



INSPECTION REPORT

St. Bernard's Catholic Primary School

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D/ES Number:

URN: 109246

Headteacher: Mrs Meg Wilson

Chair of Governors: Mrs Linda Dineen

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Clifton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: December 10-11 2012
Date of previous inspection: September 2010

Reporting Inspector: Mr Joseph Skivington

Description of School

St. Bernard's is a below average size primary school serving the Catholic community of Shirehampton, in Bristol. There are 139 pupils on roll, 60% of whom are Catholic. The majority of children are White British. Pupils in Years 2 to 6 are taught in mixed age classes. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The school has had considerable changes of staff and governors since the last inspection. Links with the parish and other neighbouring Catholic schools are good.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Satisfactory; Grade 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

In its self evaluation, St. Bernard's judges itself to be a good school, and given the evidence from the inspection, this is certainly the case. All pupils benefit from, and contribute well, to the school's distinctive Catholic ethos, and respond with enthusiastic involvement to the good provision for collective worship and the many opportunities to develop their prayer life and spirituality. It is a fully inclusive community where all are welcome and accepted as individuals made in the image of God, and its ethos is characterised by openness to all. The parish church is close by and provides opportunities for pupils to be involved in parish life, experience the Mass in different settings, and runs the well planned sacramental preparation programme. Outcomes from the religious education programme are good, the result of teaching which is at least good, and some outstanding practice observed during the inspection. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as the others, because of effective interventions, extra support in lessons, and tasks clearly suited to their learning needs. The religious education programme makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

The support from the governing body is increasingly effective. Leadership is good and has already proven its effectiveness and ability, in a very short time, to move the school forward on its rapid journey towards excellence. The governors and senior leadership know their school well and have clear, measurable objectives, which have their origin in very effective procedures for monitoring provision and outcomes. St. Bernard's is not yet an outstanding school because it has but recently emerged from a period of upheaval in terms of school leadership, staffing and governing body, and although much planning and hard work has gone into successfully addressing the issues raised at the last inspection, the impact of the new more effective assessment and monitoring of Catholic life and religious education has yet to be fully seen in outstanding outcomes over time.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

Grade 2

The school's capacity to improve and sustain the quality of care and education it provides is good. After the last inspection the school was left with key areas that needed to be tackled, such as the embedding of assessment procedures, processes for evaluating and monitoring of Catholic life and RE, developing governors' skills in challenging the school and supporting progress, and giving more responsibility to pupils to plan and present their own liturgies. Each

of these areas has been tackled with considerable success, driven by the vision and leadership skills of the head teacher, and the RE coordinator who is now a member of the senior leadership team. The school has been open to the valuable advice and support offered by the diocese and has acted on it swiftly, especially in undertaking training to effect real change. As a result structures to assess and monitor the quality of provision and outcomes are now robust. Teachers are getting to grips with the assessment and moderation of pupils' progress, benefitting immensely from diocesan support and training opportunities. This data now needs to be employed in shaping lessons, particularly in the mixed classes, and informing teaching strategies and objectives that better to meet the learning needs of the pupils. The result is a rapidly emerging picture of improvement, which will, given the recent trend, continue to be nurtured and sustained.

What the school should do to improve further

- To use individual assessment to inform teaching and learning objectives, with more smartly pitched challenges, and differentiated tasks, to meet the learning needs of all abilities.
- To bring the quality and effectiveness of all teaching up to the best practice.

How good are outcomes for pupils, taking account of variations between different groups?

Grade 2

Pupils are fully involved in the Catholic life of the school and make a positive contribution to it, not least by their good behaviour, which contributes to their own learning and the ethos of the school. They have had the opportunity to feed back to staff on their views and perceptions, for instance, through a questionnaire, and will be involved in the renewal exercise of the school's vision and mission. They feel their voice is heard through pupils' conferencing and they take responsibility for their own lives and the care of the younger children. During their years in St. Bernard's they absorb, internalise, and live out the attitudes and values inspired by the message of Jesus. They well understand, and can articulate in conversation, the connection between Christian teaching and how they should act towards others and behave in their own lives. They can identify the religious aspects of their school and are aware that for some people religion is important and affects the way they live. Pupils respond generously to the needs of others beyond the school particularly in fundraising for a variety of charities both home and overseas.

Pupils respond well to collective worship, which is inclusive of all pupils and participate generously. The assembly and class prayers were marked by reverence and attentiveness, and the nativity play rehearsal was an excellent showpiece, which involved all the children in the school. They are becoming more involved in planning and presenting their own liturgies, an aspect which was highlighted for improvement at the last inspection. They compose their own prayers, which are displayed and used in the reflective areas of the classrooms. A good example of this was the Advent Calendar display in the corridor, which had very practical reflections by the children for every day of preparation for the feast of the Nativity. As a result they have a growing understanding of the religious seasons and feasts of the Church and all participate in the liturgies, not only in the school but in the parish also. Their demeanour and reverence at prayer demonstrates a seriousness and growing faith, as well as a sense of the sacred and the special time for prayer

Achievement and progress in religious education is good throughout the school. Baseline assessment on entry indicates a wide variety of below expected prior religious knowledge and experiences. They make a good start in reception and by the end of Key Stage 1 they have made good progress. Those with special educational needs achieve as well as the others. By the end of Key Stage 2, 80% of pupils are in line with expectations, with 20% exceeding expectations, indicating good progress, reflecting a significant improvement on attainment over the last two years. Progress is not yet better because teaching is not yet consistently outstanding, especially in challenging and encouraging pupils to develop independent learning skills, and providing the more able with real intellectual challenge, and the less able with tasks, especially written, that more precisely meet their learning needs. Pupils can discuss the topics they cover and can relate them to their own lives with a confident grasp of the meaning and significance of the main tenets of the Faith, for instance, the significance of the Last Supper, as well as understanding Jesus life and teaching through His miracles and parables. In conversation, they speak easily, and from a growing depth of spirituality, about prayer, their openness to God, and its efficacy. The overall good practice suggest pupils are beginning to develop critical thinking skills, evident in some group and paired discussion in class, and more of this peer learning coupled with peer assessment will contribute even further to the independent and reflective quality of their learning. In lessons pupils work well and enjoy the subject.

