



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 118755

St John's Catholic Primary School
Rochester Road
Gravesend
DA12 2SY

Inspection date: 3 June 2015

Chair of Governors: Mr Steve Seath
Headteacher: Mr Jonathan Shields
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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

St John's is a voluntary aided Catholic primary school situated in the Gravesend Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Kent Local Authority. The principal parish which the school serves is St John the Evangelist, Gravesend although a significant number of pupils come from Our Lady of the Assumption, Northfleet. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 65%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in Key Stage 1 and 10% in Key Stage 2.

The school takes pupils from 3 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 715. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is below average. The proportion of pupils receiving pupil premium funding is below the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) supported through school action is above the national average. Pupils come from a wide variety of social and ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above the national average and the proportion who speak English as an additional language is also above the national average.

Since the school's previous inspection, there have been several changes in staffing. These include the Headteacher, who was appointed in January 2013, as well as a number of senior and middle leaders.

Date of previous inspection:

09/06/2015

Overall Grade:

1

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

St John's is a warm and welcoming school providing an excellent standard of Catholic education. The inclusive nature embraces all cultures and abilities and ensures everyone is valued. It is very much part of its parish community and involved in parish life. The strong Catholic ethos permeates all aspects of school life and is evident in the caring and considerate relationships that exist between all members of the school community. Inspirational leadership communicates a clear sense of mission and makes the school a good place to be for pupils and staff. Governors are fully involved in the life of the school. They know the school well, are conversant with school performance data and conscientious in their monitoring role. They are committed to a constant drive towards school improvement and to the school as a Christian community caring for all its members. Parents are very supportive of the school and feel part of the school community. One wrote, "I am very happy with St John's. A vibrant, inclusive environment." Another commented, "An excellent school with a strong Catholic ethos." Examples of the school's inclusivity include the teaching and use of MAKATON signing and pupil interpreters, who use signs and pictures to help pupils new to learning English when they arrive at the school.

Pupils are happy and proud to be at St John's and value its friendly environment. A pupil commented, "It's easy to make friends in this school" and another added, "Every single person is friendly here." Pupils are given many opportunities to develop independence and responsibility and are keen to rise to the challenge. They have a strong sense of moral purpose and an awareness of the needs of others. The parish priest is a regular visitor to the school and the school has strong links with the parish.

Recommendations made by the last inspection have been fully addressed.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Continue to develop evaluation of the impact of new strategies in order to further inform school improvement.

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

All pupils know the school's Mission Statement and understand its importance to school life and to themselves. They have been involved in developing their simpler version of it, which is displayed prominently around the school as the 'St John's Way'. The Mission Statement underpins all school policies and practice. Pupils are encouraged to live out their Mission Statement and regular awards recognise pupils whose actions have demonstrated the values of the 'St John's Way'. Pupils are proud of their school. One said, "When anyone asks me which school I go to, I am proud to say St John's." They know that they have a part to play in making it a happy and inclusive community and in contributing to its outreach to others. They are aware of the need to help those less fortunate than themselves and organise support and fundraising for a number of charities; local, national and international. They also organise special events within school to promote school values and enrich school life. Pupils are regularly given the opportunity to express their own views and ideas. They do this confidently, knowing that these are taken into account and inform school improvement. Pupil voice is a strength of the school. Pupils value and respect the Catholic tradition of the school. They appreciate its links with parish life, participating in Masses at St John's and St Mary's on a regular basis, including leading the readings and music. Pupils benefit from the rich programme of Collective Worship and many prayer opportunities offered by the school. They are comfortable with contributing to spontaneous prayer as well as being familiar with the traditional prayers of the Church. The school encourages pupils to take on responsibilities and they respond very positively. They are proud of their roles as prefects, peer mediators, eco-warriors, interpreters and reading ambassadors, seeing these as contributing to the values of the school and as part of their service to others. They appreciate the need to respect the religious beliefs and cultures of others within the school community and beyond. A significant number of pupils are from other faiths and denominations; all form a harmonious and supportive community. Pupils are kind and considerate towards each other. They appreciate the need for forgiveness and can relate to the teachings of Jesus. They know the standards of behaviour expected by the school and are happy to abide by these. A Year 3 pupil said, "It is important to follow Jesus and love one another." During this inspection pupils' behaviour was exemplary throughout. The school has good links with other Catholic schools, particularly with its local secondary school and other primaries in the deanery. This provides opportunities to share facilities and good practice. Pupils particularly benefit from visits and activities arranged in collaboration with their neighbouring Catholic secondary school.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Standards achieved in Religious Education are high, with significant numbers attaining the higher levels by the end of Key Stage 2. Despite generally low attainment on entry, all groups of pupils make good progress and achieve well. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs are supported to ensure they achieve their full potential. Pupils are interested and enthusiastic regarding their Religious Education lessons and keen to do their best. Behaviour for learning was exemplary in the lessons observed as part of this inspection. Work in books is of a very high standard and shows an understanding of the themes and topics studied. Presentation is excellent and reflects the pride pupils take

