

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



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

**ST BERNARD'S PREPARATORY SCHOOL**  
Hawtre Close, Slough SL1 1TB

Head Teacher: Mr N Cheesman  
Chair of Governors: Mr S Patterson

Reporting Inspector: Mrs M Basham  
Associate Inspector: Mrs K Yuen

**Date of Inspection: 18 March 2014**  
Date Report Issued: 12 May 2014

Date of previous Inspection: May 2008

**Information about the school** St Bernard's Preparatory School is a Catholic, independent, co-educational school for children aged two and a half to eleven years, serving the Holy Family parish in Langley and the multi-cultural community of the Slough area. There are currently 238 pupils on roll, 26% of which are from Christian backgrounds with 13% being baptised Catholic. Just under half of the teaching and non-teaching staff are Catholic. 26% of pupils have English as an additional language. The school is held in the trusteeship of the Bernadine Cistercian Sisters who are represented on the Governing Body.

### **Key grades for inspection**

1. Outstanding    2. Good    3. Requires Improvement    4. Unsatisfactory

### **Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school**

**Grade 1**

St Bernard's Prep is an outstanding Catholic school. The gospel values expressed in the mission statement are evident in all aspects of school life. Respect for the uniqueness of each person, celebrating the differences and ensuring everyone is welcomed and valued, are the key to the school's success. Pupils flourish in this ethos. Parents remark on the school's strong Catholic identity. As one parent commented, 'it is a caring multi-cultural community which maintains its Catholic values whilst celebrating the different faiths'. Pupils achieve high standards with more able pupils often working at exceptionally high levels of attainment. Chaplaincy is well planned providing excellent outcomes for pupils. Governors are highly effective in their role. The dedicated headteacher leads the team with an infectious enthusiasm. This permeates throughout the school. Teachers enjoy teaching, children enjoy learning and parents appreciate the caring and nurturing environment. 'I really like the warm, friendly, kind approach to all who enter,' remarked one parent.

### **The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**Grade 1**

The school has an excellent capacity for sustained improvement. The two targets for improvement from the previous Religious Education inspection have been addressed fully. Governance now consists of highly skilled governors who have the knowledge and experience to challenge the school effectively. A new Religious Education leader has been in post for two years. She is organised, pro-active and effective in her role. Due to the retirement of the previous headteacher, a new head was appointed in September 2013. He is determined to ensure the Catholic ethos continues to underpin the curriculum and life of the school. He believes, 'everything leads to the children developing a love of God'.

The school's self-evaluation is thorough, detailed and accurate. It states that children are genuinely interested in and enjoy celebrating each other's faith. Pupils' openness and willingness to share their thoughts and ideas was highlighted during inspection when children of different cultures were proud to discuss their heritage. One pupil commented, 'I am treated with respect and different in a good way'. This is reinforced in teaching when pupils have access to high quality questioning and answering sessions with parallels being made between different faiths.

A strong teamwork exists between all leaders and staff. They work together to provide the best possible education for each child. Children, in turn, are actively encouraged to be the best they can in everything they do. This is reflected in their very positive behaviour. The mission statement 'With God as our shelter and Christ as our guide' is at the heart of all decision making. Religious Education needs are identified and incorporated into the school improvement plan. The Religious Education leader meets with the link governor to audit the teaching. Staff are well supported through appropriate training and induction. Excellent chaplaincy and prayer opportunities ensure that the Catholic dimension of the school is alive and active. Religious displays and prayer areas

provide an attractive stimulus and opportunities for reflection. Pupil voice is valued and appreciated. An example of this is the spirituality audit which gives feedback from the pupils and highlights any possible future developments in the curriculum. A thriving School Council is in place. One member commented, 'this is one big happy family with God at the centre'.

