



INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

ST JOSEPHS VOLUNTARY AIDED CATHOLIC INFANT SCHOOL

Gardenia Avenue, Luton, LU3 2NS

DfE School No: 821/3357

URN: 109636

Head Teacher: Mrs J Dowsett

Chair of Governors: Mrs M Kerr

Reporting Inspector: Mrs M Betts

Associate Inspector: Mrs K Yuen

Date of Inspection: 23 November 2010

Date Report Issued: 8 December 2010

Date of previous Inspection: April 2008

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and
in partnership with Luton Local Authority

Information about the school

[SJIL 48 NOV 2010]

St Joseph's is a large four-form entry infant school for pupils aged 4 to 7 years. There are 357 children on roll, 83% of whom are baptised Catholic. The school serves four parishes within Luton. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds though a significant proportion is from ethnic minority groups. The number of children who speak English as an additional language has increased significantly. A few of these children are at the early stage of learning English. The school holds "Investors in Families" award.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Satisfactory 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade: 1

St Joseph's is an outstanding Catholic school. The committed leadership from the headteacher, deputy headteacher, governors and RE (Religious Education) subject leader very effectively maintains and develops the Catholic mission of the school. The extremely strong Catholic identity permeates the school's daily life. A pupil explained "Jesus takes care of us here". The outstanding partnership between the school, the home and the church very effectively promotes the high quality care and well-being of the whole school community. Relationships within the school are very good and reflect Christian respect and concern for others. The pastoral provision for each individual child is one of the school's great strengths. Prayer and worship are of pivotal importance in the school's life. As a result pupils' personal, spiritual and moral development is outstanding. This reflects in their good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. Pupils make good progress throughout their school life in knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

The school has continued to sustain high quality provision and maintain good religious education attainment standards. The issues for development from the last inspection were related to monitoring, assessments and marking. Good progress has been made in these areas. Religious education is now monitored regularly and written feedback given. Evaluations from the monitoring lead to targets within the School Improvement Plan. Assessments are now linked to National Levels of Attainment and used in future planning. Work is marked well with positive comments. Some teachers discuss with each child how they could improve work and the child's response recorded. However this is not yet consistent practice.

The self-evaluation form is comprehensive and accurate. The headteacher and senior leadership team have a good overall view of the school's strengths and development needs. Improvements actions are fed into the school development plan.

The senior leadership is totally committed to promoting the Catholic dimension of the school and high quality religious education. All staff are supported very well by the RE subject leader who produces clear guidance given especially to the many teachers who are at present in their first term of working here. Staff are committed to improving their skills through further professional training opportunities. The governors are very aware of their role to further foster the Catholic life and RE.

The school with its current leadership, governance and Chaplaincy team is totally committed to continue to maintain its effectiveness as a Catholic school. The restructured senior

leadership team is having a good impact on religious education which is planned in year groups with less experienced teachers guided by more experienced ones. The next planned focus for RE for improvement is to ensure progression throughout the school. The school is part of a strong local Catholic network that provides RE support and courses.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure RE curriculum progression throughout the school by lesson observations and by monitoring outcomes
- ensure RE planning provides appropriate high expectations and challenge for the more able children
- further develop RE marking to ensure consistency throughout the school so all children know how their work can be improved and make a further response.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 1

The extent to which children benefit from the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. Their personal development is given high priority. The school encourages each child to be proud of and confident of their beliefs. Children show concern for the well-being of others and adults. The children said “Everyone here is kind and helpful – this is a happy place”. Children willingly undertake responsibilities and take very seriously their “Golden Helper” role. The pupils know well the school’s expectations of them and strive to achieve these. The mission statement is understood and lived out by all in the school community. Pupils praise the friendly, caring attitude of the teachers who listen to them and encourage their learning. Pupils’ views and ideas are sought through the School Council. The children appreciate the school’s outside environment where a variety of activities are provided. They are extremely proud of the prayer garden and excited about the Christian activities that take place there.

Pupils enjoy the worship life of the school especially special services such as the Remembrance service at the war memorial. They are beginning to understand the celebrations connected to the liturgical year. They participate in prayer with ease and reverence. They appreciate the opportunities given for thinking about the theme and explain that this is a “time for listening to God”. Pupils create their own prayers and have opportunities to pray their own intentions. Children really enjoy presenting the class assembly and every child has a role. Very many family members attend these. The children’s enthusiastic singing with actions and the drama involved, greatly enhance worship. The prayer life of the school contributes extremely well to pupils’ spiritual and moral development.

Chaplaincy provision makes a powerful contribution to the spiritual life and the well-being of the whole community. The members of the team are known well to pupils who respond enthusiastically to the liturgical experiences provided. They know that chaplaincy is wholeheartedly supported by school leaders. Pupils feel safe and secure in school and are aware of the procedures to resolve their problems. A very high priority is placed on the pastoral care of the children. The individual needs of each child are well-catered for by small nurture groups, social skills groups and “Rainbows”. Parents appreciate the approachability, care and friendliness of all the staff.

