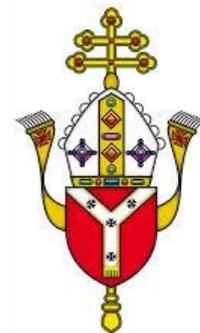


# Westminster Diocese Inspection Report

## St Catherine's Catholic Primary School

Vale Drive, Barnet, Herts EN5 2ED

Date of inspection: 24 April 2015



### A. Classroom Religious Education

**What is the overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy?**

**Overall Grade I**

The overall effectiveness of classroom religious education (RE) in developing pupils' religious literacy is judged to be outstanding. The RE curriculum is broad, balanced and very carefully planned for by an exemplary RE subject leader. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provides a great start to children's religious life in a secure and nurturing environment. Teaching is at least good in every single class seen and in many classes is outstanding, especially among the older pupils where complex thinking skills are being very effectively developed. The school is innovative and imaginative in its approach to RE and pupils awareness and ability to articulate what they have learned is of a very high order. Mutual respect is very evident between pupils and all teaching and support staff and behaviour is also outstanding both in lessons observed and all around the school. This respect is evident in the good sense of fun and relaxed humour shown by so many teachers. Staff clearly enjoy teaching RE and use their imagination and a wide range of resources to produce highly effective teaching. The school is missing some opportunities to use scripture and Bible and this needs to be addressed in the future. Marking and assessment are both well developed and the school's self-evaluation is an accurate reflection of the school. The leadership and vision of Catholic RE led by the headteacher is shared by all and she is being really well supported by an experienced and knowledgeable governing body. Parents should feel very proud that their children attend such an outstanding Catholic school.

### B. The Catholic life of the school

**What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?**

**Overall Grade I**

The school's overall effectiveness in this area is judged to be outstanding and it would be fair to describe it as exceptional. 10% of curriculum time is being devoted to the subject in all classes and the school is engaging with many initiatives to foster spiritual, moral and social development as well as teaching higher order thinking skills through philosophy and ethics. The "Golden Thread" as articulated by the priests interviewed, does indeed permeate every aspect of school life. Meditation is being introduced to Key Stage 2 (KS2) pupils weekly and is also now involving some parents. This is having a tangible impact on the Catholic life of the school. Planning follows the liturgical year and is creative and innovative in many different ways. All classes attend assembly or have an act of worship every day and prayer is quite clearly integral to the daily life of the school. Pupils also plan and lead a wide variety of liturgies and worship. Pupils are highly articulate on why they are called to help and serve others and are beginning understand much of the theology that underpins the Common Good. A very wide variety of charities are being supported but the school does need to develop some more sustainable long term ones that pupils can see thrive and prosper over the years. Partnerships are strong at all levels and links with parishes are also deeply embedded in the culture of the school. Leadership and vision of the head, RE leader and Catholic Life Committee of the governors make this a quite exceptional school in its Catholic way of living and believing.



## A. Classroom Religious Education

*How religiously literate are pupils in the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith and how well do they know, understand and appreciate the importance of religious faith and practice in everyday life?*

### **What has improved in classroom religious education since the last inspection?**

The main areas of improvement since the last inspection have been in the quality of marking and assessment. A whole school marking policy is now in place and this is being implemented right across the school. There has also been a significant improvement in the quality of marking and assessment across the school. Another area of improvement that is very evident is in the breadth and wide ranging scope of the RE curriculum.

### **How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?**

#### **Grade I**

The content of St Catherine's School religious education curriculum fully meets the requirements of the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory*. The curriculum is meticulously planned for by the subject leader of RE who is also the associate head. The school uses as its core curriculum the *The Way the Truth and the Life* scheme of work and supplements this with a wide range of other resources, including the units of work provided by Dr. Margaret Carswell. The school is committed to enhancing its curriculum by using dance, drama, music and art to enrich pupils' learning. It is highly successful in this endeavour. Pupils are being taught about other faiths such as Judaism, Hinduism and Islam in a sensitive way.

The school has invested heavily in a wide range of resources linked to the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory* and the scheme *The Way the Truth and the Life*. The planning, delivery and content of this school's religious education curriculum is of the highest order and the RE subject leader works tirelessly to promote this rich and varied curriculum.

### **Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education**

#### **Grade I**

Pupil achievement overall is outstanding. This is because pupils knowledge of RE in both written and spoken form is of a very high order. These children have a very thorough grounding and substantive knowledge of RE. Children get a great start in the Nursery and the two Reception classes, that is the Early Years Foundation Stage, (EYFS). The learning environment is carefully planned for and is a warm, friendly and caring place for children to start their education. The religious vocabulary of such young children is extensive and is clearly a daily part of their lives. Hearing the EYFS children discuss the events of the Resurrection and the role of Mary and the Disciples was a revelation of what can be achieved even by very young children. Achievement in Key Stage 1 (KS1) was at least good in every class seen. Some excellent work on the Old Testament was seen in both years 1 and 2 on the subjects of Noah and Moses and the cursive writing of the children was of a high standard.

