



Diocese of Westminster

St Dominic's Catholic Primary School
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Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Archbishop of Westminster
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: 12th March 2013
Date of previous inspection: 23rd September 2010

Reporting Inspector: Mrs P Brannigan
Associate Inspector: Ms N. Kane

Introduction

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspectors spent one day in school, visited eleven lessons, attended one Mass and carried out six interviews with school staff, pupils and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, discussion with local clergy, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

The Inspection of St Dominic Catholic Primary School Camden was carried out under the requirements of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Framework and Schedule for Section 48 Inspections approved by the Archbishop of Westminster. The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the school is in providing Catholic education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation.

Description of School

The school is a one and a half form entry primary school with nursery in Kentish Town in the local authority of Camden. The school serves the parish of the same name. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 63%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 20%, from other Faiths 8%, and from no faith 9%.

There are 300 pupils on roll, with 4 pupils with a statement of Special Educational Need. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is well above average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is also well above average. There is a well above average rate of families claiming free school meals at 44%.

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1: Outstanding;*

Grade 1: Very Good;

Grade 2: Good;

Grade 3: Requires improvement;

Grade 4: Causing Concern.

A. Classroom Religious Education

How religiously literate are pupils in the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith and how well do they know, understand and appreciate the importance of religious faith and practice in everyday life?

What is the overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy?

Overall Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of curriculum religious education is good and meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory which forms the basis for the programmes of study. The quality of teaching and pupils' attainment and progress are generally good. Pupils make good progress through the challenge and expectations of their teachers. In recent times, sound structures have been put in place to ensure quality teaching and monitoring. Self-evaluation is accurate and indicates a good knowledge of the school and development areas for religious education. Teachers generally have sound subject knowledge and there are good structures in place to support new members of staff. There is a commitment to on-going professional development to enable staff to improve and develop their teaching of religious education. The new headteacher and deputy, who is also subject leader, give the subject a high priority which permeates all aspects of the life of the school.

What has improved in classroom religious education since the last inspection and what should the school do to further improve in classroom religious education?

There were four areas for development in the last inspection report. These were: to take forward plans to develop teachers' understanding of the attainment targets and levels in religious education; track pupils' performance in religious education; make better use of the school's good practice in naming classes after saints; and encourage more teachers to begin to study for the CCRS or similar qualification. The school has responded well and the programme of staff training in the light of current developments is beginning to make an impact.

To further improve curriculum religious education in the light of the new framework, the school should:

1. Continue to support teachers in developing their subject knowledge particularly in relation to the agreed understanding of the levels of attainment.
2. Develop the tracking system to ensure pupils make good progress across both key stages.
3. Ensure all classes have enough bibles to enable pupils to have access to the text of the Scriptures.

How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?

Grade 1

The content of curriculum religious education meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. The four strands are used to very good effect and are clearly identified in lesson planning. The school is using the 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' scheme of work which it has cross referenced to the areas of the Curriculum Directory being covered. Staff are very well supported in their medium term planning which shows clear links to the Curriculum Directory and the resources used. There is regular monitoring of the curriculum, planning, workbooks and pupil learning. There are plans to invite visitors from other faiths during a themed week, to support the learning in these areas. In addition, cultural and religious festivals celebrated by non Catholic pupils are recognised in classes and assemblies. The parish priest visits very frequently and is an additional teaching resource.

Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education

Grade 2

Pupil achievement, attainment and progress in religious education are generally good. Pupils enter the school below the national average and make good progress from Foundation Stage onwards. This has been achieved by a significant investment in resources, training and good use of support staff. By the end of Key Stage 2 standards generally meet diocesan expectations. Lessons observed provided evidence of very well motivated pupils who are actively engaged in their own learning. There is evidence that pupils are attaining a good standard in knowledge and understanding of religion and are developing an ability to reflect on meaning.

The quality of teaching

Grade 2

The quality of teaching is generally good. Lessons observed across the school during the inspection gave evidence of high teacher expectations for all groups. Teachers generally demonstrate good subject knowledge and use a variety of strategies to engage the full range of ability. One teacher holds the CCRS certificate and one is about to embark on the course. All teachers have good access to in-service training which is funded by the school. Pupils make good progress and are encouraged to become independent learners who are able to develop their understanding of scripture and religious concepts. Class teachers use time well and pupils are given opportunities to develop new skills and build on previous learning. Workbooks are very well presented; marking is positive and interactive, with targets set for further improvement. Regular monitoring of teaching is in place followed by discussion and support as necessary. Good assessment procedures have enabled teachers to plan well to meet the needs of all pupils. Parents are able to support their children's learning through an imaginative 'Home Learning' programme, the 'Wednesday Word' and regular curriculum newsletters.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade 1

The leadership and management of religious education are very good and have a positive impact on the life of the school. The subject leader is very well supported by the headteacher and all staff. Together they ensure that clear vision and direction for religious education is shared by the whole school community. School leaders ensure that very good support is given to new teachers and teaching assistants. High expectations for staff and pupils ensure that religious education is at the core of the curriculum. Staff are very well supported in their teaching through in-service training and frequent continued professional development. There is a good range of resources and the learning environment for religious education is very good. Religious education is given priority in the school improvement plan which is detailed and comprehensive. Members of the new governing body show a high level of commitment to training which has enabled it to become familiar with current developments in religious education. The parish priest also acts as school chaplain and, together with the experienced Chair of governors, plays a significant role in the management of religious education.

