

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



Inspection Report of Denominational Character and Religious Education

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

ST EDWARD'S VOLUNTARY AIDED CATHOLIC JUNIOR SCHOOL

Hazell Avenue, Aylesbury, HP21 7JF

DfE School No: 825/3367

URN: 110475

Head Teacher: Mrs S Harris
Chair of Governors: Mrs M Harty

Reporting Inspector: Mrs P Brannigan
Associate Inspector: Mrs P O'Byrne

Date of Inspection: 16 March 2017

Date Report Issued: 6 April 2017

Date of previous Inspection: June 2011

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

Information about the school

St Edward's is a two-form entry junior school in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. It serves the parishes of Our Lady of Lourdes, St Joseph's and St Clare's and Guardian Angels. There are currently 248 pupils aged 7-11 on roll. About 50% of these are of White British Heritage with the rest coming from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, almost 50% of whom have English as an additional language. Around 79% of pupils are Catholics with the remainder coming from other Christian denominations or other faiths. Half of the teachers and teaching assistants are Catholics. The proportion of pupils in receipt of Pupil Premium funding is 11%. The school is part of the Buckinghamshire Catholic Schools Partnership along with seven other Catholic schools.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

St Edward's Junior is a good Catholic school. The Catholic ethos is evident in many aspects of school life with prayer and worship being central to its work. Pupils are given opportunities for spiritual and moral development through the curriculum and the wider life of the school. Provision for religious education is good with support offered to new teachers. Governors are equipping themselves to offer a good level of challenge and support. Pastoral care is good and pupils know where to go if they need help. Relationships within the school and with the parish are very good and pupils feel well cared for and supported in their learning. Parents are happy with the standard of religious education, the good level of communication and the way the school supports their children's faith journey. Pupils' standards of attainment are good.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

The school has a good capacity for sustained improvement. After an unsettled few years with many staff changes there is now a stable leadership team who are well placed to take the school forward. The school is continuing to incorporate areas for development identified in the last inspection in 2011 in its improvement plans. There has been an investment in resources for religious education which is leading to good outcomes for pupils. A monitoring system is now in place which is enabling leadership to identify areas for development. Teaching is relevant and appropriate to children's needs. The developing Year 6 liturgy team is giving pupils additional opportunities for involvement in the Catholic life of the school. The school leadership gives a high profile to religious education and has put in place strategies to share good practice and support new teachers. The well-planned curriculum enables pupils to make connections between faith and their own lives. The mission statement is due to be reviewed with the whole school community. At present many pupils are unsure of aspects of it although they know the school motto.

The senior leadership team and governors have a clear vision for the Catholicity of the school and the central place of prayer, worship and religious education. Senior staff are good role models and all staff are encouraged to improve their skills through training and attending diocesan courses. Moderation of pupils' work with other schools in the partnership is leading to a better understanding of assessment using levels of attainment. The school's self-evaluation documentation needs revision. At present it does not fully reflect the Catholic life of the school.

The current leadership has a good capacity to maintain effectiveness. The headteacher is well supported by senior leadership and the religious education subject leader. Governors, many relatively new, have a good understanding of their role. The link governor for religious education plays an active part in the life of the school and visits every week. The religious education subject leader offers good support to colleagues and assists with planning for 'Come and See' with new staff.

What the school should do to improve further

- review the way the school assesses and uses data to inform planning and raise standards
- review the mission statement with the whole school community to reflect the Catholic identity of the school
- undertake the process of self-evaluation to enable an accurate reflection of the Catholic life of the school and religious education to be made.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 2

Pupils make a very good contribution to the Catholic life of the school. They respond well to opportunities to understand the needs of others in school and the wider community. House Captains and members of the eco council, 'Scheco' play an active part in school life, helping to care for the physical environment. In addition, older pupils help and support younger ones at playtimes. Several local, national and international charities are supported throughout the year including CAFOD, Operation Christmas Child and the Aylesbury Vineyard. Pupils welcome opportunities to show compassion for others and spoke enthusiastically of 'playground pennies' where a long chain of coins is collected, counted and donated to a designated charity. There are good links with the local parish with pupils acting as altar servers at Sunday Mass. Pupils show respect for adults and each other. Behaviour is good and pupils value the sense of security, friendship and community created within the school.

Prayer and worship are central to school life. Pupils respond positively to opportunities to develop their faith journey. They can talk about scripture stories and have a good grasp of religious terminology appropriate to their ages. Pupils learn some of the traditional prayers of the Church and are given time for reflection. They are able to apply aspects of Jesus' life and teaching to their own lives. They understand the importance of prayer and participate readily in class and assemblies. On the day of the inspection a Year 3 class were exploring prayer and pilgrimage during Lent. After a discussion they went to the school oratory where quiet music was playing and the 'Our Father' formed a number of 'prayer stations' Pupils moved quietly to each station in turn where they were invited to reflect on the meaning of the prayer and respond using a range of media. All pupils responded to this experience with reverence and sensitivity, it was an excellent contribution to their understanding of prayer and spiritual development. All classes will be given this opportunity during Lent. Pupils are also given opportunities to create their own prayers and each class has a pupils' prayer book which is used throughout the school day. The developing liturgy team is giving pupils additional responsibilities although they would benefit from being given more opportunities to plan and prepare liturgies and collective worship.

