



INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

THE GOOD SHEPHERD VOLUNTARY AIDED CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Kingsland Gardens, Northampton, NN5 7HX

DfE School No: 928/3355
URN: 122039

Head Teacher: Mrs A Walker
Chair of Governors: Dr P Reynolds

Reporting Inspector: Mrs P Brannigan
Associate Inspector: Mr J Flanagan

Date of Inspection: 28 April 2011
Date Report Issued:

Date of previous Inspection: January 2008

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

Information about the school

The Good Shepherd is a two form entry primary school with nursery in the Kingsthorpe area of Northampton. It serves the parishes of St Aidan and the Cathedral of Our Lady and St Thomas although some pupils come from further afield. In recent years admission numbers have grown with a significant increase of pupils who are acquiring English, many at an early stage. There are currently 349 pupils on roll with an additional 34 in Little Lambs nursery class. Around 75% of pupils are Catholics with the rest coming mainly from other Christian denominations. 14 of the 19 teaching staff are Catholics as are 14 of the 21 support staff. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and those entitled to free school meals is below the national average.

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

The Good Shepherd Primary School is a good school with several outstanding features. These include the leadership of the headteacher, the Catholic life of the school, the provision for prayer and collective worship, the religious education curriculum and community cohesion. The mission statement, 'Jesus is our Shepherd and our friend. With his help we will show respect as we learn, love, play and pray together', is at the heart of the school and is known and lived out by the whole community. A number of new initiatives linked to teaching and learning are well supported by staff and governors who share a concern for all pupils. Relationships within the school are very good and pupils feel well cared for and supported in their learning. Parents appreciate the improved communication with staff and the way the school keeps them informed. Pupils' standards of attainment are good.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

The last inspection in 2008 identified three areas for development. These have all been addressed. Assessment has been developed to link pupils' achievement to the current levels of attainment. Marking procedures have been developed to enable pupils to improve and give them opportunities to do so. Chaplaincy provision has been enhanced and now plays a significant role in the life of the school.

The quality of self-evaluation is good. The school is using the new diocesan format and gives a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the Catholic life of the school and religious education. Some staff and governors as well as the headteacher have been involved in its completion and there are plans to share it more widely. The school improvement plan gives a high profile to religious education and includes some strategies to share good practice and support new teachers.

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. There are currently two acting deputy headteachers, one of whom is the sacramental co-ordinator. She leads the chaplaincy team and works closely with the headteacher and RE co-ordinator. Senior staff are good role models and all staff are encouraged to improve their skills through in-service training

The current leadership has a good capacity to maintain effectiveness. The headteacher shows excellent leadership of a Catholic community and recent appointments have strengthened the management team. Governors have a wide range of expertise and many are involved in the life of the school. Systems are in place to develop and strengthen recent initiatives linked to monitoring and assessment. The experienced religious education co-ordinator supports colleagues through joint planning, monitoring and work scrutiny.

What the school should do to improve further:

- consolidate the new initiatives relating to the religious life of the school including the moderation and levelling of pupils' work across the school
- enable the governing body to put in place effective monitoring systems to evaluate and challenge the outcomes of and provision for all aspects of the religious life of the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 2

Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic life of the school. They are given many opportunities to understand and respond to the needs of others in school and the wider community. Members of the School Council play an active part in school life and older pupils help and support younger ones through the 'Buddy' system. Several local, national and international charities are supported throughout the year and there are very good links with the local parishes. Pupils show respect for adults and each other. Behaviour is excellent and pupils value the sense of community created within the school.

Prayer and worship are at the heart of school life. Pupils respond positively to the many opportunities given to develop their faith journey. They are actively involved in preparation for class assemblies, liturgies and masses and participate with reverence. A liturgy group has been formed recently to give additional opportunities for involvement. Pupils learn the traditional prayers of the Church and are given opportunities for meditation and 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. Pupils are given opportunities to create their own prayers and examples were seen during the inspection. The school grounds and chapel are used frequently to support prayer and worship, especially during Holy Week and the Easter season when the Stations of the Cross was attended by many parents and parishioners.

Chaplaincy provision has been enhanced in recent years and is now a prominent feature of school life. The team includes senior staff and governors. It works closely together to promote the spiritual development of pupils and the Catholic life of the community. High priority is given to the pastoral care of pupils. They feel safe, cared for and know where to go when they need support. They value being in a friendly environment where they are listened to and encouraged to help each other. The Rainbows programme is in place and available for those who need it. Parents value the care given to their children and the approachability of staff.

