



DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION REPORT

incorporating Section 48 and Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on
behalf of the Archbishop of Southwark

URN 142156

St John's Catholic Primary School

Rochester Road

Gravesend

DA12 2SY

Inspection date:	24th November 2022
Chair of Governors:	Mrs Karen Thompson
Co-Headteachers:	Mrs Cooneyhan
	Mrs Barron
Inspectors:	Mr Stephen Beck
	Mrs Helen Frostick

EDUCATION COMMISSION

St Edward's House, St Paul's Wood Hill, Orpington, Kent BR5 2SR
Tel 01689 829331

Interim Director of Education: Angela Cox OBE



Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St John's is a large four-form entry Catholic academy within the Kent Catholic School Partnership (KCSP) situated in the Gravesend Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. The principal parish the school serves is St John the Evangelist, Gravesend, the home parish. Few pupils attend elsewhere, marking a significant change since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 56%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in both key stages.

The school takes pupils from 3 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 831. The school also has a Nursery with an additional 61 children. 51% of these pupils are Catholic.

The attainment of pupils on entering the school is below average. The school location deprivation indicator is quintile 4 (more deprived) of all schools. Pupils come from a wide range of social and ethnic backgrounds. There are 14 ethnic groups represented in the school, with White British making up 34 % of the pupil body. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language, 38%, is much higher than the national average. 17% of pupils are in receipt of the Pupil Premium grant. The proportion of pupils with SEND is slightly lower than the national average.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St John's is a good Catholic school because:

- St John's is a good Catholic school with many outstanding features. It is a vibrant and welcoming school where pupils thrive, are confident, and feel safe. It has a strong family-based ethos which all value and protect. The school offers a good standard of Catholic education within an inclusive and supportive community. The school's value statements inspire the school's strong Catholic ethos and are at the heart of school life, permeating all that the school does. Excellent leadership, and a clear direction from the recently appointed co-headteachers, have already resulted in very good pupil, staff and whole community relationships, building successfully on what was in place.
- Good quality teaching and learning in religious education results in good pupil outcomes. All groups of pupils make good progress and achieve well. Pupils are interested and enthusiastic. They are inquiring and reflective learners and are keen to do well. They enjoy their religious education lessons and can relate them to their own lives.
- All points for development identified at the last inspection have been addressed. The school has a clear vision of the way forward, and effective systems of self-review and evaluation are becoming embedded, indicating that it has a strong capacity to continue improving.
- The school offers a range of prayer and worship opportunities. These reflect the traditions of the Catholic Church and encourage pupils to develop their relationship with God. Pupils are beginning to have more opportunities to lead worship which they enjoy undertaking.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Expand the range of learning opportunities through cross-curricular links by supplementing and extending the religious education scheme of work to provide a greater degree of challenging experiences for pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding.
- Embed the school's religious education and tracking systems to ensure teachers interrogate the data collected, are clear about prior attainment and can plan even more effectively for the next steps in learning.
- Further, enhance the assessment of religious education through moderation and the development of collaborative opportunities with local Catholic schools to ensure the accuracy of assessments and that all pupils are appropriately challenged.



Overall Effectiveness

How effective the school is in providing Catholic Education.

2

Catholic Life

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.

1

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

Religious Education

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

2

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.

2

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

2

Collective Worship

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.

1

The quality of provision for Collective Worship.

2

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

2

CATHOLIC LIFE

1

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding

St John's is an explicitly Catholic, vibrant and welcoming school where pupils thrive, are happy, confident and feel safe. All policies and practices within St John's begin with their stated vision and values. These are clearly linked to scripture, 'We walk with Jesus', 'We always do our best', 'We love each other', and 'We live our life to the full'. Impressively these are known and lived out daily by all involved in the school and have become a mantra for day-to-day living. They are clearly linked to Catholic Social Teaching, which is given a high profile. Pupils are enthusiastic to be recognised as living out these values through the awarding of a coloured tie and badge, which serve to maintain a focus on this aspect of school life with explanations from staff in assemblies on how the pupils have lived out the value in practice. Adults model the values in their interactions, so pupils see them lived out in every aspect of their school life and then emulate them in their actions. Pupils clearly understand the importance of the values to their school life and to themselves. The school is full of obvious signs of its Catholic character, from the entrance where visitors are welcomed into school with the image of Jesus' out-stretched arms, to the onsite chapel with a beautiful sculpture of Our Lady, to the various signs and symbols of faith in classrooms, corridors and offices.

Pupil behaviour is exemplary. They benefit from the school's behaviour policy which is based on maintaining the dignity of individuals, even when dealing with breaches of the policy, and a restorative approach to reflect forgiveness and reconciliation.

