



**DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION AND
COLLECTIVE WORSHIP INSPECTION REPORT**
incorporating Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the
Archbishop of Southwark

URN 137856

St Agatha's Catholic Primary School
St Agatha's Drive
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey .KT2 5TY

Inspection date: 11 September 2014

Chair of Governors: Mrs Pippa Young
Headteacher: Mrs Elizabeth Cahill
Inspectors: Mr Stephen Beck
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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

St Agatha's Catholic Primary School is an academy converter school. It is situated in the Kingston Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark and is within the Kingston upon Thames Local Authority area. The principal parish, which the school serves, is St Agatha's, Kingston with some pupils coming from the parishes of St Anne's, Kingston Hill and St Thomas Aquinas, Ham. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 87% an increasing number since the last inspection reflecting a growing number of admissions from the local Polish community. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education does not yet meet the required 10% across all key stages but the school is currently moving to address this shortfall.

The school takes pupils from 3 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll, including the nursery, is 490. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is generally above average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. There are few pupils with learning difficulties but the proportion of pupils learning English as an additional language is close to the national average and is on an upward trend, having risen from 18% to 22% over the past three years. The majority of pupils are from white British backgrounds.

Date of previous inspection:

25 March 2008

Overall Grade:

1

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1
Grade 2

Outstanding
Good

Grade 3
Grade 4

Requires improvement
Inadequate

St Agatha's is an effective, distinctly Catholic school that provides a good Catholic education for its pupils. It places equal value on academic achievement and the pupils' personal faith development. It is a caring Catholic community. From the point of first contact and as soon as you enter the school the strong Catholic ethos is clearly evident. The drive to develop the whole child and to nurture individual worth is embedded in school culture. Pupils are encouraged to strive in all areas of their academic and personal development. They in turn, learn to respect all members of the community as equally valuable. Very strong liaison with parents and the parish further nurtures and nourishes this provision. The Headteacher has been in post for one year and, in the school's own self-evaluation document, has speedily identified and set to work addressing the areas accurately identified for development. The school has strong, focused management in place and an able dedicated staff and accordingly is well placed to continue to make progress and move to the next level.

Governors are passionate about the ongoing development of the Catholic ethos of the school providing both support and challenge when discussing priorities for improvement. They have a clear knowledge of their school. All leaders work together and have secured robust provision for the care, guidance and support of pupils. Relationships are excellent and pupils' behaviour exemplary. Numerous opportunities for personal and collective worship result in the pupils' spiritual and moral development being outstanding. There are strong systems of assessment in place and these are soon to be moved onto the school's SIMs system to make the data readily available to staff to assist in more refined planning to better match the needs of all pupils.

The parish priest, who is a governor, is a regular visitor to the school and is well known to pupils and staff. He provides a strong chaplaincy role that is welcomed by all members of the school community. He provides a strong parish/school link to the governing body.

The school has worked on the two steps noted in its previous inspection and is moving forward to ensure they are fully addressed. The school uses 'The Way the Truth and the Life' as its core Religious Education scheme, which it has resourced well.

As the school itself stated, *"The life of St Agatha's School is centred on our Catholic faith, in which we proclaim the Gospel values such as love, peace and justice which influence all our activities and relationships. We value and encourage the uniqueness of each child and recognise that everyone has a positive contribution to make to the life of the school community. We value worshipping and celebrating together, sharing our Christian witness and building upon the foundations already established at home where parents are the first educators of their children."* The inspectors were able to validate the school's view. As a parent wrote, *"I believe St Agatha's is an exceptional school. There is a strong Catholic ethos that runs through everything in the school."*

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Undertake a full review of the curriculum time given to Religious Education to ensure the required 10% allocation is achieved.

- Strengthen monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education through an audit of Religious Education provision, with a view to analysing the effectiveness of delivery, tasks and outcomes for all pupils.
- Demonstrate greater rigor in the provision for more able pupils.