Progress in religious education is generally good. Pupils work with interest and enjoyment. They enjoy their religious education lessons and work well together. They are eager to participate in activities and keen to do well. They have a satisfactory knowledge of the Catholic faith appropriate to their age and abilities. Workbooks show coverage of the curriculum and indicate a varied range of tasks. The greatest progress is made in years 5 and 6. Standards of attainment are mostly in line with diocesan expectations.

Leaders and managers

Grade 2

The headteacher demonstrates outstanding leadership of the school through the way she promotes, monitors and evaluates the provision for the Catholic life of the school. She communicates a clear Catholic vision to the whole community and is supported in this by the senior leadership team, staff and governors who are all committed to providing the best possible environment for the pupils. She has initiated and developed the 'All That I Am' programme of personal, social and spiritual development for Year 6 pupils which also involves parents, clergy, staff and outside agencies. She has recently strengthened the process of self-evaluation which is detailed and identifies areas for improvement. The subject leader and sacramental co-ordinator give good support to colleagues and are excellent role models.

Religious education is monitored consistently by means of lesson observations, work scrutiny and joint planning by the subject leader and the headteacher. Senior staff work alongside new colleagues and model good practice. The school has identified the need to put in place strategies to ensure all pupils make good progress and this is now happening. Much emphasis is placed on staff development and teachers are encouraged to undertake further training including the CCRS.

Governors work closely with the headteacher and have a good understanding of strengths and areas for development. They are well informed about the life of the school through the headteacher's report. Several visit frequently and are involved in the everyday life of the school. However, governors need to ensure that there is an effective monitoring system in place to evaluate all aspects of the religious life of the school and to enable them to challenge and support more effectively in their work.

Community cohesion is excellent. The school is a welcoming community where everyone is respected and valued. Diversity is celebrated and the substantial number of pupils with Polish heritage are given opportunities to share their traditions. There are plans to have a celebration of the different cultures within the school later this year. The school participates in local sporting and cultural events and there are good links with other schools. Pupils from the Thomas of Canterbury partnership schools visit each other for special events including the Stations of the Cross and come together for an annual Christmas carol service. Other faiths are taught well and speakers are invited to talk to pupils at special assemblies. Many charities including Cafod and a local shelter for homeless people are supported throughout the year and pupils are given opportunities to develop a sense of service and show compassion for others. Provision for spiritual development ensures that pupils are able to reflect on their own lives and experiences. Parents are invited to many school events and are kept well informed about their children's welfare and progress. They appreciate the recent introduction of specific information sheets about religious education which enable them to support their children's learning.

Provision

Grade 2

Provision for prayer and worship at The Good Shepherd School is outstanding. Assemblies and liturgies are well planned and contribute to pupils' spiritual development. They include visual presentations, drama, bible readings and music. Pupils are involved in collective worship in their classrooms and are given opportunities for personal reflection. Each classroom has an attractive table with religious artefacts and children's work providing a clear focus for prayer. The school organises retreats for Years 2 and 6 and there is an annual pilgrimage to Walsingham for Year 3. Penitential services are held in Lent and Advent as well as masses throughout the year to which parents and families are invited. The prayer garden and chapel are available at break times for prayer and reflection and many pupils visit each day. Priests from the local parishes support the school through masses, liturgies and links with the chaplaincy team.

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is good. During the inspection, lessons observed were generally good and one was outstanding, where pupil progress was exceptional. Pupils are given an excellent start in Little Lambs nursery class. Lessons are well planned with clear learning intentions and an interesting range of activities. Pupils work well and most make good progress. Teachers respond well to pupils' comments although occasionally opportunities to extend knowledge and develop understanding are missed. Good support by teaching assistants is a feature of many lessons. Marking is positive and in Key Stage 2 often includes suggestions of ways to improve. The assessment strategies currently being strengthened indicate that standards are likely to be maintained or improve.

The quality of the religious education curriculum is outstanding. The 'Here I Am' programme is used throughout the school and at least 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education. At present Foundation stage and Year 1 are trialling materials from a new programme with a view to implementing it throughout the school in the future. Topics are being linked to the 'Creative Curriculum' and planning is detailed and thorough. The co-ordinator and headteacher give religious education a central place in the life of the school and this is demonstrated by the good level of resources and time devoted to it. Many attractive 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.

Assessment is in place and the school is using current diocesan guidance to level pupils' work. Staff work together supported by the co-ordinator to ensure consistency in levelling work. Recent initiatives ensure that the assessment process is being strengthened and will support the learning and progress of all pupils. The school has recognised the need to consolidate and build on current good practice in this area.

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.