Westminster Diocese Inspection Report

St Philip Howard Catholic Primary School

Woods Avenue, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 8NN
Date of inspection: 8 October 2015

A. Classroom Religious Education

What is the overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy?

Overall Grade 2

Overall, the effectiveness of classroom religious education is good. The quality of teaching is good. Pupils make good progress in acquiring religious literacy. They have very positive attitudes to learning and try to do their best. Staff have regular opportunities to participate in regular training events both within the diocese, and in school. These are much appreciated by staff and supported well by the good leadership and management of religious education. The headteacher and RE coordinator have worked effectively to ensure the content of RE lessons are carefully linked to the Curriculum Directory. The quality of learning in RE lessons is monitored regularly. Pupils' work is moderated every half term both internally and with staff from the network of schools, to check that the grades teachers assign, are accurate. Pupils enjoy their RE lessons and feel valued. The school is striving to ensure that the most able pupils achieve the very highest standards in RE. Governors are passionate about the school and have a very good grasp of its strengths and areas for improvement. Religious education makes a strong contribution to the Catholic life of the school.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?

Overall Grade 1

Pupils benefit from the excellent Catholic education they receive. Staff, governors, parents and pupils know that religious education is at the heart of school life and that the school is committed to the Church's education mission. Worship and prayer are central to everyday activities. Links with parents, neighbouring schools, the parishes and the local clergy, are strong. Parish clergy are closely involved with the celebration of the liturgy in the school as well as on special occasions. Partnership with the diocese is excellent. Pupils flourish at St Philip Howard, not only in their personal development, but also in their understanding of the Church's social teaching. The school is proactive in seeking new ways to promote the Common Good, giving children every opportunity to develop a strong sense of service in response to the Church's call to action for justice and peace. Charities and projects in the community mean that children gain first-hand experience of helping others who are less fortunate than themselves. Pupils are articulate in explaining the theological underpinning of their charitable work. Governors make a significant contribution to the work of the school and promoting its Catholic life. Through their commitment, enthusiasm and expertise they are able to provide real challenge and support which is helping to sustain and develop this Catholic community.

Introduction

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspectors spent one day in school, visited six lessons, three acts of worship, carried out one learning walk and held interviews with school staff, pupils and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, the scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

The Inspection of St Philip Howard Catholic Primary School, Hatfield was carried out under the requirements of the Canon 806 and Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Framework for Section 48 Inspections approved by the Archbishop of Westminster. The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the school is in providing Catholic education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation.

Inspection Team

David Scott	Lead Inspector
Catherine Bryan	Associate Inspector
Elizabeth Nye	Associate Inspector

Description of School

St Philip Howard is a two-form entry Catholic Primary School in the LA of Hertfordshire and the locality of Hatfield. The school serves families from the parishes of St Peter's, Hatfield; Marychurch, Hatfield and St Thomas More, Welham Green.

The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 91%. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is approximately 69%. There are 386 pupils on roll, with four pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education, Health & Care Plans (EHC). The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well above average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is well above average. Forty three pupils are eligible for the pupil premium grant which is below average with the proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals being below average.

Telephone:	01707 263969
e-mail address:	admin@sphoward.herts.sch.uk
DFE Number:	919 3388
URN Number:	117469
Headteacher:	Mrs Mairead Waugh
Chair of Governors:	Mr Christopher Day
Date of previous inspection:	2010
Previous Inspection grades:	Outstanding

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1	*Outstanding*
Grade 2	*Good*
Grade 3	*Requires improvement*
Grade 4	*Causing Concern*

A. Classroom Religious Education

How religiously literate are pupils in the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith and how well do they know, understand and appreciate the importance of religious faith and practice in everyday life?

What has improved in classroom religious education since the last inspection?

The last Diocesan inspection report identified two improvement points in relation to classroom religious education:

- As identified in the Improvement Plan the school should develop an analysis of religious education tracking data.
- The school should include a section which focuses on religious education and the Catholic life of the school in the annual parents' questionnaire.

Since that time school leaders have introduced much tighter procedures for moderation of attainment both at diocesan and deanery level. Teacher confidence in levelling RE is now well developed in line with the 'Agreed Understandings'. Leaders maintain files of pupils' work to show exemplars at the different levels.

In addition, the headteacher, Chair of Governors and the RE Coordinator have attended Diocesan training events, including inspection updates. Leaders have successfully established a network of local schools, in order to moderate work, especially in the early years and in Year 6, in order to share to ideas and good practice.

How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?

Grade 2

The school uses the published scheme, 'The Way, the Truth and the Life', which meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. Through effective training and development the RE coordinator and teaching staff have ensured that lesson planning is carefully cross-referenced to the Curriculum Directory. In addition, the school also follows the 'Composite Model' which provides systematic coverage of the Curriculum Directory.