Chaplaincy provision is good and although there is a chaplaincy team, pastoral care is shared by all staff who work closely together to promote the spiritual and moral development of pupils who feel safe, cared for and know where to go when they need support. A nurture group gives extra support to children who need it and a school counsellor works with groups and individuals on a weekly basis. Pupils value being in a friendly school where they are listened to and encouraged to help each other. Parents appreciate the provision of breakfast and after school clubs and are positive about the care given to their children.

Progress in religious education is good. Pupils work with interest and enjoyment. They say they like their religious education lessons and work well together. They are eager to participate in activities and keen to do well. They have a good knowledge of the Catholic faith appropriate to their age and abilities. Lessons observed were well planned with a range of cross curricular activities including role play and literacy. Workbooks are well presented, show coverage of the curriculum and indicate a varied range of tasks.

Leaders and managers

Grade 2

The headteacher and her team demonstrate good leadership of the school through the way they promote the provision for the Catholic life of the school. The headteacher communicates a clear Catholic vision to the whole community and is supported in this by staff and governors who are all committed to providing the best possible environment for pupils. The subject leader produces an action plan each year and is well placed to support colleagues. Religious education is monitored through learning walks, workbook scrutiny and teaching. The school has plans to put in place a system to enable progress in religious education across the school to be tracked more accurately. Moderation of pupils' work needs further development to ensure assessment and levelling are accurate. The headteacher is committed to staff development and teachers are encouraged to undertake further training. Currently two teachers, both non-Catholic, are showing their commitment to the Catholic ethos of the school by studying for the CCRS qualification.

The Chair of Governors has been associated with the school for many years and works closely with the headteacher. She ensures governors are informed about the life of the school through the headteacher's report and have opportunities to ask questions. Reports for governors are now to include a section on the Catholic life of the school. Foundation governors come from all three Aylesbury parishes and attend Masses as well as visit school events. The link governor for religious education spends two days a week in school supporting pupils and accompanying classes to Mass in Our Lady of Lourdes church. She attends assemblies and has a good knowledge of the Catholic life of the school. Governors access training provided by the

diocese which will enable them to evaluate all aspects of the religious life of the school and to challenge and support effectively.

Leadership ensures that the school is a welcoming community where everyone is respected and valued. The school participates in local events and there are good links with other schools particularly those in the partnership. Parish links are good and the parish priest from Our Lady of Lourdes involves pupils in school Masses as readers, welcomers and altar servers. He promotes links with the parishes and includes school news in parish newsletters. Parishioners are invited to all Masses held in school. Other faiths are taught well and visits are made to a local mosque. A good range of charities including CAFOD, local charities such as Ollie's Fund and Disaster appeals are supported throughout the year. Pupils are given opportunities to develop a sense of service through membership of the Scheco council and as House captains. Provision for spiritual development ensures that pupils are able to reflect on their own lives and experiences. Parents are kept well informed about their children's welfare and progress through regular meetings as well as the curriculum information letters and copies of the 'Wednesday Word' which enable parents to support their children's learning.

Provision

Grade 2

Provision for prayer, worship and chaplaincy at St Edward's is good. Collective worship and liturgies are well planned and contribute to pupils' spiritual development. They include visual presentations, bible readings, drama and music. Singing is excellent and was a strong feature of the assembly on the day of the inspection when the headteacher and pupils led a reflection on water linked to the gospel reading of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. Pupils are involved in collective worship in their classrooms and are given opportunities for personal reflection. Each classroom has a prayer focus with religious artefacts and a display board which includes children's work. Masses are celebrated in school and parish throughout the year and the traditions of the Church are explored with pupils. Parents, families and parishioners are invited to many celebrations and pupils visit the church for Stations of the Cross during Lent. Pupils also lead a carol service in the church in December.

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is good. During the inspection, lessons observed were generally good. Lessons are planned with clear learning intentions and an interesting range of activities. Pupils work well and make good progress. Teachers respond well to pupils' comments and take opportunities to extend knowledge and develop understanding. In the Year 6 lessons where pupils were learning about the raising of Lazarus, the ways in which belief about death affects behaviour were explored with pupils. They were invited to use scripture references and church teaching when they began their written work which required accurate scripture knowledge. Good support by teaching assistants is a feature of many lessons. Workbooks are well presented and although marking is positive it is sometimes inconsistent. The best examples include suggestions of ways to improve and this should be extended across the school. Resources are good and there are plans to purchase more bibles so each class can have immediate access to scripture. There is evidence to indicate that current good standards are likely to be maintained.

The quality of the religious education curriculum is good. At least 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education. The programme 'Come and See' is now embedded. It is enhanced by workshops from CAFOD on 'Water Aid' and climate change. Senior leadership give religious education a central place in the life of the school and this is demonstrated by the good level of resources and time allocation. Religious education displays around the school emphasise the centrality of faith to the work of the community. The curriculum enables pupils to become aware of their responsibility for each other and their environment. It contributes very well to their spiritual and moral development. The current stability of school leadership is enabling the development of practice to improve outcomes for pupils. The assessment procedures need revision and dissemination to all staff. Once this is in place outcomes for pupils are likely to be improved.

The inspectors would like to express their thanks and appreciation to all members of the school community for their welcome and openness during the inspection.