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

Grade 2

There is a real sense, and evidence, that the leadership of the school is focussing successfully on a renewal of the Catholic life of the school and the quality of the provision and outcomes of the religious education programme, to the extent that overall effectiveness has crossed a grade boundary into good. Leadership and management are promoting the Catholic life of the school more effectively, with sharper monitoring, review, and appraisal procedures, and focussed planning for future improvement with measurable objectives. Leadership has sought advice and training, and has ensured, through appropriate Inset, that all staff are aware and involved in nurturing and supporting the spiritual life of the whole school community. The school has arranged diocesan training and other Inset for all staff on spirituality and Catholic education. Prayer life and liturgies are now monitored and reviewed more effectively, with closer liaison between governors and senior leadership. The effectiveness of leadership and management is seen in the rapid school improvement, with greater attention to detail and emphasis on accountability, the positive morale of the staff, the pupil's care for one another, and the good relationships between staff and pupils.

The governing body has been recently re formed, and is now a more aware and challenging force, together with school leadership, in sustaining and improving the school's ethos and standards of attainment in RE. The link governor for RE is a knowledgeable and supportive tie; and together with the RE coordinator, liaises well with the governors and reports formally to the governing body. Governors have undergone the relevant diocesan training, and all statutory requirements are met.

There is a clear policy promoted by governors and senior staff to promote community cohesion with the result that the school has an openness to all, all are included in its life, and its generous outreach to the local and the global community is a real strength. The school

collaborates well with other schools and participates in community undertakings, including local charities. Those of other denominations or faiths feel that they are able to express their own beliefs comfortably, and all feel included and welcomed into every aspect of school life. Acts of worship leave room for the other person's spiritual identity, their modes of expression and their values. Parents from all backgrounds, especially those from other cultures are welcomed and supported.

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Grade 2

Provision for prayer life is good, because it meets very effectively the spiritual needs of the pupils, be it through assemblies and liturgies, or the many invitations and opportunities for reflection, often in the new prayer space. The Mass is celebrated frequently both in the school and the adjacent parish church. The school supports the parish- run preparation programme for First Holy Communion. There are many occasions during the day for spiritual nourishment through prayer and moments of reflection. The liturgical year is well marked, planned, and celebrated, particularly Advent, Lent and Holy Week. Then each event is evaluated and reviewed to determine how it could be bettered and made more relevant and engaging.

The curriculum satisfactorily addresses the needs of all groups of pupils, as well as meeting the Curriculum Directory for Religious Education requirements, such as the allocation of time. The new curriculum God Matters is followed and the school is adapting it steadily to meet its specific ethos and background. Staff are becoming familiar with the new structures, approach and assessment linked to the syllabus. Relationship education is dealt with sensitively and clearly from a Catholic standpoint through the SRE programme In the Beginning and This is my Body, which is in line with diocesan guidelines and approved by the governors. Pupils respond well to this. The beliefs of other faiths are studied through topics in the schemes of work and during the dedicated Faith Week. Resources are well managed, and ICT, art and music particularly are used imaginatively to colour and enrich the learning experience. The colourful art work and displays around the school reinforce the RE topics or liturgical seasons the pupils are studying, they affirm the pupils and educate others, and visibly declare the Catholic ethos of the school. The curriculum makes a good contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils.

The quality of teaching and purposeful learning is good, with outstanding practice also seen during the inspection. The good teaching enables the pupils to learn well because it engages their interest and provides some challenge, so that the pupils themselves do the work and make the intellectual effort. Group and paired work provided opportunity for peer learning and assessment, but these need to be better and more often used. Teaching assistants provide support especially in enabling the teacher to split children into smaller groups with differentiated tasks tailored to their learning needs. The teachers' subject knowledge is sound and lessons are diligently planned. However, for teaching to be better than good, the lesson objectives need to embody real challenge, particularly for the more able, building upon pupils' prior knowledge and moving them on through activities that demand real intellectual effort. This would include better questioning which probes and elicits fuller responses depending on the pupil's age and abilities. The scrutiny of written work shows that the quality and impact of the best marking is making a real difference to pupils' progress and understanding.

Assessment procedures are securely in place and the tracking of progress is more detailed. Growing use is being made of levels to monitor individual progress and achievement and to provide teachers with a clearer picture of each pupil's strengths and where support and guidance are needed. This is essentially an information gathering exercise and what the school

is focussing on now is the implementation of this data to inform teaching and learning objectives. The school is well aware that this data must now be translated into the lesson plans and lesson objectives and tasks, in order to meet the specific learning needs of every pupil; for example, carefully chosen written tasks for the less able. The programme of specific RE lesson observations will encourage and enable the best practice in teaching and assessment for learning to be shared rapidly throughout the school.