Learning resources such as video clips and PowerPoint presentations further enhance pupils' learning. Lesson planning is carefully organised to support pupils' learning as they move through the school. Nevertheless, leaders recognises that there is more work to do to make sure all staff, particularly the six new members of staff who joined in September, are confident and understand what is required.

Links with other World faiths such as Hinduism, Judaism, and Sikhism are carefully woven into the schemes of work and supported through visits to places of worship. There are also regular exchanges with pupils in non-Catholic schools, and through visiting speakers from different faiths.

Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education

Grade 2

Pupils' achievement is good. By the end of Year 6 their attainment in religious education although comparable, is slightly below that of other core subjects. Also, although the proportion of pupils reaching Level 4 rose significantly in 2014/15, the proportion of pupils attaining Level 5, declined.

This was mainly due to teachers previously being overly generous, particularly in deciding when pupils were deemed to be achieving a Level 5. As a result of effective training and moderation and having high expectations in judging when AT1i is totally secure, the proportion of pupils attaining Level 5, dropped.

In 2014/15, at Key Stages 1 and 2, leaders noticed that boys were not achieving as well as girls. Instead of waiting to see if this was a 'blip' or a 'trend' they have taken swift action to rectify the situation. Measures have included the purchase of additional resources to stimulate boys' learning and to review ways to attract more male role models into the school.

Pupils' work is both internally every half term. External moderation sessions with neighbouring schools enable the sharing of ideas and good practice. End of unit assessments are levelled in line with the agreed understanding of diocesan attainment levels.

The quality of teaching

Grade 2

The quality of teaching is good. Evidence in pupils' books, their responses in class, together with the schools' internal tracking records of their progress shows that they make securely good progress over time. In lessons, teachers create a positive atmosphere for learning. They have good RE subject knowledge, and plan activities that encourage pupils to use the bible and to reflect on passages of scripture in all classes. As a result, children are interested and engaged and eager to do well. Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent and children respond to the praise and encouragement given. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively making valuable contributions to pupil's learning. Pupils are given regular feedback both orally and in marking. However, not all teachers provide pupils with sufficiently clear and precise advice, related to their religious literacy to enable them to know exactly what they need to do to improve their work. Also, activities are not always well matched to pupils' abilities and as a result, not all pupils achieve as well as they should, particularly the most able.

Over time, most pupils make good progress in their knowledge of the Catholic faith and their religious literacy is well developed for their age and ability. Pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an Additional Language, make particularly strong progress in RE.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade 2

Leadership and management of religious education are good. Religious education is currently led by the RE coordinator, who together with senior leaders, have a clear vision of how to develop the subject across the school. The school's self-evaluation of the success of curriculum religious education is slightly over generous and would benefit from some additional well-chosen examples to evidence the impact of its work.

The headteacher and RE coordinator regularly observe RE lessons and provide staff with feedback and areas for improvement. Staff regularly undertake joint planning and observe one another teach. The RE coordinator has attended training on the introduction to Judaism, at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue. In addition, the school has hosted a Diocesan moderation event. One in three teachers are not Catholic and they are well supported in the delivery of religious education lessons by being partnered-up with more experienced Catholic teachers for mutual support and joint planning sessions. In addition, the RE coordinator hosts regular informal drop-ins.

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

- Improve the teaching and learning still further by ensuring teachers:
  - provide activities that are well matched to pupils' abilities, particularly for the most able
  - provide pupils with clearer advice on how to improve their work
  - ensure that new members of staff are given the support and training to develop their understanding of the levels of attainment and the school's moderation procedures.

B. The Catholic life of the school

How well do pupils experience the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing through all areas of school life?

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection, the school has continued to work assiduously to promote the Catholic life of the school. It has continued to develop its partnerships with other faith groups, the parishes and with parents. During this time it has expanded its provision to two forms of entry and has over seen the opening of a new building. This has required effective planning to continually develop and refresh the school community.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget

Grade 1

Religious education is at the heart of the school and influences and enhances the quality of Catholic education offered. Parents recognise and appreciate this, as one reported, 'the school has enabled me to be very proud of my child's religious development'.

Religious education is given high priority within the curriculum and is allocated at least 10% of timetabled time, in order to satisfy the requirements of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. However, during the last three financial years the budget for religious education has been well below that provided for other core subjects. The rationale for this was to support the introduction of the New National Curriculum and to fund additional resources in English.
Links with neighbouring Catholic schools in Hertfordshire ensure that there is sustainable support for staff and a healthy exchange of ideas. All teaching staff know and understand the over-arching tenets of the Curriculum Directory and how the current programme addresses them. Those who are not Catholics willingly uphold the teachings of the Church and are very well supported by senior leaders and the RE coordinator.

The friendly and warm approach of staff is a real strength of the school. Governors are readily accessible to parents and know their views well. They spoke passionately the Catholic life of the school and work closely with leaders to develop and review the quality of pupils' religious experience and are keenly aware of areas for further development. They show great care and concern by firmly believing that all staff and pupils should be treated equally and fairly.

