



INSPECTION REPORT

St. Gregory the Great Catholic Primary School

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D/ES Number: 5207

Headteacher: Mrs Sharon Aston

Chair of Governors: Mrs Nicky Febery

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Clifton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: June 22 & 25 June
Date of previous inspection: March 2007

Reporting Inspector: Mr Joseph Skivington

Description of School

St. Gregory's is an oversubscribed primary school, which serves two parishes – St. Gregory's and Sacred Heart in Cheltenham as well as drawing pupils from further afield. There are 368 pupils on roll of whom 68% are baptised Catholic. Pupils come from mixed socio economic backgrounds, with an above average number of EAL children (29%). The numbers of pupils with special educational needs is also above average. Just over half of the staff are Catholic with seven qualified to CCRS standard in teaching religious education. The school is in close proximity to the parish church and the parish priest is on the governing body.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 3

St. Gregory's is a satisfactory and improving school with good features. It is a community with a good Catholic ethos, open and inclusive, welcoming every person as an individual made in the image of God, and developing clear links with the parents, the parish, and the wider community. All pupils participate enthusiastically in and respond well to the excellent faith enriching provision for prayer life and liturgy.

Outcomes from the religious education programme are satisfactory and improving. This is the result of now good teaching and purposeful learning throughout the school. Key to this success has been the appointment and development of enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as the others because they have tasks well tailored to their learning needs and because of the extra support provided by teaching assistants. The religious education programme makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

Grade 3

The areas for development raised by the last inspection have been tackled satisfactorily. The quality of teaching has improved and there are indications that the use and effectiveness of assessment for learning will result in rising standards of attainment and improvement. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress are being successfully embedded and are beginning to secure better outcomes. Leadership communicates well an ambitious vision and high expectation for the Catholic dimension of the school. The capacity of the school to improve and develop is sound. The role of the RE coordinator is to be taken over by a senior leader in September and sufficient time needs to be given to develop this new role.

What the school should do to improve further

- To meet the learning needs of the more able pupils better, by more precisely targeted lesson objectives which are consistently challenging.
- To increase the quantity and quality of pupils' written response to the topics they are covering by setting tasks which encourage reflection, empathy and evaluation skills.

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

Grade 3

The inspection confirmed the school's own judgement that outcomes for pupils are satisfactory. All pupils are involved in the Catholic life of the school, with no group or individual excluded and they make a valued contribution to it. They feel their voice is heard through the school council and opportunities for feedback, and they take responsibility for their own lives and the care of the younger children. They absorb the shared values lived out in the Catholic ethos of the school, can express the school mission statement in their own words, and have a sound awareness of spiritual and moral matters which they are able to articulate well. Their capacity for praise and forgiveness is evident in their good behaviour and care for each other. They are developing the skills of planning and presenting their own liturgies and assemblies. They respond generously to the needs of others beyond the school, and this makes a valuable contribution to the welcoming openness and inclusiveness of the school. All are involved in fundraising for a variety of charities both home and overseas.

Their response to and participation in the prayer life of the school is good. When given the opportunity they play a proactive part in liturgies, sing enthusiastically, and can use a variety of prayer styles composed by themselves. However, participation and celebration vary in quality depending on the group. The pupils' attitude and demeanour and reverence at prayer, even the very youngest, is good and demonstrates their growing understanding of the sacred.

Achievement and progress in religious education are satisfactory throughout the school. Pupils can discuss the topics they cover and relate them to their own lives; for instance the message in the story of Zacchaeus, where meeting Jesus can change our lives. Progress is secure right from the start where they quickly come to absorb the basic concepts and symbolism of religious language, and can retell and sequence the parables and stories about Jesus. As they get older they acquire a good grasp of the main tenets of the Faith, for instance, the significance of the Last Supper, or the Divinity of Jesus, as well as understanding the message of Jesus through His miracles and parables. In some lessons the more able pupils particularly are not always given sufficiently challenging tasks to match their abilities, often because the lesson objectives do not take full account of their learning needs. Also, pupils would benefit from more extended writing opportunities to use their imagination and critical thinking skills in reflecting on what they are being taught. The school has identified the need for this and is planning to include these aspects in the new RE scheme. The rate of progress of the less able pupils and those with special educational needs, including those with English as an additional language, is similar to the other pupils. In lessons pupils work hard and enjoy the subject, particularly when they are challenged and engaged by effective teaching strategies which involve them in their own learning, through group and paired work and peer assessment.

