



Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School**

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D/ES Number: 846/3318

Headteacher: Mrs Jacqueline Lance

Chair of Governors: Mr John Stone

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Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Bishop of Arundel & Brighton  
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Date of inspection: 4 June 2013  
Date of previous inspection: 16 June 2007

Reporting Inspector: Mr Stephen Beck  
Associate Inspector: Miss Ros Gillies

## **Description of School**

The school is voluntary aided. It is situated in the Brighton and Hove Deanery of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. It is maintained by Brighton and Hove Local Authority. The principal parishes which the school serves are St Thomas More, Patcham and St Mary's, Preston Park and the vast majority of pupils live and worship in these parishes. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 94%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to religious education is 10% in all key stages.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 218. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free schools meals at 5% is below average. Around 17% of the pupils receive extra support in class. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds although 13% of pupils speak English as an additional language.

### **Key for inspection grades**

Grade 1: Outstanding;    Grade 2: Good;    Grade 3: Satisfactory;    Grade 4: Inadequate.

## **Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school**

St Bernadette's is an outstanding school. It benefits from the committed leadership of a dedicated headteacher, who is instrumental in effectively maintaining and developing the school's Catholic identity. The school's mission statement marks out its family orientated approach to all aspects of school life, which is driven by a 'Spirit-filled and reflecting approach'. It is a school which in its own words says, "We embrace challenge and opportunity to achieve the best in all that we do" and it is this view that complacency is not an option that drives the success it achieves.

Gospel values are at the heart of this caring, family school and the life of St. Bernadette, the school's patron saint, is well known by the pupils. This provides a strong inspiration for living out the values expounded. The school articulates a commitment to developing the whole child and all pupils are valued as unique and individual with precious gifts. The strong Catholic ethos underpins a secure and supportive community which is like a family. Pastoral care is a strength of the school.

Prayer is at the centre of school life and interwoven into the school day. There is a strong motivation to educate, promote and support each individual's journey of faith by bringing the Gospel values and the teaching of the Catholic Church into every aspect of school life. Pupils are welcoming, well-mannered and polite and behaviour in class and round the school is exemplary.

The mission statement is given a high profile in all documentation and around the school. It is marked by its clarity and purpose in setting the school's vision. It was written with input from all members of the school community and sets high expectations in all areas of school life. It was blessed by Bishop Kieran at a special liturgy. The statement is kept alive among pupils through events such as the annual Leavers' Mass in which the mission statement is passed on to two children in Year 5 by Year 6 children. Each year every class rewrites the mission statement in their own words and it is regularly reflected on both in class and in liturgies.

The governors, headteacher and deputy headteacher, in partnership with the religious education coordinator and SENCO/EPR coordinator ensure that the distinctive Catholic nature of the school is at the forefront of all that the school undertakes. The school has two Parish Priests who are governors of the school. They are knowledgeable about St Bernadette's, being regular visitors and contributors to the life of the school in numerous ways. They provide a strong chaplaincy role which is greatly valued by all members of the school community. This reflects the very strong home, school and parish links that provide a very firm foundation to this Catholic community. The school has an active Parent Teacher Association that arranges both social and fundraising events which are enjoyed by children, staff and parents alike

Religious education within the Catholic curriculum is very strong. In lessons observed, all children were fully engaged in their learning and attitudes were exemplary. Religious education books are valued by pupils and seen as special. Curriculum coverage is clearly evidenced. The standard and quality of work is of a high standard with all groups of pupils making expected progress or better, including those children in groups nationally, that are liable to underachieve. Religious education assessment work is moderated in staff meetings to ensure that all teachers have a full understanding of the levels, and this has had a significant impact on ensuring there is progression across each key stage. The religious education coordinator works closely with Catholic schools in the Deanery, among which moderating work has been a focus. The school has a record of religious education lesson observations which show that children participate in lessons with interest, enthusiasm and confidence. Lessons benefit from differentiation that takes a range of forms by task, support provided, use of frames, and different success criteria. This was validated during this inspection.

As a parent stated, *"This is an excellent Catholic school in all respects. We are delighted to be able to send our children to a safe and nurturing school."*

St Bernadette's is appropriately a 'self-confident' school. This is built on a knowledge of its own strengths and areas for development as identified in its concise, well prepared but appropriately detailed self-evaluation form provided for this inspection.

