

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



Inspection Report of Denominational Character and Religious Education`

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School

Tewkesbury Lane, Monkston Park, Milton Keynes, MK10 9PH

DfE School No: 826 3383

URN: 134318

Headteacher: Mrs Maxine Clewlow
Chair of Governors: Miss Mary McGowan

Reporting Inspector: Mrs Marion Betts
Associate Inspector: Mrs Kirstie Yuen

Date of Inspection: 7th October 2015

Date and grade of previous inspection: September 2010. Grade 1

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and in partnership with
Milton Keynes Local Authority

Information about the school

St Bernadette's school is a larger than average school for pupils aged 3 to 11 years. There are 467 pupils on roll of whom 60% are baptised Catholics. Two thirds of the teachers are Catholic as are 35% of the support staff. The school serves three local parishes. Pupils come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and they speak 54 different languages. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below national average. The school chapel is being extended. The National Education Trust has awarded the school the status of Advocacy School for positive playtimes.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Bernadette's School is an outstanding Catholic school. The extremely strong Catholic identity permeates the school's daily life. The committed leadership of the headteacher, senior staff and RE leader is instrumental in very effectively maintaining and developing the school's Catholic identity. This includes empowering staff to fully fulfil their role of powerfully fostering pupils' awareness of the Catholic faith, their understanding of Christian values, and how to live these out in their own lives. As a result pupils' personal, spiritual and moral development is outstanding. The governors are equally dedicated to promoting and sustaining the school's high quality Catholic education. Prayer, worship and sacramental celebration are of pivotal importance in the school's life. The Catholic ethos is tangible around school with many vibrant and attractive displays. Staff are committed to the very high profile given to religious education (RE) and pupils make very good progress in this subject throughout their school life.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires Improvement 4: Unsatisfactory

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

Since the last inspection, St Bernadette's has not remained complaisant but has continued to further develop the school's Catholic life and religious education. The improvements recommended in the last report have been fully completed. There is now a clear annual monitoring cycle in place and feedback to staff is given. RE assessments are moderated both within school and with the local Catholic partnership. There are now stronger links between the school and the three parishes it serves.

Self-evaluation and staff's personal and professional development is a key part of the ethos of the school. The self-evaluation is derived from rigorous monitoring by senior staff and the RE leader who thereby gain a very good overall view of the school's strengths and development needs. Appropriate improvement actions and the RE raising attainment plan (RAP) are fed into the whole school development plan, the progress of which is regularly reviewed by staff and governors.

The headteacher, leadership team and governors plan strategically in order to continue to promote their vision for the school's Catholic life and RE. The mission statement and corresponding Christian values are made explicit to the whole community. Staff, pupils and parents fully participate in the school's spiritual dimension. All staff are committed to achieving high quality religious education and are willing to improve their skills through training opportunities.

The governors are dedicated to promoting and sustaining high quality Catholic education. The school have sought the views of pupils and parents and taken action on any recommendations. For example there are now opportunities for the families, especially those from other faiths, to discuss with staff whether their child's prayer life is being fully provided for within the school. There is a very strong capacity for the current leadership to maintain the school's effectiveness and to continue to develop even further.

What the school should do to improve further

- continue to develop RE marking so that pupils know how to improve their work and are challenged to demonstrate further understanding and given opportunities to extend their thinking.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 1

The extent to which pupils benefit from the school's Catholic life is outstanding. They understand the mission statement and the corresponding Christian values and strive to achieve them in all areas of their school life. When they have been observed demonstrating a value, pupils are rewarded by achieving "Bernadette Beads". The current value of "Respect" is paramount in relationships throughout the school and pupils show a strong concern for the well-being of others. They understand forgiveness and say they try to follow "what Jesus would have done" in their choices and actions. Pupils express their own views and beliefs with confidence and are very proud of the school. Pupils undertake a wealth of varied school responsibilities and are passionate about the good the group they belong to is trying to achieve. For example, one group vehemently promoted their chosen charity to the pupils of other Catholic schools resulting in the enlargement of the fundraising sphere. Pupils' achievements are recognised and valued. In these ways the school very strongly promotes pupils' personal, moral and social development.

Worship and prayer make an outstanding impact on pupils' spiritual development. All pupils respond very well to worship. They participate respectfully and with ease. Worship challenges them to think deeply about their beliefs. Pupils often create their own prayers. The voluntary prayer activities provided in 'prayerzone' are well attended. Pupils appreciate their independence in planning their own class worship and prayer table focus. The session observed by the inspector was presented reverently and confidently by the group who enthusiastically related how their planning had been developed. Pupils' high quality singing enhances their worship. They have a good understanding of the liturgical year and enjoy experiencing its traditions.

