

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



Inspection Report of Denominational Character and Religious Education

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

SACRED HEART VOLUNTARY AIDED CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Langford Drive, Luton, LU2 9AN

DfE School No: 821/3361

URN: 109640

Head Teacher: Mrs J Cullen

Chair of Governors: Mr A Collon

Reporting Inspector: Mrs P O'Byrne

Associate Inspector: Mrs P Brannigan

Date of Inspection: 4th October 2011

Date Report Issued: 20th October 2011

Date of previous Inspection: June 2008

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

Information about the school

Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School is situated in Stopsley, an urban area in north Luton, and serves the immediate parish and surrounding areas. There are 402 children on roll, 93% are Catholic; in Foundation Stage and Year 1 the figure is 98%. The school also has a similarly high number of Catholic members of staff, eight of whom have the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies. Three quarters of the pupils are white, two thirds of whom are British and one third Polish. The school is housed in two buildings, one accommodating Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 (KS1) and the other, Key Stage 2 (KS2).

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

Sacred Heart is a good Catholic school with a number of outstanding features. The head teacher together with the governors, other members of the leadership team and the chaplaincy team, are very effective in promoting the Catholic dimension of the school. Prayer is an integral part of school's life and is central to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. The prayer garden and the circle of trees provide special areas for group and individual reflection. Pupils behave very well, work hard and thrive within a strong Christian community where they feel loved, well supported and safe. Their work on the anti bullying committee (ABC) has been recognised with the national 'Diana' award. Pupils benefit from good teaching appropriate to their individual needs and, overall, make good and, sometimes, outstanding progress.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

Since the last inspection, the school has worked hard to ensure consistency of practice in planning, marking and assessment. Pupils' attainment is now tracked and this system is being reviewed to provide a break down within each level so that grades give a more accurate picture. Time is set aside to enable pupils to respond to staff suggestions on how to improve their work.

The school, rightly, recognises that teachers require further support in the teaching of religious education (RE) and arranges peer observations and planning sessions in order to share good practice. The school has piloted the new RE scheme 'Come and See' in readiness for next September.

The governors and senior leadership team (SLT) are committed to improving the school. Its Catholic dimension is strengthened through the chaplaincy team which includes members from Sacred Heart parish and the key support networks in the school. The head teacher is ably supported by a deputy head and an assistant head teacher and a very effective RE co-ordinator. Teaching assistants (TAs) have been trained by the assistant head and the SENCo and now offer good support in the classrooms; they are fully involved in lessons and collective worship.

The current leadership, together with the governors, have the capacity to ensure good, or better, effectiveness is maintained.

What the school should do to improve further:

- continue reviewing work on assessment so that grades more accurately reflect pupils' attainment within the broad levels;
- continue preparing for the introduction of 'Come and See'.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 2

Pupils are eager to participate in school and community activities. They are friendly and caring, ready to help others. The RE pupil voice group gives pupils the opportunity to evaluate their Catholic education and raises the profile of RE within the school. Pupils can talk about the main events in the Church's year and appreciate the development of the prayer garden which provides a special area for reflection. They are proud of their circle of trees which was used as a way of the cross during lent. Pupils are thoughtful and considerate, being aware of the needs of others within the school and in the wider community. They enjoy working with pupils at the adjoining Lady Zia Wernher special school and they understand that every person is special. Pupils are confident and happy to serve their school by volunteering to be part of the school council, RE pupil voice and the ABC. The success of the ABC has been externally recognised through the 'Diana' award.

The prayer life of the school community is central to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. In the three collective worship periods observed, pupils were attentive, responsive and reflective; the Year 2 meditation was particularly inspiring. All classrooms have a prayer table and RE display board and pupils are given the opportunity for personal reflection and spontaneous prayer. A rota gives each year group the responsibility of looking after the prayer garden and, where possible, linking it with the Church's year, hence the current focus on the rosary. In Year 3 pupils are prepared for the sacraments of reconciliation and first Eucharist.

The chaplaincy team includes members of the SLT, pupils, parishioners and representatives from each of the support networks within the school: school council, Rainbows, SEAL, ABC, and the family worker. As school chaplain the parish priest is also a member of the team and visits the school regularly for team meetings, to celebrate mass and to support the 'Here I Am' topics. Pupils respond very well to the activities organised by the chaplaincy team and they really benefit from the excellent communication which ensures chaplaincy is not a bolt-on; it is highly valued and permeates the life and work of the school.

