

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



**INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL
CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

**ST JOSEPH'S VOLUNTARY AIDED
CATHOLIC LOWER SCHOOL**

Chester Road, Bedford, MK40 4HN

DfES School Number 820/3350

URN 109629

Head Teacher	Mrs L Sumpter
Chair of Governors	Mr C Donnellan
Reporting Inspector	Mrs K Yuen
Associate Inspector	Mrs P Brannigan

Date of inspection	28 th June 2012
Date report issued	16 th July 2012
Date of previous inspection	February 2009

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

Information about the school

St Joseph's Catholic Lower School is a two form entry lower school with nursery, situated in the Queens Park area of Bedford. It caters for pupils from 3.5 to 9 years of age. There are 343 children on roll. 39% of the children are baptised Catholics. 13% of the children attending St Joseph's are white British with 87% of the schools population coming from other ethnic heritages. 78% have English as an additional language and 25% of the children are eligible for free school meals. 5 out of the 15 teaching staff are Catholic as are 11 out of the 26 support staff. There have been significant changes in leadership since the previous inspection. The current headteacher has been in post since January 2011. St Joseph's is part of the Bedford Federation of Catholic schools and shares its governing body with three other schools. The Federation has an Executive Principal.

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

St Joseph's is a good Catholic school with some outstanding features. A significant feature of the school is the Nurture Room in which identified children are supported through a varied range of strategies and intervention programmes. This has resulted in the school receiving the Inclusion Quality Mark. The headteacher demonstrates enthusiasm and drive uniting everyone in the quest to improve standards. The quality of provision in religious education [RE] means that pupils make good progress and reach standards that are broadly average. The governing body is knowledgeable and fully involved in the life of the school. They are able to provide encouragement and challenge thereby supporting the school leadership and staff. There is a shared vision and commitment to securing improvements in the provision of RE and developing the Catholic life of the community and a determination by all to succeed. The school benefits from being able to access support through Specialist Leaders in Education from other schools within the Federation.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good. Since the last inspection the school has made good progress in addressing the issues raised. There has been a review of the Mission Statement which is now more child-friendly and better understood within the community. There is also a wider participation in the development of the SEF-RE. The school has supported staff in developing their knowledge and understanding of Catholic traditions. This is still on-going partly because several new teachers have recently come into post. Each class now has a RE focal point. However, the quality of these varies with the best featuring individual work relating to the topic and displaying children's prayers.

The school's self-evaluation is comprehensive and accurate giving a clear picture of its strengths and areas for development. Plans to more fully integrate this within the School Development Plan will further aid its effectiveness.

The headteacher, senior leadership team and governors are committed to improving the school. Its Catholic dimension is strengthened by the chaplaincy team, which includes the parish priest. The RE subject leader is energetic and passionate about her role, which is impacting on the school's improvement. St Joseph's is a school that knows itself and is rapidly improving. The headteacher, leadership team and governors have a clear vision for the future and have effectively communicated this to the staff.

The current leadership together with the governors has a good capacity to maintain effectiveness and to move forward in their plans to improve standards in all areas of school life.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure that lessons provide challenge for all groups of pupils and increase the opportunities for independent learning
- ensure the quality and consistency of RE marking throughout the school so children know how to improve their work and have opportunities to do so

- ensure that the improvements outlined in the SEF-RE become integrated within the school's Improvement Plan.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 2

Pupils make a good contribution to the Catholic life of the school. They are given many opportunities to respond to the needs of others in school and the wider community. The pupils asked knew the Mission Statement and could explain it in relation to their lives. One child explained its meaning saying: "when we learn we learn with Jesus and when we play we play with Jesus." Pupils are able to take on responsibility and have a pupil voice through their work in the School Council and the newly formed Junior Chaplaincy Team. Their recommendations are actively implemented and promoted. The newly created prayer space has been initiated and developed by the children.

Pupils understand that prayer is an important element of school life and respond well to the many opportunities for prayer during assemblies and key moments in the day. The children are encouraged to write personal prayers which can be placed in a prayer basket and read out in assembly. The celebration assembly held during the inspection was memorable because of the attentiveness and excellent behaviour of the children. The school choir enthusiastically led the singing with actions.

