



INSPECTION REPORT

**St Bernadette Catholic Secondary School
Fossedale Avenue, Whitchurch, Bristol, BS149LS
Telephone: 0117 3772050
e-mail address: info@stberns.bristol.sch.uk**

URN: 109331

**Headteacher: Mr E Walker
Chair of Governors: Mr P McDermott**

**Date of Inspection: October 12th-13th 2022
Date of previous inspection: May 2016**

**Reporting Inspector: Mr G Maher
Additional Inspector: Mrs A Fowler**

Description of the school

St Bernadette's Catholic Secondary School is an average sized mixed 11-16 school. It serves the Catholic community in south Bristol including some of the most deprived wards in the city. It currently takes pupils from a number of parishes in the surrounding area. 15% of pupils are recognised as having special educational needs and 12% of pupils speak English as an Additional Language. The proportion of baptised Catholic pupils is slightly lower than other schools in the diocese at 23%. The new headteacher has been in place since September 2021 having been a member of the senior leadership team prior to this. During the previous two years the school faced the challenges presented by Covid with much of the teaching taking place online and monitored closely. The school has established good strategies to support the academic work of pupils and the pastoral wellbeing of both pupils and staff.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

Grade: Outstanding

This is an outstanding school because:

- St Bernadette's is explicitly a Catholic school where pupils feel valued for who they are and what they achieve.
- Catholic life is at the centre of the strategic direction of the school.
- Catholic Social Teaching is embedded across all aspects of the work of the school.
- All members of the community fully understand and articulate coherently the mission of the school.
- Religious education is extremely well managed and led, which enables all pupils to make progress and become religiously literate.
- Chaplaincy is at the heart of the school and provides a variety of meaningful opportunities for all pupils to grow in faith.
- Leaders model the caring Catholic ethos which permeates throughout all aspects of the work of the community.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

- Issues identified in the previous inspection have been addressed.
- Leaders and governors are fully committed to evaluating all aspects of the work of the school to secure further development and improvement.
- Pupils are achieving good outcomes and results at Key Stage 4, demonstrating continued improvement for all groups of learners.
- Religious education is extremely well led and highly valued by pupils who believe it teaches them how to be a good person.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to raise outcomes for all groups of learners at Key Stage 4.
- Continue to provide opportunities for pupils to plan, lead and deliver prayer and acts of worship.
- Continue to provide support for teachers in the delivery of prayer and reflection.

Catholic Life

Grade: Outstanding

a) The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school

- St Bernadette's is explicitly a Catholic school where pupils feel valued for who they are and what they achieve. Pupils are immensely proud of their school and speak enthusiastically about the school's distinctive Catholic nature and fully embrace the many opportunities provided for all to grow in faith.
- Pupils have reviewed the mission statement and feel that the school responded to their contributions well emphasising the value that the school places on pupil voice. Pupils have a number of opportunities to take leadership responsibility through the school council, representing the school at parents' evenings and open days and organising charity events.
- All pupils are cared for equally and this reflects the inclusive nature of the school's ethos. The sense of community cohesion is very strong and is celebrated by pupils who acknowledge the richness that diversity brings to the community as a whole.
- Pupils welcome and appreciate the opportunities offered to learn about other faiths and cultures. Pupils understand and articulate coherently what it is to be a pupil at St Bernadette's and fully embrace the "excellence wheel" and can explain in detail how this influences their attitudes to all those around them. One pupil explained "the excellence wheel teaches you values for life which will help to make you a good person." Pupils know and understand what is expected of them to ensure that they are able to learn in a purposeful way and behaviour throughout the school is exemplary.
- Catholic Social Teaching is embedded across all aspects of the school and is evident through classroom displays, corridors and the explicit reference which is made at the beginning of lessons. Consequently, pupils understand Catholic Social Teaching and the need to put this into practice in their daily lives.
- Pupils are aware of their responsibility to help those less fortunate and demonstrate genuine concern for everyone around them through extensive, planned charitable activities including support for CAFOD, Young Volunteers, SVP and the local food bank.

b) The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school

- Catholic Life is at the centre of the strategic direction of the school and is clearly expressed on the website, in its documentation and in its recruitment procedures. Catholic education is based on its mission statement and underpinned by "excellence in faith and learning."
- All faculties have reviewed their schemes of work in order to write individual faculty mission statements which enable all staff and pupils to understand how each subject contributes to the Catholic ethos of the school and supports pupils' spiritual and moral

development. Staff articulate strongly that there is a clear shared language which permeates all aspects of school life and all staff fully support the ethos of the school.

