

**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 101460

St John Fisher Catholic Primary School  
Kale Road  
Erith  
Kent  
DA18 4BA

Chair of Governors  
Headteacher  
Inspectors

Ms Siobhan Sherlock  
Mrs Mary Ryan  
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Mrs Catharina Mayhew

Inspection dates            19 October 2011

**ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK  
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# Introduction

## Description of the school

St John Fisher is a voluntary aided Catholic primary school in the Greenwich Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. The school is maintained by Bexley LA. The school serves the parishes of, St John Fisher, Thamesmead, St Benet's, Abbey Wood and St David's, Abbey Wood. These three parishes are now amalgamated as one. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 70%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to religious education is 10% in Key Stage One and 10% in Key Stage Two.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 210. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is below average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. Around 25% of the pupils receive extra support in class. The vast majority of pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds, mainly Black African and Black British. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is above average, although few pupils are at the early stage of learning English.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

St John Fisher is a highly effective Catholic school with a number of outstanding features. Of particular note are the excellent relationships that exist throughout the school, the exemplary behaviour of the pupils and the high regard parents have for the quality of care and education given to their children. Questionnaires received from parents were very positive with many containing comments such as, 'The school has equipped my child to develop in her faith and academically' and 'There are very good relationships between parents and teachers'. St John Fisher is a caring, nurturing Catholic community that embraces pupils of all abilities and cultures and their families. The headteacher's leadership and passionate commitment to the school motivates staff and pupils to strive for excellence. The warm and positive atmosphere in the school leads to pupils' respect for adults and their peers and excellent behaviour. Pupils have a well developed sense of responsibility and demonstrate a mature understanding of the needs of others in school and in the wider community. Their spiritual, moral, and social development is outstanding. The priests are very involved in the Catholic life of the school. They visit regularly both informally and formally and are well known by staff, pupils and parents. Due to good and often outstanding teaching pupils make good and sometimes very good, progress in religious education. Given their starting points, they achieve well and many reach levels of attainment that exceed national expectations. Issues identified in the previous report have been partially addressed, but the quality of the focal areas for prayer in the classrooms, continues to need development. The school is committed to continuous improvement and has a good capacity to improve further.

### **Grade 2**

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

- Improve the quality of class prayer areas so that they are more prominent and attractive and integral to the prayer life of the class. Pupils should be personally involved in the development of these areas.
- Ensure that the development of the Catholic life of the school and religious education features prominently in the School Improvement Plan, leading to a specific and annual action plan for both areas.

# The Catholic life of the school

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade 2**

Strong leadership and management by headteacher and governors shape a clear direction for the school and underpin its distinctively Catholic values. The headteacher has a clear vision of Catholic education and has built a cohesive team, which is focused on the school's mission and strives to ensure that every member of the community is valued as a unique individual and their gifts recognised. One parent wrote, 'I am able to learn a lot of the Catholic ethos from the children'. Some high quality artefacts and attractive displays such as those in the hall depicting various stories from the Bible proudly proclaim the school's Catholic identity. The Mission Statement is displayed in classrooms and drives the work of the school, with pupils clearly aware of it. The school could now consider making the location of the statement more prominent and ensure that it is in all school policies. Pupils clearly love their school and are full of praise for their teachers and the education they are receiving. One pupil said, 'Our teachers keep us safe, get us involved and give us fun things to do while we are learning'. Very effective care and support systems are in place to serve all pupils, including those with additional needs and those who are more vulnerable. The two priests, both of whom are governors, are very supportive and active within the school and their commitment is greatly valued and appreciated by all members of the school community. Links with the parish are good and one teacher is the catechist for the programme for the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Lessons are given after the school day on Fridays and take place on school premises. Governors are committed to the school and fulfil their role in promoting the Catholic ethos and giving support. The governing body reflects the cultural diversity of the school. Other staff and some governors serve in a variety of ways in the parish or their own parish.

