



DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION REPORT

incorporating Section 48 and Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on
behalf of the Archbishop of Southwark

URN 118780

St Benedict's Catholic Primary School

Lambourn Way

Chatham

Kent

ME5 8PU

Inspection date: 21st March 2023

Co-Chairs of Governors: Mrs Warren-Heys

Mr Blatter

Acting Headteacher: Mrs S McAlpine

Inspectors: Mr Stephen Beck

Mrs Patricia Horsman

EDUCATION COMMISSION

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Interim Director of Education: Angela Cox OBE



Key for inspection grades

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

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Benedict's Catholic Primary School is a one-form Voluntary Aided school serving the Parish of St Simon Stock (Walderslade) within the Diocese of Southwark. Catholic families are predominately from St. Simon Stock Parish, but the school also has families from St Augustine's Catholic Church (Parkwood), Our Lady of Gillingham, St. John Fisher Catholic Church (Rochester) and the Catholic Parish of St. Peter and The Good Shepherd (Bearsted). The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 52% and has remained relatively stable. There are strong links with the parish church, St. Simon Stock Parish, Walderslade. The school is maintained by Medway Local Authority.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in both Key Stages. The number of pupils currently on roll is 211. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly around average. The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding at 8.5% is below average. Around 8% of pupils are disabled or have special educational needs, 5% have English as an additional language, and 9% are eligible for free school meals. Most pupils are from a White British heritage, although 34% of pupils are from ethnic minorities. These statistics are broadly in line with national averages.

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SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Benedict's is an outstanding Catholic school because:

- It has maintained and built on the outstanding grade it received at its last inspection throughout a significant period of change that has been well handled. Recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed.
- St Benedict's is a warm, welcoming school providing an outstanding Catholic education. The school's inclusive nature embraces all cultures and abilities and ensures that everyone is valued. It is very much part of its parish community and involved in parish life.
- A strong Catholic family ethos permeates all aspects of school life and is evident in the caring and considerate relationships that exist between all members of what is a cohesive school community.
- Religious education is effectively led and managed and is at the heart of the school curriculum. The leadership of the headteacher, her leadership team and the religious education lead, including governors, in promoting the Catholic Life of the School is outstanding. School leaders communicate a clear sense of mission and make the school a happy learning community for pupils and staff.
- Governors are fully involved in the life of the school. They know their school well, are conversant with school data and are conscientious in their monitoring role. They are committed to a constant drive towards school improvement and developing the school as a Christian community caring for all its members.
- Pupils are happy and proud to be at St Benedict's and value its friendly environment. They have a strong sense of moral purpose and an awareness of the needs of others.
- High-quality teaching and learning in religious education ensure that all groups of pupils make good progress and achieve well. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary, and they enjoy their religious education lessons and take pride in their work.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and report that there is nothing they would like to change about the school; 'It is perfect as it is,' one child reported to the inspector.
- The school's collective worship and prayer life is outstanding. Prayer and worship opportunities reflect the liturgical year and provide many occasions for the school to celebrate as a worshipping community. Pupils are actively involved in designing, planning and delivering age-appropriate liturgies, and these occasions are highlights of the school greatly enhanced by opportunities for song.
- Prayer forms an integral part of the school day and school life.
- Parents are very supportive of the school and of each other. Older pupils support younger pupils, and all feel part of a lively school community.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

- Build on current good practice to increase the stretch and challenge for more able pupils.
- Review current curriculum plans for religious education in the light of the new religious education directory and plan for its implementation in line with diocesan guidance.



Overall Effectiveness

How effective the school is in providing Catholic Education.

1

Catholic Life

1

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

1

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

Religious Education

1

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

1

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

1

Collective Worship

1

How well pupils respond to and participate in the schools' Collective Worship.

1

The quality of provision for Collective Worship.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