**Grade 1**

### **Improvement since the last inspection**

The school has made excellent progress in regard to the three areas identified in the last inspection as possible areas for improvement. It has built strongly on its assessment processes which now have appropriate elements of pupil self-assessment that see consistent use of levels of attainment and 'I can' statements throughout the school. Pupils self-assess each piece of work in religious education and this is enabling them to identify their next step in their learning. There is a strong awareness of individual pupils' needs with strong differentiation that meets the needs of all pupils. Prayer is central to the life of the school and incorporates a wide range of prayer forms.

**Grade 1**

## **What the school should do to improve further**

With no significant areas for improvement the school should work to maintain and build on its current numerous strengths.

Governors, headteacher and staff could;

- Increase opportunities for pupils to visit local places of worship to extend their 'real life' experiences in connection with the teaching of other faiths.
- Ensure appropriate resource provision and establish an in-service training programme to secure teacher knowledge in embedding the new religious education scheme 'Come and See' over the coming academic year.

## **The Catholic Life of the School**

### **Leadership and Management**

At the time of the previous inspection leadership and management were graded as outstanding. Since this time the school has seen the appointment of a new headteacher who has successfully built on this. As a result of a highly professional partnership between the Chair of Governors, who has provided continuity over this period, the school's senior management team and governing body, the school has gone from strength to strength. The Governors are well informed. They access training to support their work of encouraging and promoting the Catholic life of the school and its development. They attend Diocesan and local authority training, are involved in recruitment and in admissions and participate in religious celebrations and school monitoring visits. The Governing Body both challenges and supports the school in regard its Catholicity reflecting a truly critical friend approach.

The headteacher has admirably secured a school environment that is supportive of all involved. There is a shared vision that sees all persons valued within the school community. In addition, this ensures the school's aim to develop an understanding of the value of 'family' in the widest sense, is lived out in the daily life of the school. The headteacher is justly held in high regard by staff, parents and governors. She provides strong spiritual leadership and has a clear vision, which is enthusiastically communicated to all members of the school community, based on Gospel values. All work in unity to provide a bright and stimulating environment which includes a high standard of display that emphasises the school's Catholic ethos. The mission statement is displayed throughout the school, reflected in all documentation and shared with parents.

There are good links with local Catholic schools, enabling the sharing of good practice in a supportive context. Very positive relationships have been forged between home, school and parish. Parents are actively involved in the life of the school, helping in classes, on school trips and through the St Bernadette's Parent Teacher Association.

Leadership and management at all levels are effective in developing the Catholic life of St Bernadette's School. They promote spiritual and moral development and provide a very strong capacity to sustain ongoing improvement.

**Grade 1**

## **The Prayer Life of the School**

The prayer life of the school, including collective worship, is seen as an essential element of religious experience and is integral to the life of this happy and welcoming community. Pupils are given daily opportunities to participate in collective worship and prayer which they do enthusiastically. They are encouraged to recognise the importance of their faith through prayer and are taught an appreciation of showing respect and reverence. The school's assembly programme is a highly valued part of the life of the school and includes whole school, key stage and class assemblies. Prayer is central to the school day with regular opportunities given to reflect on and write their own prayers. Pupils make use of the class Spiritual Journey Books, which have been established for each class. School Mass is celebrated on Holy Days of Obligation, special occasions, for specific celebrations in the liturgical year and classes also attend masses in the parish churches.

Classroom focal points, which are contributed to by the pupils, are used by teachers in religious education lessons for quiet reflection or meditation. They are of a consistently high standard and very effectively support the prayer life of the school. Display work around the school, largely centred on the current religious education theme, is of a very good standard maximising use of display areas. Pupils understand the notion of accepting responsibility for their own actions and demonstrate a great love of their faith.

In an assembly led by Year 1, pupils were very attentive with the high level of staff participation being noteworthy. The celebration was greatly enhanced by the use of music, drama and singing which were of a very high standard. The young pupils spoke with confidence, clarity and excellent diction, making appropriate use of a microphone when necessary. The theme of 'Africa' utilised excellent cross curricular links and touched on aspects of other faiths and community cohesion. 'Going Forth' cards were distributed to all classes at the end of the assembly re-emphasising the message to the school to, *'Help others and never take more than you give'*.