In lessons pupils behave very well and are interested and focused on their work. Pupils have a very good attitude to learning; they co-operate and work well in pairs and larger groups. They try to do their best and take pride in the work. The school has attainment data which shows KS1 is at least average or above and the data for the last Year 6 cohort showed 51% of the pupils were outstanding. Currently there is no data showing separate levels in attainment target 1 and attainment target 2.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

The head teacher has a clear vision for the school which is shared and owned by all members of the school community. Members of the SLT and chaplaincy team clearly promote the Catholic life of the school. The Catholic mission of the school is explicit and evidenced in its documentation and, more importantly, in its daily life. There are thoughtful RE related displays around the school and in the classrooms, and there is a lovely mosaic at the entrance of the KS2 building. The RE co-ordinator is very enthusiastic and an excellent role model for colleagues and pupils; both her lesson and the meditation she led were outstanding.

Senior members of staff monitor pupils' progress and have a broad understanding of pupils' achievement. Teachers' ongoing assessments are used in conjunction with Target Tracker, a computer programme for recording data, to provide an end of year level for each pupil but the information requires further analysis to reflect whether the level achieved is secure. The co-ordinator has worked hard to ensure marking now helps pupils move forward. The SLT monitor lessons and undertake book scrutinies and provide written feedback to members of staff. The pupils themselves are good leaders, able communicators and proud of their work on the school council, the ABC and as representatives on the RE pupil voice group.

The governors are aware of their responsibilities and have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are invited to comment on the RE SEF and the school plan once the documents have been reviewed by staff. One governor runs the gardening club and subject link governors meet respective co-ordinators and report back to the governing body (GB). The RE link governor has recently presented a very detailed report to the GB.

The school is highly regarded by its parent body. One parent wrote, "This school goes beyond expected guidelines to promote, support and engage all members of the community. The ethos of the school is very evident on a day to day basis and dealings with everyone. A privilege to have our child here." Another, "Great family network, everyone pulls together, fantastic attitude from staff and children". Consequently, all pupils work well together and have a common sense of belonging whilst also learning about and respecting those of other faiths. This work is furthered through projects with other schools in Luton and the neighbouring Lady Zia Wernher School. Links have been formed with the local mosque where Year 2 pupils visit as part of their Here I Am topics. The family workers provide effective support, especially at induction time and through the Saturday dads' club. In July, the school was awarded 'Investors in Families' which recognised the school's family-friendly ethos. Two Polish TAs have been employed to support parents and ensure all children have full access to the curriculum.

Provision

Grade 2

Collective worship is well planned and there are a range of formal and informal opportunities for daily prayer. Class masses are celebrated in KS2 and all the pupils go to the parish on First Fridays which parishioners describe as beautiful but pupils interviewed did not know the significance of First Fridays. Similarly, whilst the pupils understood the sentiment of the quote attributed to Bishop Peter, no one interviewed knew its biblical origin. The wide representation on the chaplaincy team ensures everyone supports and nurtures the Catholic identity of the school.

Teaching observed was good or outstanding and reflected the school's own monitoring records. Pupils benefit from good teaching appropriate to their individual needs and, overall, make good and, sometimes, outstanding progress. Lessons are well planned and very well supported by class TAs. Pupils enjoy RE lessons and take pride in their work which is well presented in books with special covers that make them stand out from other subjects. The book scrutiny undertaken as part of the inspection showed evidence of good subject coverage and progression, and also recorded details of practical activities.

The school devotes 10% of teaching time to RE and uses 'Here I Am', the RE programme recommended by the diocese. The school has already trialled 'Come and See', the new scheme of work the diocese is recommending for use from next September. The curriculum has been enriched during the last three years through the school's involvement in the creative curriculum partnership. An artist in residence helped pupils develop an appreciation of God's wonderful world through work ranging from the creation to the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The Wednesday Word is distributed to families each week to help them prepare for the Gospel of the following Sunday which, in turn, is used for key stage collective worship each Monday and Tuesday.

The school is assessing work according to current diocesan guidance and also using Target Tracker to record an end of year level. Pupils are given targets on success ladders so they are more aware of their work level and the steps they need to make in order to progress. Pupils' books are very well presented and interactive marking now enables pupils to move forward with their learning.

The inspectors appreciated the hospitality extended by all members of the school community.