1



CATHOLIC LIFE

1

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding

- St Benedict's was rated as an outstanding Catholic school at the time of its last inspection and continues to be so. The Catholic life of the school is engrained in its day-to-day operation. It has sustained itself as a unique shining example of a Catholic community where everyone is welcomed, valued and encouraged, and pupils enjoy school and achieve well. They recognise the care and support the school provides and the many opportunities it offers them. They are enthusiastic participants in all aspects of school life, enhancing the spiritual and moral development of the school's community.
- The parish priest helps and guides the pupils in their religious journey through Mass celebrations, penitential services, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, class talks, and staff support. Further spiritual support is provided by the parish Deacon who regularly attends school events in addition to leading class talks to enhance the pupils' religious learning.
- The primary purpose of the school is to provide an education in a Catholic environment that will give each pupil an equal opportunity to experience the love of God and understand their role and responsibilities in school and the Catholic and wider communities.
- The whole school community is aware of its Mission and Vision, which set out to enable confident, independent, and resilient learners inspired by Gospel values to become Christ-like citizens. These are based on ten clear values, Faith, Love, Compassion, Truth, Integrity, Confidence, Independence, Resilience, Hope and Forgiveness, which are encompassed in the school's Mission Statement, *'Learning and challenge rooted in faith'*.
- Whilst the needs of pupils are served first, their engagement is of a high order. They are active in several groups, for example, School Council, ECO Stewards, Chaplaincy Team, Prayer and Liturgy leaders, Mini Vinnies and other leadership roles. This develops a range of pupil leadership skills and establishes great role models for other pupils at St. Benedict's. Through these substantial leadership opportunities, pupils gain experience of Catholic Social Teachings and the impact of their actions on the local community and the wider world.
- As the parent of a non-Catholic pupil said, *"My child feels no different to other children and has developed spiritually in this community"*.

The quality of provision of the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding

- Staff at St Benedict's Catholic Primary School are committed and caring. They work extremely hard so that all pupils feel safe and part of a Catholic community.



- Three current staff members have completed their Rite of Christian Initiation whilst working at St. Benedict's, reflecting the school's evangelical nature. Good working relationships are fostered and maintained between staff, learners, parents, carers, governors, the Parish Priest and the church community.
- Pupils meet high staff expectations of behaviour in the classroom and around the school. School values are reinforced using Class Dojo, the 'Value of the Week', and during prayer and liturgy.
- There are various ways for pupils to communicate worries, concerns/ideas, and wants. For example, class worry boxes and senior leader post boxes.
- The school's positive behaviour policy and reflection are centred around the school's values. Restorative justice, linked to adopted school values, is encouraged, and pupils are supported by staff during related sessions.
- The pupils' understanding of social, moral, spiritual and cultural issues is deepened through PHSE, RSE, circle time and mindfulness. The school uses the 'Ten-Ten' Programme: 'Life to the Full', and pastoral programmes are planned with care and attention to the teachings and principles of the Catholic Church and are well supported by parents.
- Pupils support each other both in class and at playtimes. They have made suggestions and been integral to implementing initiatives such as 'The Buddy system' and 'Mati's Mentors', named after a past pupil.
- Support for vulnerable pupils is a strength of the school and has a positive impact through provisions such as Lego therapy and Nurture groups. All staff ensure the whole school has an embedded, consistent approach to emotional wellbeing. The school has trained play leaders who support pupils' social interaction at playtimes.
- Pupils are very aware of how their peers may be feeling and are proactive in offering support to others.
- The school and its community highly appreciate the considerable support provided by the parish priest and deacon, who are generous with the time they allocate to the school in providing a broad range of chaplaincy and curriculum support.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding

- The strong Catholic ethos of the school is evidenced throughout the school and grounds in which there are numerous religious focal points. A large cross is displayed in the entrance lobby, covered in artwork from every pupil and adult in the school. The school values are displayed at the entrance, and wall art depicting St Benedict is visible to all who enter.
- Leaders and governors at St. Benedict's are deeply committed to the Church's mission in education. Two of the school improvement priorities each year are dedicated to religious education, and the other school improvement priorities all have a religious education-linked focus as well.
- Pupils are supported in their faith journey and staff work hard to instil Catholic Social Teaching. Children learn not only about the Catholic faith, but of other world faiths and cultures, particularly those represented within the school community.



- The governors and senior leadership team effectively ensure that the school's Catholic life and character are nurtured, supported, maintained and developed. A high level of parental questionnaire was received and were virtually all positive. One parent wrote, *'The school is truly a family school where every child is nurtured, supported and challenged. The dedicated staff go above and beyond to ensure the children receive a high standard of education and enrichment opportunities'*.
- Pupils are aware of their unique talents and gifts. They grow, develop and mature in the knowledge that these gifts and talents from God can be used to benefit others.
- The Chair of Governors meets regularly with the headteacher to discuss and debate the school's direction and ensure that the evaluation and progression of the Catholic life of the school always remain a central issue. The Catholic Life of the school is reported to governors through headteacher reports.
- Headteachers from all the deanery schools regularly meet to discuss and guide each other in strengthening the Catholic faith within their schools and communities. This has facilitated external moderation of levelled pupils' work, validating the school's judgements.
- The religious education co-ordinators from the schools within the deanery meet as a group. They support and guide each other in their roles and share experiences or suggestions which they have each found effective within their school.

