

**ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK  
COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS & COLLEGES**



***SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT***

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the  
Archbishop of Southwark and inspection of  
Denominational Education under Section 48  
Of the Education Act 2005  
URN 118772

St Simon of England Roman Catholic Primary School  
Noakes Meadow  
Ashford  
Kent  
TN23 4RB

Chair of Governors  
Headteacher  
Inspectors

Mrs Sarah Kennett  
Mrs Elizabeth Willis  
Mr Stephen Beck  
Mr Gary Tanner

Inspection date: 14<sup>th</sup> June 2012

**ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK  
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Director of Education: Dr Anne Bamford**

# Introduction

## Description of the school

The school is voluntary aided and is situated in the Canterbury Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Kent Local Authority. The principal parish, which the school serves, is St Simon Stock, South Ashford. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 50%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to religious education is 10% in all Key stages

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 211. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is below average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Around 19% of the pupils receive extra support in class. Most of the pupils are of White British background with a second significant group coming from other White backgrounds. Since the last inspection there has been a change in the school demographic that has seen a sizable increase in the number of pupils who speak English as an additional language to an above average level.

## Key for inspection grades

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

# Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

St Simon of England school is to be commended for the way it has sustained the strengths identified in the last inspection during a period that has seen a change to the demographic of its intake. The school is justly proud of its high standing in the local community as reflected in the high demand for places. The inspectors agree with the school's own assessment of its effectiveness as detailed in the good self evaluation form provided. It has a clear understanding of its strengths and of areas for development. The staff and governors of St Simon's school show a determination to do all they can to serve its community and meet the needs of all its pupils and in particular those who are most vulnerable. The school has identified and clearly articulated what it sees its mission to be. It says,

- 1. Our mission within South Ashford is to support parents who are practising their faith in the Catholic upbringing of their children i.e. 50% of the baptised Catholic population of the school.*
- 2. For the remaining baptised population we evangelise and support and promote engagement with the church through engagement with the sacramental preparation programme.*
- 3. For our largest group we create a missionary school where they can encounter the loving God, the person of Jesus through the breaking of the gospel and RE education and the power of Holy Spirit in the relationships of the whole school community.*

The school is very successful in these aims which parents see as being one of the reasons they choose St Simon of England as the school for their children. As one parent wrote, *"Although we are not Catholic we are always made welcome at liturgies etc. Our children are growing up to be polite, helpful and know right from wrong."* All members of the school community, pupils, parents, staff and governors articulate their belief that they are valued by virtue of their God-given individuality. The school is committed to excellence in spiritual, social and academic education. It is a secure, supportive community underpinned by a strong Catholic ethos. Pupils are respected, affirmed and supported. This encourages them to be confident and provides a positive climate for work. Positive relationships exist between all members of the school community which have been established by a close working partnership between home, parish and the local community. It is a school that is confident in itself, supported by an explicit and shared vision. It operates collegiately but with clear direction. A strong and dedicated headteacher encourages staff and pupils to fulfil their personal potential. Pastoral care is a strength and pupils' emotional well being is supported through a curriculum that offers opportunities for spiritual reflection. Pupils achieve well and make good progress in each key stage. The school has made good progress on the issues identified in the last inspection and their very accurate self analysis reflects a strong wish and capacity to achieve further improvement.

**Grade 1**

## **What steps need to be taken to improve further?**

- Ensure that pupils are clear of their 'next steps' in religious education through more consistent developmental marking that offers opportunities for all pupils to respond in order to further increase levels of attainment.
- Further develop current assessment and monitoring processes to ensure the appropriate targeting of identified groups.
- Continue engaging with parents to better enable them to support their children's religious education in the context of a Catholic school.

## **The Catholic life of the school**

### **Leadership and management**

The headteacher is well regarded by the school community and is strongly supported by the management team and governors. She is highly effective in maintaining a strong Catholic community and cohesive staff and governor teams. Her clear vision of Catholic education is firmly based on the Common Good, ensuring that St Simon of England is an inclusive school where pupils are nurtured as unique and valued individuals. The cohesive nature of the leadership at St Simon of England school is highly effective. The senior leadership team show a clear commitment to maintaining a vibrant, inclusive Catholic school and as a team, provide strong role models for pupils. All in the school community are clearly dedicated to maintaining and developing further the Catholic life of the school. Governors are active participants in the life of the school. They have a clear understanding of their responsibilities in the context of both developing the Catholic life of the school and in securing the very best religious education curriculum for pupils. They attend some staff meetings, support the School Council and meet subject coordinators regularly to hear the work of the school and to offer their strategic vision to planned developments. Parents feel well informed via the governors' and school's newsletters. Evidence from the parent questionnaire responses showed overwhelming support for the school. The school is proactive in fostering parish links and is keen to develop these further following the fairly recent appointment of a new parish priest.