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

Grade 1

The school's provision for prayer, collective worship and liturgy is outstanding. Prayer and worship are central to the life of the school and pupils are offered a variety of opportunities to experience this. The school excels at being a community based on Catholic tradition and practice. Prayer trees adorn every classroom and the main entrance to the school. This has encouraged children, parents and staff to write their own prayers when considering and praying for the needs of others. To aid prayer and reflection, each classroom is equipped with a prayer table as a focal point designed to complement the topic being delivered within RE. The addition of a beautiful prayer garden provides a quiet place for children to reflect and pray.

The school is linked to two local parishes and during the summer, a Corpus Christi procession between the two, brings the school and parish communities together, giving both the opportunity to experience the richness of the Catholic tradition of prayer and worship. Mass is celebrated in school by the parish priest and is well attended by both parents and local parishioners. Acts of worship take place regularly in class. However, there is scope for teachers to provide more opportunities for children to plan, prepare and participate in acts of worship.

Music plays an important part in the life of the school. Through regular hymn practices music teachers have ensured that there is a good repertoire of liturgical music to enhance prayer and worship. This exemplifies how the school is very successful in making sure its Catholic ethos permeates aspects of its academic work outside of religious education.

The commitment and contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice

Grade 1

The school displays an outstanding commitment to the Common Good and pupils have a real understanding of the theology underpinning Catholic social teaching. The school council co-ordinates charity fundraising events and is proactive in creating ways of supporting and responding to those in need locally, nationally and globally, as evidenced in the impressive 'Good News' folder. A wide range of opportunities enable all children to develop and celebrate their gifts and talents and use them to serve the school and local communities. An excellent example of this was seen during the inspection, when an inspector was shown a letter from Great Ormond Street Hospital to one pupil, who is also a patient there, thanking her for raising funds and for sharing her personal connection with the hospital.

There is an acute awareness of justice and peace issues and this is clearly evident in the way any issues that arise during the school day are dealt with. The school is a very welcoming community and promotes respect in relationships at all levels. Pupils spoke warmly about the school and are proud to belong to the community. They spoke articulately about the importance of good relationships and the merits or working together and helping each other. For example, the school has developed very strong links with Southfield special school, where children visit each other's school to take part in special events, including singing and signing sessions.

The impact of assemblies and Fair Trade workshops to develop a sensitive awareness of the needs of others is evident in the school's sustained action for social justice, giving the children a strong sense of the responsibility to witness to Christ in the world. As well as ongoing, generous support for international charities such as Cafod and Mary's Meals, there are regular creative activities to support a local Women's refuge and a wide range of other local and national charities.

Enabling the authentic partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

Grade 1

Leaders and governors have developed excellent partnerships with the diocese, local parishes and with parents. They play a key part of the school's understanding of itself and of its immediate and wider community. Parents are fully supportive of the school fully as demonstrated by the positive response to the parental questionnaire. Typical comments were: 'Great school with great Catholic teaching and fantastic discipline'; 'All the staff teach the children to love and care for each other.'

Parental links are excellent. Parents are invited to formal and informal school events via e-mail, have daily opportunities to meet staff and are encouraged to join whole-school celebrations both in the school and at the local Church. Leaders work closely with parents and carers to develop a shared understanding with them of the school's mission and values. Parents reported that they are very well supported by the school, particularly in times of distress or difficulty. For example, a bereaved parent recently received very warm support and care, which was much appreciated. Parents reported that their children 'are proud to be Catholic', and often arrive home singing hymns! One parent commented, 'the school makes every child feel special and safe.'

The Governors actively participate in diocesan training to enable them to fulfil their roles in the school. They are thoroughly involved in the life of the school and parish and have a very good understanding of parents' needs and views of the school. The headteacher together with senior leaders regularly attend diocesan conferences and participate in deanery moderation meetings.

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

Grade 1

Excellent leadership of this Catholic school is demonstrated by the outstanding commitment in promoting an outstanding Catholic ethos in the school. The school's mission statement, 'We are part of God's family, we follow the way of Jesus by loving, learning and doing our best', permeates every aspect of school life and demonstrate its deep commitment to the Church's educational mission. New staff are very well inducted into its Catholic ethos and existing staff are given many opportunities for training and development. Stimulating visits and activities encourage pupils' understanding of the faith and traditions of those other than their own. For example, the residential visit to the Isle of Wight, commences with a Mass at Arundel Cathedral. This gives pupils the opportunity to reflect on their faith and the exciting activities they are about to embark on. Governors are passionate in their drive to improve the school in all ways, including its Catholic identity and succession planning. The school knows well its strengths and the areas still to be improved. Its self-evaluation is generally accurate, and reflects very strong capacity to improve still further.

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

- Provide more opportunities for children to plan, prepare and participate in acts of worship.