

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

**ST JOHN RIGBY VOLUNTARY AIDED
CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL**
Polhill Avenue, Bedford, MK41 9DQ

DfES School No: 820/3350

Head Teacher: Mr A Palmer
Chair of Governors: Mr C Donnellan

Reporting Inspector: Mrs M Betts
Associate Inspector: Mrs M Basham

Date of Inspection: 3 July 2014

Date Report Issued: 27 August 2014

Date of previous Inspection: 2 October 2007

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

Information about the school

St John Rigby School is a larger than average school for pupils aged 4 to 11 years. There are 394 pupils on roll, 87% of whom are baptised Catholics. 56% of the teachers and 68% of the support staff are Catholic. The school serves a number of parishes across the Bedford Deanery. Pupils come from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds and from a variety of cultures. 31% of pupils have English as an additional language. Almost two years ago the school changed from a lower school to a primary school and the first additional cohort of pupils are now at the end of Year 6. The new headteacher has only been in his full-time post for 2 months.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

St John Rigby School is a good Catholic school. Its Catholic identity permeates the school's daily life. The mission statement is known and understood by all pupils who can describe how they try to follow it in their daily lives. The committed leadership of the headteacher, executive principal and directors effectively promotes the pupils' spiritual development and faith awareness. Pupils show great respect for each other and their behaviour reflects Gospel values. Pupils and parents benefit exceedingly well from the work of the lay chaplain who makes a powerful contribution to the pupils' well being. Pupils are proud of their school describing it as "like a massive family". Prayer and worship are of central importance in the school's life. Pupils make good progress throughout their time at school in knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

The headteacher communicates a clear vision for maintaining and developing the school's Catholic ethos. He has gained the respect of staff, pupils and parents and has plans to enhance even further pupils' faith formation and spiritual growth. The directors are dedicated to promoting and sustaining high quality Catholic education within the Trust. Their Catholic Life committee ensures good and relevant courses are available to the school staff and many recently attended one entitled "Inclusion as a Christian Philosophy". The school's self-evaluation identifies those areas in which progress is well established and others in which the school plans further development. In the area highlighted during the previous inspection the school is making progress. Religious education (RE) work is now marked. Teachers give appropriate praise and affirmation to pupils. They sometimes write comments to extend or improve pupils' work although this practice is not yet consistent across all the classes. Pupils are not often given the opportunity to make these improvements. RE assessments take place after each topic. Teachers assign levels to pupils' outcomes linked to the national RE Levels of Attainment with differentiation within each level further divided into three progression bands. Directors are regularly updated about RE attainment and informed of the results of the RE monitoring undertaken by the RE lead teacher, RE link governor and the school's senior staff. The directors' and the school senior leaders' dedicated commitment to the school's Catholic identity ensures it has a good capacity to develop further.

What the school should do to improve further

- increase the progress of all pupils especially those in Years 5 and 6 and those of higher ability in all year groups, by ensuring that every pupil has access to rigorous RE teaching and are given tasks that challenge and extend their RE learning
- provide training to ensure that teachers have a thorough understanding of how to adapt the RE curriculum to inspire and motivate pupils to learn
- purchase appropriate and relevant RE resources to enrich learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 2

Pupils benefit well from the school's Catholic ethos. They are proud of their school and particularly mention their enjoyment of trips and other extracurricular experiences. They understand the mission statement and strive to follow its message in all areas of school life. One child explained "We know God is always helping us here". Pupils willingly accept responsibilities especially as members of the School Council or when supporting younger pupils. They demonstrate an awareness of the needs of others, undertaking fund-raising for local and global charities. They participate in local area events and have performed at concerts for senior citizens and sung carols in town for charity. Pupils praise the caring attitude of the teachers who listen to them and encourage their learning. Their achievements are recognised and celebrated. Pupils understand that religious beliefs are important and have promoted this by posters displayed in school. One reads "Be one of God's people".

Prayer has a very high profile within school life and all pupils respond well participating respectfully and with ease. Pupils really enjoy creating their own prayers. Following an outside walk to observe God's wonderful world, the Reception children have written some very thoughtful prayers. Other prayers by older pupils also demonstrate a growing depth and maturity of religious thought. Worship contributes well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Pupils enjoy worship especially with action songs and when they have the opportunity to listen to or present class assemblies. During the inspection Year 3 pupils presented a liturgy based on their RE topic. The liturgy used song and visual material well to enhance the presentation. Pupils enjoy the broad range of liturgical experiences and celebrations offered and mentioned particularly the Rosary club they have attended.

