanding provision of Catholic life of the school is secure.
- The school's leadership is fully committed to the Church's mission in education in an exemplary way. Governors make a highly significant contribution to the work and Catholic dimension of the school.

## A. Classroom Religious Education

### What has improved since the last inspection?

The recommendation from the last inspection was to continue to induct new and non-Catholic teachers into the religious education programme and its delivery. During this inspection, it was evidenced that induction procedures are a strength of this school. Inspectors made this judgement from lessons observed, pupil voice and in pupils' religious education books.

### The content of classroom religious education is good

St Dominic's uses the Religious Education Curriculum Directory (RECD) effectively to ensure that its programme of study meets the requirements outlined. All teaching staff refer to the RECD in planning. The resources used support pupils in religious education (RE) lessons and enable them to make good progress. Displays are child led and informative. The delivery of the content of religious education is well structured and ensures progression throughout the key stages. Other faiths are taught creatively; in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), for example, pupils were exploring the festival of Diwali by working with Mendhi patterns on a hand template, making Diwali cards and considering the significance of this festival to Hindus. This creative learning experience ensured pupils were engaged and were developing a sound knowledge of the festival of Diwali.

### Pupil achievement in religious education is good

St Dominic's is using the Westminster Diocese Agreed Understandings to assess pupil outcomes. The school has also begun to explore the use of driver words to focus learning. Work is moderated against the Levels of Attainment both internally and with local schools. There was some evidence that samples of work moderated were not consistently judged in accordance with the Agreed Understandings which in turn impacted on pupil outcomes. Pupils have a good attitude to learning; they are well behaved and engaged. Their religious literacy is strong as is their knowledge of scripture. In lessons observed, it was evident that pupils are used to working collaboratively to produce work which is then presented to the whole class for further discussion. Pupils understand the Levels of Attainment although there was no evidence that pupils understood that this could be used to further develop their learning journeys. Pupils are very good at relating their learning to their own lives. They also have a good understanding of tradition in the Catholic Church. The supplementary materials to enhance the published scheme of work would enable these religiously literate pupils to evaluate and analyse their learning. The impact of this is that pupils do not achieve at the higher levels in line with other subjects.

### The quality of teaching is good

Teaching is consistently good with examples of outstanding practice. Teachers' subject knowledge is very strong and this impacts on learning in a highly effective way. In a Year 2 lesson observed, the teacher overheard a pupil remark that the light of Christ burned brightly for the good Samaritan, as if he has a fire on his head and the teacher immediately reminded pupils about their prior learning and linked current learning to what they already knew about Pentecost. This teacher effectively used mini plenaries to develop further pupils' thinking during the lesson. Pupils take a great pride in their work; books are very well presented. There is evidence that feedback is used effectively by pupils. During the lessons observed, pupils were engaged and attentive. Lessons planned do not always provide opportunities for independent and deeper learning; pupils work on similar tasks and provide written responses according to their ability. Work in books evidences lots of writing in response to learning, however there is not as much evidence of creativity in lessons. Most lessons seen were three part lessons where pupils were actively engaged and listening; however some pupils did not need all of the input and could have been provided with opportunities to deepen their learning

experiences. However, in the best lessons seen, teachers were skilled in questioning as was seen in Year 5 where effective questioning gave rise to a wide range of responses from pupils which evidenced their strong religious literacy. Pupils can reference scripture well. The use of the Bible as a resource in class could be developed as this is not consistent practice. The best practice using and referencing scripture was observed in Year 6 where scripture was used by pupils along with their strong prior knowledge to present their ideas. The teacher modelled high expectations which resulted in high quality discussion. In Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils were working on very creative tasks learning about other faiths. Inspectors observed a lesson on the Hindu feast of Diwali, learning outcomes were good because of the high expectations of the teacher as well as her high quality questioning. Children were allowed to move freely in the learning space and activities outside were carefully planned to enhance pupils' learning experiences.

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

The leader of religious education has worked tirelessly to ensure induction procedures are highly effective, and is well supported by the head teacher. New staff are provided with training to enable them to deliver high quality lessons. Training focuses on topics to be covered to ensure staff are confident to deliver the programme of study. The head teacher has ensured that there are good systems in place for a thorough induction process and that planned moderation activities impact positively on outcomes for most pupils. The head has a clear vision and commitment to the school's key role in the educational mission of the Church and this is in evidence in the development of a team approach to religious education. This includes the leader for religious education, the newly appointed deputy and the head teacher. This team has established good systems and structures to ensure religious education lessons are of high quality. Governors are involved in religious education in this school. They have contributed to the writing the self-evaluation documents and have ensured that they have addressed the areas of development from the last inspection.

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

- Ensure that lessons provide opportunities for both independent learning and learning at greater depth so pupils can accurately identify their next steps in learning.

## B. The Catholic life of the school

### What has improved since the last inspection?

The recommendations from the last report were to develop ways in which the prayer garden is used in the life of the school and to promote opportunities for parents to develop their theological understanding of themselves as believers and parents. During the inspection it was evidenced that the prayer garden used by pupils during play and in lesson time was used to good effect and pupils indicated that it is used through the year. Parents have been involved in developing the prayer garden since the last inspection. Parents told inspectors that homework has helped them develop their own theological understanding.

### The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

**is outstanding**

On entering into St Dominic's, there can be no doubt that in this school pupils are offered an experience of a Catholic education that engages them in a rich tradition. This school ensures that pupils are actively engaged and encourages pupils to reflect on a Catholic way of living. Pupils are given the required 10% curriculum time for RE as required by the Bishops' Conference for England and Wales. Religious education is at the heart of this school, as is evidenced by budget and staffing. Governors and school leaders offer outstanding support in developing and reviewing the religious education in St Dominic's. A website redesign is currently in hand, which will further improve the strong Catholic message to the community.