### **Grade 1**

### **Quality of provision for personal and collective worship**

The school fully meets the statutory obligations for the provision of collective worship. There is an established programme of worship that encompasses, class worship, assemblies, Mass and liturgical celebrations. There are clear links with the religious education scheme of work and the liturgical year as appropriate.

It is noteworthy that this programme is kept under review and adjusted as felt appropriate. This has seen the recent introduction by the parish priest of class Masses, which is hoped to continue and develop. Parents, carers and friends all have an open invitation to attend liturgies and events.

The school describes itself as "A Catholic Missionary Community which shapes its day with prayer, teachings of Jesus in its day to day work with pupils, staff, parents and other agencies, local authority, parish and neighbourhood". This mantra is evident in all the school does. The school is clearly aware that in many cases it is the main agent in pupils' religious formation and accordingly actively supports the development of pupils' knowledge of the Gospel through a range of learning strategies including discussion, searching questions, drama, role play, acts of worship, liturgical celebrations, celebrations of pupils' work, annual Harvest celebrations and a pilgrimage to Aylesford.

Prayer is central to the life of the school with pupils being given numerous opportunities to experience a broad range of prayer. In addition to having a school prayer book pupils have opportunities to write their own and initiate spontaneous prayer. When assembling for prayer the school pays attention to symbols and signs, atmosphere, reverence and the needs of the individual to have space to communicate with a God of Love. In its management of pupils' learning and behaviour for learning, it acknowledges that the school is a learning community and that the priority is to help pupils develop a sense of love and respect for God and for each other. This recognition of each individual's own faith journey is a strength of the school.

In a thoughtful liturgy in the Early Years, pupils were totally absorbed and able to express their love for each other as a member of God's family. A spiritual atmosphere was created through the sensitive use of the interactive white board onto which a picture of each child was projected. In an assembly attended on the theme of 100 Days of Peace around the Olympics, pupils entered quietly to a song and were attentive throughout. In addition to providing history links with the development of the games, the assembly was well linked to the theme of peace and the impact children can have on such issues, for example through initiatives such as the school's 'peace ripple' with other schools. As a parent commented, *"My children have always been supported and well guided in all areas at St Simon's."*

Good displays are marked by high levels of inclusion of pupils' work. In a display on the topic of 'People of other faiths' good use is made of a 3D effect tree on which the names of faiths are included under which is written, 'God feeds waters and anchors us'. It is commendable that good use is made of the local parish church, which the school walks to for visits, services and Mass on special occasions such as the start and end of terms even though it is some distance away.

**Grade 1**

## **Community Cohesion**

St Simon of England is an inclusive community that continues to welcome pupils and their families, valuing them equally, whether from the Catholic faith, other faiths or none. A warm friendly and welcoming atmosphere pervades the school. There is a common sense of belonging. Leaders respect difference, value diversity and ensure equal opportunities for all. Relationships among pupils are very positive. The school is a close-knit community where all work together to encourage and support the development of every pupil with staff members providing very good role models. In its religious education, personal social and moral education programmes, the school teaches its pupils to be aware of their own identity and their own differences and to value the gifts and talents of others. Pupils are equipped with skills that enable them to lead, listen, take responsibility and respond through initiatives such as the School Council. The Council expressed a keenness to take on a more self-directed role in its organisation and this could usefully be developed further. Parents felt particularly well supported at the time of secondary transfer.

Whilst a formal parent association has ceased to operate, parents feel that the informal nature of current support given to staff as events are organised by the school, works well. It is important that the school keeps this under review in order to keep all options open and maintain an appropriate balance for staff.

Collective worship is seen as an opportunity to support, uplift and affirm each other. It introduces pupils to the idea of social harmony and justice and to appreciate the diversity of backgrounds within the school and wider community. The religious education curriculum introduces pupils to the study of other world faiths. The school has responded well to changes that have taken place in the school demographics resulting in a more diverse intake to the school community and the school is working to engage more with parents to better enable them to support their childrens religious education in the context of a Catholic school.

Pupils show respect for each other and older pupils are very supportive of the younger ones. The school aims to promote community cohesion through a range of activities including, the Emmaus walk, links with Sure Start, Multi-cultural theme weeks and visits from Chernobyl children over the past two years. The annual Harvest celebration raises goods for a local homeless charity in Ashford reflecting a willingness on the part of the school to support a range of charities over time.

**Grade 1**

# Religious education

## **Achievement and standards in religious education**

Attainment on entry to the school is generally below age expected levels and many pupils have no faith background and little experience of religion or Church. Excellent care and support in the Early Years enables pupils to settle quickly so that good personal and social development is secured. Within this affirming atmosphere the pupils become confident and motivated to learn and a firm foundation for future learning in religious education is established. As a result of consistently good and at times outstanding teaching, pupils across all key stages then make steady progress from this lower than average starting point and by the end of Key Stage 2 attainment is generally at least at age expected levels and in a number of cases above. This appears to be an upward trend. As the school further refines the analysis of data it will be in a position to identify and target specific groups as measured by their attainment levels as they progress through the school. The school has itself identified that pupils perform at higher levels orally as a result of a school focus on speaking and listening which in turn is linked to the development of high standards of religious vocabulary and that there will now be a focus on lifting recorded work to a similar standard. With teachers concentrating on spoken language development, pupils are happy to express their ideas vocally and contribute freely to class discussions. Pupils work cooperatively and willingly share ideas with each other offering help to those less able in the class.

