

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

ST BERNADETTE'S VOLUTARY AIDED CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Tewkesbury Lane, Monkston Park, Milton Keynes, MK10 9PH

DfE School No: 826/3383

URN: 134318

Head Teacher: Mrs M Clewlow

Chair of Governors: Mr J Brandon

Reporting Inspector: Mrs M Betts

Associate Inspector: Mr J Hamilton

Date of Inspection: 29 September 2010

Date report issued: 18 October 2010

Date of previous Inspection: 10 July 2007

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

Description of the school

St Bernadette's was opened 5 years ago and the number of pupils has increased rapidly to its present roll of 383. It accepts pupils aged 3 to 11 years. Pupils come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The school serves three local parishes. 60% of the pupils are Catholic with the majority of the remaining pupils being Christian. 79% of the teachers are Catholic. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below national average. The headteacher joined the school at the beginning of the previous term and the religious education subject leader has been in post for 4 weeks.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Bernadette's School is an outstanding Catholic school. The extremely strong Catholic identity permeates the school's daily life. The committed leadership of the headteacher and governors is instrumental in inspiring a strong spiritual purpose throughout the school. This very effectively promotes the pupils' personal, moral, social and cultural awareness which reflects in their good behaviour and positive attitudes. Relationships within the school are very good and reflect Christian respect and concern for others. Staff create an environment where pupils are respected, listened to and where learning is fun. Pupils are very proud of their school and appreciate the opportunities given to discuss values and choices. They realise that they are developing skills for their future. Prayer and worship are of pivotal importance in the school's life. Religious education has a high profile and very good progress is made by pupils.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

Since the last diocesan inspection the school has continued to sustain high quality provision and maintain good standards of attainment in religious education. The issues for development in the last inspection report were related to providing staff training for the "Rainbows" pupil support programme and establishing regular retreat opportunities. Good progress has been made in these areas. The Rainbows programme has been implemented and parents made aware of this service on the website. The older children attend a Catholic led residential retreat each year.

The headteacher, having undertaken a detailed and comprehensive review of provision since arriving in post, now has a good overview of the school's strengths and development needs. She has already implemented changes following her evaluations and encouraged further improvements to be part of the new school development plan. Self-evaluation is comprehensive and accurate.

Senior leaders are totally committed to promoting the Catholic dimension of the school and high quality religious education. All staff are encouraged and supported by the leadership team. Senior staff are role models in the living of their faith. All staff are committed to improving their skills through further professional training opportunities. The governors are very aware of their role in strategic planning to further foster religious education and the Catholic life of the school.

The school, with its current leadership and governance, has a very good capacity to continue to maintain effectiveness. The new, experienced RE subject leader is totally committed to the school's mission and is enthusiastic in her role. She has already begun to evaluate and monitor RE as the basis for a revised subject improvement plan.

What the school needs to do to improve further:

- develop and implement a clear monitoring and evaluation cycle for religious education teaching and learning
- further develop RE assessment by moderating work across the school to ensure consistency of judgements and to record the criteria by which each judgement is achieved
- develop stronger links with all three parishes the school serves and raise the profile of the school within the church communities.

How good are outcomes for pupils, taking account of variations between different groups? Grade 1

The extent to which pupils benefit from the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. Pupils display respect for each other and for adults. They willingly undertake responsibilities and show concern for the well-being of others, the older pupils acting as buddies to the younger ones. The pupils know well the school's expectations of them and strive to achieve these. The mission statement and "statements to live by" are lived out within the school community. Pupils said, "Here we love and care for one another and serve those less fortunate than ourselves". Pupils value the real sense of community created within their school, especially at whole school celebration of the current "statement to live by" successes. Pupils praise the friendly, caring attitude of the teachers. Pupils' views and ideas are sought and taken into account through the School Council. They appreciate the variety of club activities and the enriching experiences of day and residential visits which promote their personal and spiritual development.

Pupils enjoy the worship life of the school. They respond sensitively and maturely to the themes planned. They understand the importance of prayer and participate with ease and reverence. They know and use a variety of prayer styles. Pupils create their own prayers as part of their religious education learning and share these in class worship. They value highly the opportunities for reflection promoted during worship and are able to apply the Christian values discussed to their own lives and experiences. Many pupils also participate in liturgy through high quality singing, instrument playing and reciting poetry. This greatly enhances worship. The prayer life of the school contributes extremely well to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

Chaplaincy provision makes a significant contribution to the spiritual life and the well-being of the whole community. The parish priest is known well to pupils who respond enthusiastically to liturgical experiences, often contributing to the activities. They know that chaplaincy is wholeheartedly supported by school leaders. Pupils feel safe and secure in school and are aware of the procedures to resolve their problems, seeking out appropriate staff if needed. High priority is placed on the pastoral care of pupils. The individual needs of each child are well-catered for through opportunities given to those who will profit from regular small nurture groups such as the "Values" groups and "Rainbows.". Parents appreciate the care and friendliness of all the staff.

