



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL SUTTON COLDFIELD

Inspection dates 21st – 22nd June 2011
Reporting Inspector Mr Dominic Collins

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Primary
Age range of pupils	4-11 years
Number on roll	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Dr Kirsty Hill
School address	Little Sutton Lane Sutton Coldfield B75 6PB
Telephone number	0121 3546270
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Date of previous inspection	May 2008
DCSF School Number	330/3401
Unique Reference Number	103473

Headteacher Mr Gerry O'Hara

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one Diocesan Inspector. The inspector visited 3 full religious education (RE) lessons to observe teaching and learning, pupils' behaviour, and held meetings with governors, staff, parish priest and groups of pupils, and spoke to parents and parishioners. He observed the school's work, including Mass and classroom prayer time, and looked at a range of evidence, including key documentation such as the school's development plan, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in RE, and pupils' work.

Information about the school

St Joseph's is an average-sized Catholic primary school located in the residential area of Sutton Coldfield and serves the parishes of Holy Trinity and Sacred Heart. The pupil population is drawn from an area of largely owner occupied housing. There are 210 pupils on roll, all of whom are baptised Catholics. The percentage of pupils identified with special educational needs is below the national average, as is the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals. The numbers deriving from an ethnic minority background are small.

Overall effectiveness of the school as a Catholic school

St Joseph's is an outstanding Catholic school. The headteacher provides inspirational leadership to a caring and committed staff team, ably supported by his deputy, who is also the RE subject leader. Together, they are dedicated to providing a high quality Catholic education, so that all pupils have the opportunities to develop as maturing Christians in a secure and happy environment. The school has an extremely positive Catholic ethos. Pupils are able to articulate its distinctive mission and are eager to express their Catholic identity in the way they embrace it. Pupils enjoy their RE lessons and engage fully due to the excellent teaching they receive. They make very good progress in RE with a significant number of pupils achieving above average standards.

Provision for collective worship is excellent and pupils respond positively to the many opportunities they have to pray and reflect together during the school day.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement in its Catholic life is outstanding. There is a powerful combination of dedicated staff and governors with a shared vision and passion to drive the school forward. School self evaluation is thorough and accurate. There were no key issues arising from the last inspection, but the school has continued to work hard to refine and develop the overall RE provision. The RE subject leader has evaluated all aspects of the Catholic life of the school and notably improved the school's performance. A comprehensive RE school improvement plan is in place and is being systematically addressed. The current focus is centred on the awareness of other faiths and festivals.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop strategies to deepen pupils' understanding and awareness of other faiths and festivals.

How good outcomes are for individuals and groups of pupils

Overall, pupils make excellent progress in their religious education. On entry into school at the Foundation Stage, baseline assessment in RE reveals a limited knowledge and understanding. However, pupils receive a very positive start to their faith journey and they are encouraged to develop an understanding of how to be close to Jesus through prayer and be able to appreciate the wonderful world he created for us. As the children progress through the school, end of unit assessments from the diocesan strategy programme show a rapid and consistent improvement resulting in above average standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 1. By the end of Key

Stage 2 most children are achieving standards significantly above diocesan expectations. Attainment in RE compares well with the pupils' performance in English.

Pupils enjoy their learning in RE and respond enthusiastically to the innovative and stimulating range of teaching strategies used. All learners make good progress due to the focused support given to match their particular needs. Teaching assistants provide excellent support in the classroom and they make a significant contribution to pupils' learning. The children have developed good habits of work and demonstrate a positive attitude to their learning. They are keen to do well and evidence of the high quality work recorded in RE books show a personal pride and determination to achieve.

The extent to which the pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school is excellent. An extremely positive ethos permeates the school community in every way. The children understand its values and mission: 'to follow in Jesus' footsteps caring for each other when we work, play and pray' and are eager to express their Catholic identity in the way they embrace it. A child friendly reminder is displayed prominently around the school and is frequently referred to in RE lessons and during prayer. Pupils know how much they are valued as individuals and the responsibility they have to show respect and care for each other. They show a growing understanding of their faith, take responsibility for their own actions and demonstrate a genuine trust and friendship towards each other, readily celebrating successes and sharing responsibilities. Pupils are able to relate their own daily lives to the way Jesus lived and express their own views thoughtfully, with a confident maturity. It is evident through their general demeanour that the children are mindful of the effect their actions have on others. When questioned during the pupil interviews, one child declared "Our school is special because we work together here as members of God's family.'