How effective are leaders and managers in developing the Catholic Life of the school?

Grade 2

Leadership and management promote the Catholic life of the school effectively, with clear self evaluating procedures that include frequent monitoring, reviews, appraisal, and planning for future improvement. The Catholic ethos of the school imbues all of its activities. Care is taken to revisit the mission of the school frequently, with dedicated Inset at the start of the year for staff and governors on spirituality and Catholic education. Prayer life and liturgies are monitored and reviewed effectively, with close liaison between governors and senior leadership. The school development plan indicates a school that knows itself well, although not all laudable aims are expressed as clearly measurable objectives. The good calibre of leadership and management is seen in the high morale of the staff, the pupil's good care for one another, and the very good relationships between staff and pupils. All staff, particularly those who are not Catholic, receive valuable support through ongoing Inset sessions in understanding the nature of a Catholic school, and are well supported in teaching RE.

The governing body is totally committed to sustaining the strong Catholic ethos and improving standards in every area of school life. Their particular concern in recent months has been to secure the best quality of RE provision by careful selection of new staff. The parish priest is also the link governor for RE and gives support in lessons explaining aspects of faith as well as celebrating the liturgical year with the school community. A senior leader is taking over the role of RE coordinator in September and planning and preparation for the role is already well under way.

The provision and promotion of community cohesion is good. Governors have a clear policy and enthusiasm to encourage community cohesion with the result that the school has an openness to all, all are included in its life and its generous outreach to the local and the global community is a strength. The school collaborates well with other schools and participates in a good number of community undertakings, including local charities. The school has fruitful links with Kenya and China. Pupils themselves have done a lot of work on global issues such as Fairtrade and have won awards for their planning and presentations. The curriculum provides an opportunity to explore other faiths, and pupils are genuinely interested in the beliefs and cultures of others. Those of other denominations or faiths feel that they are able to express their own beliefs comfortably, and all feel included and welcomed into every aspect of school life. Parish links are close and particularly celebrated with impressively large numbers of children making their First Communion.

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Grade 3

Provision for prayer life is good because it meets effectively the spiritual needs of the pupils, be it through assemblies and liturgies, the Sacraments, and opportunities for retreats. There are many occasions during the day for spiritual nourishment through prayer and moments of reflection. Some teachers are better at providing and animating than others, but the school is aware of this and developing strategies to support all staff.

The liturgical year is well marked and celebrated, particularly Advent, Lent and Holy Week. All pupils participate willingly, and as they move up the school, with more confidence and conviction.

The curriculum satisfactorily meets the needs of all groups of pupils, as well as meeting the Curriculum Directory for Religious Education requirements, such as the allocation of time. Work is needed to translate the curriculum into challenging schemes of work, lesson plans and objectives. The piloting of a new, alternative diocesan syllabus in the older classes has been judged successful, and is being carefully monitored by governors and senior staff. Relationship education is dealt with sensitively and clearly from a Catholic standpoint. The beliefs of other faiths are explored through topics in the schemes of work. Resources are well managed, and ICT, art and music are used positively to enrich the learning experience. Attractive displays around the school reflect the liturgical year and the topics the pupils are studying.

The quality of teaching and purposeful learning is now generally good. Where teaching is good it enables the pupils to learn really well because it engages their interest and provides challenge, particularly in searching questioning, so that the pupils themselves do the work and make the intellectual effort. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils discussed their ideas about God very thoughtfully and were able to quote Matthew 22 and John 13 without any prompting. Group and paired work are especially effective strategies because they provide peer learning and assessment. Where teaching was less effective it was not always pitched well, the pace was slower, and the needs of the more able pupils were not specifically planned for with sufficient challenge built in to the lesson objectives. Proactive teaching assistants provide invaluable support especially in allowing the teacher to split children into smaller groups with differentiated tasks tailored to their learning needs. The scrutiny of written work shows that marking is inconsistent, but when helpful it makes a real difference to presentation and quality of work. There is less expectation and opportunity for pupils to write more extended pieces of work. Pupils' efforts and behaviour in lessons is good and they are genuinely interested in the subject.

Assessment procedures are still to be embedded and more effective use made of level indicators to monitor progress and achievement. Tracking of individual progress is being developed, and will provide teachers with a clearer picture of each pupil's strengths and where support and guidance are needed. The challenge is to use this knowledge tellingly in drawing up lesson plans and appropriate teaching strategies to meet the learning needs of all the pupils.