in their work. Pupils show high standards of religious literacy and are able to talk confidently about their learning and the importance of Religious Education to their lives. They show good standards of knowledge and understanding of religious themes and topics and are able to reflect on the deeper meaning behind these. Activities involving art, music and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) enhance the pupils' experience and enjoyment in Religious Education. Pupils also spoke enthusiastically of 'hot seating', drama, singing and liturgical dance as enriching their Religious Education lessons. Even the youngest pupils remain focused and on task throughout their lessons. They enjoy tackling challenging activities and are keen to extend their learning. They are confident in their ability to complete tasks successfully and fulfil the high expectations of their teachers.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

Pupils see Collective Worship as an important part of school life and are keen to play their part. From their earliest years at the school they are encouraged to see this as a special time and an opportunity to join with others as a worshipping community. In the acts of collective worship observed, pupils were reverent and respectful. They were able to use periods of silence for private reflection and responded very well to questioning and discussion. They sang joyfully and with enthusiasm. Reception pupils presented their work on the Sacred Heart through drama, art and reading, sharing this with confidence with Key Stage 1 pupils. Pupils are familiar with the traditional prayers of the Church and enjoy celebrating the Church's feasts and seasons. They are also keen to write their own prayers. Examples of these are available in every classroom and regularly used in class worship. Song, art and dance enrich the school's Collective Worship and offer pupils a variety of ways to participate. Pupils are involved in preparing liturgies in the local parish and very much enjoy this involvement and opportunity to contribute to the parish community. Parishioners also enjoy the pupils' contribution to their worship. The inclusive nature of the school ensures that all pupils feel included in Collective Worship, regardless of belief or ability. This was illustrated by a Sikh pupil who said he felt equally welcome in his Sikh community and the school Christian community. Pupils are encouraged to put forward their own ideas regarding Collective Worship and these form part of development planning.

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

School self-evaluation is rigorous and reflective. It includes evidence from across the school community and uses this to inform and shape development planning. Pupils, parents, staff and governors are actively involved in the school's Catholic life and in monitoring this provision. School development planning has clearly identified priorities, timescales and success criteria together with reviews of previous targets. The school should now develop this further by deeper analysis of the impact of planned strategies to inform future school improvement planning. Development planning is shared with the school community so that all know and work towards identified priorities; this extends to having the development plan on the school website to keep parents well informed and involved. Senior leaders play an inspirational role in promoting the Catholic life of the school. As a result, staff and pupils' understanding of the school's mission is outstanding. All share a sense of common purpose and are actively involved in promoting and supporting it. Detailed tracking and assessment procedures are in place. This is used to identify pupils in need of support to enable them to achieve and results in high performance throughout the school. A range of pastoral care support systems are in place. Pupils know that adults are there to help them if they have any problems. Newly qualified teachers are supported by mentors and all staff are supported and supportive, forming a cohesive team in which morale is high. Leaders, governors and managers have a strong commitment to the Church's mission in education. Nurturing the spiritual life of the pupils, offering them the opportunity to 'grow and develop in the light of Christ' is central to the mission of the school and immediately apparent to all visitors. Staff form a cohesive team. New colleagues are supported by effective induction procedures and staff training ensures that all are enabled to play a full part in the life of the school. Diversity is celebrated and embraced so that those of other faiths also make their valued contribution to the school community. Governors are very supportive of the school, particularly in school events and contributing to the school self-evaluation. Governor visits are recorded as part of their monitoring role.

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

Religious education is given importance as a core subject at St John's and is part of the school's comprehensive and robust systems of monitoring and evaluation. Lesson observations, book and planning scrutinies, assessments and pupil voice provide evidence to guide self-evaluation and development.