- The school's environment reflects its mission and identity through effective signs and images which are clearly visible throughout the school. Regular communication with parents takes place through the school website, letters home and newsletters. This continued during Covid restrictions with staff engaging with parents online.
- Pupils' well-being is extremely well promoted in a variety of activities and pupils are encouraged to be healthy and safe and articulate this well. Care for all pupils including the most vulnerable is evident throughout all aspects of the work of the school.
- Pastoral leaders are supportive and actively encourage every pupil to be the best that they can be. Staff well-being is considered, and support provided as appropriate including amendments to the school's calendar as necessary.
- The behaviour policy is influenced by the mission of the school with an emphasis on restorative justice and excellent relationships exist between pupils, staff and parents.
- There are a number of opportunities to celebrate success through assemblies, the headteacher's award and the success board displayed in the main hall. The school achieved the Romero Award in November 2021 at Participator level with further development planned for 2022.
- The personal, social and health education programme (PSHE) is delivered through one lesson per fortnight at key stage 3 and this is delivered by staff from the religious education faculty. PSHE is delivered at Key Stage 4 through curriculum enrichment days and through the tutor programme. Support and resources are provided for tutors to ensure that there is consistency of practice in delivering the programme across all tutor groups. As a result, pupils are able to make informed choices about remaining safe and have a strong sense of right and wrong.
- The religious education faculty leads the relationships and sex education programme. This promotes clear links between Church teaching and current issues, enabling pupils to become both informed and knowledgeable. However, this is not always fully communicated to parents and the school has already recognised that further work needs to be completed to ensure that all parents understand fully what is being taught.

c) How well leader and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school

- All leaders and governors have a shared understanding of what their responsibilities are in leading a community of faith and are committed to the development of the school's Catholic Life.
- The headteacher has a clear vision for Catholic education and is ably supported by a highly effective leadership team. The belief in the school as an extension of the family is testament to the work being undertaken by the school and is a strength.

- The chair of governors has detailed knowledge and understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and is fully committed to the role. Catholic Life is the first item of the headteacher's report to the governing body and the development plan accurately identifies further opportunities to improve the Catholic Life of the school.
- The governing body is encouraged to be fully involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the Catholic life of the school and bring a wealth of experience and skills to the school in order to support continued improvement. Governor visits are encouraged, and outcomes recorded. Visits focus on an area identified in the school development plan and results are reported to the full governing body during their meeting.
- Governors clearly understand their role in holding the school to account for the Catholic life and actively seek opportunities for further improvement. Governors provide appropriate support and effective challenge to the headteacher and senior leadership team. The link governor is knowledgeable and Catholic life is monitored through the mission and pastoral committee and reported to the full governing body.
- Pupils' views are sought through questionnaires, and many feel able to contribute to the evaluation of Catholic Life. However, this is not fully embedded and is an area for further development.
- Governors and leaders in the school are committed to supporting staff induction to promote the Catholic character of the school. One staff training day per year is dedicated to developing teachers' understanding of the Catholic ethos which promotes the strong sense of community.
- The school benefits from the support of the local clergy who make themselves available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and to celebrate the weekly voluntary Mass. Open dialogue and good communication is appreciated between the school, parents and the parish.
- Leaders and governors support all diocesan events and participate in all training provided. The school actively engages with the Aquinas Partnership through chaplaincy events, sports events and moderation for Religious Education and meetings between school leadership teams.
- There is an openness and willingness to embrace opportunities and strong relationships exist between the school and parish. Outreach work is developing, and this joint working promotes a sense of belonging to the school with the Youth Alpha programme being particularly successful.

