



Archdiocese of Birmingham

Canonical Inspection Report

ST DOMINIC'S PRIORY SCHOOL

37 Station Road, Stone, ST15 8ER

Inspection dates:

30th September – 1st October 2019

Lead Inspector:

Maureen O'Leary

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS:

Good

Catholic Life:

Good

Religious Education:

Good

Collective Worship:

Good

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

This is a Good Catholic school because:

- The headteacher's clear vision about the development of the school has led to significant improvements to the celebration of its Catholic identity and mission. Pupils and staff are united in the promotion of this mission, which is supported by parents and governors.
- Religious Education is valued by pupils, staff and senior leaders. Pupils enjoy their lessons and achieve increasingly well as they progress through the school. Teacher expectation of pupils' work is higher in the senior school. Consequently, the standard of senior pupils' work is significantly higher.
- The school provides daily opportunities for Collective Worship. Pupils are engaged in a variety of prayerful opportunities throughout the year, where they participate with reverence.
- Senior leaders have established ways to monitor and evaluate the Catholic Life of the school that have led to planned improvements to enhance it further.

It is not yet Outstanding because:

- Staff training for the development of Catholic Life and Collective Worship is not provided regularly enough.
- The current scheme of work in the preparatory school does not meet diocesan requirements.
- Preparatory school pupils' attainment and progress in Religious Education requires improvement.

- Collective Worship during senior pupils' form time needs to be enhanced, to provide a greater spiritual encounter of prayer.
- Although governors are supportive of the Catholic Life of the school, they are not sufficiently active in holding the headteacher to account for its promotion and development.

FULL REPORT

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Senior leaders should make more regular, high quality Catholic Life and Collective Worship professional development a priority for all staff.
- Ensure that the diocesan scheme of work, 'Learning and Growing as people of God', is taught in the preparatory school.
- Ensure preparatory teachers communicate higher expectations in Religious Education to their pupils.
- Ensure that Collective Worship during senior form times includes a variety of approaches to prayer, so that it has a profound effect on the pupils' spiritual development.
- Ensure that all governors view the development of the Catholic Life of the school as their core responsibility. Increase their involvement in its evaluation and their ability to challenge as well as support the headteacher.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the Catholic Life of the school.	Good
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.	Good
The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.	Good
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school.	Good

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

- The pupils have a good understanding of the Catholic Life and mission of the school. They appreciate how their new house patrons, St John Henry Newman, St Mother Teresa of Calcutta and St Oscar Romero inspire them to speak to God from their heart, to put others first and to speak out for justice.
- Through each forms' school council representative, pupils have been part of planned improvements to the school. For example, they have chosen new Romero crosses for their form rooms.
- The 'Golden Rule' is the foundation of the school's own set of rules. All pupils know and understand this rule and link it to Christ's command to, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." As a result, pupils' behaviour towards each other and towards staff is extremely courteous, respectful and kind.
- The pupils appreciate the presence of the Dominican Religious Community next to the school. Small groups of pupils, including a senior rosary group and pupils learning about the Sacrament of Confirmation in P6, have the opportunity to meet with the religious sisters to pray and talk.

- Staff support pupils very well to be aware of the needs of others beyond their own school community. Consequently, pupils are keen to raise money for a number of local, national and global charities. Pupils also donate their time and talents to people in the local community. The parish priest explained to the inspectors how pupils, "have a mature understanding of the practical aspects of their Catholic faith."
- Pupils are increasingly given opportunities to take a leading role in the Catholic Life of the school. Senior pupils were able to apply for the recently created role of senior Catholic Life prefect. Over the last few years, members of the school council have chosen a number of charities for the school to support.
- The school regularly provides a number of opportunities for pupils to attend retreats at diocesan centres, including a day retreat to Alton Castle for Year 7 and a residential retreat to Soli House for Year 10.
- Staff know pupils very well and are able to provide them with strong pastoral care. Pupils value how their teachers help them to develop both spiritually and morally. As a result, the vast majority of pupils are happy, confident and secure in their own emotional and spiritual development.
- Pupils have some understanding of relationship and sex education, but this area of the curriculum is currently being developed to meet growing national requirements. Staff have attended relevant diocesan training as part of this development.
- A focus on teaching about vocation has helped pupils to have a good understanding of their own vocation. They can reflect on their own gifts from God and how best they can use them to serve others. They are especially informed about the vocations of marriage, the religious life and the priesthood, which has been supported by visits from the parish priest.
- The school is unfailing in its support for the local parish. The parish priest is grateful to the school choir, who add a joyful dimension to functions for the sick and the elderly and the school's support of the parish foodbank. The school has approached the parish to increase its involvement in training altar servers and in support of sacramental preparation. The headteacher's generous offer of the use of the school carpark, by parishioners attending Sunday Mass, has been very much appreciated by the parish priest.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school.

