

DIOCESE OF PLYMOUTH

Vicariate for Formation



**St. Joseph's Primary School
Coombeshead Road
Newton Abbot
TQ12 1PT**

URN 113467

**Head Teacher: Mrs Liz Hamilton
Chair of Governors: Naomi Harnett**

**Record of Diocesan Inspection
7th March, 2013**

Introduction

St. Joseph's was inspected by Ofsted in December 2012 and was judged to be a good school. The Diocesan Section 48 inspection identified some of the key strengths of St. Joseph's School and also identified areas of focus required to further strengthen the life and work of the school. The inspection covered a wide range of issues and as a process it sought to be creative and to support the school in its on-going development as a Catholic community.

The inspection was conducted by Sarah Adams (Diocesan RE Adviser for Schools) working closely with the Headteacher, the RE leader and the Parish Priest. The outcomes of the inspection are based on the following areas:

- documentation made available in school;
- scrutiny of pupils' work;
- observation of lessons;
- discussion with the RE Co-ordinator regarding development plans
- meeting with members of the School Council
- meeting with the Parish Priest
- participation in a whole school Act of Worship
- Meeting with the Head Teacher

Context of the School

St. Joseph's is a smaller than average sized primary school in the middle of a rural town. Although the number of children eligible for free school meals and premium support is below average, the proportion of children with disabilities and children with special educational needs supported on school action is well above average. There are an average number of children who are supported on school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.

The Headteacher took over the headship of St. Joseph's in January 2011 while she was also Headteacher of another Catholic primary school. These schools have now federated under her leadership.

St. Joseph's school has a number of significant features which give it a distinctive identity as a Catholic school. In addition it reflects those areas which demonstrate its commitment to contributing to the wider mission of the Church. The list below intends to be illustrative, not comprehensive.

Leadership of the School

Since the last S48 inspection in 2010 there have been significant changes to the staff of the school. Nearly all teachers are new to the school. Such a change could have had a detrimental effect on the development within the school. However, the

relatively new Headteacher has worked hard to continue the good work started by the previous Headteacher to raise standards and expectations. In particular the new Headteacher has worked very hard to develop the ethos of the school and to affirm it as a Catholic school in all its fullness. Her quiet but strong leadership brings a clear vision for where the school is and where it needs to go. Her ability to empower her staff makes them confident and committed to doing the very best for the children. The leadership team, which includes the RE leader, works well together ensuring that across the board all adults appreciate what is expected of them. As a consequence relationships within the school are positive.

Religious Life

Since the last inspection and because of the enthusiasm of the new RE leader the religious and spiritual life of the school has grown significantly. Although there is a need for further formation and support through INSET, the commitment to providing the best opportunities for the children to grow spiritually and in their relationship with God, is worthy of praise. The Act of Worship experienced on the day was a rich exploration of Lent. The children participated well and responded to times of quiet prayer with a high quality of stillness. Their singing was tuneful and prayerful. When asked questions on the reading the children responded well, showing a real confidence in their knowledge and understanding. A number of children were involved in readings and presenting candles and the Book of the Gospels at the start of the liturgy. During the liturgy all the children showed respect, concern for others (demonstrated in the way they spoke of how they could help children in the developing world) and an ease with praying together. All the teachers and teaching assistants attend acts of worship and their positive modelling has been an asset in helping the children to develop their own liturgical skills.

The school has a very committed parish priest who is a great ally of the school and who has a deep desire to support the school in whatever way that he can. Although there is a distance from the parish church to the school he visits when he can. Links are maintained with the parish through the newsletter. He is keen to develop his relationship with the school and to support the liturgical life on a regular basis.

Throughout the school focal points are of a high quality. It is clear that teachers are growing in their appreciation of the purpose of focal points. Children are encouraged to take care of them and to contribute to them. In addition religious displays in classrooms and throughout the school reflect the central heart of the school as a Catholic school. The mission of Christ is very evident in displays and artefacts on display. As soon as one enters the school this important message is seen in the focal point on display.

Children commented positively on their appreciation for the prayer life that they experience which for some is the only experience of prayer they have in their life.

Teaching in RE

Since the last inspection the teaching of RE has improved significantly. Although most of the teachers are new to teaching RE, they have embraced the process

involved in teaching 'God Matters' with enthusiasm and are growing in confidence. Children spoke of their enjoyment of RE lessons. The teachers are particularly strong in their approach to AT1 and are growing in their capacity to think about AT2. This has been enhanced by their attendance at Diocesan INSET on the curriculum.

A number of lessons were observed during the course of the inspection. All the teachers were keen to show their best teaching. Lesson plans show a clear sense of progression between lessons and the opportunity for children to engage with material from a variety of starting points so that their understanding is fully embedded. Some children were able to make clear links between their understanding of scripture and their own lives, for example in one lesson a year three child was able to conclude, "if we change ourselves it will help others to change" and another child was able to say, "the world would be a better place if we could change and become like Jesus". These answers came following an exploration of the story of Jesus and the widow of Nain's son. Many of the children were making clear links between this religious story and the beliefs of others and the impact of their own behaviour on others.

Across the school most of the lessons observed were of a high standard and demonstrated the commitment of the teachers to ensure that children reach a high level of attainment. Generally lessons were well paced, engaging, innovative, and enjoyable for the children. Just occasionally within a lesson things did not always go to plan. Either children spent too much time on the carpet or insufficient scaffolding was put in place to enable children to fully achieve. Where this happened the teachers were aware of what they needed to do to improve and determined to apply their understanding.

Pastoral Life of the School

Enthusiastic conversations with the children, revealed the extensive, pastoral nature of St. Joseph's. Children feel very cared for and listened to. Despite all the changes that have taken place over the last couple of years, the children feel safe, nurtured and confident in the adults who look after them. On the day of the inspection the sadness of one young boy, having to leave the school to move, was very apparent. He was keen to express his great gratitude to the adults for all that they had done for him in his time there. Other children, shortly to leave for secondary school, said it was the 'best school ever' and they based this on the fact that teachers make lessons fun, they are given many opportunities and in their eyes, it would be difficult to change anything to make the school better. Systems at the school ensure that children know where to turn to if they are in trouble and how they can support one another.

The children are also keenly aware of the needs of others and love to raise awareness and funds for charities locally and world-wide. The school council, in particular, take a healthy lead in suggesting charities to support and appear very adept at ensuring that events to raise money take place on a regular basis. This, they see, as part of being a Catholic school, part of their mission and part of what the Church expects. The school's commitment to the 'Rights Respect and Responsibilities' initiative underpinned by the school's mission statement to, "Live, love and learn in a caring

Catholic community" has already brought praise from the Director of Schools for UNICEF. The school is now working towards their level 2 RRSA award, a great achievement for a small school.

Areas of Focus for Development

The school's mission as a Catholic School will be further enhanced by focusing planned development in the following areas.

1. Ensuring that the planning of lessons enables all pupils to achieve at their level and above. This will require a focus on differentiation according to pupils needs. In addition continued work on how to develop and ensure the inclusion of AT2 activities is essential for children to progress.
2. To continue developing the liturgical life of the school so that more children can develop their skills to lead and prepare acts of worship.

Conclusion

The recent OFSTED visit highlighted many strengths of the school and deservedly so. St. Joseph's is a school growing in confidence. It is a very welcoming community where there is meaning and purpose and where it is clear that the children 'live and learn in a caring community'.

Sarah Adams
RE Adviser, Plymouth Diocese