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The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school

Pupils have a strong sense of belonging to the school community and that of St Agatha's parish with which strong links have been established. They are keen to take part in all aspects of the Catholic life of the school and to make a contribution themselves. Pupils are very inclusive in their behaviour and acceptance of different backgrounds and needs. They are interested in finding out about other faiths and are fascinated by similarities and differences. The school is aware of the need for further opportunities for the pupils to develop an even greater understanding of other faiths.

Pupils are eager to take on responsibility within school and the wider community. They are very aware of the Catholic character of the school and what this means in terms of relationships with God. They act as ambassadors for the school, showing care for other children in living out Gospel values. Through the School Council pupils are able to influence the development of the Catholic character of the school and show a keenness to take on this responsibility. It is central to St Agatha's ethos that each child is made in God's image and as such is nurtured so that they develop their unique gifts and value everyone's talents. Pupils look beyond their community to the needs of others. They have visitors from organisations such as CAFOD, Peace One Day and have collected funds for a variety of charities including CAFOD, CABRINI, and the Cardinal Hume Centre, as well as other charities including GOSH, RNLI, NSPCC, WATATO, Mission Together, CLIC Sargent, Marie Curie Cancer Care and the Poppy Appeal.

The school's house system and School Council give the pupils in KS2 a chance to engage in a democratic process to elect pupils to represent and put forward their views. This provides opportunities for those elected to develop their maturity and take on more responsibilities within the school. Pupils are encouraged to be resourceful, independent and responsible. They hold these positions in high regard and enjoy the sense of ownership they feel over things that happen around the school. They feel involved in decisions, including which charities to support and through considering aspects of school life, for example, how safe they feel in school. As a parent commented, *'The school has supported me greatly to instil a real sense of right and wrong in my daughter and in demonstrating respect and kindness for others. Her Religious Education and the values taught have taught my child to reflect on the events in her life e.g. illness of grandparents, friendships etc.'*

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Achievement in Religious Education is at least in line with the standards in other core subjects. The school's own lesson observations and work scrutiny suggest that the standard of teaching is consistently good with some outstanding elements. The inspectors have been able to validate this. The school could now work on disseminating identified good practice across the school.

Pupils recognise the importance that is placed on Religious Education across the school and in all areas of school life and are clear about the importance of their faith and know it is integral to school life. Pupils express a love of Religious Education lessons.

Staff are working to extend more able pupils and ensure that assessment tasks provide more opportunities for the higher levels to be achieved and have identified this as a development priority.

Pupils with specific learning needs are very well served by teachers and support staff, who work seamlessly together to ensure these pupils are fully included and their work celebrated. Pupils particularly value more creative tasks that challenge their understanding and these opportunities should be further developed.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

Pupils enjoy assemblies which offer a variety of different experiences and opportunities to help them access the key messages being shared. They are used to enhance and deepen their moral values, spirituality and faith. For example, good use is made of music, film clips, stories, drama, power point presentations, visual artefacts and symbols.

Staff share their own personal experiences and 'real life' experiences of others, as appropriate, which help pupils to contextualise the themes to their own lives.

Pupils prepare their own services for class-based liturgies and take a leading role in preparing whole class assemblies to which parents are invited. They also prepare displays and choose prayers and reflections.

The high level of staff engagement in collective worship provides excellent role models for pupils and is a strength of the school.

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How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils

The leadership of the school in its widest sense is fully committed to developing the Catholic life of the school. There is a strong collegiate approach throughout the school.

A high level of parental questionnaire returns showed parents as overwhelmingly supportive of the school's Catholic ethos and value it. The sense of community and targeted support given to families is highly valued. The school benefits from a strong supportive Parents' Association that both fundraises and provides a social network for the school.

The strong relationships between school and parish strengthen the Catholic life of the school. As a parent stated, *"The links between the church and the school mean that my children feel part of a strong community with a very Catholic ethos."* The school and parish maximise the advantages of being so geographically close to each other. The school liaises with the other parishes from which its pupils come and fosters links whenever possible.

St Agatha's benefits from, and highly values, the time given to the school by the parish priest, who provides a strong chaplaincy role to the whole community. This greatly strengthens the home, school, parish partnership.

A higher profile could be given to the school's mission statement with consideration being given to working with pupils to develop child friendly versions of the statement.

