



Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

INSPECTION REPORT

St Catherine's Catholic Primary School

Highdown Drive Littlehampton BN17 6HL

Telephone: 01903 716039

office@stcatherines.w-sussex.sch.uk

D/ES Number: 9383332

Headteacher: Mrs G Howell

Chair of Governors: Mrs E Bedford

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

Date of inspection: 21 October 2010
Date of previous inspection: 14 June 2007

Lead Inspector: Mrs M Hughes
Associate Inspector: Mrs P Rickard

Description of School

St Catherine's Catholic Primary School is a voluntary aided school in the Worthing deanery in the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. It is maintained by West Sussex Local Authority. It serves the local parish of St Catherine's. There are currently 137 pupils on roll across 5 classes. Around 65% of them are Catholic. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage but the proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is rising. Over a third of pupils are of Polish, Indian or Filipino origin. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average, while the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average.

The school has been through a significant period of change. The deputy headteacher is currently on secondment to another school and a temporary assistant head has been appointed. Just over half the staff are Catholic and one has the Certificate of Catholic Education. 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education in Key Stages 1 and 2.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

St Catherine's is a good and continually improving Catholic school. Significant improvements have been made in all areas of school life since the last inspection. The headteacher leads by example, communicates her vision clearly and promotes a strong Catholic ethos for the school. She has worked tirelessly to identify areas for development, renew staff confidence and raise attainment across the curriculum. She has achieved a great deal while ensuring that the strong sense of the school's mission and purpose is not lost. The governors support her well, showing dedication and commitment to developing the Catholic life of the school and to raising standards of teaching and learning. They monitor provision for religious education (RE) with vigour. This is a caring community that embraces pupils of all abilities and cultures. Pupils are happy and proud of their school. Their behaviour is exemplary. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive and appreciate the good pastoral care provided by teachers and support staff. Management of RE, prayer and the liturgical life of the school are very effective. Pupils make good progress in religious education and their attainment is good in relation to their starting points. Rigorous systems are now in place for monitoring and assessing pupils' work but it is too early to gauge their full impact on standards. The school has an accurate view of its own strengths and development needs and inspectors agree with the judgements made in the school evaluation.

Grade 2

Improvement since the last inspection

Very significant improvements have been made against the four key issues identified in the last inspection. Sufficient time is now allocated to the management of RE, enabling a rigorous schedule for monitoring teaching and learning to be instigated. Scrutiny of pupils' work and

teachers' planning is undertaken and the constructive feedback given to teachers encourages constant development. Regular moderation activities ensure that they are secure in their assessment judgements. Teachers work to the renewed Marking and Feedback Policy so that their comments in pupils' books make achievements and areas for improvement clear to everyone. They are beginning to use the information gained from assessment to inform planning and are differentiating work to meet the needs of individual pupils. These excellent systems will require time to work through the key stages and impact significantly on attainment.

Many other improvements are evident, especially with relation to prayer and spirituality. The environment strongly reflects the Catholic ethos of the school, clearly emphasising the importance given to personal and collective prayer.

Grade 1

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

The improved systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's work are now effective. They are used to enable the headteacher, staff and governors to have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and to set clear priorities for the future. This has been a key factor in the improvement of the overall effectiveness of the school since the last inspection. With the commitment and enthusiasm demonstrated by the whole school community it further indicates that the school's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

Grade 2

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise attainment for the more able pupils by providing more opportunities for extended writing and independent learning so that they are consistently challenged.
- Embed all assessment activities and carefully evaluate their impact on teaching and learning.
- Continue to work with CAFOD to make links with an international school, in order to deepen pupils' awareness of global issues.