Religious Education

Grade: Outstanding

a) How well pupils achieve and enjoy learning in Religious Education

- High levels of engagement are evident in all lessons observed and it is clear that pupils enjoy their learning in religious education and can relate this to everyday life. Pupils in all key stages make good progress when compared to results achieved nationally.
- Key Stage 3 outcomes are in line with targets set using key stage 2 data to set realistic and challenging end of key stage targets. Key Stage 4 results in 2022 demonstrate improving outcomes for all groups of learners. The average grade being achieved is 5+ and subject progress is +0.28.
- Results in Religious Education are the highest of all the core subjects being taught in the school. Disadvantaged pupils perform less well although the school is fully aware of the gap in attainment and has been able to explain the reason why. Appropriate steps have been taken to address this.
- Pupils treat each other with respect and listen attentively when discussing religious concepts and alternative views and gain confident understanding of the impact of faith on their lives. Pupils enjoy discussion which enables them to explore their faith and deepen their understanding.
- Pupil progress is evident in books which builds on prior learning and enables knowledge to become embedded.
- Pupils are very articulate and becoming knowledgeable about faith, using religious language confidently and in context. Pupils are therefore religiously literate using key terms correctly. Pupils are able to explain their responses and use appropriate vocabulary and expression fluently. For example, pupils were able to talk convincingly about the difference between religious and scientific truth.
- Pupils report that they enjoy being challenged and are always encouraged to do well. Work is differentiated effectively in most lessons to support the development of knowledge and skills. Work is appropriately scaffolded for less able students to ensure they achieve success in line with expectation.
- However, middle ability learners need more opportunities for independent learning and the use of cut and paste should be avoided as it does not contribute to pupils' understanding. Answers are modelled in class to ensure that pupils feel confident to apply their knowledge when responding to the variety of tasks being undertaken.
- Foundations for extended writing are built at Key Stage 3 and explicit links are made to exam content and skills. The strategies pupils need to succeed at both key stages 3 and 4 are reinforced and examples of extended writing are displayed in classrooms and corridors to support the pupils' learning and understanding.
- The targets set for pupils are challenging. Progress against targets is monitored regularly and early intervention is put in place as necessary to support pupils and secure outcomes.

b) The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and demonstrate high levels of expertise. However, opportunities for creative work, particularly at key stage 3 are limited and this needs to be developed further. Lessons are well planned using a variety of tasks to secure the engagement of all groups of learners. Pair work is used effectively to develop understanding and embed knowledge, However, there are inconsistencies in a very few lessons.
- Lessons have good pace which ensures pupils remain focussed throughout the lesson. Where questioning is used effectively it provides appropriate challenge and promotes higher level thinking. However, this is not consistent across all teachers within the faculty.
- Written work is well presented, and extended writing tasks are completed well. However, boys' writing skills are not as well developed as those of girls in a minority of classes. Teachers are encouraged to have high expectations of pupils and pupils believe they are achieving well as a result. Meaningful homework is set which is designed to support pupils' knowledge and develop their understanding.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is exemplary which allows all pupils to learn in a purposeful manner and enables them to ask questions when they do not understand.
- Data is used effectively to help teachers plan their lessons and ensure that teaching meets the needs of all learners. Books are marked regularly, and clear feedback is given to check pupils' understanding and identify misconceptions which are addressed appropriately.
- Pupils actively respond to the feedback they are given and will add to any challenge questions they are given. Where errors occur, teachers respond immediately to ensure that pupils continue to make progress and achieve. Formal summative assessments are used as part of the school's procedures for tracking pupil progress. Pupils are aware of the progress they are making and use the feedback and targets set to help them improve further.

c) How well leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education

- Leaders and governors ensure that religious education receives the required time allocation in all key stages and is funded in line with other core subject areas. Pupils in key stage 3 receive 10% of the teaching time which increases to 12% at key stage 4. Therefore this fulfils the requirements of the Bishops' Conference.
- As part of the curriculum pupils learn about other faiths and can articulate what they have learned. Pupils value the opportunity this gives them and recognise how this adds to the richness of the community as a whole. One pupil explained how this enabled her "to understand the custom and practice of some of my Muslim friends."

The link governor has strong links with the religious education faculty and meets on a regular basis to discuss issues for development and holds members of the faculty to account well. The link governor is knowledgeable, enthusiastic and well informed and his support and challenge has already contributed to the improvement in outcomes for learners.

- Learning walks, work scrutiny and pupil questionnaires are all used effectively to ensure consistency across the department. This is used to inform practice which will in turn lead to further improvement. Faculty evaluation is robust and provides an honest evaluation of the strengths and areas for development.
- Faculty improvement planning is detailed with appropriate measurable outcomes and milestones to secure success. Progress against outcomes is monitored through the Mission and Pastoral committee and the findings are reported at full governing body meetings.
- Religious education is extremely well led by an enthusiastic and committed subject leader. He is extremely knowledgeable and provides excellent support for all members of the faculty including non-specialist teachers. The faculty meets regularly to share ideas and report on teaching strategies and the progress of pupils.
- The curriculum in religious education is coherently planned and sequenced to build on knowledge and skills and takes full account of the curriculum directory. There is a clear rationale for the learning being undertaken with road maps and learning steps being provided for pupils which highlights the skills being developed. The scheme of work is detailed and provides appropriate opportunities for peer and self-review which builds on prior learning effectively.
- Knowledge organisers are provided for pupils and available on the school's website. Pupils use these for revision and to check understanding and believe this supports their progress and develops their understanding effectively.