The headteacher is committed to maintaining the excellent reputation of the school by continuing to strengthen the strong bond that exists between parents, staff, the parish and local community. He is very ably supported by the well respected and inspirational deputy headteacher who provides outstanding spiritual opportunities for pupils, through her own teaching and well planned liturgies. The Religious Education leader is effective, hard-working and forward thinking. An obvious joy and commitment is evident in all leaders. Governors are well informed and encouraged to be active participants in school life. The chaplain provides excellent support and guidance. Teachers show a genuine desire for continued improvement. They are open and receptive to advice, showing an eagerness to constantly improve provision for all pupils.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- share and model outstanding classroom practice to ensure all teaching is at the level of the best
- broaden the range of religious education books.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

#### **Grade 1**

St Bernard's Prep provides outstanding outcomes for its pupils. In all classes pupils demonstrate a real sense of well-being. This confidence results from the ethos of respect and acceptance of one another. St Bernard's Prep is a school that lives out its mission statement. Pupils are given many opportunities to contribute to the Catholic life of the school. Through the different areas of chaplaincy, they have access to a wide variety of activities. Prayer partners and a buddy system ensure pupils are not isolated or lonely. Pupils support local, national and international charities. The school council meets with other schools to discuss and share ideas. Pupils lead and participate in liturgies, assemblies and prayer sessions. They speak and read with clarity and confidence showing a maturity beyond what might be expected for their age. Behaviour is excellent. Children understand the importance of living out the gospel values of love and forgiveness in their daily relationships. 'Forgiveness strengthens friendships' was one child's comment.

Pupils respond with reverence during prayer sessions. In the reception class all children can make the sign of the cross and say the Lord's Prayer in a sincere manner. During a reconciliation service on the inspection day, Year 6 pupils showed an ability to be still, prayerful and reflective. Music is used effectively to encourage calmness and ambience in lessons. Pupils have the opportunity to express themselves through dance and drama, art and poetry. Colourful and poignant displays encourage pupils to think deeply about prayer. The St Benedict display in the hall is an example of prayers of humility with one child writing 'when I show humility I don't show off when I win'.

Chaplaincy provision is outstanding. Staff and pupils know that they all have a role to play in supporting one another. Weekly chaplaincy sessions take place with the four areas that the school has established being effective and at the heart of school life. Children in Key Stage 2 have an opportunity to attend retreats; the annual Year 6 retreat being led by the Bernardine community in Stroud. Pupils have access to the guidance of a trained child counsellor who is a staff member and the Rainbow's Club; a bereavement and loss counselling group. Year 5 and 6 pupils are encouraged to support and care for the younger children. The school chaplain is proactive, with staff and children appreciating and benefiting from his presence in school.

The quality of children's learning and progress is outstanding. The air of enthusiasm and joy that exists in the school is also evident in the classrooms. Well planned lessons with thought provoking questioning and discussion, result in pupils achieving high standards. Pupils are encouraged to work collaboratively and be independent learners. They are given opportunities to compare and contrast the gospels often presenting their findings in a profound manner. Work is recorded in a variety of ways. Poetry is used effectively in response to work on the scriptures. The standard of attainment in religious education amongst more able pupils is often very high. Some children are performing at exceptionally high levels by the end of Key Stage 2.

Pupils have many opportunities to develop research and inquiry skills. Children's use of bibles and quotations in their work is impressive. A comprehensive Religious Education baseline assessment is carried out in the early years and foundation stage. Progress is then tracked from this starting point, showing that pupils make very good progress. Assessment and tracking records which are monitored on a termly basis are thorough and detailed.

### **Leaders and Managers**

### **Grade 1**

The headteacher and deputy headteacher are outstanding in their commitment to leading and promoting the Catholic life of the school. The school evaluation form clearly states that respect and concern for others, rooted in a love of God, is embedded in the ethos of the school. New staff are given a comprehensive induction to highlight the importance of the Catholic nature of the school. The Religious Education leader is an excellent role model. She has established an effective system of monitoring with written and oral feedback to teachers. Staff give additional time to support chaplaincy and other counselling groups. During Lent weekly Mass is held in the chapel with breakfast being shared after with the children who attend. Chaplaincy is alive and effective in school. Responses from children highlight the positive effect chaplaincy provision has on their well-being. Prayer is central to school. Pupils are at ease when praying silently. The parish priest who is the chaplain makes a valuable contribution to school life. He leads staff training and has introduced a welcome liturgy for all children and families new to the school. Families of all faiths are also given support by the parish priest in times of difficulties.

