

St Alban and St Stephen Catholic Junior School

Cecil Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 5EG



Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 27 January 2017

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is good

- The requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory are fully met and underpin the curriculum in religious education.
- The leader for religious education is recently appointed and is implementing a range of structures and systems for marking and tracking.
- The headteacher and the leader have a clear vision and determination to move religious education to be consistently excellent.
- Teaching is consistently good.
- The lessons were well planned, including clear differentiation, with some opportunities for more able pupils to be challenged in their thinking and understanding.
- There is evidence from the beginning of this academic year that pupils are making progress across the year groups.

Classroom religious education is not yet outstanding because

- More rigour is needed in the assessment of religious education.
- Pupils of all ages need to become familiar with the language of levels and how to make progress.
- Teaching needs to become more dynamic and challenging to inspire the pupils to be pro-active in their learning.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The school fully meets the 10% of curriculum time requirement as laid down by the Bishop's Conference of England and Wales.
- Pupils are presented with a wide variety of opportunities for prayer and worship.
- The chaplaincy team helps to prepare and lead assemblies and liturgies and also publishes a half-termly detailed newsletter.
- Pupils are nurtured, which influences their understanding of their call to serve others.
- The pupils are proud of their ownership of key areas of fundraising and respond very effectively to the call to social justice and the Common Good.
- The behaviour and confidence of the pupils across the year groups is exemplary.
- Pupils love their school and are proud to share how it supports and guides them in their faith journey.
- The partnership between the school, parish and the home is thriving.
- The parents are full of praise and appreciation of how well the school nurtures their child's faith.
- The headteacher leads the school with passion, vision and determination, which is shared by the leadership team.
- The governing body lead the strategic direction with energy and commitment.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

The school has begun its process of levelling and tracking progress in religious education. They have purchased a new scheme and are supplementing this with creative learning opportunities, including the development of liturgical art. This is linking the knowledge and understanding for the pupils in line with the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory, (RECD). They have displays on the four areas of study, Revelation, Church, Celebration and Life in Christ. These are visible across the public areas of the school and in every classroom, as a constant reminder to pupils, through the 'colour-coded' prompts at the beginning of all tasks set. These guide the pupils to show their understanding and make appropriate links, on their journey of faith. There is now an emphasis on the use of Scripture, which is at the forefront of religious education lessons, enabling pupils to develop their understanding of their faith at an appropriate level.

The content of classroom religious education is good

The school has recently introduced a new scheme of work and has ensured that the appropriate resources, including ICT, are available to enhance the learning opportunities of the pupils. The recent appointment of the leader for religious education, also the deputy headteacher, has influenced the implementing of systems and structures for monitoring and moderating levels of learning. This will ensure that the highest expectations from all staff will be developed. Throughout the academic year pupils also cover other faiths, including planned visits to the Shri Swaminarayan Temple in Neasden, the Synagogue in St Albans and the London Central Mosque.

Pupil achievement in religious education is good

Pupil achievement and progress is judged to be good. Although there is no historical data to compare attainment over time, the new leadership team understands the need to analyse progress over time in religious education, against the Levels of Attainment. Teachers are planning lessons with a strong emphasis on the expected outcome and links to the relevant age appropriate level of attainment across the different strands. The school has developed networks with other schools and is using the moderation process to accurately record the level of attainment being achieved. The leadership team has introduced regular pupil progress meetings which identify for the staff those pupils requiring support and or intervention. Through its effective self-evaluation, the school has identified that they need to be more aware of the needs of more able pupils, and this is a priority action point on the religious education action plan. The work in the books demonstrates how pupils are given guidance and probing questions which enables them to make further progress. The 'Big Question' has been introduced and is having an impact and will need to develop over time. Pupils who have additional needs and those with significant additional needs are very well supported by the other adults in their learning.