Relationships throughout the school are excellent. The children are fine ambassadors for the school. They are friendly, cheerful, courteous and welcoming. Behaviour is exemplary, during lessons and around the school generally, even in the more unstructured situations on the playground and during mealtimes. Their smart appearance reflects all they do, impressing by their initiative, positive attitudes and developing maturity. Pupils are eager to engage in a variety of responsibilities around the school and they perform their duties with pride. Year 6 pupils act as peer mediators in the playground and play an active role in the school 'buddy scheme' for Foundation year pupils. Children from Years 2-6 are represented on the school pupil council and through their role have successfully requested additional items of playground apparatus and also influenced a change to the school uniform. Each class takes a turn to prepare and lead a school assembly, to which all parents are invited. Many older pupils serve at Sunday Mass and help with the children's liturgy group. As part of their preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation, Year 6 children experience a retreat at Alton Castle, to which they respond with enthusiasm and interest. The children understand that through prayer and alms giving, their efforts can make a real difference to those less fortunate in the wider community. On going charity work is a key feature of the school calendar and the children are eager to become involved in these initiatives. Older members of the school council also help organise and participate in events including; National Youth Week, band and carol concerts, and residential home visits. Pupils take full advantage of the opportunities the school provides for their personal, moral and spiritual development as maturing Christians.

Pupils' response to collective worship is very positive. They are attentive and reverent in prayer and understand the importance it has in their daily lives. The children participate enthusiastically and are able to express their feelings thoughtfully and confidently when sharing prayer intentions publicly. Mass celebrated in school during the inspection was a joyful experience. Children read with clarity and expression and their inspirational singing readily engaged the parents, parishioners and governors who were present. The children were attentive to the parish priest, who engaged them fully by his interactive approach and invitation to contribute to questions about the lives of SS John Fisher and Thomas More. The pupils' enjoyment of the Mass is further nourished and encouraged by the example and commitment of all members of staff. Prayer is embedded in the daily life of the school and a high quality, attractive prayer focus is prominent in every classroom and is regularly changed to reflect the liturgical calendar. The children are encouraged to use the class prayer boxes to lead family prayer at home. Collective worship makes a powerful contribution

to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils and reflects the strong Catholic character of the school.

How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the school

The headteacher provides inspirational leadership and sets high standards and expectations for all members of the school community. Supported by his very able deputy, he is passionate about developing the Catholic life of the school and, together, they successfully communicate a clear vision to promote and enrich it. The school RE development plan is a very useful working document that reflects a systematic audit and evaluation of provision for and outcomes from the Catholic life of the school and how all personnel can contribute to areas deemed to be in need of refreshment. This system of regular review and self evaluation results in accurate planning and high quality outcomes for pupils. Performance management includes an RE target for all staff each year and the monitoring of performance ensures effective, sustained improvement. The staff are excellent role models for the pupils; committed to the Church's mission, together they foster a happy, secure and caring environment in which all children and adults can learn and pray together. Underpinning the high quality provision and outcomes for RE, are the excellent organisation and support to all members of staff by the RE subject leader. Dynamic and knowledgeable, he oversees all services and celebrations throughout the year, arranges ongoing individual and whole school staff professional development and is committed to his own development through attending courses offered through the Diocesan Department of Religious Education. An informative *RE Position Statement* is published annually and shared with all staff and governors.

The school governing body has a full compliment of Catholic membership. They are fully involved in the Catholic life of the school and discharge their statutory and canonical responsibilities effectively. The governors are able to offer a high level of expertise, a number of whom, having professional backgrounds in education, are therefore able to offer significant professional challenge to the school for improving the Catholic life and RE. Governors are very supportive of the headteacher, who keeps them fully informed of current developments and progress. The headteacher meets regularly with the chair of governors, who is also the link governor for RE, with whom all RE monitoring activities are shared. The annual performance management of the headteacher always includes an RE based focus. The RE subject leader attends governors' meetings and shares progress in the Catholic life through the *RE Position Statement*. Governors engage very effectively with parents and have established a forum of governors to be available at parent-teacher consultation evenings in order to gather first hand feedback from parents about the Catholic life of the school. The chair of governors communicates regularly with parents to inform them of the outcomes and actions taken in response to their views. The school *Sunshine Club*, initiated and managed by the governors, provides an excellent before and after school facility for children who attend the school. This is well supported and appreciated by parents.