Achievement is at least good in every class seen in Key Stage 2 and outstanding in the upper Key Stage 2 classes (KS2). Topics covered were challenging and clearly designed to stretch pupils' thinking and empathy skills. Some good examples were seen in Year 3 with challenging work on Reconciliation and also in Year 4 on making links between belief and sources using Zachariah's diary; and in Year 5 work seen on Conscience Alley and the decisions of the poor beggar. This was linked in with work on recognising how morals and values affect our decision making and was of a very high standard. In Year 6 classes written work on a wide variety of inspirational people such as Maximilian

Kolbe, Nicholas Winton and Oskar Schindler was also of a very high standard indeed. Some of the written work around ethics and choices was simply a joy to read. Presentation of written work in books does not always reflect the very high content and high standards in the school. It is untidy in places with too many unnecessary pictures being glued in and the school should address this to achieve even higher standards in the future. Pupils are highly articulate about what they have learned and can also discuss their work in sometimes quite complex and meaningful ways. Opportunities are being missed to use Bibles and Scripture more in lessons and this is an area that needs addressing. Older pupils are not at present secure in doing research related to scripture. Children enter the Nursery broadly in line with the national average. Progress is consistent through the years and by the time pupils leave in Year 6 standards of both written and oral work are mostly outstanding. Progress is therefore judged to be outstanding overall. Classroom displays and around the school are very good and some of the abstract artwork seen by pupils was clever and very creative. This school has very high standards of achievement and is always looking to improve its practice.

## **The quality of teaching**

### **Grade 1**

The quality of teaching across the school is judged to be outstanding overall. Every class in the school was observed teaching during this inspection and every lesson was judged at least good with some outstanding lessons also seen. Matching up the quality of teaching observed with the work produced by the pupils one can confidently state that teaching over time is broadly outstanding. Teachers have very high expectations of pupils and this comes across clearly in lessons observed. There were many highlights seen, such as the response of pupils in the EYFS stage and the caring and nurturing environment provided by all staff, not just teachers. All pupils were well supported and those with special educational needs are also very well provided for in every class. The school is fully inclusive. The teaching in both Year 5 and 6 classes was quite outstanding. It was at times highly innovative with two teachers team-teaching in very modern classroom layouts. This worked extraordinarily well and the two year 6 classes moved seamlessly around while at the same time being always on task and producing work of the highest standard. The year 5 teachers used the lovely grounds to teach outdoors and again this was highly effective. There were many other highlights seen but these stood out on the day. Marking is highly developed in this school, is comprehensive and informative in helping pupils develop their knowledge even further. Behaviour was a special feature of this school. The pupils have a highly developed sense of self-discipline and were almost always on task. This is a tribute to the quality of teaching in the school as pupils were clearly enjoying what they were doing. Mutual respect was evident between staff and pupils and the atmosphere in lessons was relaxed and full of fun. Pupils were enthusiastic and engaged during lessons and behaviour all around the school and also in an assembly was of the very highest standard one could wish to see.

## **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education**

### **Grade 1**

The leadership and management of religious education is clearly outstanding and no other judgement could be possible. The head leads by her own clear vision, commitment and dedication to Catholic education. She has a strong and very positive relationship with all staff and pupils and is hugely respected and valued by the whole school community. She is assisted by an exemplary and highly experienced RE leader who is also the associate head. It is hard in a report such as this to do justice to the work and effort this RE leader puts in to ensuring such high standards in this school. She works tirelessly to support staff and provide the best materials possible to enhance the teaching of RE. The school also greatly benefits from a highly committed and pro-active governing body who provide an excellent balance of challenge and support. Governors have a Standards Committee

meetings as well as Catholic Life meetings to monitor the work of the school. They are being very well led by an experienced Chair of Governors who ensures the very highest standards are being maintained and is equally ambitious for the future of the school. The school's own self evaluation is a thorough and highly accurate document and mostly reflects the strengths and weaknesses of the school. In-service training and staff meetings are used to share best practice and new and non-Catholic teachers are being very well supported. Overall the leadership and management of religious education are judged to be outstanding.

### **What should the school do to develop further in classroom religious education?**

- Improve opportunities for children to use Bibles and scripture more during lessons and provide evidence of this in their written work
- Continue to train and develop staff through peer observations to further improve their own subject knowledge and encourage even more team teaching
- Use ICT more to record and even further enhance the creative, innovative and dynamic aspects of the RE curriculum in this school.

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

*How well do pupils experience the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing through all areas of school life?*

### **What has improved since the last inspection?**

There have been numerous significant developments since the last inspection. The spiritual, moral and ethical development of pupils are being continually addressed through the creative and thoughtful teaching of RE. The Catholic Life committee of governors plays a key role in fostering the outstanding Catholic Life of this school. What the school calls its “Golden Thread” runs through all curriculum planning enabling pupils to develop a sense of awe and wonder. The introduction of meditation into the school is beginning to impact on pupils overall spiritual development.