Pupils make good progress in religious literacy in the school. They enjoy their religious education lessons especially those linked to practical activities and drawing and illustrating. The children are encouraged to be independent learners. They are eager to respond to questioning and try to produce their best work. Pupils have a positive attitude to RE learning and engage well with the tasks. Children are developing a sound knowledge of the Catholic

faith. They achieve age appropriate levels of RE attainment and some exceed these. Their books evidence a range of written tasks and are well presented.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

The headteacher, with the support of the senior leadership team and governors, powerfully promotes a clear vision for the Catholic life with pupils' care and well-being paramount. The school leadership is deeply committed to provide many and varied opportunities for children to learn and grow in their faith. Pupils' achievements are recognised, valued and celebrated. Attractive displays emphasise the Catholic ethos. The school is effectively managed in a way that ensures regular evaluation of its religious life. The leadership team, the family workers and the chaplaincy team all contribute to the extremely good partnership between school and home. Parents from many different cultural backgrounds are helped and supported. Parish links are very good.

The Religious Education subject leader works closely with the headteacher and senior leadership team to ensure this subject has a high profile across the school. She is enthusiastic and conscientious. Joint monitoring ensures lessons and books are regularly evaluated. The RE subject leader has a clear knowledge of the strengths of the subject and an appropriate vision for improvement. She undertakes regular training and guides teachers very well, providing them with materials and resources. Many of the teachers hold the Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies. The budget for Religious Education and Worship is in line with that allocated to other core subjects. Religious Education is very well resourced.

Governors fulfil their statutory and canonical responsibilities. They make a significant contribution to the Catholic dimension of the school and are very supportive. They regularly visit the school on "Governor Days". They are well informed about the work of the school through the headteacher's and RE subject leader's regular reports. They monitor developments within the School Plan. Governors give high priority to the school's Catholic identity. They have clear systems for seeking the views of parents and pupils and mechanisms for acting on these.

The school is a welcoming inclusive community where all members are respected and valued. Through the Catholic identity and the openness of the school's welcome, staff, pupils and families from a variety of cultural backgrounds work in partnership with each other. The family workers welcome parents and others from the local area to their new room for courses, play sessions and as a meeting venue. Parents are encouraged to lead their own groups. The impact of this families' work is of immense value to the school community. Visitors from the local community share their expertise as well as their cultural traditions with the children. The children show concern for others by their regular fund-raising for local as well as national charities. Harvest gifts were given to the local homeless. Worship provides good opportunities for all to link the theme with their own experiences. Religion Education includes teaching about another world faith. The school participates in local events and sing carols at a residential home. Children work alongside others in sporting events. The school invites parishioners and parents to share in celebrations.

Provision

Grade 1

Worship and prayer are integral to the school's life. Worship is well planned with high quality delivery using visual presentations, artefacts, drama, and singing to promote pupils' interest and develop their thinking. The children learn a variety of traditional prayers. Very attractive prayer tables encourage pupils to use them for reflection. Chaplaincy provision is outstanding and provides very effective spiritual and pastoral support to staff, parents and children. The team consists of members from each parish, a family worker, senior staff and a

governor. Regular exchanges of information ensure that communication is very good. Staff, pupils and families all appreciate the outreach of the chaplaincy work. This has a very effective impact on the welfare and spiritual development of the whole school community. The older children attend first Friday Mass each month and pupils contribute to the liturgy. The parish deacon is an intrinsic part of the school community and makes a significant contribution to its spiritual life.

The quality of religious education lessons overall is good. Lessons are planned well with clear learning intentions. Where teaching is best visual presentations; open questioning; talking partners; using the staff's and children's own contributions; and practical outcomes are all effectively used to motivate and interest pupils. In some lessons reference was made to the topics' key vocabulary and in all classes this was prominently displayed. In some lessons the pace was slow and challenges for more able children were not included within the planning. Teaching assistants are usually well informed and are committed to the RE programme. Some lessons were effectively linked to sending a gift to a person the children know for children in Cambodia.

The quality of the religious education curriculum throughout the whole school is very good. It provides children with a range of powerful liturgical celebrations and extra Christian activities in a fun and exciting way, for example the Catholic "Little Sing" event. Hence the children gain insights into their Catholic faith at an appropriate level for their age. The church, the deacon and a Bible storyteller are used as extra resources for learning. Pupils are encouraged to become aware of the demands of religious commitment and the current topic helped them to think about giving to others without expecting a return. The religious education subject curriculum fulfils the requirement of the Bishops' Conference. 10% of curriculum time is used for religious education following the "Here I Am" programme. Religious education is linked well to other curriculum areas such as literacy, creative activities, drama, song, information and communication technology (ICT) and PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education). Another faith is studied once a year and other religions' celebrations experienced. The curriculum contributes very well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Attractive religious education displays around school give added value to this core subject.

Assessments are made linked to national expectations and levels recorded. Marking is affirmative and in some classes extra questions are asked and answered by the children. This extends their learning.

The inspectors wish to thank the headteacher, staff and children for their very warm welcome and for contributing to their very enjoyable and interesting visit.