St Joseph's is an inclusive school. The welcoming ethos is one of happiness, unity and mutual respect where all pupils are valued and fully integrated into the school community. There are well established links with the parish community and the school is actively involved in parish life. All children who attend the school are of the Catholic faith. The celebration of Mass is at the centre of the vibrant and cohesive Catholic community. Many of the older pupils serve at the parish Sunday Mass and help with the children's liturgy. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the schools' support for national and local charities throughout the year and understand that their efforts through prayer and fund raising initiatives really do make a difference to those less fortunate. Opportunities to support the wider community is achieved through the school involvement with the Birmingham Catholic Primary Partnership.

The school acknowledges the need to deepen pupils' understanding of different world religions. The RE subject leader has produced, and already introduced, a long term plan for multicultural study. The children recently enjoyed a school international day, where all classes learned about a chosen country. Initial contact has also been made with an inner city school in order to extend opportunities for pupils to learn and develop, in partnership with pupils from other cultures and faiths.

The quality of the school's work in providing Catholic education

The quality of teaching in RE is consistently effective with some outstanding teaching observed during the inspection. Long term planning for RE is based on the diocesan *Curriculum Strategy* which is carefully adapted to meet the needs of all pupils, thus ensuring that different ability groups are suitably challenged in their learning. Time allocation for RE meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. Lesson planning is thorough and developmental because it is built upon prior learning. Evidence of pupils' excellent progress is displayed in their written work and thoughtful responses and opinions during the lessons. Positive relationships are clearly evident between teachers and pupils. This, combined with their eagerness to achieve, creates a purposeful setting for teaching and learning. Clear learning objectives are shared with the children and they are encouraged to self assess their own progress towards achieving them.

Teachers communicate their faith through their enthusiasm and sound subject knowledge. They have high expectations of all learners, who in turn, are highly motivated and keen to achieve. An effective range of teaching styles and innovative activities fully engaged the children, making their lessons interesting and enjoyable. Excellent examples of these were seen in lessons about Pentecost and the effect the Holy Spirit had on the apostles, how their feelings changed from fear to courage. The use of photographs of children dramatising the setting during a previous lesson and a blindfolded child being guided around the classroom were very effective aids used to consolidate the learning objective. In the same way, a 'treasure' hunt to find the Fruits of the Holy Spirit, sound effects of wind and dramas using 'tongues of fire' headbands, made these lessons come alive, resulting in an enthusiastic response from the children. Excellent support staff are effectively deployed to guide individuals and groups in their learning. An extensive range of resources, including ICT, has been developed and these also broaden the quality of curriculum delivery in the classroom. The plenary of each lesson included a time for reflection and personal prayer, led and conducted by the children in an atmosphere of peaceful reverence.

Marking is used consistently to inform pupils about their progress; they receive good quality feedback and guidance of how to improve further. Working relationships within school are strong and show understanding of strengths and developments in RE which have a positive impact on the quality of learning. The RE development plan includes a comprehensive monitoring cycle that reflects the school's priorities and involves all stakeholders. An effective and rigorous range of assessment systems, including pupil interviews, are now firmly embedded and are consistently applied. End of unit assessments are used to monitor individual progress and inform future planning. Portfolios of levelled pupil work are also used to identify areas requiring further consolidation.

A close liaison has been established with the parish priest, who is a regular visitor to school and confirms that preparations for the Sacraments are well organised and thorough. The school also works hard to foster a close partnership with parents. A Sacramental home/school link book is currently being piloted as an initiative to promote further involvement of the whole family. Sex and relationship education is well established and is based upon the diocesan programme *All that I Am*. There is good communication with parents and carers, who speak very highly about the school and the quality of RE provision, which has a very positive impact on pupils' spiritual and moral development.

Provision for collective worship is excellent. Prayer is an integral part of the school day and there are many opportunities for staff and pupils to pray and reflect together. Pupils respond with enthusiasm and reverence and they are confident to share their own prayers and intercessions with others. Music and visual resources are used effectively to create a prayerful atmosphere. Each classroom has a prominent, high quality prayer focus. Attractive religious displays and quiet prayer stations around the school offer further stimulation for thoughtful reflection. Mass is celebrated regularly in school to which parents, parishioners and governors are invited to share.