### **The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget**

#### **Grade I**

10% of curriculum time is devoted to the teaching of religious education across all key stages every week. The school values and recognises religious education as a core subject in the curriculum and as such, time, money and resources are given in accordance with this status. A large and substantive annual budget is allocated to the subject every year and is being wisely spent by the RE subject leader. Teachers have good subject knowledge of religious education and high expectations of pupils in accordance with the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory* for England and Wales. All teachers, including those new to the school and non-Catholic, are being well supported in learning about the teaching of religious education. The accommodation is really well maintained to a high standard with some lovely imaginative landscaped gardens and outdoor areas. Displays and prayer focus areas are prominent and of good quality around the school. Upon entering the school one immediately knows that this is a Catholic school.

### **The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community**

#### **Grade I**

Prayer and Catholic worship is a quite clearly outstanding and is a major strength of this school. The vision of the headteacher and all of the school leadership ensure that prayer and worship are central to every aspect of school life. There is so much good practice evident in this school that a report such as this can only mention some of the more noteworthy examples. Planning is thorough, follows the liturgical year and is creative and innovative in many areas. All classes attend assembly or have an act of worship every day and prayer is integral to the life of the school. Excellent opportunities are also being provided for quiet reflection, meditation and spiritual development. Meditation sessions are held weekly for KS2 pupils by one of the local priests and this is also being extended to the parents. This initiative is having a major impact on the spiritual development of the pupils in the school. Pupils also plan and lead assemblies, prayer services and school and class Masses. During this inspection a vibrant assembly on St George was seen planned and led by a year 6 class. Pupils are also actively involved in the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacramental celebration throughout the liturgical year. There are very strong links with the two local parishes and the school is blessed with the active involvement and participation of three local priests who are frequent and welcome visitors to the school. The pupils regularly visit other places of worship and are being well taught about Judaism and Islamic forms of worship.

Parents greatly appreciate the rich variety of Catholic worship offered in this school from the moment children enter in the nursery until they leave in year 6. The breadth, richness and creativity evident in the development of Catholic worship merits the school being graded exceptional in this area.

### **The commitment and contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice.**

#### **Grade I**

The school considers “The Golden Thread” to be a core value of its work towards the Common Good. Pupils are being taught extensively about Catholic Social Teaching and this work is being developed very effectively within the school. Pupils are articulate on why they are called to help and serve others and are very sensitive to those less fortunate. Recent Open Day focussed on Nelson Mandela’s “Long Walk to Freedom” linked in with Global Citizenship and the RE curriculum. This day was a celebration of a remarkable life featuring music, poetry and dance and was loved by parents and the wider community at large. Pupils are being given ample opportunities to be of service in the school with a house system, a buddy system and a school council so they can help even more in school life. Pupils are involved in a wide range of local and international charitable initiatives such as the Catholic Children’s Society, NSPCC, Homeless in Barnet, Marie Curie, CAFOD and Water Aid and many more. The school has in the past supported schools in Uganda and Zambia but this has lapsed somewhat and the school recognises the need to develop newer and more sustainable overseas links in the future. The school is also involved in the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools programme and one can see how this is also raising consciousness and awareness of global development issues in a meaningful way. The social and cultural development of the pupils is a real strength of this school.

### **Enabling the authentic partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf;**

#### **Grade I**

The parents are very supportive of the life and the work of the school in developing Catholic education and are very proud of the Catholic Life offered to their own children. A recently completed questionnaire showed overwhelming support for the school and its leadership. The school sees good communication with parents as a paramount concern and parents are given weekly newsletters, the Word on Wednesday and information via an informative website. They are also invited in to liturgies, assemblies and masses throughout the year. The teachers and staff work closely with the Diocese making full use of training opportunities and also regularly attend deanery meetings and work moderation meetings with other Barnet Catholic schools. Partnerships, collaboration and support for other Catholic schools in the area is a noteworthy aspect of this particular school. The school is blessed with having such active local priests who play a key role in the success of this school on so many levels. Links at all levels are very strong and purposeful.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school**

#### **Grade I**

The leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school are judged to be outstanding and even exceptional. The headteacher leads by example and has a clear and shared vision for excellence for the whole school community. Her leadership of the school is of the highest

order one could wish to see. She is greatly assisted by the RE subject leader and associate head who is a tireless worker in promoting the Catholicity of this school. She is quite simply an exemplary leader who has maintained very high standards in RE over many years and yet also has a clear ambition and desire to see the school adapt to changes and adopt best practice. The Governing Body also are worthy of praise because of their level of expertise, their constructive input and overall support and challenge of the school. The Catholic Life Committee in particular, leads on promoting the Catholic Life of the school and keeps up to date with all developments in religious education.

### **What should the school do to develop further the Catholic life of the school?**

- Develop or revisit some longer term and sustainable charitable overseas projects to further enable the pupils to help those less fortunate and to promote the theology and practice of the Common Good in their everyday lives.