- Since her appointment, the headteacher, with support from staff (especially the leaders of Religious Education) has increased the Catholic identity of the school. As the parish priest explained, "She is enthusiastic for this bit of God's vineyard. Raising its profile with pupils, staff and parents."
- Since a diocesan monitoring visit and attendance at diocesan training, senior leaders have established processes to monitor Catholic Life. The evaluation of this monitoring has led to some planned improvements.
- The induction of new staff includes information and support regarding the Catholic Life of the school. Some ongoing training is given to all staff, but this would benefit from being more regular.
- Most parents have a good understanding of the school's mission and are supportive of it. They value the pastoral care, moral and spiritual guidance that their children receive. Some parents are keen to emphasize even further the school's links to the Dominican Religious order.
- The Catholic Life link governor and a newly appointed parent governor enthusiastically promote the Catholic Life of the school. The link governor has taken an active part in the school's self-evaluation of Catholic Life and has an

understanding of its strengths and any areas that need improving. Other governors, although they support the Catholic Life of the school, are only superficially involved in this self-evaluation. Consequently, they are less able to promote and hold the headteacher to account for the quality of Catholic Life.

- Senior leaders have engaged very well with the diocese to develop their understanding of the requirements of a canonical inspection. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and the Religious Education subject leader, from the preparatory school, have all benefited from relevant diocesan training.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The quality of Religious Education.	Good
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.	Good
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.	Good
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.	Good

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.

- Pupils throughout the school enjoy and engage very well in their Religious Education lessons. They value both the subject and their teachers. Consequently, behaviour during lessons is usually exemplary.
- The senior teacher for Religious Education has expert subject knowledge. She consistently encourages pupils to reflect on how to apply religious beliefs and principles to their everyday lives. As a result, the vast majority of senior pupils make very good progress.
- The teachers in the preparatory school are confident in their subject knowledge. Small class sizes ensure that teachers are able to talk to each pupil individually during each lesson and give feedback about any misconceptions. This helps pupils to verbally use appropriate religious vocabulary to explain their knowledge and understanding in Religious Education.
- Preparatory teachers plan lessons that provide a variety of learning experiences for pupils. This includes regular opportunities for class and paired discussion. Teachers often record the learning from these discussions in a class 'big book'.
- Teachers in the preparatory school ensure that pupils regularly respond to targeted questioning. However, teachers too often accept one word or limited answers from pupils. As a result, the opportunity to challenge and develop pupils' understanding is frequently missed.
- Although individual pupils record their work regularly in the preparatory school, it does not sufficiently challenge them to reflect at length or to apply their learning to their own lives. An over reliance on worksheets, colouring and limited pieces of extended writing restricts the progress of many pupils. Teachers need to share higher expectations with pupils about the quality of their work.

- Teachers in the preparatory school are developing new ways of recording pupils' responses to the Religious Education curriculum that are verbal or practical.
- There is a significant intake of pupils from other religions and backgrounds, who have low levels of religious literacy on entry to the senior school. Because of a focus on developing an understanding of core religious beliefs, Bible skills and key technical vocabulary, pupils are well-positioned to meet the demands of GCSE Religious Education by the start of Key Stage 4.
- Planning in Religious Education for senior pupils and resources are clearly differentiated, with appropriate support offered to all. Consequently, all pupils can sustain progress in lessons, despite the varying levels of challenge they are presented with. More able pupils would benefit from being challenged at a higher level earlier in lesson time.
- Pupils in the senior school offer a deep insight into key Catholic beliefs because of the teacher's insistence upon using sources of religious authority and academic scholarship in their extended writing. There is an emphasis on contemporary Catholic Social Teaching, ensuring that pupils' reflections are well-informed.
- The attainment of pupils at GCSE is above diocesan and national standards and compares very well to pupils' attainment in other core subjects.
- The use of additional adults in the classroom is varied throughout the school. Some teaching assistants are very effective in supporting and challenging pupils' learning, rephrasing teachers' questions and motivating pupils to work. However, others are less effective and can be especially passive during teacher led discussions.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

- Senior leaders have taken appropriate steps to ensure that the chosen examination board for GCSE meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. Seniors leaders and governors now need to ensure that the scheme of work for the preparatory school for Religious Education meets the requirements of the diocesan Archbishop.
- Senior leaders and governors have ensured that the appropriate amount of time is given to teaching Religious Education.
- Religious Education is regularly monitored and evaluated, and this has led to some planned improvements to teaching and learning. However, this self-evaluation by senior leaders needs to be more rigorous in order to provide even greater challenge.
- The preparatory school Religious Education subject leader has a sincere desire to develop teaching and learning. Her commitment to attending diocesan training ensures that she is aware of current diocesan initiatives. She consistently shares this training with staff in the preparatory school.
- As the only teacher of Religious Education in the senior school, the senior subject leader would benefit from external support. Regular attendance at diocesan training and cluster meetings would provide a greater awareness of current best practice in teaching and assessment.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

