

# St Joseph Catholic Primary School

Great Hadham Road, Bishop's Stortford. CM23 2NL

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 13 February 2019



## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### A. Classroom religious education is outstanding

- The religious education curriculum meets all the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. It challenges pupils to develop religious literacy in a rich, relevant and creative way.
- Pupils' achievement and attainment across all key stages is outstanding. Pupils' confident use of religious vocabulary is a real strength. They are articulate and confident when answering questions and discussing topics. Pupils demonstrate exemplary attitudes to their learning; these attitudes make a significant contribution to the rapid and sustained progress they make. They demonstrate a real thirst for learning and enjoy religious education lessons.
- Teaching across all key stages is outstanding and never less than good. Teachers have high expectations and excellent subject knowledge. They plan and deliver lessons which are inspiring, engaging and creative. They create a positive environment in which all can learn.
- School leaders have a clear vision for the school. Structures are well embedded to ensure high quality teaching and the rigorous monitoring of all aspects of pupils' learning. Leaders continue to develop highly innovative systems to ensure outstanding teaching and outcomes for pupils. They model excellent practice.
- Governors are highly knowledgeable about the school. They support and challenge leaders to ensure that the school continues to be a place of excellence.

### B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- Religious education is at the core of this vibrant Catholic school. Curriculum time for religious education fully meets the requirements of the Bishop's Conference of England and Wales. Religious education is well resourced and teachers use these resources in a dynamic and creative way.
- Prayer and worship are central to life at St Joseph's. Pupils take great enjoyment in planning, preparing and leading a variety of reflective and meaningful experiences for their peers.
- The school offers rich opportunities for pupils to develop and celebrate their gifts and talents. Pupils are quick to recognise their responsibility to and fully engage in serving and supporting others. Pupils fully appreciate the different ways this can be achieved and have developed a deep understanding of the theology underpinning their actions.
- The strong partnership with parents, the parish and the diocese contribute significantly to the Catholic life of the school. Parents are overwhelmingly positive in their praise of the school. Staff take full advantage of the training opportunities offered to ensure the Catholic life at St Joseph's remains a strength of the school.
- The outstanding religious education coordinator is the driving force behind the engaging, creative and rich experiences of Catholic tradition offered for the pupils.
- The dynamic head teacher and his team are passionate in their leadership and ambition for the school. They are excellent witnesses to the mission statement of this outstanding Catholic community.

## A. Classroom Religious Education

### What has improved since the last inspection?

All the recommendations from the previous inspection have been addressed. New teachers are well supported by key stage leaders and the religious education coordinator to ensure they are confident in planning, delivering and assessing the religious education curriculum. The number of pupils achieving the higher levels at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 continue to increase year on year and the school have continued to further develop links with local secondary schools.

### The content of classroom religious education is outstanding

The content of classroom religious education fully meets all the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory (RECD) in a lively, rich and dynamic way. All areas of the RECD are carefully mapped across the key stages giving pupils excellent opportunities to build upon and deepen their knowledge and understanding year on year. Religious education (RE) is delivered in imaginative and creative ways using a variety of strategies including ICT, art, drama and music. Religious education is well resourced and teachers are highly creative in the ways in which resources are used to enhance learning; they provide for a range of learning styles, needs and abilities. This was clearly seen in reception class where children were creating their own prayers and where one pupil used bubbles to represent sending his prayers to heaven. Creativity is central to teaching and this is particularly evident in both the rich engaging classroom activities and the innovative homework tasks set. Pupils were very keen to share their homework Nativity scenes with the inspection team as well as sharing their excellent work on a variety of topics including baptism and reconciliation. Pupils not only made use of the knowledge they had gained in class to complete their homework tasks but always made excellent use of their family backgrounds from other cultures to enhance their work. Beautifully maintained classrooms and the school environment demonstrate the importance placed on religious education. A beautiful display reflecting the school mission statement contains responses from many members of the school community – pupils, staff and governors, reflecting the centrality of the mission statement to the daily lives of all involved in the school community. Class prayer tables are carefully maintained and hold a central place within the room. They are proudly looked after by the pupils who are actively involved in deciding which artefacts are displayed. Prayer tables act as a focal point for prayer throughout the school day.

### Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding

Outcomes for pupils across all key stages are outstanding and attainment is as good as, and in some cases better than in other core subjects with a high percentage of pupils achieving level 3 at the end of Key Stage 1 and level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2. Robust, rigorous tracking and monitoring systems ensure that pupil progress throughout the whole school is rapid and sustained. Discussions with pupils and scrutiny of pupils' work gave further testimony to this. Pupils clearly enjoy their learning and consistently demonstrate a real thirst for learning frequently choosing to undertake the more challenging tasks set by their teachers. A real strength is pupils' high level of oracy. From early on in their school career they are highly articulate speakers using religious vocabulary confidently to support their ideas and opinions both in their written work and when answering questions or during discussions. The high quality of the work in pupils' books demonstrates the high regard pupils place on religious education, their work is beautifully presented. Pupils talk knowledgeably about how to improve their work, they respond to highly constructive teacher marking and feedback extremely well. They can both discuss their targets and complete their own self assessments at the start and end of each topic with confidence. They strive to be independent learners using a variety of classroom resources to support themselves and are highly proactive in reflecting upon what has been learnt. Pupils' commitment to homework tasks is strong, contributing well to their learning and further testimony to their high regard for the subject and their relentless drive to do well.