An excellent Reception class liturgy commenced with one of the pupils building up the focal point whilst music played and the teacher commented on the items being brought together. The teacher was very affirming in her approach incorporating strong learning through the posing of questions such as, "What is the Bible?" Talk partners raised the level of learning through discussion of the parable of the feeding of the five thousand. The teacher's excellent rapport with the pupils and the setting of above age related expectations, saw pupils absorbing the challenging concept of the Body and Blood of Christ through an analogy of 'Communion enabling people to feel Jesus in their heart'. These Reception pupils participated in spontaneous prayer with reverence, thoughtfulness and respect for each other. Singing with signing further enhanced this liturgy.

St Bernadette's has developed opportunities across the school for guided meditation. There was an excellent example in Year 5 where pupils wrote their own guided meditation which formed part of a class liturgy.

There are quiet places for prayer in the school and in the school grounds' prayer area. The upper corridor has a prayer focus area which is regularly changed to reflect the liturgical calendar and to give children different opportunities for reflective and interactive prayer. The school makes good use of its beautiful and tranquil grounds in which they have a grotto dedicated to Our Lady. This is used by the whole school community and for outdoor masses. Currently under development are a 'Mary Garden' and a 'Sacramental Garden'. These developments reflect the school's great commitment to developing the widest possible prayer opportunities for pupils through a variety of reflective environments.

It was of significant note that in the school's Ofsted inspection the following comment was made, *"The Christian foundation leads to good opportunities for pupils' spiritual development, for reflection in the school's Prayer Area and in the display space devoted to religious education in each classroom. The relationships between adults, pupils and among the pupils are especially good. This reflects the school's positive ethos and provides a good basis for classroom learning. School staff set high expectations for pupils' conduct and attentiveness, which promotes their moral and social development well and leads to their evident readiness to learn."*

**Grade 1**

### **How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?**

St Bernadette's School is an inclusive school that welcomes all. A recent parental survey found that 98% feel welcome and comfortable in the school. There is a common sense of belonging. School leaders respect difference, value diversity and ensure equal opportunities for all. Relationships among pupils are positive. They are able to express their identity with pride. Provision for spiritual development offers opportunities for staff and pupils to celebrate and respect diversity. The school is a close-knit community where all work together to encourage and support the development of every pupil, with staff members being very good role models. This enables pupils to gain an understanding of how cooperation and valuing diversity serves to create a purposeful, harmonious community. Pupils are equipped with skills which enable them to lead, listen, take responsibility and respond through routes such as the school council. Older pupils are responsive and thoughtful in supporting younger pupils. The school sums up its approach to community cohesion through the part of its mission statement which states, *"We welcome everyone and reach out to all people."* Ofsted noted how relationships between pupils of different ages were noticeably good, partly because of the weekly mixed age pastoral care sessions, which continue to be a strength of the school. They further added, *"The school fosters pupils' understanding of global issues, for example, through the social justice committee of the school council."*

There is a strong tradition of working well with other schools in the area. St Bernadette's is part of the Westdene Teaching School Alliance, Patcham Cluster and it works regularly with other Deanery schools. The school collaborates with local Catholic schools, those of other denominations and faith traditions and schools with no religious character as part of the Preston, Patcham Cluster. The headteacher attends regular Deanery meetings and local authority briefings, along with headteacher meetings at the local teaching school. The deputy headteacher is also involved with relevant cluster meetings and the school SENCO is an active participant of the local SENCO group with regular meetings held at the school. St Bernadette's is involved in football and netball leagues with Catholic and non-Catholic schools. The school contributes to the life of the local community and to national and international events, initiatives and opportunities.

Charity is an important aspect of St Bernadette's. This year, the whole school community has participated in Little Way Week, raised money for Macmillan and CAFOD, Comic Relief, Help the Aged and many more. In each case the fundraising is built around pupils' learning, which includes discussion, to enable pupils to understand and have an empathy with those they are helping. Inclusive whole school and class liturgies ensure that all pupils regardless of ability can play an active part, which the school feels is especially important where such a high percentage of pupils are Catholics. Committed and talented teaching staff lead worship very effectively through class assemblies, liturgies and masses, making sure pupils are well prepared and ensuring that all are involved in the prayer life of the school. Parents are welcome to all liturgies and masses.