Pupils make very good progress in religious literacy during their time in the school. They enjoy their religious education lessons especially those linked to learning about Jesus and those with practical outcomes. Pupils have a positive attitude to learning in religious education and work together very well.

Pupils have a sound knowledge of the Catholic faith and the teachings of Jesus appropriate to their age and abilities. They achieve age-appropriate levels of attainment in religious education and many exceed these. Pupils take a pride in their religious education work.

Their books are well presented and evidence a good coverage of the curriculum, including bible research.

How effective are leaders and managers in developing the Catholic life of the school? Grade 1

The headteacher, with the support of the senior leadership team, powerfully promotes the Catholic life of the school. She communicates a clear Catholic vision which is supported by the school's mission statement and "statements to live by". These values guide pupil behaviour and inspire all in the community as a foundation for living. Very attractive displays around school confirm the community's Catholic identity. Leadership promotes pupils' spiritual and moral development extremely well with pupils being given daily opportunities to reflect on a range of topics before writing their thoughts and feelings down in "The Big Write" programme.

The new religious education subject leader, with strong support from the headteacher, is ensuring this subject continues to have a high profile across the school. She has a clear vision for improvement and has begun to put this into practice. The school gives high priority to developmental training and two of the teachers are on the CCRS (Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies) course with a further senior leader currently undertaking an MA in Catholic school management. The school has invested in many new materials and religious education is well resourced.

Governors fulfil their statutory and canonical responsibilities. They are very supportive and pro-active in the school. They are well informed about the work of the school through the headteacher's regular report and undertake regular monitoring visits which feed into the school development plan. Governors have adapted their strategic plans as the school has grown but always give high priority to the school's Catholic identity.

The school is a welcoming inclusive community where all members are respected and valued. Diversity is celebrated and parents and pupils share their traditions during multi-cultural weeks and international evenings. Pupils show compassion for others by their own initiatives being used for raising money for local, national and international charities. Locally the school supports a neighbourhood hospice. The school participates in local events and provides carol singing in the community. Provision for spiritual development effectively provides opportunities for pupils to link learning with their own experiences. The school invites parishioners and parents to share celebrations. Pupils learn about other world religions.

How effective is the provision for Catholic education? Grade 1

Worship, chaplaincy, prayer and personal reflection are integral to the life of the school community. Worship is well planned with high quality of delivery using visual presentations, drama, poetry and music to promote pupils' interest and develop their thinking. Bible passages are used to illustrate the message and older pupils are challenged to discover more through their own research. Focus on value statements ensures worship makes an excellent contribution to the spiritual and moral development of pupils. Collective worship offers pupils of different age groups the opportunities to be involved in prayer, liturgy and worship. Pupils sometimes prepare their own liturgies. The attractive prayer tables in each classroom effectively provide a clear focus for prayer. Mass is celebrated regularly by the whole school and pupils participate in leading this. The parish priest, who is an intrinsic part of school community, makes a significant contribution to the sacramental life of the school and takes a pro-active role in planning pupils' liturgical experiences. The chaplaincy team

has recently been extended to include parents and governors. Community use of the school chapel for parents and parishioners is being actively encouraged.

The quality of religious education lessons overall is good. Lessons are planned well with clear learning intentions made explicit to pupils. Visual presentations, open questioning, use of talking partners, differentiation of tasks and practical outcomes are all effectively used to motivate and interest pupils. Teaching assistants are well informed, committed to the RE programme and often use their own initiative when responding to the requirements of teachers and the needs of pupils. Teacher instructions are not always clearly given or linked firmly enough to the learning intention resulting in the planned outcome not always being fully achieved. Marking is positive and affirmative and pupils are given opportunities to extend their learning through the provision of additional challenges. Assessments are made linked to national expectations and progress recorded.

The quality of the religious education curriculum throughout the pupils' whole school learning experiences is very good, and provides pupils with an understanding of their Catholic faith at an appropriate level for their age and abilities. Pupils are encouraged to become aware of the demands of religious commitment within their daily lives and to care for the environment. The religious education subject curriculum fulfils the requirement of the Bishops' Conference. 10% of curriculum time is used for religious education following the "Here I Am" programme. Religious education is linked to other curriculum areas such as literacy, art, drama, poetry, song and information and communication technology (ICT). Other faiths are studied and the curriculum enhanced by visits to local places of worship of other religions. The curriculum contributes very well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Attractive religious education displays around school give added value to this core subject.