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is outstanding

- The school has recorded some quotes from pupils taken from a recent questionnaire that generated the following, 'Music and candles are calming' Y1, 'RE lessons make me close to Jesus' Y2, 'We get to have a relationship with God' Y3, 'RE is a special time to let go of your worries' Y4, 'It is special because of the reflections we do' Y5, 'We connect to God, find a good confidant who won't disappoint' Y6, 'Teachers are always willing to listen to us' Y6.
- These comments reflect that pupils are enthusiastic and highly motivated learners who benefit from unique experiences that improve their spiritual and moral development and vocational guidance. This aspect is enhanced by the school's creative use of the Forest School area of its site for a range of religious education-related activities.
- Feedback on pupils' learning is given in various ways, including verbal feedback, discussion and using the school's marking policy to deepen thinking and learning. They are given opportunities to respond and understand their thoughts and ideas are valued and validated. Their achievements are celebrated and often displayed for all to see in the main corridor and in celebration assemblies.
- Excellent use is made of scripture that is successfully used to build on prior learning.

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is outstanding

- St Benedict's follows 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' religious education scheme. Planning demonstrates that teachers use assessment of pupils' prior learning and current affairs to maximise learning opportunities.
- Lessons observed were well planned, reflected teachers' firm subject knowledge, and were delivered confidently and well. Pupils are highly motivated during religious education lessons due to the range of activities provided in individual and collaborative forms. This could now be usefully extended to better serve those pupils at greater depth.
- Religious education lessons are differentiated and ensure that literacy skills do not have an adverse effect on pupils' attainment in Religious Education. Good use is also made of ICT resources.
- High-quality resources are available within the school and online, including dyslexia friendly Gospel texts that have been sourced and purchased and are well utilised.
- Classroom support staff are very effective in supporting pupils with special needs in a discreet manner that does not impact the learning of others.
- The school is highly effective in providing Catholic education. All pupils receive engaging teaching, which helps them to have a deep understanding of the Catholic faith and how the messages in the Bible affect our own lives and behaviours and extend to others locally and globally.



- The teaching observed was never less than good, and many lessons had outstanding elements. In the best lessons, teachers' questioning was of a very high order, and a range of cross-curricular links was utilised. High-level thinking was supported, with one example being around pupils analysing the key meanings of the Beatitudes. In another, pupils considered the meaning of sin and how it reflects on relationships. This outstanding practice could now usefully be more widely disseminated.
- Pupils' workbooks reflected consistently strong progress over time, implementation of the school's assessment policy and differentiation of work by task and outcome. Staff use 'Big Books' as appropriate to celebrate pupils' work, an excellent example of which was a condolence book for Her Majesty the Queen.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is outstanding

- The governors and staff at St. Benedict's School are committed to ensuring that religious education is taught to a consistently high standard across the school.
- The governing body has a strong skill set, being drawn from all walks of life and the parish. They are all devoted to developing the Catholic Life of the school and its links with the broader community.
- The high expectations held for teaching and learning within religious education by leaders ensure that lessons are child-centred, interesting and motivating, with opportunities for learning to be applied to themselves and others. New staff members are supported in the planning and delivery of the curriculum. They are given support in understanding the Catholic faith and ensuring that it remains embedded in the life of the school. Leaders monitor pupils' enjoyment and achievement in religious education through observations, work scrutiny, learning walks and pupil interviews.
- The governors take an active role in monitoring the provision of religious education by attending liturgies, Masses, lesson drop-ins and meetings with leaders within the school. The designated religious education governor meets with leaders to discuss the planning, teaching and coverage of the subject within the school.
- Within the cycle of monitoring deanery headteachers or religious education subject leads from both primary and secondary schools jointly observed religious education lessons. This process validated the school's lesson observation judgements and provided CPD for all leaders involved.
- Parents and carers are aware of the school's mission and the intentions for their children and are supportive of it. They felt the school has an open-door policy and that they can easily discuss with teachers or senior leaders any concerns regarding any aspect of their child's education, relationships and life within the school.



COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

1

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding

- All pupils, regardless of their faith, participate respectfully and joyfully in all acts of Collective Worship that permeate the school day. Staff model conduct in a manner that pupils respond to accordingly and demonstrate that they, and the school, strive to live according to Catholic values.
- Pupils act with reverence and are keen to participate in prayer and liturgy. In year-group assemblies and school Mass, they are always eager to read and be involved. They sing joyfully, reflect silently and join in community prayer appropriately. EYFS children are expected to begin attending Mass when ready, which is as soon as possible in the school year. Pupils across the school can choose to write Mass introductions and Bidding Prayers whenever they have an intention they would like the school to pray for.
- Pupils lead prayer within their classrooms at different points in the day and are confident at leading different types of worship at their age and stage of spiritual development. Pupils write and lead prayer to begin all celebration assemblies. They understand the Church's year well, including seasons and feast days and can choose appropriate scripture, hymns and prayers that reflect understanding. Pupils are at ease and act with integrity when praying with people from other faiths. The Chaplaincy Team meet weekly and participates in a whole school assembly on a termly basis. Some of their initiatives are to read Bible stories to the younger pupils in the school and to help others engage more deeply in their faith by encouraging their peers to reflect quietly and respectfully in the prayer area.
- The Chaplaincy team promotes their faith within and beyond the school and leads in organising the school's acts of charity. During their meeting, they plan weekly class prayer and deliver these sessions throughout the school. They are growing in confidence in their understanding of different types of worship.
- The evangelical nature of the school was noted by a parent who wrote, '*I personally have become more interested in faith, and the teachings of the Catholic church since my child started at St Benedict's*'. Another wrote, '*I chose to send both of my children to this school because of the dedication to Catholic education and the exemplary pastoral care*'.



The quality of provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding

- Every day, morning prayer is offered to all pupils and adults. During the month of October, daily rosary sessions are held before school, and all children, parents and carers are invited to celebrate the Rosary and Our Lady. Annually in October, the school participates in '1 Million children pray the Rosary', where the whole school attend a service with the Parish Priest to deepen their understanding of the Rosary and Mary's role. The school came together to pray for peace along with thousands of other Catholic children worldwide. During May, the 'Hail Mary' is said daily in class alongside other daily prayers, the school celebrates the crowning of Our Lady, and their Mary Prayer Box goes home to encourage families to come together in prayer.
- Parish links are strengthened through two teaching assistants who, alongside supporting the Chaplaincy Team in school, also lead the Children's Liturgy at Church on Sunday.
- First Holy Communion classes are held at the school, run by two catechists from the local parish. Pupils led the bidding prayers at St. Simon Stock church on Education Sunday. They participated in the parish Christmas Eve nativity alongside leading readings and the Epiphany carol service.
- To support the Catholic life in other settings, the pupil chaplains led a planning session remotely with their pupil chaplains and leadership team. They ended the session with the sign of the cross in Spanish. To support their Spanish and religious education curriculum, a pupil created a video for them to refer to.
- Each year group leads prayer and liturgy for the whole school, and parents, the parish priest and governors are invited to share the celebration. The pupils decide on the themes, Bible stories related to them, and activities they feel will help them develop their understanding.
- At least twice a year, pupils in Key Stage 2 are involved in a reconciliation service during Lent and Advent. During the reconciliation service, all pupils participate in reflective activities and can attend confession if they have received the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- EYFS and KS1 attend a 'Sorry Service' during Advent and Lent.
- Walking around the school, it is clear that it also celebrates itself as a place of worship. Each classroom has a prayer corner which changes according to the liturgical calendar, and classes have their own prayer books for pupils' personal prayers and worry boxes to use.
- An assembly attended was greatly enhanced by singing and by the full participation and engagement of staff, who modelled well, and pupils along with appropriate periods for reflection. The liturgy included scripture, questioning, liturgical dance, and prayers confidently led by the pupils. Opportunities should now be taken to ensure all pupils project their voices appropriately, which would further enhance the celebration.
- Following difficult or worrying events in school or at home, pupils regularly use the school prayer areas to reflect quietly. They can access these areas easily and write their prayers, which are offered during collective worship.



How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding

- Leaders have an excellent understanding of how to plan and deliver quality collective worship. They are knowledgeable about the Church's calendar and feast days. Where gaps in understanding or knowledge arise, they know they can readily turn to the parish priest or deacon, who make themselves available as a support and guide.
- The senior leadership team are models to other staff of outstanding practice concerning planning and delivering Collective Worship.
- The parish priest observed the school's senior leaders delivering meditation sessions and provided feedback and guidance to ensure their continued professional development.
- The leadership team and governors are aware of the importance of taking every opportunity of prayer and liturgy to inform, guide and develop the spirituality and morality of the school community. These acts of shared experience bind the community.
- The senior leadership team have a cycle of monitoring class prayer and collective worship, and governors review and evaluate the planning and delivery through observation and professional dialogue.
- The school has specific development points for collective worship and the school's prayer life in the school improvement plan and in a subject-specific development plan. These have been well thought out, and with clear succession planning in place, there is appropriate confidence in the sustainability of ongoing progress for the benefit of all in the school community.

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