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

After a period of considerable instability, school leaders worked diligently to inspire and encourage staff to strive for improvement. They have succeeded admirably. Their shared vision gives rise to a strong Christian community which impacts positively on the nurturing Catholic ethos of the school. Pupils know they are valued and are encouraged to contribute to the improvement of their school. Their personal development and well being are at the heart of all new initiatives. With drive and determination, the headteacher sets clear direction for St Catherine's and is steering it through a period of rapid change with calm efficiency and sensitivity. With the assistant head and governors she is carefully monitoring the impact of development on standards and on the Catholic ethos of the school. Governors are very supportive and now engage in challenging debate about priorities for the future. They are becoming increasingly involved in the evaluation of the school's Catholic life through the Policy Development Group and the RE Development Group and monitor provision with increasing confidence. With the headteacher, they ensure that the mission statement, which strongly emphasises the call to live out Gospel values, is reflected in the positive attitudes displayed by

staff and pupils. The core values of the mission statement are displayed around the walls of the entrance hall, making the message explicit to all who enter the school.

Pastoral care is good and effective management systems are in place to serve all pupils, especially those with additional needs. Intervention programmes and focussed support for individual pupils ensures that all feel included. Building good relationships with parents is considered paramount. Communication is continually improving and parents appreciate being able to work alongside staff for the benefit of their children. One commented: "The atmosphere is warm and friendly. You feel welcome and the staff make you feel useful." Such constructive liaison promotes good spiritual, social and moral development in pupils, which underpins all aspects of school life. The school continues to forge links with the parish community and it participates effectively in the mission of the Diocese through involvement in deanery initiatives such as hosting the Deanery Mass earlier this year.

Grade 2

The Prayer Life of the School

Prayer underpins the daily life of the school and a good variety of prayer experiences is offered to pupils during assemblies, liturgies and religious education lessons. Pupils feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and confidently engage in spontaneous and reflective prayer. There are many opportunities provided throughout the day, for them to share prayers of thanks and intercession through class prayer boxes and through prayer trees. The tree in the Reception area enables the whole community to share their thoughts and the one in the Prayer Garden provides an opportunity for quiet personal reflection. Both were used with sensitivity. The Year 3/4 class chose the Prayer Garden as a setting for their lesson plenary. They used drama to show what it means to be a good Christian and did so very effectively. Pupils were absorbed and attentive. In every RE lesson opportunities for prayer and reflection are skilfully provided so that solid links are made with learning. Older pupils were seen reflecting on being "the clay" at "The Potter's hands" and put notes about their personal attributes into their own clay pots. Their response was mature. Younger pupils prayed easily together in a circle, demonstrating an understanding of communal intercession. They all made the Sign of the Cross with deliberation.

The Prayer and Praise Rota is organised on a termly basis and provides a good range of opportunities for collective worship. It is based on the liturgical year and supports the RE programme, while encouraging pupil involvement at all levels of ability. It is well planned and regularly monitored by the RE subject leader and governors to ensure it remains relevant to the pupils. Two acts of worship were visited; both were based on the parable of the Lost Sheep and made connections to the pupils' life experiences. In the Key Stage 1 assembly, everyone took part in a lively rendition of the story, responding with enthusiasm and delight. At the same time, the Key Stage 2 pupils engaged in animated discussion about the messages contained in an artist's impression of the subject. Both acts of worship were entirely suitable to the age of the pupils, who showed an understanding that Jesus was a good shepherd and loved every one of them. The singing in both cases was joyful.

Liturgical provision is good and pupils are keen to be involved in the preparation of Masses and liturgies in school. The parish priest visits regularly and has supported Key Stage 1 pupils in their role playing of Baptism. His co-operation is valued.

Such varied opportunities for personal and collective worship result in good spiritual and moral development in pupils. There are plans to develop the prayer life of the school through the Diocesan Prayer Project, which will further enrich provision.

Grade 2

How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?