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

**Grade 2**

Prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist are central to the life of the school. There is a structured programme for assemblies, which are linked to the liturgical year, the 'Here I Am' religious education programme, Scripture and the celebration of pupils' achievements. Pupils are encouraged to become personally involved and use their various talents. Both assemblies observed during the inspection were well planned and had clear messages, which related well to the pupils' own lives. Pupils were involved throughout and the personal prayers said by some pupils were particularly meaningful. The pupils were focused, interested and responded very well and there was time for silent prayer and reflection. All adults set an excellent example and participated fully in all aspects of the prayer and worship. Pupils have a good knowledge of the traditional prayers of the Church and are encouraged to compose their own prayers. All religious education lessons include time for prayer and reflection and pupils are clearly at ease with moments of silence. All classes have a focal area for prayer but many do not have a prominent place in the classroom and are not integral to the prayer life of the class.

Mass is celebrated for the whole school at various times during the year and key stage two classes have the opportunity to celebrate a class Mass each term, to which parents and parishioners are always welcome. Other liturgies and devotions are celebrated throughout the school year, for example the crowning of Our Lady in May and Holy Week and Easter liturgies. Older pupils are given the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Lent.

## **Community Cohesion**

## **Grade 1**

St John Fisher is an inclusive school, which extends a warm welcome to all its pupils and their families and values them equally. Each child is seen as a unique individual, made in God's image and part of one human family. Almost all the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and for many English is their second language. The school's excellent support systems and the high expectations of teachers, ensure that all pupils, including the most vulnerable, thrive in this happy school community. In the words of one parent, 'St John Fisher teachers take extra miles to support children to achieve their potential by focusing on individual needs'. Pupils are happy, confident and secure in the knowledge that there is always someone to listen to their concerns or worries. From the very beginning of their time at the school pupils learn to show respect and consideration for others. They work and play happily together and are adamant that there are few disagreements, with one child saying, 'It rarely happens and we always end up forgiving each other.' They are given many opportunities to support each other, for example as reading buddies and being part of the playground squad. They feel their voice is heard through the School Council, which meets regularly and has been responsible for the provision of a variety of playground equipment. They are now eager to get large umbrellas to provide shade in the playground. All pupils are encouraged to participate in fund raising activities, which help to develop their awareness of those less fortunate than themselves. For example, they support CAFOD, Cabrini and a children's hospice and also respond well to emergency appeals. The school has excellent links with other Catholic schools in the local authority through the Bexley Catholic Schools and College partnership. This provides a platform for sharing of ideas, the discussion of Catholic education and mutual support. The headteacher is the link person between the diocese and the local authority, which keeps her up to date with Diocesan initiatives and the wider view. Local students are welcomed on work experience and others provide support for pupils in French, Latin and football. The diversity of pupils' cultural backgrounds is welcomed and celebrated through work during Black History month and the forthcoming Black story telling day, which includes workshops for the pupils and full involvement of parents in music and dance. Parents provide the food for a shared meal. The school has links with a school in Lagos and information is exchanged regularly. Two teachers are hoping to visit the school in the near future. Links with a school in Ghana are also being developed. Through their work on other faiths, pupils learn to understand and respect different religious traditions and ideologies. This learning is enriched by visiting speakers and visits by pupils, for example to a Sikh temple and a local exhibition on the Jewish way of life.

# Religious education

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

**Grade 2**

Pupils generally enter the school with some skills below those expected of their age, particularly language and communication skills. Due to excellent care and support and high expectations, these young children settle quickly into school life. They are already beginning to learn some traditional prayers, which have been sent home for parents and children to pray together. A firm foundation for future learning in religious education is being established. Pupils make good progress, which is maintained throughout Key Stage 1 and by the end of Year 2, pupils achieve standards expected of their age. Their knowledge of the Sacrament of Baptism was being developed and they had a good understanding of the main signs and symbols used and why. Progress throughout Key Stage 2 is good and sometimes very good and at the end of Year 6 a considerable number of pupils achieve standards higher than those expected of their age. Pupils in Year 4 were able to explain the deeper meaning of Baptism and could talk about the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. Pupils are confident speakers and are able to discuss ideas and their learning in a mature way. They are developing a good religious vocabulary. Those pupils with additional needs are well supported by skilled teaching assistants and as a result they make good progress. All pupils display a very positive attitude to their work and their behaviour is exemplary. Across the school pupils are able to make connections between what they learn and their own lives and this was evident in a Year 6 lesson where pupils discussed the difference between a basic need to live as opposed to things we just want to have. Although early in the academic year, pupils' books showed a range of written work, including narrative, diary and letter writing, leaflets and empathetic writing.