Pupil voice continues to be a strength of the school. They feel they are listened to, can make a difference and articulate their pride in their school, which exudes a strong family-based ethos in spite of St John's being a very large school. Numerous opportunities are provided for pupils to take on responsibilities, such as school council membership, angels in action, eco warriors and prefects. Plans are in place to develop closer links with local Catholic schools and build on the current strong ties with its neighbouring Catholic secondary school.

The quality of provision of the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding

The whole school curriculum is designed around a desire to develop the whole child. Whilst the religious education lead is relatively new to post, a strong religious education team has been established with two Catholic life leaders- one who focuses on 'prayer and liturgy' and one who focuses on 'living our faith in our active deeds' and this team is well supported by the co-headteachers with all teachers being aware that they are also responsible for promoting the Catholic ethos and life of the school through active participation.



There is a strong sense of partnership between the school, parents and parish community members, which is being rebuilt following the recent pandemic. The parish priest regularly visits not just to celebrate Mass but also to be involved in religious education lessons, to lead staff training and to be involved in general celebrations and events. He is a highly valued member of the 'school's family.'

As a parent responded on their questionnaire, *"My child is always excited to go to school. That says a lot about the environment, Christian teachings, lifetime learning and the faith learning which engages them"*.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding

The co-headteachers, leadership team and governors, are deeply committed to the mission of the Church and provide an inspiring environment that develops the pupils' spiritual, moral and vocational life. The parish priest provides both challenge and support to the school's leadership. As a governor, he works with his governor colleagues, the senior leaders of the school and the staff to continually evaluate and improve provision for the Catholic life of the school. The Governing Body is ambitious for the Catholic life of the school. It has a named governor involved in the ongoing evaluation of the provision and ensuring that the Co-Headteachers report on Catholic life at all Governing body meetings.

There is a good training programme used by school leaders to support non-Catholic teachers and those new to Catholic education, which is very effective and has led to increased staff confidence.

Evaluations from parental questionnaires show that parental support for the school is exceedingly strong. The link between home, school and parish is demonstrated by the number of pupils and families who regularly attend the parish Sunday Masses. The parent of a SEND child was highly complimentary of the support the school had provided for her child, indicating that following a family bereavement, the support received from the school was exceptional. Another parent wrote, *"Although not all of the children who attend the school are Catholic, the school teaches very strongly the Catholic faith and beliefs. These will stand all the children in good stead for the future."*

The leadership of Catholic life is prioritised as part of the whole school improvement plan, raising the importance given to both the religious ethos of the school and the place of religious education as a core subject. A parent stated, *"St John's has a fantastic reputation within the wider community. My child has fully embraced the new vision and values and speaks about them all the time"*.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

2

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is good

Pupils enter the school at a below-average level, including in their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith. Pupils clearly enjoy their religious education lessons and consider them an important part of their learning. Pupil interviews reflected this when they stated, *"We enjoy our RE lessons because we can learn about Jesus and we are able to do art, singing and dance in these lessons"*. This reflects an early growth in using cross-curricular activities to support the religious education curriculum. Teachers have high expectations for all pupils and encourage them to produce their best work following their 'blue' value, and they plan lesson content and delivery to interest pupils. Work would benefit from more significant differentiation and tasks to ensure they are better matched to the pupils' abilities. Learning behaviour in lessons observed was excellent, with all pupils on task and motivated by their learning, which is mainly teacher-led and scheme based. There is now an opportunity to enable pupils to become more independent learners through opportunities to undertake pupil-initiated learning and research. Promoting questioning, using whole class big books, and reflection time in lessons have ensured greater opportunities for pupils to become more religiously literate, and religious education is at least as good as achievement in other core areas.

Pupil voice is gathered regularly by the religious education leader, and pupils say they enjoy lessons and talk about their learning with enthusiasm and interest. They are particularly confident using their big books to talk about the learning in which they have been engaged. These books reflect well on curriculum coverage, which was less well evidenced in pupils' workbooks. Very good examples were seen in the big books of work undertaken across the school on a recent topic of remembrance.

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is good

Teachers in St John's plan effective lessons using the scheme 'The Way, the Truth and the Life', which is well-resourced. Pupils can reflect on how what they are learning impacts their everyday lives. The school allocates time in the year to study other faiths, such as Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. Pupils also experience visiting a local Gurdwara temple.

Lesson observations show that the teaching of religious education is consistently good. Effective use was made of the examples set by saints and famous people who have undertaken good works, e.g. St. Oscar Romero, Fr Pedro, Marcus Rashford, both current and historical, for pupils to reflect on their own lives. These lessons are enhanced by good questioning and clear messages such as *'People being taught to help themselves'* and *'Agree not to have more but to be more'*. Classroom religious focal points are prominent, and good use was seen of the use of music to support the learning atmosphere. Identified good practice could be usefully shared across the school, and classroom displays could be further enhanced to celebrate pupils' work.