Outstanding chaplaincy provision is a significant strength of the school. It makes a powerful contribution to the spiritual life and well-being of the whole community. The parish priest as chaplain is an integral part of the community and is known well by pupils. High priority is placed on the pastoral care. Each child's needs are assessed and access to high quality nurture programmes, including Rainbows, ensure early and effective intervention. Pupils feel safe and secure in school and know how to access help and support if the need arises.

Progress in RE is generally good. Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons and work with interest and enthusiasm. Pupil's oral responses are good, as is their behaviour during lessons. They have a satisfactory knowledge of the Catholic faith appropriate to their age and abilities. Workbooks show coverage of the curriculum but presentation is not always at its best and work is not always completed. Standards of attainment are satisfactory.

Leaders and managers

Grade 2

The headteacher demonstrates good leadership of the school through the way she promotes, monitors and evaluates the provision for the Catholic life of the school. She shows a deep commitment to the church's mission in education and, supported by the senior leadership team, communicates a clear vision which inspires all in the school community. A parent commented that they chose the school for the "Friendly and Godly environment". The RE subject leader gives good support to her colleagues.

Religious education is monitored by the head teacher and RE subject leader. This is by means of lesson observations, termly book scrutiny and monitoring of planning. More recently learning walks have provided an insight into existing practice and provided a basis for future action. The RE subject leader has made improvements and is aware of the subject's strengths and future areas for development. One teacher has the Catholic Certificate for Religious Studies [CCRS].

Governors fulfil their statutory and canonical responsibilities. They are very well organised and make a significant contribution to the direction of the school. The governing body has established procedures for gathering information and this enables them to make informed decisions for the good of the school and to offer challenge. The RE governor is also the Executive Principal of the Federation.

The promotion of community cohesion is outstanding. St Joseph's is a welcoming and inclusive school where all members of the community are respected and valued. The children show compassion for others by supporting charities locally, nationally and globally. These include: Mission Together, CAFOD and Operation Christmas Child. Recently St Joseph's has formed part of the Queen's Park Faith Tour where two schools, after visiting three places of worship, came for a tour of the school. Opportunities to develop this link further are being sought. In a corridor there is a world map showing the different countries from which the children's families come. In a very natural way pupils' different backgrounds are acknowledged and respected. The work of the recently appointed inclusion leader will further enhance this area.

Provision

Grade 2

Children are provided with many opportunities to develop and grow in the understanding of their faith. Worship and prayer are central to the life of the school community. Pupils are enabled to compose prayers either as part of their religious education learning or to use in their acts of worship. Pupils are very respectful during prayer and enjoy these experiences. There is a weekly reflection meeting where staff can gather to pray. Mass is celebrated at various times throughout the year and, during Advent and Lent, additional lunchtime prayer groups are offered. Chaplaincy provision is excellent and effectively planned by an established team. The parish priest is a frequent and supportive visitor and his input is highly valued by the school. The nurture room holds weekly coffee mornings, where a self-help group for parents has naturally evolved.

The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is generally good. The lessons observed ranged from satisfactory to good, some with outstanding features. During the best lessons teachers effectively use visual presentation, talking partners and interesting activities to motivate pupils in their learning. On occasion teaching does not sufficiently challenge all pupils and opportunities to extend knowledge and develop understanding are missed. In some cases the instructions given by teachers are not sufficiently clear. Teaching assistants respond well to the requirements of teachers and the needs of the pupils. There is good classroom management and consequently the behaviour of pupils is also good.

The quality of the curriculum is good and suitable for the age and abilities of the learners. It fulfils the requirement of the Bishops' Conference. 10% of curriculum time is given to religious education following "Here I Am" and the new "Come and See" programmes with additional work linked to the liturgical year and to the lives of saints. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning and consider how it might be applied in everyday life. The curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Attractive religious education displays in communal areas give added value to this core subject.

Assessment is in place, with all pupils being assessed termly and their achievement measured against national expectations of attainment. The sources of evidence and judgements made are well documented. This information is used to record pupil progress. The school plans to strengthen this further by working on the moderation of judgements and introducing individual targets. However, marking lacks consistency across the school and, as a result, pupils are not always challenged and shown how to improve their work and make expected progress.

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.