The quality of teaching is good

The overall typicality of teaching and its impact on learning in religious education is good. The staff are becoming familiar with the new scheme which is supported well by a range of external and in-house professional development. The newly appointed leader has a clear grasp of the strategies being implemented to support staff to deliver high quality lessons and set challenges for the more able. From the observation of learning in the lessons there is evidence that the pupils use Scripture to develop their religious literacy. An example of this was seen in a Year 6 class where pupils were able to research and compare the synoptic gospels. The lessons were well planned, including clear differentiation, with some opportunities for more able pupils to be challenged in their thinking and understanding and using appropriate visual resources. Behaviour for learning is good where the

teacher's expectation is really clear. The other adults in the classroom are used effectively and are confident supporting the pupils' learning. The school is fully inclusive and ensures that the appropriate additional resources and materials are available to support the learning of all pupils. There are examples of pupils being set homework tasks to deepen their learning, such as 'The Eucharist', 'The Sacraments', 'Joseph of Nazareth' and the role of the Deacon, which also enhance the pupils' ICT and research skills. The homework is recorded in their religious education books.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education is good

The school has developed its senior leadership team over recent times. The leader for religious education was appointed at the beginning of this academic year. In the three years since he joined the school, the headteacher has been pro-active in moving the school forward, through his rigorous determination to implement those strategies for improved provision in religious education. He works well in partnership with the leadership team and the governing body, and they are firm in their vision to strive for excellence. The senior leadership is actively monitoring the delivery of religious education and has a clear understanding of how the school is planning and assessing the areas of learning and progress of the pupils. The staff and senior leaders are implementing their new systems and structures. The staff take part in diocesan professional development which supports their subject knowledge. The parish priest, who is the designated governor for religious education, is an active and welcome visitor to the school. He enhances the subject knowledge for staff and empowers pupils to make links, which deepens their knowledge and understanding of the faith.

What should the school do to develop further in classroom religious education?

- Review the methods by which all pupils are challenged, but especially the more able learners in all year groups, with a specific focus on pace, challenging questioning, progress and opportunities for extended writing in religious education.
- Expand the targeting of levels of attainment in religious education for all pupils.
- Embed the recently introduced systems and structures for tracking and analysing progress

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

A vibrant chaplaincy team has been developed, who are supported by the parish sister, in partnership with the leader for religious education, and are actively involved in the prayer and liturgical life of the school. They wear a special tie and are given due status in the school. Their responsibilities include promotion of the Common Good and social justice, developing a range of activities for 'eco council' awareness, fundraising for different charities and delivering high quality presentations in assemblies for the whole school. The senior leadership team is recently formed and has taken strategic action in re-evaluating the mission statement, 'nurturing every child to grow and flourish in Christ.' Through this process the whole school community are empowered to support the way forward. The newly appointed parish priest is also the governor with responsibility for the Catholic life of the school and is a frequent and active visitor to the school. He recognises the importance of the strong partnership of home, school and parish, which is flourishing.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is good

The school fully meets the 10% of curriculum time requirement from the Bishops' Conference in England and Wales. The place and importance of religious education is given due status and reflected in the reports from the senior leaders to the governing body. The governing body has generously allocated funding to ensure the school is provided with the full range of artefacts, resources, banners, chaplaincy ties, statue of Our Lady, and the planned development of the Grotto. The teachers are being encouraged to enrol for the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies and the deputy headteacher is overseeing this important opportunity for all staff, alongside other courses relevant to the needs of the children in their class, to effectively deliver the RECD programme.

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community

is outstanding

The pupils are given four opportunities to pray daily and are encouraged to create their own prayers on the prayer table which forms a focal point in the classrooms. The liturgical year and the scriptural readings are regularly celebrated in the assemblies, which parents regularly attend. In the assembly observed during the inspection the pupils made links through the Trinity of the importance of being connected as a community of nurture, as one child described, "...we are linked to each other, just as we are linked to God". The portfolio records the full range of liturgical celebrations. Pupils are offered regular opportunities to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, particularly during Advent and Lent. This supports their experience in making the links from their religious education to their spiritual development and parish life. The chaplaincy team, comprising older pupils, is encouraged to prepare assemblies and liturgies and also publishes a half-termly detailed newsletter. They have also planned for the development of a 'Grotto,' dedicated to Our Blessed Lady, during the summer term. The pupils' designs and proposals were presented to the governing body for their agreement to fund the project. The altar servers visited the infant school to outline their service role in the church. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Eucharist was enhanced through their recent visit to the church, supported by the parish priest and parish sister, as evidenced in the research homework. The parish priest and parish sister were glowing in their appreciation for how the school has nurtured and developed the links with the parish.

The contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice –**is outstanding**

The headteacher and staff know, respect and passionately care about the pupils across the phases and this care is evident in all interactions within the school community. The pupils are proud of their ownership of key areas of fundraising and respond very effectively to the call to social justice and the Common Good. The school community regularly celebrates the gifts and talents of the pupils in order to celebrate their growing maturity and human flourishing. The school is fully committed to supporting local, national, global charities including, Cafod, LEPR, Ministries of Tanzania, and the Emmaus Project. These are chosen by the pupils following their research, as one pupil described that, 'as a Catholic, God would want us to help other people and treat them as we would want to be treated.' The behaviour of the pupils through the school is excellent, demonstrating a mature approach in their relationships with each other and with the adults in the community.

The partnership with parents, school and parish, and collaboration as an integral part of the diocese through its relationship with the diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf**is outstanding**

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school, indicated by the response to the questionnaire. Pupils love their school and are proud to share how it supports and guides them in their faith journey. One pupil during an interview described how, '...the Catholic identity of our school shapes how we do everything in our school'. The governing body fully understand their ecclesial responsibility to the diocese. The members of the school leadership work in partnership with diocesan officers, ensure that the school is kept up to date with all educational matters. The parents who met with the inspectors were full of praise and appreciation of how well the school nurtures their child's faith, such as '...the headteacher is an outstanding faith role model to my child, and ...his faith in Christ and the Church is a real asset to the school.' This was particularly evident in the inclusive way pupils with high significant needs are both supported, guided and nurtured to achieve effectively from their starting points.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school**is outstanding**

The revised mission statement is the driving force behind the outstanding Catholic life of this school. The strong partnership between the home, school and the parish is a testimony to the vision and leadership of the headteacher. He is fully committed to collaborative engagement with all, especially the parish community. He has the pupils at heart, and is passionate about supporting and developing their spiritual growth. New and inexperienced members of staff are given mentoring and modelling support from experienced colleagues. The deputy headteacher has been well supported by the headteacher in her senior role. She is fully committed and enthusiastic in her important role in the religious life in the school. The re-constituted governing body lead the strategic direction with energy and commitment. They fully support and challenge the headteacher and the leadership team, as they implement their identified priority action points. The school's self-evaluation is both thorough and accurate.

What should the school do to develop further the Catholic life of the school?

- Ensure pupils understand the theology underpinning their fundraising and call to social justice
- Implement the plan to encourage boys to take a more pro-active role in the Catholic life of the school.

Information about this school

- The school is a two form entry Catholic Infant and Nursery school in the locality of St. Albans.
- The school serves the parish of St. Alban and St. Stephen in St Albans.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 99.57%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 0.43% and from other faiths is 0 %.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 62%.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 2.
- There are 9.3% of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 2 have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is below average.
- There is a below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 21 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (8.8%).

Department for Education Number	919 3421
Unique Reference Number	117491
Local Authority	Hertfordshire

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Aided Academy
Age range of pupils	7- 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed Male Female
Number of pupils on roll	238
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Adam Herron
Headteacher	Mr Charles Soyka
Telephone number	01727 866668
Website	www. ssasjm.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@ssasjm.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	09 November 2011
Grade from previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out (i) under the requirements of the Canon 806 and (ii) in accordance with the Framework for Diocesan Inspections 2015 approved by the Archbishop of Westminster and (iii) under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

- The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection.
- During the inspection 8 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended 1 assembly and a number of acts of worship.
- Meetings were held with school staff, pupils and governors.
- Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

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