

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

ST JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC VOLUNTARY AIDED INFANT SCHOOL

Hazell Avenue, Aylesbury HP21 7JF

DfE School No: 826/3372
URN: 110478

Head Teacher: Mrs A Taylor
Chair of Governors: Mrs J Servi

Reporting Inspector: Mrs K Yuen
Associate Inspector: Mrs P Brannigan

Date of Inspection: 21 October 2014
Date Report Issued: 7 November 2014

Date of previous inspection: **30 September 2010**

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and in partnership
with Buckinghamshire Local Authority

Information about the school

St Joseph's Catholic Infant School is an oversubscribed two form entry school for pupils aged from 4-7. It is situated in the Parish of St Joseph's, Aylesbury but draws children from adjoining parishes and villages. Currently there are 180 pupils on roll of whom 92% are baptised Catholics. There is an on-site community preschool under the governance of the school. The junior school, to which most pupils transfer at the end of key stage 1, is on the same site. The number of children who speak English as an additional language has increased in recent years and a number on entry are at the early stage of learning English.

Key grades for inspection

1. Outstanding 2. Good 3. Requires Improvement 4. Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of the Catholic school

Grade 2

St Joseph's Infant School is a good school with a number of outstanding features. These include the leadership of the headteacher, the Catholic life of the school and the provision for prayer and collective worship. Pupils fully participate in and respond joyously to the outstanding provision for collective worship. The school recognises the need to secure and extend the RE subject knowledge of teachers and improve the quality of all teaching to match best practice. St Joseph's Catholic identity permeates the school's daily life. Parents praise the standard of care shown by all staff.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

The school has a good capacity for sustained improvement and development. The issues from the last inspection were to improve resourcing thus enabling pupils to work more independently, raise expectations of presentation in RE and to share the strengths of the school's chaplaincy provision within the newly established pastoral area. Very good progress has been made in the first two areas. The sharing of the chaplaincy provision has not been possible due to the ill health of the lay chaplain. However, the school has created a new chaplaincy team which is developing good practices and is very effective.

The school's self-evaluation is detailed and accurate. This is a school that knows itself well. The staff and governors are committed to continued improvement. The headteacher and deputy have a good overall view of the school's strengths and development needs. Regular monitoring and evaluations feed into the school development plan.

The leadership has very successfully communicated an inspiring vision for the school leading to its present effectiveness and is able to maintain and develop this even further. Senior staff are good role models and all staff are encouraged to improve their skills through in-house support and training.

The current leadership has a good capacity to maintain effectiveness. Recent interventions in teaching and learning and further staff support ensure that the school has a good capacity for sustained improvement. As the experience and involvement of the new governing body increases, it will be able to fulfil the criteria for 'outstanding'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop teacher's RE subject knowledge and skills by in-service training and giving opportunity to see outstanding practice.
- Develop the role of the school in the wider Catholic community to further enrich the religious education curriculum.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 2

Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic life of the school both in their positive response and caring behaviour towards one another. They are given many opportunities to respond to the needs of others. The thoughtfulness of pupils through organising an event to raise money for a sick child in the school community is an example of this developing sense of service. Pupils praise the caring attitude of teachers whom they describe as one of the best things about the school. Behaviour is excellent and the 'star awards' are recognition for those living out the mission statement.

The prayer life of the school is real and tangible and contributes significantly to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Pupils value prayer and are equally aware that their prayers are valued. They often write their own personal intentions and place them in the prayer baskets which are in each of the classrooms. The pupils' joyous response to collective worship is uplifting and an outstanding feature of their prayer life. In the assembly observed during the inspection, the pupils were attentive, reverent and made heartfelt responses through song and prayer. The youngest children in reception quickly learn to pray and to make the sign of the cross well. They could be seen making brief visits to the prayer table.

Chaplaincy provision is a prominent feature of school life. The team includes the head teacher, music teacher, the RE link governor and the parish priest. Members work closely together to promote the spiritual development of pupils, the Catholic Life of the school and offer valued support to staff. Pupils feel safe, cared for and know where to go and what to do when they need help. They value and respond enthusiastically to liturgies devised by the chaplaincy team. Parents value the care given to their children and the approachability of staff, commenting that, "As soon as you hand them over you know they will be well cared for."

Pupils make steady progress in religious education. They achieve age appropriate levels of attainment. Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons especially those linked to practical activities such as role play and art. The attitude of pupils makes a positive contribution to their achievement. Their books are well presented and, despite being early in the new school year, there is evidence of a varied range of tasks.

Leaders and managers

Grade 2

The head teacher's commitment and vision for the Catholic life of the school is empowering for the whole school community. Her leadership of this is outstanding. The emphasis placed on pupil's spiritual, moral and social growth is a strength. Governors work closely with the headteacher and have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development. The RE link governor supports the promotion of the school's Catholic life. Her work is valued by staff. As the skills and confidence of the many new governors develops and grows this will further enhance their effectiveness. The school evaluates its effectiveness through a variety of monitoring activities and has detailed and accurate assessments for RE.

Despite experiencing unsettling times in recent years the school's continued focus on improvement and maintaining a clear Catholic ethos is powerful testament to the strong team spirit and an open and supportive culture.

The headteacher who is also the RE subject leader has a clear knowledge of the strengths of the subject and a plan for improvement that is linked into the whole school development plan. Religious education is monitored consistently by means of lesson observations, work scrutiny and impromptu drop-ins. The deputy head teacher works alongside the two newly qualified teachers to model good practice and support planning. This invaluable resource has been most effective in securing good standards and is a reflection of the strong supportive ethos. Procedures for assessment of RE are well established. Moderating activities with other Catholic schools has resulted in a standards file being produced. This will be a useful resource for new staff and in ensuring levels are benchmarked.

Provision

Grade 2

The provision for the prayer and spiritual life and collective worship at St Joseph's is outstanding because it very effectively meets the spiritual needs of the pupils, be it through assemblies, liturgies or opportunities for formal or spontaneous prayer. There are also many powerful opportunities for spiritual nourishment through meditative reflection and high quality prayer through song.

Assemblies and liturgies are well planned and contribute to pupil's spiritual development. Masses held at the school give pupils the opportunity to worship in a community strengthening links with the parish. Attractive themed Prayer tables known as "Jesus tables" are prominent in each classroom and provide a further focus for prayer, reflection and learning.

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is good. However, there are inconsistencies across the school. Where teaching is good or better it enables pupils to progress well because it engages their interest, thus raising thoughtful questions and responses. Where teaching is less effective there is too much teacher talk and RE subject knowledge is not always as secure. Proactive teaching assistants provide invaluable support especially in allowing the teacher to split children into smaller groups with differentiated tasks tailored to their needs. However, on some occasions the movement of groups to different spaces across the school disturbs the flow of learning and reduces learning time. Marking is affirmative and there are some examples of next steps being identified.

The quality of the religious curriculum is good. The "Come and See" programme is used throughout the school and at least 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education. Resources are well managed and support the curriculum. Attractive displays around the school reflect the liturgical year and the topics the pupils are studying giving added value to this core subject. Cross curricular links are evident in literacy and music. Other faiths are taught and festivals recognised. Parents are kept fully apprised of what the children are currently learning through a termly newsletter.

The inspectors wish to thank the headteacher, staff and children for their warm welcome and for contributing to their very enjoyable and interesting visit.