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

**Grade 1**

The teaching observed during the inspection was consistently good and often outstanding and teachers deliver religious education with confidence and enthusiasm. Lessons are carefully planned to build on pupils' past learning and to be relevant to their own experiences. Learning objectives for each lesson are shared with pupils so that they are clear what is expected of them. Good questioning involves all pupils and challenges them to explain and develop their ideas. Teachers take account of the wide range of abilities and interests in the class and offer activities that match the needs of all pupils. Excellent support is provided by teaching assistants, who make a valuable contribution to provision and encourage those with additional learning needs to make a full contribution to lessons. The school has worked hard to provide challenge for the more able and to encourage more independent learning. Teachers use a wide range of teaching methods and resources in order to stimulate their pupils' learning. In a Year 1 class each group of pupils was given a bag belonging to the priest and they had to sort the contents and find the signs and symbols of Baptism in the bag. This caused great excitement

and reinforced the pupils' learning. Role play and the use of talk partners was well used in Year 2. The extent to which pupils enjoy their work was seen in Year 6 when pupils were making shadow puppets showing the basic needs of all people, for example food, water, light and love. While doing this they had to try to link these to their faith and many were able to relate them to important parts of scripture and the Catholic faith. All teachers mark their pupils work well and the best marking poses further questions for pupils and some explains what pupils need to do to improve further. This good practice now needs to be more consistent across the school. Teachers assess their pupils' progress and achievement in a variety of ways, including observations during lessons, work in their books and progress meetings between teacher and pupil. Staff have taken part in shared moderation exercises and pupils levels of attainment are recorded against the attainment targets and tracked. This system appears to serve the school well but inspectors are of the opinion that the school would benefit from a portfolio of levelled work in order to verify their judgements and provide further evidence

### **The religious education curriculum**

### **Grade 1**

While 10% of the timetable is devoted to religious education the subject permeates much of the school day. Based on the 'Here I Am' religious education programme, the curriculum builds on the foundations of home and relates to the needs of the pupils and the community. The curriculum builds well on prior attainment and good links with previous learning were seen in all lessons. It is well planned using diocesan proformas, which teachers annotate according to the needs of their pupils. There are good cross curricular links with other subjects. Pupils are explicitly encouraged to use their literacy skills and religious education work on display demonstrated the use of ICT and maths. The support and input given by the priests is appreciated by everyone. An example is when the reception class visit the church each year. One priest is linked to the Year 6 class and gives both pastoral and curriculum support to these pupils. Parents are kept well informed through the headteacher's newsletters, religious education newsletters and occasional homework. The school works hard to engage parents and involve them in their children's education and the Catholic life of the school. There is a very good programme for PHSE, personal, health and social education, which is linked to the religious education curriculum when appropriate. Together with good use of circle time it contributes to pupils' spiritual and moral development by offering them opportunities to discuss life issues and by preparing them well to face future challenges. The school policy for sex and relationship education is rooted in Catholic values and parents are kept well informed. The school has a good supply of resources including those for the teaching of other world faiths. All religious education lessons provide time for prayer and reflection which further enriches pupils' spiritual development, which is outstanding.

The headteacher is at present the coordinator for Religious Education and has been for several years. Together with governors she ensures that religious education is focused on the school's Catholic mission and on promoting the faith development of pupils. The coordinator gives good support to staff both informally and formally and leads staff meetings on various aspects of the subject, for example prayer life of the school and assessment. Part of one staff training day each year is devoted to religious education and/or the Catholic life of the school. The subject is monitored through learning walks, scrutiny of pupils' books and lesson observations. Teachers are given constructive feedback and this has an impact on learning. The coordinator has a clear idea of areas for development and these should now be formulated into an action plan, which could be shared with governors. The governors are kept informed through a programme of visits and regular reports from the headteacher/coordinator. The priests also give feedback to the governing body. While governors have a good knowledge of the Catholic life of the school and some knowledge of the religious education curriculum, they now need to ensure that strategies are in place to ensure that they are made aware of standards achieved in the subject. All staff give strong support to the school's Catholic ethos and this is evident through attractive displays, which celebrate pupils' work, talents and achievements.