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

**is outstanding**

Since September, the newly appointed deputy head teacher has set up systems to build a sound evidence base for collective acts of worship. Pupils are adept at evaluating their practice. There is a good mix of child-led collective worship and teacher-led worship. This ensures that evaluations from pupils are considered and teachers help pupils redefine their acts of worship by modelling good practice. Prayer opportunities for staff and pupils are planned in a way that is inclusive. Parents value opportunities to attend liturgy. Staff attend morning prayer that is scripture based and sets the foundation for everyday life at St Dominic's. The school serves the parishes of St Thomas More and St John Fisher and the school highly values the contributions of the local clergy. These contributions impact on pupils' liturgical formation as well as staff subject knowledge. Pupils use different forms of prayer during worship. They are adept at creating intentions books, family prayer books and have taken part in 'Be Spirited Week' and rosary club, all of which have contributed to pupils' spiritual development.

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

**is outstanding**

Pupils in this school are provided with excellent opportunities to develop and celebrate their talents and gifts both as individuals and as a community. Pupils reflect on the 'Value of the Month' and are able to link this value to their fundraising activities. The newly created 'Minnie Vinnies' are clear that they are stewards of God's creation and the liturgy team can articulately explain their role in school. Pupils are actively involved in supporting those in need, locally, nationally and globally. Displays evidence the school's commitment to global issues, the 'Spotlight on Africa' fun run raised £3195.50 this year for the charity and the school, and the front entrance display promotes the 'Rotary Shoebox' project. When inspectors spoke to pupils, they expressed their understanding of their mission to help others and to follow Jesus' example. Pupils raise money for their own causes; for

example, following the passing of a grandparent, funds were raised to buy a piece of garden furniture for the residents for the care home in which the grandparent had been residing. All pupils knew the school's mission statement and expressed their delight at receiving a token in the box for living out the mission statement. Pupils could link the certificates for religious education with gospel values.

**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**

Parents feel welcomed in this school. Parent questionnaires returned 95 responses which were overwhelmingly positive. Parents are happy to share their skills and talents to contribute to school life. For example, a group of parents have formed an orchestra whose work enriches liturgical celebrations. Parents are very pleased to note that homework contributes effectively to pupils' learning and that tasks enable families to learn and work together. Parents spend time reading with pupils in school. Parents are very happy with their children's faith foundation and have indicated that they feel that the school is thoroughly committed to religious education and Catholic life. Parents have said that the school fosters a family spirit. The majority enjoy the homework tasks set as the whole family can contribute. They also value the 'Minnie Vinnie' initiative and see this as a great opportunity for pupils to support those in need in the community. Grandparents expressed their delight to be included in the school community and applaud what is being achieved both within the school as well as in the wider community. Local clergy contribute significantly to school life ensuring highly effective collaboration between the school and parishes. Priests from both parishes have forged exceptionally strong links through regular visits to classes to support prayer life and the curriculum. For example, one shared his call to the vocation of priesthood with pupils. He also visited to support pupils' understanding about the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Another regularly supports teachers with the planning of Masses. Staff indicate that they feel very well supported by both parishes.

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

**is outstanding**

The school's leadership is fully committed to the Church's mission in education in an exemplary way; leadership, consisting of senior leaders, the RE coordinator and the governors, is creative and dynamic. This is evidenced in the welcome visitors receive, in the high quality and informative displays throughout the school and in the prayer spaces created. St Dominic's is a lively Catholic community where parents contribute significantly, and where governors share in the strategic vision of the school with energy and enthusiasm. Governors monitor the impact of the self-evaluation document with the religious education leadership team. Governors are proud of the school and contribute to policy and practice. They recently worked with the diocese on their admissions policy to include criteria for Catholic looked after children from abroad to ensure that this is an inclusive Catholic community. Governors monitor the use of resources to ensure that the Catholic life is well supported. Staff are passionate in expressing their commitment to enhancing faith experiences of pupils. Induction procedures are highly effective ensuring those new to the school very quickly share and participate in the Catholic life of the school. The leaders for religious education make themselves available for one to one support. The leadership team and governors are the driving force in the school's commitment to the education of young people with a vision of discipleship for life. It is evident that there are high expectations of all staff to promote the Catholic life.

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

- Continue to work on the development of child led collective worship.

## Information about this school

- The school is a one-form entry Catholic primary school in the locality of Harpenden.
- The school serves the parishes of St. Thomas More, Wheathampstead; St. John Fisher, Redbourn; Our Lady of Lourdes, Harpenden.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 98%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 1.6% and from other faiths is 0%. 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 two.
- There are 4% of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 2 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.
- 5 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (2.2%).

<b>Department for Education Number</b>	9193401
<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117478
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary Aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 - 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	228
<b>The appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Jemma Thomas
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss Clare O'Sullivan
<b>Telephone number</b>	01582 760047
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stdominic.herts.sch.uk">www.stdominic.herts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:admin@stdominic.herts.sch.uk">admin@stdominic.herts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	11 September 2014
<b>Grades from previous inspection:</b>	
<b>Classroom religious education</b>	Outstanding
<b>The Catholic life of the school</b>	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, 8 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended two 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.

Ms Evelyn Ward

Lead Inspector

Mr Daniel Keane

Associate Inspector

Mrs Cynthia Ni Loingsigh

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>

Vaughan House  
46 Francis Street,  
London  
SW1P 1QN

T: 020 7798 9005  
E: [education@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:education@rcdow.org.uk)  
W: <http://rcdow.org.uk/education>