Pupil voice is heard through the established school council which was effusive about the contribution it felt it made to the life of the school. Pupils are given opportunities to take on a range of responsibilities. The religious education curriculum and programme for collective worship promotes community cohesion. World faith fortnight in November includes the study of Judaism and will usually include a visit from the local Rabbi. In the summer term classes also study another world faith. During the school's annual International Week, families from other faiths or other cultures visit the school to talk to pupils in their classes or to lead an assembly. The school fosters pupils' understanding of global issues, for example through the social justice committee of the school council. Extra-curricular provision extends pupils' cultural understanding well, and includes a good range of sports, peripatetic instrumental tuition and activities such as Spanish, and gardening. The curriculum is broad and balanced with different learning styles being supported and catered for. It is personalised to cater for the needs of individual groups of learners. Religious education students from Brighton University have also taught world faiths to the pupils.

*As a parent wrote, "I am very impressed with the school's approach, both its Catholic ethos and its respect for other faiths. I like the blend of spiritual and practical. I feel it is so important to both understand and put into practice what we believe." St Bernadette's clearly does this.*

The participation and positive interactions between groups of pupils, parents and staff make an important and beneficial contribution to cohesion. The Catholic ethos of St Bernadette's is far reaching as people are drawn into this cohesive community.

**Grade 1**

## **Religious Education**

### **Achievement and Standards in Religious Education**

Pupil attainment on entering the school is variable but is generally in line with age related expectations, although a number are below national norms. Pupils make good progress at every level and by the end of Key Stage 2 attainment is at least average and frequently above. Attainment in religious education compares very favourably with literacy and is often better. This applies to pupils from all backgrounds and equally to boys and girls. Pupils are developing a good religious vocabulary at all levels. Many can articulate their thoughts and ideas about what they have learnt and willingly share these in lessons. Attainment in religious education across both key stages and across all year groups is good in relation to learning outcomes. This is reflected in the standard of children's work in religious education lessons and in their books. As they progress through the school the children's work reflects their ability to apply their learning to their own lives and social issues. They ask thought provoking questions using good religious vocabulary. They also demonstrate increasing insight into the beliefs and attitudes of others. Pupils are aware of the high expectations of their behaviour through agreement of class rules, have a good sense of right and wrong treating everyone with respect. This is based on an established strong value system. The presentation of work in pupils' books across the school is of a very good standard reflecting the high value pupils place on their books. The content reflects comprehensive coverage demonstrating clear continuity and progression. Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons and progress is successfully built on year by year. Pupils' books show continuity throughout the school in regard to developmental marking. Pupils are given and take the opportunity to respond to marking which significantly enhances their learning.

**Grade 1**

## **Teaching and learning in Religious Education**

Teaching is never less than good and in the main is outstanding. Teaching is well supported by teachers' subject knowledge and understanding of the religious education curriculum. The higher quality teaching is marked by a brisk pace, clear revisiting of learning objectives, clarity of success criteria, and tasks matched to learners needs. Teachers have a good rapport with pupils providing a secure classroom environment through sensitive interaction and skilful use of discussion with pupils. Supporting adults provide good role models for the pupils they support. Teachers make an effort to ensure that religious education lessons are distinctive and include time for individual reflection or prayer. They create enthusiasm among pupils for religious education through the use of supporting materials such as music, candles and ICT. Teaching across the school is of a high standard and in some cases is inspirational. Some teachers willingly supported discussions with examples from their own lives, helping pupils to relate topics to their own lives. Teachers build successfully on previous knowledge and establish excellent relationships with pupils. Teaching and learning benefit from teachers' strong subject knowledge and a whole school approach to planning. This is in the main appropriately matched to the needs of pupils. Classroom management is of a high order with lessons generally being well paced. Teachers use affirmation regularly, thereby developing self confidence in the pupils. In the summer term the school moved away from learning objectives being recorded at the start of each piece of work as it was felt more valuable for understanding of the learning objective and success criteria to be assessed by pupils and their teacher at the end of the lesson. The school constantly reviews its practice to measure its impact on learning outcomes. Religious education books show recording of lessons in ways that actively engage all groups of learners by, for example, leaflets, digital photos of drama activities and so on. At the same time there is an awareness of the need for children to undertake sustained pieces of writing particularly in upper Key Stage 2. The standard and quality of work within the children's books is of a very good standard. All groups of children make expected progress or better including those children in groups nationally that are liable to underachieve.