Teachers make good use of formative assessment through effective questioning in lessons and during feedback. The school has integrated religious education assessments into their data collection procedures as in other core areas such as English and mathematics. As teachers become more proficient in using this data, they will be better able to use their knowledge of this assessment to plan and meet the needs of all pupils and enable them to achieve their full potential.

Teachers, including those who are not Catholic, work hard to ensure they have a strong subject knowledge. Early career teachers and apprentice teachers attend religious education training to ensure that they are equipped with appropriate strategies to ensure pupils learn well and enjoy their lessons. Early Years Foundation Stage teachers have also engaged in bespoke training provided by the diocese. As a result, the teachers feel confident, and in turn, pupils in St John's are keen to learn, concentrate, enjoy their work and achieve well.

Praise is used effectively in religious education lessons and throughout school life, and achievement and effort are highlighted and rewarded in various ways, including comments, stickers, stamps, awards and points.

A particular strength of the school is the high level and quality of support given to pupils with special educational needs. This is well-targeted and discreetly delivered. As a parent commented, *"We have experienced amazing pastoral care from all staff at St John's, from the office staff to the co-Headteachers"*.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is good

The leadership of religious education is good. The leadership team are determined and committed to celebrating the school's successes and addressing areas for development. The self-evaluation provided for this inspection clearly shows they know their school well, are clear about its strengths and areas for development, and that complacency is not an option.

In conjunction with the leadership team, the religious education leader identifies whole school targets and priorities for religious education in the school, which then form part of the religious education action plan within the school improvement plan. It is important now to prioritise and appropriately target the priorities identified.

The subject leader has been given more time to fully concentrate on improvements within the subject through the appointment of a team to develop the whole Catholic development of the school. The school benefits from a strong, active and involved governing body with an extensive skill set. Its membership provides a good level of continuity and succession planning that continues to serve the school well.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding

St John's is a prayerful community where pupils and staff regularly engage in various prayers, liturgies and reflection times. Pupils are reverent and attentive, fully engaging in the opportunities for worship provided. Pupils are confident and joyous in their response to song and prayer. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the Church's liturgical year, seasons and festivals. Collective worship is central to the life of the school, and praying together is part of the daily experience for pupils and staff. Pupils use a variety of approaches to prayer; formal and informal, private and communal and they are encouraged to be still and to listen to God. The school has a morning prayer, end-of-the-school-day prayer and grace at lunchtime. All pupils regardless of their faith are aware of prayer as an opportunity to 'talk to Jesus'. Pupils' response to voluntary prayer is evident in the number of pupils making use of the opportunity to use the school's chapel room during lunchtime voluntarily.

Being a sizeable, four-form entry school with limited space, Mass is the only time the whole school comes together in one area twice a year- with Masses to mark the beginning and end of the academic year. These are held outside and are truly special occasions as the whole community joins together as one body in prayer. It is noteworthy how well the school premises are cared for and support the pupils' desire to care for the environment.

Each class has its own prayer book, allowing children to add their own prayers, which can then be shared with the rest of the class. All classes have a class candle, which is lit at the beginning of each act of worship. The parish priest blesses these at the beginning of the school year.

The school has a prayer room and chapel, which are used regularly for individual and group worship. The Blessed Sacrament is present in the chapel, and children show reverence in this presence. The newly established religious education team have plans to extend the range of opportunities for collective worship to provide opportunities for pupils to take a more active role in leading these celebrations.

St John's has an active school council that feels strongly that "they make a difference". They work alongside another group of pupils known as 'Leading Lights', a pupil group that supports staff by setting up the focal point of a session and leading the prayers.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is good

Prayer and liturgy are central to the life of the school for all pupils and all staff. The beginning of every day is dedicated to Prayer and liturgy –all teaching, staff, support staff and pupils participate in this time of collective worship and reflection. The co-headteachers support staff to encourage pupils to reflect on the different aspects of their own lives and actions and how they can support others through Catholic Social Teaching and school values.

Pupils are encouraged to express their ideas and thoughts and explore various forms of worship, including movement, song, art and dance, which could usefully be expanded. Their reflections are often captured in their big class book, which is well-used.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is good

There is a good range of liturgies over the academic year, and the parish priest commented on how well pupils were prepared for the celebrations of Mass. Collective worship has a clear message and purpose. Themes for Masses and assemblies reflect the liturgical calendar and ensure pupils understand the liturgical year, seasons and feasts.

The school has strong links with the local Catholic secondary school, St John's Comprehensive School. Pupils have benefitted from their school chaplain and student prayer leaders visiting the primary school to lead collective worship enabling the pupils see role models of older students leading prayer. One parent wrote, *"My son is incredibly happy and supported by the ethos of the school"*, and another stated, *"St John's is a brilliant school, and my children have had a wonderful education"*.