Pupils demonstrate exemplary behaviour and excellent attitudes to learning. Their perseverance and commitment together with high levels of respect are major factors in them making excellent progress.

### **The quality of teaching is outstanding**

Teaching across all key stages is outstanding and never less than good. It is creative, inspiring and actively engages pupils in their learning. A clear strength is the warm working relationships within the whole school community allowing pupils to grow and flourish in a secure caring environment. Teaching is well matched to pupils' needs ensuring all groups of pupils make rapid progress. Teachers have high expectations and excellent subject knowledge which they impart with great enthusiasm. They plan engaging lessons collaboratively which build on prior learning and which challenge all groups of pupils to achieve their very best in a highly positive learning environment. Adults routinely check pupils' understanding throughout lessons and offer appropriate support and challenge as necessary. Marking and feedback in workbooks clearly support pupils in moving their learning on. Teachers know their pupils extremely well and consistently challenge them to strive for excellence. This was clearly evident from discussions with individual pupils, work book scrutiny and monitoring files all of which indicated excellent practice. Higher order targeted questions challenge pupils to extend their knowledge and understanding and pupils can confidently discuss and reflect significant belief and practice from early in their school career. When discussing baptism a Year 2 pupil was able to comment that 'The holy water cleanses our sins'.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education is outstanding**

School leaders have a clear vision and direction for the school, driving and encouraging a creative approach to the teaching of religious education. The innovative and creative leadership of the head teacher and religious education coordinator has led to excellence in all areas of religious education. Leadership at all levels share this creative vision for religious education ensuring that it is a real strength of the school. The dynamic religious education coordinator has established and embedded excellent systems for monitoring and tracking of both teaching and pupil progress ensuring that everyone is well supported and that the high teaching standards and excellent pupil progress are maintained. All staff have a real commitment to the diocese and take full advantage of the support and training on offer to further develop their teaching and expertise. They participate in school, deanery and diocesan training and moderation meetings to ensure the accuracy of their assessments. Work book scrutiny, pupil progress meetings and lesson observations enable leaders to identify strengths and areas for development and then put strategies and timescales in place. The 'Lesson Study' and 'Peer on Peer' initiatives are excellent examples of the school's innovative approach to the continual improvement of religious education and the constant striving for excellence. Governors ensure that the high standards achieved in religious education continue to improve; they have an in-depth knowledge of the subject, contributing to the religious education self-evaluation document and challenging senior leaders to ensure that the expectations for achievement and progress remain high.

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

- Continue to work on assessment, with particular regard to developments in diocesan recommendations.
- To review the curriculum in light of the new Religious Education Curriculum Directory and the school's expansion to two forms of entry.

## B. The Catholic life of the school

### What has improved since the last inspection?

All recommendations have been fully addressed. Parent workshops have been held to support parents in helping their children pray at home, Early Years Foundation Stage children have prayer bags and home/school prayer books. Retreat days have been held with the local secondary school and sixth form students lead sessions during Advent for St Joseph pupils.

### The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

**is outstanding**

Religious education is at the heart of the school and is given the highest priority. Curriculum time for religious education fully meets the requirements of the Bishop's Conference of England and Wales and funding for the subject is generous and in line with other core subjects. High quality classroom displays, prayer areas in classrooms and around the school further demonstrate the importance placed on religious education for the whole school community. All members of the community actively live out the school mission statement and pupils' books reflect their growing theological understanding of its meaning in their daily lives. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about religious education reporting that there is 'A strong faith in action ethos throughout the school.' They enjoy being included in celebrations with their children which led to one parent commenting 'The opportunity to celebrate Mass with my child's class is a lovely occasion and always good for the soul.'

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

**is outstanding**

Worship and prayer permeate the life of St Joseph's. Pupils' engagement in both the planning, preparation and delivery of prayer and worship is an integral part of their commitment to the Catholic life of the school. Act of worship in class offer pupils focused prayerful spiritual experiences in the middle of a busy school day. Pupils have many opportunities to celebrate and reflect on their rich Catholic traditions throughout the year including marking the start of Advent, Ash Wednesday celebrations, the Stations of the Cross and praying the Rosary. The headteacher and religious education coordinator have led workshops for parents on how to pray with their children at home and the 'Wednesday Word' is sent home to support parents. Prayer bags for the younger children and home/school prayer books are welcome initiatives to support prayer and pupils take great pride in writing their own prayers and sharing them with peers. One parent reported that her daughter was pleased to write her own prayers as it gave her the opportunity to reflect on the things for which she is grateful. The strong chaplaincy team make a significant contribution to the religious life of the school. They are charged with enhancing the Catholic life of the school and do much to encourage all pupils to grow in their faith in as many ways as possible. They act as excellent prayer role models for their peers. The assistant parish priest is a frequent and welcome visitor to the school. He joins the children in class as well as celebrating Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation with them.