In lessons seen behaviour was exemplary and pupils displayed a positive attitude towards their learning. In the best teaching, skilful open ended questioning is employed very effectively. Pupils enjoy an excellent beginning to their educational life in Reception and Key Stage 1 where religious education is of high quality, provided at an appropriately age related level and this is successfully built on in Key Stage 2. In a Year 6 lesson seen pupils worked in a very conducive environment for learning. There was good engagement from the teacher whose classroom management was of a very high order. Good use was made of group work, and talk partners were well utilised. Good cross curricular links worked particularly well in geography and an extended writing task. Classroom support staff were very well deployed operating in a confident but discreet manner. In a Year 2 lesson pupils were prayerful and focussed in an excellent lesson. They demonstrated considerable maturity during a period of prayerful silence. The pupils were able to independently access answers to questions without immediate recourse to the teacher. In another excellent lesson in Year 3, pupils were fully engaged in a range of tasks that included the writing of a book, development of a poster on feelings using a picture prompt and the retelling of the story of the prodigal son using an Ipad. The lesson was marked by very good questioning, high level classroom management and challenging differentiation by task. True 'awe and wonder' was created, through the releasing of balloons to which were attached notes pupils had written about a time where they had not made a correct choice, which built on the theme of reconciliation removing sin. A Year 4 lesson was likewise marked by good questioning where for example 'contrition' was given understanding through an explanation likening it to a 'bridge'. This lesson exemplified differentiated activities that suited the abilities of the pupils and included appropriate challenge.

**Grade 1**

## **Quality of the Curriculum**

The importance St Bernadette's School gives to religious education is highly commendable. The school is planning to adopt the 'Come and See' scheme of work which is a revision of the 'Here I Am' religious education scheme currently in use. Religious education is at the core of the whole school curriculum, with the scheme being followed by all classes at an appropriately age related level.

The religious education curriculum makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development and makes a positive impact on the raising of pupils' self-esteem. Religious education includes the teaching of other faiths and the religious education programme more than meets Bishops' Conference requirements for 10% of curriculum time to be allocated to the subject. Religious education is embedded in the timetable as a core subject. Regular opportunities are provided for pupils to learn and practise prayers, which provide them with rich experiences of prayer and help to support their developing awareness of their own relationship to God. Pupils make very good use of prayer areas in the school building and grounds.

Parents are given information each term about the religious education programme and this serves to involve parents by suggesting ideas on how they can help at home. Pupil voice is well served by an effective school council. The school website is informative and supports the religious education curriculum. The curriculum is enhanced by the school's PHSE programme. Parents are clear about the school's policy for sex education and are happy with this aspect of the curriculum. It is notable that a high percentage of questionnaires were returned, 100% of which were positive. A parent commented on the return, *"I feel St Bernadette's offers a very strong sense of Catholic education. There are many opportunities for the whole community to pray together. My children are privileged to get such a strong sense of belonging and care. Through the school's Pastoral Care Groups and events, they learn about their responsibilities to others. My children often talk about religious education topics and I feel have made good progress in their religious education and have an excellent grounding in their Catholic Faith."*

**Grade 1**

## **Leadership and management of Religious Education**

Inspection evidence gathered supports the school's judgement that the leadership and management of religious education are outstanding. The subject leader has excellent knowledge of her subject and is well placed to advise and support the school's motivated staff and knowledgeable Governors. She has a clear vision of her role in the school and provides proactive, strong leadership and direction for her subject. A recent initiative has seen the setting up of a religious education council consisting of two children from each class. The role of the RE Council is being developed and it is intended that it will secure a strong pupil input into religious education at St Bernadette's

Clear religious education and education for personal relationships (EPR) policies, and a religious education staff handbook ensure the subject is in line with Diocesan guidelines and that staff are consistent in approach. All religious education is taught by practising Catholic teachers with some teachers currently undertaking the CCRS. The school has a well-established monitoring and review cycle which includes lesson observations and work scrutiny. The subject leader writes a termly report that is presented to governors.

Her key strategic position in the school helps ensure that religious education is held first and foremost in the life of the school. There are effective systems in place to enable her to monitor her subject. She has successfully created an effective team which she inspires and motivates, whilst ensuring appropriate support and challenges are evident. There is a clear and well laid out action plan for the future development of this subject. The school is well served by the priests of its parishes. The priests are regular visitors to the school and make a highly valued contribution to the life of the school. They support the religious education curriculum in addition to providing a chaplaincy role to the whole school community.

The religious education coordinator leads her subject with considerable professionalism, knowledge and expertise. She shows a real commitment to see her subject grow and flourish as a core subject in the school.

**Grade 1**