Pupils work and play together in harmony, appreciating that diversity is part of God's plan. They know to celebrate difference, not to feel intimidated by it. Families speaking English as an additional language share their culture and traditions willingly and are valued for the richness they bring to others' experiences. Their involvement in multi-faith weeks demonstrates their commitment to strengthening the sense of community. The religious education programme further strengthens the respect pupils have for the different faith traditions and ideologies of the wider community. Provision for prayer and collective worship is always inclusive as pupils are invited to respond personally through reflection or spontaneous prayer. The liturgical life of the school is enriched by the many different cultures of the community and strengthens community cohesion. Behaviour management is firmly rooted in understanding different points of view and pupils respect each other and their teachers, who work hard to create an atmosphere of trust. Incidents of bullying behaviour are very rare, with pupils saying they feel safe in the knowledge that adults will support them. The result is a happy school, where all pupils, including those with special educational needs, know that their efforts will be valued. The School Council is very effective in identifying concerns and members appreciate the responsibility they have for the well-being of the community.

Pupils have worked alongside adults with disabilities and learning difficulties to gain an understanding of the complex nature of society. They visit the sick in the local convent and enjoy the support of the local retired community, who regularly help with reading and gardening. Pupils readily show concern for those who are less fortunate than themselves and regularly participate in a range of fundraising activities for such causes as Cabrini. These good community links contribute significantly to pupils' overall personal development. At the moment there are no established links with schools in other parts of the country or worldwide. However, through working with CAFOD, St Catherine's has agreed to become a "Case Study School", which will establish meaningful overseas links to support people in developing countries. This will complement the strong local community partnership.

Grade 2

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

On entry to school, children's understanding and skills are generally below those expected for their age, especially in speech and language. They also have a limited experience of Church so for many of them school is their introduction to the concept of religion. Due to the good care they are afforded, children settle quickly in the friendly atmosphere of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They make good progress in their personal development and in religious education. Those experiencing difficulties are identified immediately so that they can be supported from an early age. Pupils make good progress throughout KS1 to reach levels of attainment in religious education that broadly match national expectations. Progression is less obvious in Key Stage 2 with some pupils not reaching expected levels. This is probably due to under achievement in the past and does not reflect the good learning that is currently taking place. The more able pupils in particular, have not been able to show their ability and still need further challenge to succeed appropriately. However, given their starting points, the majority of pupils make good progress and their attainment compares favourably with that in similar schools. Standards in RE generally reflect those in reading, with assessment data showing them to be higher than those in writing. Pupils are gaining knowledge, skills and understanding

at a good rate across both key stages. Even the youngest know that we are invited into the Church through Baptism. They understand the role of Godparents and the significance of the water, candle and white garment in the celebration of the Sacrament. Many Key Stage 2 pupils show a good understanding of Scripture through their analysis of psalms, parables and St Paul's letters. As the pupils progress through the school their work reflects their ability to apply their learning to their own lives. For example, by Year 6 pupils know how the Gifts of the Holy Spirit can help them in their relationships with others.

Pupils are confident and enthusiastic about RE. They enjoy their lessons and participate happily in meaningful and interesting tasks. They engage in lively discussion, sharing their views eagerly with others. Most have reached good levels of religious literacy. Their attitudes reflect the good levels of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development they have achieved.

Grade 2

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Teaching is good or better throughout the school because teachers have high expectations of their pupils, nurture their confidence and encourage their self esteem. Relationships are excellent. Good behaviour management and class organisation make a positive impact on learning outcomes because pupils know what is expected of them and respond purposefully. Teachers have worked hard to develop their subject knowledge and to make their lessons interesting. Pupils in the Reception Class enjoyed making stained glass windows and using lego and playdough to illustrate what happens at Baptism. Others were totally immersed in role play, each wanting to be the priest. In the strongest lessons observed, teachers employed good questioning techniques to challenge pupils' thinking. They affirmed pupils in their answers allowing them to take risks and extend their understanding, saying "it's alright to make mistakes". The pace of these lessons was lively. Occasionally other lessons were too long and pupils' interest wavered. In all classes focussed, sensitive support is provided by teaching assistants who encourage pupils with learning and language difficulties to make good progress. All teachers take account of a wide range of learning styles and match activities to the different abilities of their pupils. Since the last inspection they have planned carefully for differentiation. A good example was observed where pupils were identifying what love is through three different tasks; making pamphlets, writing prayers and matching opposites. All succeeded to some degree at their own level. Challenge is evident amongst the oldest pupils, one of whom said "RE is always challenging. We have to work hard and explain ourselves." However, pupils in other classes, particularly the more able, would benefit from more opportunities for extended writing and independent learning, so that they are exposed to a wider range of experiences. This has been correctly identified as an area for development by school leaders who have already improved the quality of learning. Good systems for assessing pupils' work have been established and teachers are secure in their judgements because they have moderated work together and have received good training. Individual pupil progress is tracked carefully and the information gained is used to inform planning. This well structured assessment process now needs to become thoroughly embedded in practice so that it makes further impact on attainment. School evaluation shows this to have already been identified as a priority.