Chaplaincy provision is outstanding and provides very effective spiritual and pastoral support to staff, children and families. The guidance and help given by the lay chaplain is valued highly. Pupils are aware of how they can access help if they have a problem and are certain of a positive response. The individual needs of children are well-catered for by experienced staff. The lay chaplain and school's Family Worker support vulnerable pupils. All staff contribute effectively to the well-being and spiritual development of the children.

Pupils develop a sound knowledge of the Catholic faith. A priest visits classes regularly and is available as an extra resource for RE learning. Pupils make steady progress and nearly all achieve the expected level by the end of Key Stage 1. Progress is slower towards the end of Key Stage 2. Most pupils enjoy their religious education lessons especially when given practical tasks to extend learning such as role play and drama. They work well together. The presentation of work in RE books is generally good but this is not consistent throughout the school. The books evidence a good variety of written work and a full coverage of the curriculum. Pupils know the level they achieve in RE but are not aware of what they should do to reach a higher level.

Leaders and managers

Grade 2

The commitment of the directors and senior leaders to the Catholic identity of the school is very strong. A clear powerful vision is effectively demonstrated by the variety of pupils' Catholic life experiences; by the school's drive for pupils to achieve their full educational potential and by the strong encouragement given to pupils to fully commit to the faith. The directors are very supportive and regularly monitor and evaluate the work of the school. The school environment effectively promotes the Catholic ethos. Parents responded extremely positively to the inspection questionnaire. They mentioned the caring family atmosphere of the school, the approachability of staff, and their appreciation of the headteacher's morning greeting. The school has very strong links with the parishes and the supporting priest visits regularly as does the local Polish priest. Directors regularly lead acts of worship, attend prayer meetings and dine with the pupils.

The religious education leader is dedicated to her role. Pupils are assessed regularly and RE progress tracked in detail. Moderation of pupil assessment is supported by the RE advisor to ensure consistency of judgements. The RE link governor regularly joins the monitoring activities and seeks the pupils' views. The directors receive reports concerning RE curriculum, monitoring pupil RE achievement data. The religious education leader provides firm support and guidance to the staff. She led the staff well during the introduction of the new RE scheme of work. She takes an active role in supporting non-Catholic staff in facilitating prayer and acts of worship. Further training for teachers to be able to deliver RE more effectively has been identified as a development need. The RE budget provided is low and below that given to other core subjects. There are insufficient resources for teachers to deliver activities that encourage independent pupil research.

Provision

Grade 2

Worship and prayer are integral to the school's life. Pupils are accustomed to different kinds of prayer; formal and congregational; informal and reflective. Pupils experience a broad richness of prayer, sacramental and worship experiences such as the enriching Sion days. They have regular opportunities to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and enjoyed the school's fortieth anniversary Mass celebrated by Bishop Peter Doyle. The linked priest makes significant contributions to the school's sacramental life. Pupils also engage in various ecumenical initiatives including "Easter Storyteller" and the "Lifepath Olney" programme. Worship themes reflect the liturgical year. Recently "Fruits of the Spirit" assemblies have supported pupils in recognising these biblical values. Older pupils are involved in leading the "Thanks and Reflection" at the end of the day. The lay chaplain is very well supported by the executive chaplaincy team. The school environment promotes well its Catholic identity with attractive prayer tables and the Hosanna prayer room.

The quality of religious education is good overall but is not consistent throughout the school. Where RE lessons were best, teachers provide confident, rigorous teaching with visual demonstrations and practical activities motivating pupils to learn. Lessons were planned with clear learning objectives and success criteria. No differentiated activities were observed during the inspection. Hence the more able pupils were not sufficiently challenged and the special needs pupils were not able to fully access the learning.

The quality of the curriculum is good, and suitable for the age and abilities of the learners. It fulfils the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. 10% of curriculum time is used for religious education following the "Come and See" programme. Scripture is used well during much of the teaching but work focused on Bible research was not observed. The curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Religious education is linked to other curriculum areas particularly to literacy, drama, and art. There was no evidence that ICT tasks are given in RE. The curriculum raises pupils' awareness of other faiths. Those studied are chosen to reflect religious practice within the local community. Visits to Christian churches and places where other faith groups worship are effectively used as extra resources for RE learning. Pupils are encouraged to become aware of the demands of their faith and of their responsibility to other people.

The inspectors wish to thank the headteacher, staff and children for their very warm welcome and for contributing to their informative and interesting visit.