How well leaders, governors and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education and plan and implement for improvement to outcomes for pupils

Leaders prioritise Religious Education and are keen to ensure that best practice is shared, but this needs to be developed further. Time is given for staff training and discussion (particularly when a new topic is to be covered). They ensure Religious Education has a high profile and is seen as a core subject. Religious Education is prioritised in the School Development Plan, is well resourced and receives funding comparable to other core subjects. The Religious Education coordinator is proactive in providing information for staff, making sure that they understand Catholic doctrine and the liturgical year.

The parish priest is generous with his time, providing support for staff and spiritual guidance. The role he plays in the school community is highly valued and much appreciated.

The Religious Education governor works well with the subject coordinator and is gaining a sound grasp of attainment, the school's strengths and areas for development. He provides a good link to the governing body and this provides an opportune time to audit the Religious Education timetable with a view to monitoring the effectiveness of curriculum delivery, tasks and outcomes for all pupils. Parents are provided with information on the

Religious Education curriculum in line with other areas and feel supported to help their children at home.

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The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education

School observations show a consistent level of good teaching. There is a number of experienced staff, including the Religious Education coordinator who work hard to support new staff and those who are of other denominations. Lessons are generally varied, lively and enthuse pupils. Staff are pro-active in finding out more and have a desire to 'get it right'. Marking is thorough and gives pupils the opportunity to reflect on their learning. Developmental marking is evident with opportunities for pupils to respond becoming embedded. Teachers have high expectations of engagement and demonstrate the importance of Religious Education at St Agatha's.

Objectives and outcomes are shared with pupils. Skilled questioning takes place in well planned and resourced lessons. There is excellent classroom management, with a range of teaching strategies being used. This could be extended by wider use of ICT to provide opportunities for research and pupil initiated learning. Pupils display positive attitudes to learning and work hard at developing the 6 Rs. Activities are well matched to the needs of pupils although more able pupils would benefit from greater challenge. Lessons should offer more consistent opportunities for differentiation by task and in some cases a more vigorous pace. Pupils are given opportunities to think theologically, ethically and spiritually and this is underpinned through all staff giving witness to the Christian values they teach. It is a strength of the school that pupils are given opportunities to apply learning to other aspects of school life and beyond school, for example fundraising, debating with other schools, community engagement, links with a school in Spain, International School Day.

Home learning is established and pupils are given Religious Education tasks as part of this policy and end of year reports inform parents on the progress their children have been making in Religious Education. Class Religious Education books are made distinctive through the use of a religious picture or symbol on the cover. Pupils demonstrate considerable pride in and care of these books. A parent noted, *"My child is 7 years old and this summer she had a discussion with some adults regarding a biblical account. I realised then how amazing the Catholic education is at this school."*

The use of Circle Time provides really good links to Education for Personal Relationships and Speech and Learning and helps to encourage pupils to make links to 'Learning from Religion'. The school has a successful and well-established Sex and Relationship Education Programme that parents commended highly. The use of drama, for example, TenTen Theatre Company enriches the Religious Education curriculum. Lessons are strengthened by building on previous learning. Pupils are very well supported, especially those with additional needs. Supporting adults are generally well prepared, with the relationships between pupils and adults having a positive impact on learning.

In an outstanding Early Years lesson pupils were excited by the teacher's enthusiasm for 'building the world' in a very well planned and resourced lesson on the topic of creation related to new beginnings. These young pupils responded to excellent open ended questioning by the teacher and to opportunities to engage in talk partners. The lesson was well paced with pupils moving efficiently to their tasks. Good use was made of the classroom focal points for prayer which was led by one of the pupils. The confidence of the pupils was a joy to behold so early in the school year with them having attended for less than a week.

In a lesson on the topic of 'The parable of the mustard seed' pupils were attentive. There was good building on previous learning and very good questioning by the teacher, who demonstrated excellent classroom management. Pupils were slow to access the lesson tasks due to an overly long carpet session and would benefit from a less didactic approach and speedier access to tasks.

A Key Stage 2 lesson on Baptism reflected very strong subject knowledge by the teacher. Pupils enjoyed the opportunity to role play a Baptism. The lesson was very well resourced with pupils having an opportunity to experience 'chrism' that helped them to understand the chronology of the Sacrament.