Chaplaincy work is outstanding and highly valued by pupils who know how they can access support and are certain of a positive response. Access to 'playzone' is provided for pupils who need a greater level of nurture and support. Pupil buddies enthusiastically carry out their roles and say that they are responsible for ensuring all children have a positive playtime. Pupils know the school leaders support and promote the chaplaincy team who provide them with a richness of spiritual experiences. The pupils' chaplaincy group are involved in leading liturgy and selecting and implementing fundraising for charities.

Pupils enjoy RE especially when given practical activities such as drama and puppets. Hot-seating is used very effectively for pupils to gain a growing depth of understanding of the possible feelings and thoughts of biblical characters. Pupils are gaining religious literacy at a very good rate throughout the school. One pupil said "we learn from the bible and link it to our lives". Pupils are engaged and interested during lessons and have a positive attitude for learning. Their books are very well presented and demonstrate a range of interesting written tasks. Pupils' responses in lessons and RE books show evidence of their growing depth and maturity of thought and opinions.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

The leadership of the school's Catholic life is outstanding. A clear powerful vision is effectively demonstrated by the richness of pupils' Catholic life experiences; by the high quality education provided; and by the strong encouragement given to pupils to develop their personal skills and faith beliefs. Governors are very supportive and regularly review the work of the school. The school environment very effectively promotes the Catholic ethos. The school is a welcoming inclusive community where all members are respected and valued. The staff works in partnership with parents who appreciate the school's caring family atmosphere and the good spiritual foundation it provides for their children. The school has strong links with the parish and with the parish administrator who contributes well to the sacramental life of the school. A sister from the local community is closely involved as Chaplain and RE governor.

The religious education leader is extremely well supported by the school leadership. This ensures RE has a very high profile. RE is monitored rigorously and a clear direction for improvement is set. Staff training is linked to the monitoring as demonstrated by the recent training on marking following the scrutiny of the RE books. Pupils are assessed regularly using set tasks as well as "I can" statements and pupils' progress is tracked. Additional resources are provided for those pupils

who do not achieve expected outcomes. The RE governor regularly receives reports concerning RE curriculum and achievement data. She monitors through learning walks and talking to pupils. The RE leader provides firm support and guidance to the staff encouraging them to improve their skills. She, and senior leaders, also arrange training opportunities for staff from the Catholic partnership schools. The budget provided is generous and in line with other core subjects. In the past 3 years two staff have completed the CCRS course (Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies).

Provision

Grade 1

Worship and prayer are central in the school's life. Pupils' liturgical formation is extremely well planned and ensures the widest possible experiences of the richness of the Catholic tradition of prayer and worship. Pupils attend Mass regularly and the school's tenth year anniversary was led by the bishop. The latest addition to pupils' prayer experiences is the Rosary club led by the chaplain. The worship observed very effectively used visual presentation, artefacts and song to link with the theme and response activities were planned to develop pupils' thinking. Attractive classroom prayer tables are used well as a focus for worship. The chaplaincy team work coherently to achieve improvements and have undertaken training for their roles such as a course to enhance prayer tables led by a local Christian charity. The team produce resources to further involve families for example the newsletter "Community Matters" distributed to parents and the linked parishes. They plan to further develop pupils' prayer bags for each year group. The team ensure effective spiritual and pastoral support to staff, families and children and have recently created a community prayer board.

The majority of teaching is outstanding. The best teaching very effectively uses creative planning and delivery; accurate pace; open and challenging questioning; positive praise used effectively to encourage pupils; lessons accurately pitched to promote challenge; and practical tasks to inspire pupils to work with enthusiasm and independence. For example following the teaching about the qualities of biblical people whom God chose for His work, pupils reflected on how they could apply these in their own lives and responded with deep understanding and thoughtfulness. Teachers demonstrate sound subject knowledge and are supported by experienced and confident teaching assistants. Marking is generally linked to the learning intention but not all staff are consistently extending pupils' thinking.

The quality of the religious education curriculum is outstanding. At least 10% of curriculum time is used for religious education following the "Come and See" programme. The class "learning journey" books evidence a comprehensive coverage of the curriculum. Scripture is linked well to the learning. Tasks often have creative and dynamic links with other curriculum subjects for example Drama, Song, Craft and Literacy. The diversity of the pupils' cultures is celebrated well with contributions from parents and pupils. Visits and visitors linked to other faiths have contributed to RE learning. Forest School activities inspire pupils with a sense of wonder in God's creation. Pupils are encouraged to become aware of the demands of religious commitment and hence the curriculum contributes very well to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

The inspectors wish to thank the headteacher, deputy head, staff and children for their very warm welcome and for contributing to their enjoyable and interesting visit.