The monitoring and evaluation of Religious Education is consistent and robust. The subject leader is meticulous with record keeping and pupil assessments. Needs are identified and acted upon. She has attended training and organised resources for the new scheme. The music leader has also attended training to develop the use of music in Mass.

The governing body is highly successful in its role of holding the school to account for pupil's progress, safety and well-being. Governors bring with them a variety of skills and expertise. The trustees are also represented on the governing body. The Religious Education link governor, who provides invaluable advice, has recently carried out a review of safeguarding in the school. Governors are invited to take responsibility for a year group or an area of school life.

The happy and united multi-faith community of St Bernard's Prep is proactive in its support for others. Parents report that their children are encouraged to give to those less fortunate than themselves. The school supports local charities, CAFOD, the Bernardine Sister's school in Goma and the Beacon of Hope School in Kenya. Parents are invited into school to share their faith and multi faith assemblies and trips to places of worship are planned into the curriculum. Links with local churches are well established. Parishioners and members of the community are also invited to attend school celebrations. The Religious Education leader has assisted other schools with the planning and assessment for the new scheme of work 'Come and See'.

## Provision

## Grade 1

Pupils grow spiritually and develop a love of God through outstanding opportunities in chaplaincy, prayer and collective worship. The different faith backgrounds of the children are respected and celebrated allowing everyone to develop an understanding of other's beliefs. This is a real strength of the school. It is evidenced by pupils' genuine love and compassion for one another. Prayer boxes and stimulating displays encourage pupils to think deeply about prayer. As one child commented 'I like to be still on the outside and on the inside'. Parent prayer is held during Lent to enable parents to be part of the schools prayer and worship. Chaplaincy has a very powerful influence on children's ability to support one another. Collective Worship and liturgies offer many opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding of their faith.

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is outstanding. Lessons are well planned and engaging with assessment being an integral part of the process. Pupils are given time to respond and contribute to discussions. They are encouraged to work together. As a result pupils are articulate, knowledgeable and interested in their learning. Some lessons observed during inspection were of a very high standard with outcomes for pupils being exemplary. The use of poetry is highly effective in developing skills of empathy. One Year 6 pupil wrote a moving poem about Martha and Mary showing a deep insight into this gospel story. From an early age pupils are encouraged to gain confidence and develop independence. Lessons are fun, an example being a pass the parcel game used in the foundation class during a Religious Education lesson on Lent. Children showed excitement and involvement as they took turns to unwrap the parcel and see what they had to do in Lent to help others. ICT is used well to motivate pupils and illustrate the class focus. Drama and role play are also used to encourage pupils to empathise and relate to subject knowledge.

The curriculum is based on the diocesan approved scheme 'Come and See' with the required 10% of curriculum time allocated to Religious Education. Differentiated activities cater for the needs of individual pupils. A variety of faiths are studied through topics in key stage 1. In Key Stage 2 pupils investigate a different faith each year; Sikhism, Islam, Hinduism and Judaism. Pupils appreciate that they have the opportunity to share their faith. 'I feel really proud that I am Hindu' one child remarked 'and I like to share my knowledge'. Pupils are given many opportunities to locate and discuss biblical texts. The variety of work in their Religious Education books shows the impact this bible study has on their knowledge and understanding of the scriptures.

Assessment and monitoring procedures are firmly embedded in the curriculum. Systems are in place to ensure consistency and progression. Termly assessments and children's self-evaluation enable teachers to track and review pupil progress. The early years and foundation stage religious education baseline is excellent practice as it enables teachers to plan for the needs of individual pupils. Religious Education levels from Year 6 are passed to the follow-on schools at the end of the school year.

St Bernard's is an exceptional school. Children of all faiths are helped to feel very special. Learning is fun and exciting. The ethos of enthusiasm and respect is infectious. Inspectors appreciated the warm welcome from the headteacher and deputy headteacher, the friendliness and openness of staff and children, the positive feedback from parents and the experience of being part of a happy and supportive multi-faith community. As one parent commented 'a wonderful mix of different faiths working so well together'.