The Catholic life of the school

How well do pupils experience the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing through all areas of school life?

What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?

Overall Grade: I

The school is very effective in developing pupils' experience in the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing. The leadership and vision of the new headteacher and deputy, supported by the parish priest, and governors are instrumental in ensuring that worship and prayer are central to the life of the school and are well planned and resourced. Religious education is valued and recognised as the core of the curriculum. Pupils are encouraged to reach their full potential academically, spiritually and morally by all staff. There are plans to include pupils in a chaplaincy programme as well as to give them additional opportunities to become involved in social justice issues. The governing body includes members with a wide range of expertise who are able to contribute to the school's vision of itself as a Catholic community. Good links with parents, parish and Diocese demonstrate the school's commitment to partnership and its clear identity as a diocesan Catholic school.

What has improved since the last inspection and what should the school do to further develop the Catholic life of the school?

Since the last inspection the school has begun a redevelopment process which will enable it to improve the environment and provide space for a prayer garden. Led by the headteacher and deputy, the Mission Statement has become well known by pupils and seen as a reflection of the vision and values of the school. Pupils have been given increased opportunities for reflection and meditation as well as more occasions where they can contribute to school and classroom liturgies. All staff have been well supported as the school implements the new diocesan Framework and requirements of the Curriculum Directory.

The school has identified that it should continue to engage parents in a wider variety of ways to enable them to support their children on their faith journey.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget

Grade I

Religious education receives 10% of curriculum time and has a larger budget than other core subjects. Resources are good and teaching assistants play a significant role in supporting pupils. There is a very good learning environment through attractive displays in classrooms and other areas of the school. All staff receive in-service support and training relating to the Catholic life of the school. Members of the new governing body are now able to provide support in reviewing and developing the place of religious education. The priest from the local parish supports new teachers in developing the subject knowledge necessary for effective teaching of religious education. He is a frequent visitor to the school for a planned programme of masses and liturgies. He also acts as chaplain and as an additional learning resource.

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

Grade I

The school's provision for prayer and worship is very good. Pupils are given many opportunities for prayer, meditation and reflection and examples were seen during the inspection. A school developmental liturgy and prayer programme enables pupils to participate and contribute to a wide range of worship. Religious education lessons often include prayers and sometimes include a simple liturgy. Prayer and worship are respectful towards pupils from other faiths and denominations and, where appropriate, designed to be inclusive. Parish led sacramental preparation takes place on the school premises and is given good support by staff. Pupils are engaged in the preparation of liturgies and masses which are part of the school's provision. Their spiritual development is nurtured through religious education which permeates the wider life of the school. During the inspection pupils from Year 5 and Reception class contributed to the daily Mass at the adjacent parish church. Pupils read, sang, led bidding prayers and the offertory procession and acted as altar servers. They participated with respect, reverence and enthusiasm. The parental questionnaires indicated that parents were very positive about invitations to Masses, liturgies and other school celebrations.

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

Grade I

Pupils have a clear understanding of the gospel call to justice and service and are actively involved in support for local and national charities including Cafod, a local homelessness support group, 'Sanktus' and the parish St Vincent de Paul Society. Conversations with members of the school council indicated an awareness of the problem of homelessness in the local area and their understanding of ways they could help. They have a clear understanding that the need to work for the common good and put others before themselves is rooted in gospel values. Pupils learn to respect and value those from other faiths and cultures through assemblies and visits. At the time of the inspection they had prepared a presentation for the local authority on ways the school helps pupils to resolve conflict and improve facilities in the locality. This included examples of school life and 'tips' for peaceful conflict resolution. Pupils are given many opportunities to support their school including helping in the nursery at lunchtimes and assisting in the playground. They are growing in their understanding that responding to the call to justice and service is part of being a member of a Catholic community. Behaviour and relationships within the school are very good.

Enabling the authentic partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf;

Grade I

Governors, headteacher and staff see partnership between parents, school and parish as a central part of the school's understanding of itself with its immediate and wider community. Parish links are excellent and pupils visit the church frequently for Masses and to deepen their faith and understanding. The school works very closely with parents and carers who are appreciative of all that is done to enable their children to develop. There are also very good links with the Diocese through participation in training offered through the Westminster Diocese Education Service for both staff and governors. Senior staff attend diocesan conferences and have participated in local and diocesan moderation sessions. There are plans for pupils to visit Westminster Cathedral to enable them to have a better understanding of their place within the wider Catholic Church.

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

Grade I

The leadership of the school is committed to the Church's mission in education and demonstrates this by providing a curriculum with spiritual and moral development at its heart. Headteacher, subject leader, governors, parish priest and senior staff ensure that the Catholic life of the school is central to all its work. Pupils are given many opportunities to know the life and teachings of Jesus and the traditions of the Catholic Church. Leaders share a vision of the nature of Catholic education and work with staff, pupils and families to move the school forward. All aspects of school life are underpinned by the mission statement, 'Let your faith shine through in respect for yourself and others and in your achievements.' which is to be reviewed by the whole school community this year. Each class has a saint's name, an attractive prayer focus and a display area which emphasises the importance of religious education. Governors have a wide range of expertise and make a significant contribution to the life of the school. They are well organised and have a clear understanding of their role in safeguarding and promoting the Catholic life of the school.