Pupils hold a special regard for the word of God and display a reverence and respect in religious education lessons, resulting in very good behaviour which is mirrored outside of the classroom.

Workbooks show good coverage of topics and are generally well presented. There is evidence of developmental marking across the school and pupils respond well to this approach. Pupils could be made more aware of their 'next steps' in religious education through more consistent developmental marking that offers opportunities for all pupils to respond in order to further increase levels of attainment

## **Grade 2**

### **Teaching and learning in religious education**

Teaching and learning at St Simon of England benefits from good subject leadership, teachers' strong subject knowledge, thoughtful planning and classroom management skills of a high order. All teachers teach with enthusiasm and set high but attainable expectations academically and for behaviour to which pupils generally rise. Very good teaching applies strong classroom management skills and careful planning with clear learning objectives which are shared with pupils and revisited during the course of the lesson.

A range of teaching strategies are applied and the use of a broad range of cross curricular links makes lessons interesting and keeps pupils on task. Lessons are well paced and teachers build successfully on prior learning with praise and affirmation developing self confidence in the pupils. Support staff are well deployed and fully involved in the lessons and give discreet quality support to individuals and groups of pupils which has an impact on their access to the curriculum and progress made. Pupils settle quickly to lessons and demonstrate an ability to work well individually, in pairs and in groups and to adapt to a varied use of these patterns of work. Good use is made of 'talk partners' and appropriate background music to support the learning environment is used as a matter of routine in most classes and the best examples of this could usefully be shared across the school.

In lessons seen, teaching was never less than good with some being outstanding. Teaching could be further improved through less use of didactic approaches and a more consistent use of classroom focal points at the start and end of lessons. In an excellent lesson on other faiths the lesson commenced with background music setting a reverent atmosphere with pupils being asked to consider the words of the song being played which they then sung with signing. This was followed by a class member choosing a prayer from the class prayer book to read. Pupils then proceeded to build very well on previous learning relating to Christian artefacts, by applying this in groups to a range of artefacts covering three other religions. One group undertook independent internet research as part of work leading to each group presenting a powerpoint presentation back to the class. The plenary offered an opportunity for reflection and prayer to conclude the lesson. In another lesson understanding the meaning and responsibilities of being part of a community, the teacher employed high level questioning skills, ensured a clarity of task for the pupils and made good use of the interactive whiteboards as a resource. In a lesson on 'helping others' a pupil referred to helping an unhappy child by suggesting, "You must believe in yourself". Religious understanding is developed well through thoughtful reflection on vocabulary used.

In one lesson, pupils considered what 'being a Christian means and came up with thoughtful and insightful responses such as, "sharing peace" and "loving each other."

## **Grade 2**

### **The religious education curriculum**

The curriculum time allocated for religious education more than meets the national expectation of 10% with the curriculum meeting the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. The school's adoption of 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' religious education scheme around the time of the last inspection has revitalised religious education throughout the school. It is now well established successfully building on prior attainment and providing good support to parents to help their children at home.

The policies for personal, health and social education and education for personal relationships are linked to aspects of religious education. Together with the programme for Sex and Relationships Education they are all set in the context of Catholic teaching.

The whole curriculum nurtures pupils' spiritual and moral development by helping them to respect and value themselves and others, and it is commendable that the school continues to keep this under review as it looks to broaden the range of curriculum materials it utilises.

## **Grade 2**

### **Leadership and management of religious education**

A parent described St Simon of England as *"A proactive happy school - welcoming children - enhancing skills - supporting the individuals,"* Another parent added, *"My child is very well provided for, spiritually and academically and I could not ask for more."*

The school benefits from a proactive, enthusiastic religious education coordinator who leads by example and ensures that religious education is never seen as less than a core subject. Through the three leadership days a year allocated to her she is able to focus on book scrutinies, lesson observations and individual feedback to teachers. She meets with the Governing Body to regularly update the school's self evaluation form, religious education policies and to maintain a review of Education for Personal Relationships. She is able to provide support and guidance to year groups to ensure planning links to the liturgical year. She is a thoughtful practitioner and has a clear view as to the priorities for her subject and is actively moving assessment in this curriculum area forward. Religious education policy documentation and the coordinators file are substantial and very well presented. She is supported by the Headteacher, the senior team and governing body who have a shared vision and strong collegiate approach to development in this subject area. Professional development opportunities are given and readily accepted by the coordinator who then disseminates this among staff as appropriate. She has been very active within the local Deanery cluster with the coordinator recently leading the initiative for inset on the new Mass for the group of schools.

## **Grade 1**