The quality of Collective Worship.	Good
How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.	Good
The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school.	Good
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.	Good

**How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.
The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school.**

- Collective Worship is part of the daily life of the school. Following a previous diocesan visit, the school has increased the number of opportunities for prayer. In addition to the established morning prayers for pupils and the celebration of Mass, a daily time of prayer for staff, an afternoon prayer for pupils and the fortnightly celebration of Mass have been introduced. This has enhanced the school as a prayerful community.
- Pupils throughout the school value these times of prayer, which they take part in with reverence. Younger pupils explained to an inspector that, "It is important to speak to Jesus." They had a very good understanding that through their prayers they are able to praise God, ask for his help, thank him and ask for his mercy.
- Meaningful prayer tables in each preparatory class create a sacred space; pupils feel they, "Remind us that Christ is there." These carefully crafted spaces have encouraged some pupils to recreate their own prayer spaces at home.
- Preparatory pupils regularly make very good use of diocesan resources to plan and lead class Collective Worship. They use scripture, song and gesture to engage their peers in prayer. This good practice could now be adapted and extended into the senior school.
- Senior pupils readily and enthusiastically respond to the challenge of preparing and leading acts of Collective Worship. As a result, pupils are engaged and reverent during whole school prayer services.
- Prayer in the senior school is routinely led by pupils, who demonstrate a developing confidence in using both traditional and extempore prayers.
- Pupils' spiritual development benefits from the school's annual Stations of the Cross project. The outcome of this cross-curricular opportunity also contributes significantly to the school's physical environment.
- Because teachers prioritise many activities during a ten-minute form time, acts of Collective Worship in the morning can sometimes be rushed and ineffective in enabling pupils to have a genuinely spiritual encounter with Christ. The school plans to alter the structure of the school day to address this.
- Mass is celebrated fortnightly with another primary school in the parish, in addition to several whole school Masses for feast days and the start and end of each term. Pupils are prepared well by the school to act as altar servers, sing in the choir and read the Liturgy of the Word, which they do with a sense of reverence.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

- Senior leaders have taken effective action to plan and deliver a growing range of Collective Worship for both pupils and staff. As well as reflecting on current social issues, these times of prayer focus on the Church's liturgical year, seasons and feasts.
- Staff, especially in the preparatory school, have made good use of diocesan resources to promote pupils planning and leading Collective Worship. Senior leaders have ensured that all forms lead an assembly at least once a term. During the inspection, older pupils from the preparatory school led an assembly about the Pope's teaching in *Laudato Si'*. This very engaging assembly helped both pupils and staff to reflect and pray about their care of the Earth.
- Staff, especially those new to teaching in a Catholic school, have received some support and guidance about how to best deliver Collective Worship.
- The appointment of a staff liturgical leader to the senior leadership team has meant that Collective Worship has become an increasing priority for senior leaders.
- Their review of Collective Worship has led to real improvements in both its delivery and its impact on pupils' spiritual development. Although leaders now regularly monitor Collective Worship, the process of self-evaluation needs to be embedded with a greater focus on key areas for development.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Unique reference number	124476
<i>This inspection was carried out under canon 806 of Canon Law.</i>	
Type of school	Preparatory and Senior School
School category	Independent
Age range	3-16 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	170
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mark Burton
Headteacher	Mrs Rebecca Harrison
Telephone number	01785 814181
Website address	https://www.stdominicspriory.co.uk
Email address	info@stdominicspriory.co.uk

INFORMATION ABOUT THIS SCHOOL

- St Dominic's Priory is an expanding Catholic independent school situated in the town of Stone, Staffordshire. The school is part of the Immaculate Conception and St Dominic parish in Stone. Pupils attending the school come from a wide area beyond the parish and town.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils is currently 20%.
- The percentage of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average.
- The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average.
- The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic origins is below the national average.

- The percentage of pupils with English as an additional language is below the national average.
- Attainment on entry is broadly in line with age-related expectations.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION

- The inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors: Maureen O'Leary and Ben McArdle.
- The focus of the inspection was on the impact, quality and leadership of the school's provision of Catholic Life, Religious Education and Collective Worship.
- The inspectors observed teaching across ten Religious Education lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils to evaluate their understanding of Catholic Life, the impact of Religious Education teaching on their learning over time and their experience of Collective Worship.
- Meetings were held with the two Catholic Life link governors, the headteacher, the parish priest, the senior school Religious Education subject leader and jointly with the preparatory Religious Education subject leader and head of the preparatory school.
- The inspectors attended a Preparatory School assembly (led by pupils), senior form and preparatory class Collective Worship, a voluntary lunchtime rosary group and undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of learning and teaching in Religious Education, the presentation of the Catholic Life of the school and pupils' behaviour.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation, data about pupils' attainment and progress, the school development plan, the Catholic Life action plan, teachers' planning and learning journals.