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

**is outstanding**

The school's mission statement, to 'Live, love and learn in a caring Christian community' permeates all aspects of school life. Pupils have a clear understanding of their commitment to the common good and a solid understanding of the theology behind it. They appreciate that we are called to love and care for each other especially for those who have less. Pupils respond eagerly to the call for

action and are committed to supporting others in any way they can. One pupil reported that '...God has made us guardians of the world. It is our responsibility to care for the world that God has given us, including all of the people in the world.' St Joseph's is built on positive relationships between all its stakeholders and the support they offer to various local, national and international charitable organisations is to be commended. Pupils are actively involved in deciding how the finances from fundraising activities should be spent. Their on-going project supporting children in Rwanda has so far raised over £10,000 and has been used to provide medical care for those in need. Pupils have a genuine desire to behave how Jesus would want them to and living out their mission statement is paramount to them. They have a clear understanding that they do not always need to raise money to support others but can also do so through prayer and action. This was clearly evident in their response to Pope Francis' recent call to 'share the journey' when they collectively walked 750 miles and gained a deeper understanding of the plight of refugees.

**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**

The school enjoys strong links with the parents. During the inspection, inspectors met with a number of parents at the start of the day and analysed the results of 188 parental questionnaires received. Parents were overwhelmingly positive about the Catholic life of the school and the support and opportunities for their children to grow in and develop their faith. They spoke of the 'family atmosphere' and the transition through the school as being 'excellent'. Parents welcome the opportunity to join their children for class Masses and are kept informed of what is happening in religious education via the comprehensive termly newsletter. Strong links with the parish are firmly embedded. The parish priest is a governor and the assistant parish priest visits the school regularly. Pupils across the school attend Mass in the church throughout the year and parishioners are kept informed of school events via the parish newsletter. The school 'Chaplaincy Team' hosts an annual carol concert for the parish and parishioners are invited to join the school for the May fayre and School Association events. The school community participate fully in diocesan training events and conferences. The head teacher has represented the deanery at the Diocesan Headteachers' Forum as well as mentoring and coaching head teacher colleagues. The RE coordinator has organised and led a 'Chaplaincy team' retreat day on the theme of Adoremus for over 100 pupils.

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

**is outstanding**

The school mission statement is shared by all in the school, it is integral to all school policies. The head teacher and his senior colleagues act as moral compasses ensuring it is lived out in their daily practices and thus ensuring the school is a vibrant, engaging and caring Catholic community. Leaders at all levels demonstrate a real commitment to the church's mission in education. Governors are highly proactive in their support of the school. They maintain a visible presence around the school and know the school very well. The head teacher and religious education coordinator are passionate in recognising the gifts and talents of each individual and ensuring that the whole school community can experience a rich Catholic life. Highly effective systems are in place to support new staff especially those from other faiths and Christian denominations to that they can enjoy and contribute to the Catholic life of the school.

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

- Provide opportunities for the 'Chaplaincy team' to lead and support pupil led liturgies in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

## Information about this school

- The school is a one and a half form entry Catholic Primary school in the locality of Bishop's Stortford.
- The school serves the parish of St Joseph's and the English Martyrs, including the churches of St Joseph's and the English Martyrs in Bishop's Stortford, Holy Cross in Much Hadham and Most Holy Redeemer in Sawbridgeworth.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 98%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 2% and from other faiths is 0%. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 81%.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 4.
- There are 17 (5% of pupils) in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 4 have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is average.
- There is a well below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 6 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (2%).

<b>Department for Education Number</b>	9193318
<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117425
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary Aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 -11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	351
<b>The appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Suzanne Fitzgerald
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Peter Coldwell
<b>Telephone number</b>	01279 652576
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stjosephs207.herts.sch.uk">www.stjosephs207.herts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:admin@stjosephs207.herts.sch.uk">admin@stjosephs207.herts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	23 May 2014
<b>Grades from previous inspection:</b>	
<b>Classroom religious education</b>	Very good
<b>The Catholic life of the school</b>	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 11 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended 2 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 Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

Mrs Angela Podmore

Lead Inspector

Mr Michael Ross

Associate Inspector

Mrs Margaret Hanley

Associate Inspector

Ms Carol Maguire

Associate Inspector

## Information about inspection

The purpose of Diocesan inspection is to report to and advise the Archbishop on the quality of classroom religious education and the Catholic life of the school. The inspection report is also used to inform parents and carers, and the wider Catholic community. Inspection provides an opportunity to support, challenge, evaluate and promote the work of Catholic schools. It also assists schools in the work of self-evaluation and improvement, and enables the Diocese to celebrate with schools their sense of identity and their strengths as Catholic schools.

### Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

This report is published by the Diocese of Westminster and is available at:

<http://rcdow.org.uk/education/schools>

Vaughan House  
46 Francis Street,  
London  
SW1P 1QN

T: 020 7798 9005  
E: [education@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:education@rcdow.org.uk)  
W: <http://rcdow.org.uk/education>