Strengths are celebrated and development priorities identified. Regular assessments in Religious Education enable pupils to be supported and challenged as appropriate. Teachers' judgements are validated by school and deanery moderation processes. Performance over time is closely monitored to ensure that standards of progress and attainment are maintained and built on. Leaders and managers are committed to their quest for excellence. Governors are well informed regarding school standards achieved but also appreciate the importance of all children achieving their potential, saying, "How

each child is performing is what matters; each child is treated as an individual and must be enabled to achieve their best.” Pupils are encouraged to be active participants in their learning and in planning for improvement. Developmental marking helps them to identify areas to improve and guidance towards achieving this. The subject leader, supported by the leadership team, ensures that action planning is in place and that the necessary resourcing is available. Governors are conscientious in their monitoring role and in school self-evaluation.

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

Four lessons were observed across three key stages. Lessons ranged from securely good to outstanding. In all cases, teachers demonstrated excellent subject knowledge, built on previous learning and skilfully guided pupils to develop their understanding of the themes and concepts involved. Pupils were actively engaged and very attentive. They answered questions with confidence and insight and demonstrated a high standard of religious literacy. Resources were of high quality and effectively used. In one lesson, the fruits of the Holy Spirit were illustrated by real fruit, much to the delight of the pupils. Lessons drew on pupils' own experience. In a Key Stage 2 lesson, pupils had been asked to bring in an item representing overcoming a difficulty; this was imaginatively represented by a pupil who brought in a pair of trainers because he had learned to tie his laces. It was clear that all contributions were recognised and valued. Lessons were all well planned and well structured, with clearly differentiated activities. Other adults supported pupils effectively and unobtrusively. Throughout the school, high quality teaching and learning ensures pupils make good progress and achieve well. Evidence of this includes school assessment data and the quality of work in pupils' books. Teacher response to pupils' work is a strength of the school. Books reflect a clear and purposeful dialogue between teacher and pupils which consolidates and extends learning and understanding as well as involving pupils in their own learning. The school marking policy is comprehensive and consistently applied. It is understood and valued by the pupils. Attractive Religious Education displays celebrate pupils' work and achievement and enhance the learning of Religious Education. Pupils are proud of their classroom displays and of their contributions to the prayer focus areas. Questioning is very well used to explore and deepen pupils' understanding and discussion and talk partners are used as effective tools for learning.

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

The school follows the 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' programme of Religious Education. Curriculum time allocation is in line with the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. The curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of all learners. Pupils with SEN are enabled to access the curriculum through the provision of appropriate support and resources. High attaining pupils receive an appropriate level of challenge and this is reflected in teachers' planning. As a result, pupils make good progress and attainment is high. Religious Education permeates all areas of the curriculum and is enhanced by a variety of extra-curricular links and activities. A wide range of special days, events and celebrations enrich the curriculum and pupils' enjoyment and learning. Saints feast days, Sikh Week, Friendship Week and a host of events form a regular part of the school calendar. The school participates in meetings with other Catholic schools within the deanery and beyond to share good practice, training and moderation of pupils' work. Parents recognise and appreciate the Religious Education provision. This is reflected in the positive feedback from parents. One parent said, "My son and daughter show very good religious knowledge and commitment to the faith; their understanding has grown so much due to the care of the school." Religious Education provision includes the study of other faiths. This makes the most of the cultural diversity of the school and reflects its inclusive nature.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

Collective Worship is central to the life of the school and provides excellent opportunities for pupils' spiritual development. Assemblies, liturgies and daily prayer offer pupils a range of high quality opportunities including time for reflection and personal prayer. The school chapel is the spiritual heart of the school where the Blessed Sacrament is present. It is regularly used for personal and class prayer. All classes have a class candle, which is blessed at the beginning of each school year. At each assembly it is lit from the school candle, providing a strong image of the unity of the school. Collective Worship extends to pupils preparing and leading Sunday parish Mass once a month; this is valued by the Parish Priest and parishioners. A parent wrote, "This is a fantastic Catholic school which serves its children and the parish very well." Many members of the school staff attend the First Holy Communion celebrations in the parish to support the pupils at this important stage of their spiritual journey. Collective Worship reflects the Church seasons. Pupils are aware of liturgical feasts and seasons and their importance in the life of the school and were celebrating June as the month of the Sacred Heart at the time of this inspection. Collective Worship includes all pupils and staff, including those of other faiths. Parents are invited to join the school in Collective Worship and appreciate these opportunities.

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