In another Key Stage 2 lesson true 'awe and wonder' was generated by very good pupil input into the topic of creation.

A Key Stage 1 lesson made excellent use of an 'emotion wheel' to support pupils' to empathise with Daniel in the Lion's den and understand his situation and the strength of his faith.

Generally lessons would benefit from more effective use of time, the use of targeted materials to provide greater challenge and direct use of scripture where appropriate to further improve pupils' religious literacy. Music is well used in lessons to create a spiritual atmosphere in periods of prayer and reflection and this is a strength across the school.

The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning

Pupils are proud of their school, enjoy coming to school and are happy. They enjoy their Religious Education lessons and this has been confirmed through pupil discussions where they are positive in their attitudes to the subject. They show pride in their work, listen well to others, are confident in offering their own ideas, values and beliefs and contribute freely. They take part in school Masses and services and enjoy taking active roles in reading, the offertory procession and serving. Religious Education is seen as essential in helping the school to establish a clear value system based upon Gospel values and through these it strives daily to live life as a Christian community.

Lesson observations and staff and parent views show that the pupils are trustworthy, polite and well behaved. They behave well during lessons and demonstrate positive learning behaviours. Pupils' behaviour is influenced by the quality of staff who have consistent expectations of pupil behaviour and are supported by a shared value system between home and school that provides for their emotional security and a sense of belonging.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

St Agatha's state a belief in the importance of pupils taking on and developing a core set of moral values, centred on the teaching of Jesus Christ. They believe that it is important for pupils to become confident and independent learners always remembering to be sensitive to the needs of others. They facilitate this well. There is a good range of different collective worship experiences provided for pupils. Pupils pray formally at the start of the day, before lunchtime and at the end of the day. Further opportunities are offered for spontaneous and informal prayer as well as times for reflection. There are good quality focal points for prayer within classrooms and around the school and some excellent

displays that provide stimuli to help children focus. Staff give positive witness by attending collective worship and both staff and children are involved in the planning and leading of these celebrations. Pupils are attentive and actively participate. The children are encouraged to explore a variety of forms of worship (music, songs, enactment, reflections, prayer, art, outdoor prayer). On Fridays at lunchtime a teacher provides a Rosary-based prayer group for all pupils, which has proved to be very popular. Each class has their own class saint for which they have voted. On the feast day of their saint the children in that class take part in activities based on the life of that saint, for example, trying Indian food that St Alphonsus might have eaten, telling jokes that St Philip Neri might have laughed at. This helps to raise the profile of their saint and helps the children to feel more connected to them and their lives.

Pupils are currently revising a book of prayers that is traditionally shared with children when they start school. The school celebrates and affirms pupils' achievement through assemblies. Class Masses are meaningful acts of worship for the children and parents are invited to attend these. There is good communication between the parish priest and the individual class teachers who prepare the class Masses with the children. Regular Masses and prayer services are a feature of school life and take place each term with parents invited and encouraged to join their children on these occasions. The whole school celebrates Mass at the start and end of each term and on special feast days. Annually, the school celebrates its patron saint, St Agatha, with a Mass in her honour followed up with a day of activities based on the various things of which she is a patron.

The recognition that pupils attend different parishes and have well developed links with other priests, for example, their Polish priests is well supported and managed to the benefit of the community as a whole.

The assembly attended provided a good reinforcement of the school's core values at the beginning of the school year. The use of freeze framing pupil drama served to engage the pupils and provide a visual focus that assisted pupil understanding of the overall message. Pupil behaviour throughout the assembly was exemplary. The assembly was well prepared and managed. In order to maximise the celebration as an act of worship the school should consider its composition and duration to ensure the primary purpose is an act of worship for the community rather than a teaching tool.

A Key Stage 2 lesson started with a meditation that created a very spiritual atmosphere through the choice of appropriate music, artefacts with a special meaning for the pupils, and an opportunity for silent reflection and sharing of special thoughts and memories. This created an environment in which pupils were clearly secure and able to share their thoughts and feelings within an act of worship.