

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

ST VINCENT'S VOLUNTARY AIDED CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL Hammersmith Gardens, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 5RG

DfE School No: 109631

URN: 820/3348

Head Teacher: Mrs C Lake

Chair of Governors: Mr L Fitzgerald

Reporting Inspector: Mr J Flanagan

Associate Inspector: Mr M Everington

Date of inspection: 25th October 2012

Date report issued: 14th November 2012

Date of previous inspection: 26th March 2009

Information about the school

St Vincent's Catholic Primary School serves the Catholic community of Houghton Regis which is part of the parish of St Mary's in Dunstable. It is an average sized school with 225 children on role, of whom 82% are baptised Catholics. 62% of the children come from ethnic minority backgrounds but few children speak English as a second language. The proportion of children with special educational needs is below the national average as is the number able to claim free school meals. Almost all the full time teaching staff, and a majority of the support staff, are Catholic. Since the last Section 48 inspection, there have been several changes in the teaching staff, including the appointment of a new head teacher and a new RE co-ordinator.

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

St Vincent's is a good Catholic school with several outstanding features including the leadership of the head teacher and RE co-ordinator, the provision for chaplaincy and opportunities for quiet prayer among the pupils and the promotion of community cohesion. The Mission Statement is known and lived out well by members of the school community. The children are proud of their school and feel happy and secure. Teaching is good and pupil attainment is also good.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

Since the last inspection, the school has seen many changes. The issues raised in last report have been addressed and the school is moving on to face the challenges posed by a different inspection schedule and the new Diocesan RE scheme. Pupil progress is now being measured more accurately and data is being used to track pupil progress. The amount of money allocated for resourcing RE in the school has risen.

The self-evaluation of the religious life of the school is accurate. It is succinct though in places would benefit from additional supporting evidence to substantiate the judgements. It has been conducted largely by the head teacher and now needs to be shared more widely with other leaders and managers within the school.

The head teacher and the RE co-ordinator have a very clear vision for the school and have plans to raise standards even further. They share a commitment to Catholic education and recognise the need to develop further the religious ethos of the school. In this they are supported by the chairman of the governing body. There is a very clear intention among the leaders that progress will be made so that children of St Vincent's will be educated within a vibrant Catholic community.

The capacity of the current leadership and management of the school to maintain effectiveness is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Include all those involved in the management of the school in evaluating its religious life
- Further embed the new RE programme, "Come and See", so that standards of attainment in RE continue to rise

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 2

The children play an active part in the life of the school. They recognise the consequences of their actions and the newly introduced "Statement to live by" is recognised by them as a power for good in the school. They value the Catholic life of the school and display a clear understanding of how the Mission Statement is at the root of all that happens in the school. They are happy to share one another's successes and are proud of their school. Some older children would like to be given more responsibility for leadership in the school.

Overall, the children make a good response to the prayer life of the school. When they are offered the opportunity for quiet, meditative prayer their response is outstanding. They have a good knowledge of the prayers of the church and prayer forms an important part of the daily life of the community. They are encouraged to compose their own original prayers and to consider people in need of prayer on many occasions. The majority of these original prayers remain private and personal to the children and this they value.

The enormous value the children place on chaplaincy is evident in so many ways. Fr. Jimmy is a much loved priest and the children find him approachable and helpful. They remember what he has taught them and value the times when he leads their worship. They also recognise that help and support is available from other sources within the school and they feel safe and secure. Chaplaincy is an integral part of the life of St Vincent's and makes an outstanding contribution to the lives of the children.

Most groups of children make good progress in RE. They take a pride in their work and accept challenges which they know will lead to them making further progress. Their behaviour in lessons is generally good and they are keen to participate by taking part in role play and question and answer sessions. Standards of attainment are good.

Leaders and Managers

Grade 2

The leadership of the head teacher is outstanding. She is deeply committed to the mission of the school. In her relatively short time as head teacher, she has accurately identified the school's strengths and weaknesses. This knowledge has been used to compile a very clear plan for raising standards still further. In this she is ably supported by the newly appointed RE co-ordinator. Staff and parents spoke very favourably of her energy and vision and one boy volunteered the opinion that, "Mrs Lake is just right for St. Vincent's." Other children in the group agreed.

The introduction of the new RE Scheme, "Come and See", in September has presented an opportunity to review all aspects of teaching RE in the school. This has been grasped with enthusiasm and vision by the RE co-ordinator. A rigorous system of monitoring is being introduced ensuring that lessons are well planned, pupils' needs are met precisely and high standards are set and reached. Evidence of good attainment by pupils was found during the inspection both in their written work and in their oral contributions.

The governors carry out their duties as set down in the law and by the church. The chairman of the governing body is very committed to the school and works hard. He is keen that the school should offer a high quality of education to its pupils. Governors have good links with parents and there is a designated governor for RE.

However, the governing body as a whole is not fully involved in the monitoring of the religious life of the school. They are aware of this situation and plan to alter the way they review practice and provision for RE. Currently, there are two vacancies for foundation governors at the school and this results in some governors having a very heavy workload.

The provision for community cohesion in the school is outstanding. Inclusion is at the heart of the school. A lot of effort is put into making people feel welcome and supporting those in need. Many visitors are invited into the school to widen the children's awareness of issues such as disability. The pupils are able to talk enthusiastically about how they are involved in raising money to help people at home and overseas. Their participation in coffee mornings and designing plates of food to raise money for CAFOD had clearly captured their imaginations. Children are also given the opportunity to reach out to the local community through the distribution of harvest boxes, visits to sing in residential homes and through strong links with the Vincentian movement. All these activities are deeply appreciated by the children and make a substantial contribution to their knowledge of communities both in the local area and across the world.

Provision

Grade 2

The provision for chaplaincy, prayer and worship is good. Chaplaincy is provided in a manner that is accessible to and appreciated by everybody in the school community. The church year is sensitively reflected in the life of the school. Vibrant displays are to be found in many parts of the school. Each class has a stimulating prayer focus. A pleasing variety of opportunities to pray is offered to the children, including a rosary and prayer group at lunchtime. Collective worship is well planned and the children have the opportunity to celebrate and take part in a range of liturgies.

Teaching is good. As a result, the children make good progress. Lessons are planned in detail and there is clear evidence of teachers catering for different abilities. Teaching assistants are well used and some make a significant contribution to pupils' learning. Teachers' subject knowledge is good. ICT is used effectively in lessons. Pupils' work is well marked and the children respond positively to the comments that are written in their books. This helps their progress.

The RE curriculum is good. 10% of teaching time is devoted to the teaching of RE. The curriculum provides good opportunities for spiritual and moral development among the children, such as the "statement to live by". The children display a good awareness of other faiths. There are plans to expand the visits programme experienced by the children to enrich further the RE curriculum.

Pupils' work is assessed in line with national guidelines. The school has a good procedure for tracking the children's' progress. Teachers challenge the pupils with work to improve their rate of progress and take action when underachievement is identified. This practice is supported by the high standard of marking found in many books. Teachers' comments inform the children of the progress they are making and guide them towards making further improvement.

The inspectors would like to thank the members of the school community of St Vincent's for making them so welcome and for so patiently answering their questions during the inspection.