The Prayer Life of the School

Grade: Outstanding

a) How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's prayer life

- Prayer is central to the life of the school and there are a number of different opportunities for pupils and staff to experience prayer. Staff prayer is available before school on two mornings a week. Pupils are respectful and participate reverently in prayer and important celebrations during the liturgical year including Masses and retreat days. This helps to develop their understanding of the different seasons of the liturgical calendar and explore connections with their own lives.
- Pupils are involved in the planning of morning prayer and assemblies and form tutors are provided with well-planned and structured resources which cater for all pupils, including those of other faiths and indeed no faith at all. Form tutors acknowledge that it is important to take account of the different experiences pupils have in order that everyone feels able to contribute and feel valued for who they are.
- Pupils appreciate the opportunities to work as part of the chaplaincy team and value the experience this gives them to develop their understanding of how prayer helps them in their daily lives. Pupils are aware of different forms of prayer and appreciate the opportunity to participate in them. However, this needs to be developed and further training needs to be provided to ensure that all staff are skilled at delivering high quality prayer. This will in turn develop the skills of the pupils so that all pupils have the opportunity to contribute to and experience quality prayer including art and music during tutor time.
- The chapel is a calm and reflective space and is open to pupils to pray throughout the day. Pupils have the opportunity to evaluate prayer and their opinions are actively sought following retreats and special events. Pupils also have the opportunity to suggest further activities to enhance the prayer life of the school and feel that they are listened to and that improvements are made.

b) The quality of the prayer life provided by the school

- Praying together is part of the daily experience for all pupils and staff. Themes are linked to the liturgical calendar and displays around the school highlight the liturgical season, although a few pupils do not fully understand the significance of this. Prayer stations are in place in the chapel at key times of the year and pupils appreciate the variety of activities that they are able to undertake at these times.
- Reflection is used well to allow pupils to make connections between current issues being experienced by communities around the world and the impact this can have on their daily lives. The school continued to provide liturgies for pupils throughout the period of Covid and this was developed further to include the involvement and delivery to the parish community while the local parish church was being refurbished.

- Retreats are available to pupils with year 7 attending an internal retreat (in addition to a retreat at Alton Castle), year 8 and 9 visiting Viney Hill and year 11 attending Woodcroft Christian Centre, although plans are in place for an alternative venue to be sought in the future. During the inspection pupils in year 10 participated in a joint retreat with other schools in the diocese held at another partner secondary school. Pupils are keen to participate in the retreats although numbers can be limited.
- Pupils from other faiths are supported in appropriate forms of prayer and provision is made for Muslim children to pray with a dedicated prayer room being made available for them. This adds to the sense of community cohesion and enables pupils to fully understand the needs of other pupils in the school.

c) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the prayer life of the school

- Leaders and governors place a high priority on the prayer life of the school and provide time and space in order for this to be developed. The work of the chaplaincy team is excellent, and they are fully involved in the planning and preparation for assemblies and acts of worship to ensure that what is presented to pupils is accessible, meaningful and relevant. Pupils believe that prayer is a high priority for the school and that leaders and governors value prayer through the example and witness they give.
- The lay chaplain makes a significant contribution to the prayer life of the school and provides inspirational leadership. Pupils enjoy the enthusiasm he demonstrates and are keen to be involved in the many activities provided for them to take on leadership responsibility.
- The lay chaplain provides staff and pupils with high quality resources to help them plan and prepare prayers and staff appreciate the resources being structured to develop consistency across all year groups in the school. Staff articulate that good practice is shared through pastoral meetings which has resulted in further improved experiences for pupils.
- The governing body is kept fully informed about the prayer life of the school through the headteacher's report, the link governor and observation. The head of religious education monitors the prayer life of the school as part of his responsibility to the Mission and Pastoral Committee.
- Parental views are actively sought through questionnaires and pupils feel that they can also contribute to the development of prayer which then impacts on planning for the future. A very few parents did not feel that they were involved in the prayer life of the school well enough. However, the school has already recognised that parents need to be fully involved in the worship opportunities available to their children and plans are in place to address this.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 64 responses from parents which were almost entirely positive. Parents commented on the support the school provides with the majority of parents selecting the school because of its ethos and excellent reputation locally. One parent commented, "We chose the school because it was friendly and provided a warm environment which feels safe, inclusive and welcoming." Another parent commented "We are impressed with the many opportunities there are for the children to reflect on their spiritual development and personal growth through enrichment days, retreats and masses," The pastoral support given by the school was mentioned by many parents for example, "The school offers a nurturing and supportive environment which allows my child to grow both spiritually and morally". Another parent commented on the relationship between staff and pupils, "The school has a strong sense of community with caring and supportive teachers."