Grade 2

Quality of the Curriculum

A well balanced curriculum, based on the "Here I Am" programme and supplemented by a range of other resources, relates directly to the pupils' own life experiences. It is organised around the teaching of Jesus and the Church and the beliefs of Catholics who follow that teaching. The school's aspirations for every pupil to become "the best they can possibly be and

to feel comfortable in their relationship with God" is central to all teaching. Consequently religious education is not just confined to the 10% of curriculum time required by the Bishops' Conference, but underpins the whole school day. The inclusive curriculum is designed to encourage the all round development of pupils so equality of access is an expectation, ensuring that all pupils, including those with learning difficulties, can make progress. In general it meets the differing needs of the pupils, although planning for the more able is yet to make sufficient impact on their attainment. The curriculum is well monitored to ensure progression of skills and understanding across the key stages. Creative cross curricular links, especially with literacy, art and ICT make learning fun and successfully integrate religious education into other areas of school life. Such events as Multi Faith Week enable skills to be transferred across the curriculum, giving the subject a global dimension. The many visitors, particularly parents, nourish provision and bring the curriculum to life.

The RE programme is well integrated with that for Education in Personal Relationships. In this way it contributes very effectively to the pupils' spiritual and moral development by equipping them to deal with sensitive personal issues. They are encouraged to think carefully when faced with difficult situations and to reflect on the consequences of their actions. They are well prepared for the future.

Grade 2

Leadership and management of Religious Education

All leaders have a coherent vision for the religious life of the school, which is based on their school mission. The 3 statements: Growing in Faith, Aiming at Excellence and Learning for Life underpin their management of RE. The headteacher has recently taken on the responsibility for the subject, monitoring provision rigorously with senior staff and governors. Through an agreed schedule of evaluation and assessment, strengths and areas of concern are regularly identified and quickly addressed. A programme for development is implemented and targeted action planning put in place. As a subject leader, the headteacher gives focussed feedback to individual teachers, encouraging them in reflective practice. She sets an example of excellence in demonstrating teaching, helping with planning and leading collective worship. Extremely focussed, she communicates national and diocesan expectations clearly and ensures staff are confident, able and resourced to deliver RE. Her liaison with the Diocese and other deanery schools enables collaboration so that good practice is regularly shared and judgements on attainment are moderated. Opportunities for individual staff development are good, with teachers being encouraged to nourish their own spirituality and theological knowledge. Pupils' views are regularly sought to ensure that teaching matches their needs. In this way the impact of professional development on classroom practice is tracked and the impact of teaching on learning evaluated. Members of the governors' RE Development Group work productively to keep the Catholic life of the school dynamic. All staff share a common sense of purpose, working hard to promote the school's Catholic ethos, which is made explicit by the many distinctive displays in the classrooms, corridors and hall. Colourful, eye catching examples include the class banners and the Rosary, Good Shepherd and Islam exhibits.

The impact of such strong leadership and shared sense of mission is reflected in the good progress made by pupils and in the obvious pride they have in their school. All work as one to fulfil the school aim "to help children prepare for the journey of life knowing that God walks with them every step of the way."

Grade 2