



DRAFT INSPECTION REPORT

St Francis Catholic Primary School

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Headteacher: Ms C Hostein

Chair of Governors: Mr M O'Neill

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: March 2010
Date of previous inspection: March 2006
Reporting Inspector: Mrs A Barrett

Information about the school

St Francis is a popular, oversubscribed average sized Catholic Primary School which serves the parishes of St Francis, Nailsea and The Immaculate Conception, Clevedon. The numbers of Catholic children has decreased since the last inspection from 65% to 56% with the remainder practising or broadly acknowledged Christians or other faiths. The number of EAL pupils has risen to 7% with a range of ten different languages, adding diversity and richness which the school warmly embraces. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and those taking free school meals is well below the national average.

The current head teacher has been in post since September 2008.

Overall Effectiveness

Grade 1

St Francis is a first class Catholic school which enables all its pupils to thrive and grow in its caring and vibrant environment of high expectations, challenge and creativity. The head teacher is an outstanding leader who commands confidence in staff, governors and parents alike. Her infectious enthusiasm and commitment act as an inspiration to all. All leaders and managers are excellent role models who strive to ensure that the Catholic nature of the school is clear, consistent and embedded in the mission statement. The teaching staff are talented practitioners who are ably supported by excellent teaching assistants. This is a school which knows itself very well, identifies priorities, secures improvement and thrives on challenge in all aspects of its work and mission.

Capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding due to strong, open and compassionate leadership. Leaders and governors work seamlessly together to ensure that the school's shared mission, vision and aims are driven forward with a commitment to excellence in all areas. Morale is exceedingly high, with belief in the school's success running through all levels of staff. There is a real sense of all everyone working together to promote, with commitment and pride, the Catholic life of the school. This results in sustained and continuing improvement to outcomes for pupils in all aspects.

Improvements since the last Diocesan Inspection have been good and the school has moved forward in developing a more cohesive system of the provision of curriculum RE. This increasingly open culture has shown improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.

What the school needs to do to improve further

- Devote one full Inset day per year to the Catholic life of the school for all staff and governors.

- Provide planned opportunities for pupils to study other faiths in greater depth.
- Continue to embed systematic assessment and evaluation of RE data to ensure outcomes for pupils are consistently good or excellent.

PUPILS

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

Grade 1

Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic life of the school and benefit greatly from it. They take full advantage of all the opportunities the school provides by contributing to both parishes through participation in children's liturgy, acting as altar servers and readers. They actively contribute to parish fund-raising as well as running stalls for parish events. In addition, the school choir sings at important events such as communion Masses in both churches and will on occasions contribute to a part of the Sunday Mass. Thinking about others and putting one's faith into action is strongly emphasised by the school as being a very important part of its mission. This is demonstrated by the large amount of money raised for a variety of charitable causes, including CAFOD, Children' Pilgrimage Trust, local children's hospice and a Methodist centre for the homeless. The school uses its feast day to raise funds in support of a charity whose work is linked to the ideals of St Francis.

Interviews with a range of pupils highlighted their huge pride and respect for their school and its strong Catholic ethos. Above all, they have a clear understanding of the importance of putting faith into action in their daily lives with each other, their families and the wider community. Pupils take an active part in whole school and class assemblies and Masses, bringing the liturgy to life through dance, drama, music and poetry. A distinctive feature is the strong commitment of families from other practicing Christian denominations and other faiths who are strongly supportive of the school's ethos and who bring their own richness and enthusiasm.

Pupils talk enthusiastically about the prayer tables in each of their classrooms and the many opportunities provided to write prayers and seasonal promises. This is due to the strong commitment of all staff to ensuring that pupils are exposed to a range of formal and informal prayer, adapted to meet their age and need, with a balance between teacher and pupil led. This focus on developing the prayer life of children has, in turn, enabled all staff to grow in their own faith journey and to be more effective in communicating and sharing their own increasing spirituality with the children. A notably refreshing feature of the school is the openness of all staff to learn from the children and be prepared to be awed and humbled by the spiritual clarity and insight that children often demonstrate. Pupils speak with confidence about their relationship with God and are proud to share it with others. For example, one Year 3 pupil commented as part of an end of unit RE assessment that "a snowflake is like a little piece of God coming to visit us." There are well planned opportunities for all pupils to participate in assemblies, masses and reflections and which actively involves them in all aspects of their preparation. This is carefully distributed so that all every child actively participates in some aspect of the mass and assembly.

The whole school Mass which took place during the inspection was a joyful and vibrant experience for all, and well attended by parents, governors and members of the parish. Children were fully engaged and focused throughout the Mass, enthusiastically participating in the singing and responses. Careful attention is paid to ensuring that a wide range of media is used to bring liturgy to life with music an integral part, with the choir leading the singing. Pupils readily talk about how much they enjoy mass and whole school and class assemblies. In particular, they relish the many opportunities to participate through playing percussion, singing, dancing, performing drama and reading. They have a good knowledge and awareness of the symbols and colour of the liturgical year to support prayer and reflection. Older pupils provide an excellent role model for younger pupils, who gain confidence through watching them so that when they lead an assembly they have an understanding of form and expectation. Pupils imaginatively engage in composing their own prayers to fit the theme they are sharing as well as making new words to hymns. These reflections are effective in providing pupils with the opportunity, within the safe environment of the classroom, to explore connections between faith and life in greater depth, particularly in issues appropriate to them.

All pupils make outstanding progress in Religious Education throughout all key stages as a result of well planned and highly effective teaching. Pupils are highly motivated because of teachers' excellent subject knowledge, enthusiasm and skills in facilitating excellent learning and pupil progress. All lessons were characterised by a tangible enthusiasm and joy, on the part of all pupils, combined with a genuine search for knowledge and desire to extend and improve their learning. There is clear evidence that all pupils are becoming increasingly religiously literate, demonstrating high quality learning given their capabilities and starting points. Their high levels of religious literacy are clearly shown through their confident articulation of the school's ethos from a child-centred perspective.

Pupils' engagement and re-working of the mission statement is an example of good practice. This was led by members of the school council and Year 6 who used whole school assemblies and the house system to embark upon writing a child friendly statement. Teachers' commitment to developing their knowledge of the levels of attainment in RE has made a significant contribution to more focused learning objectives. In turn, this has had a positive impact on the quality of pupils' written work which matches those in literacy. The school has rightly highlighted the need to continue to provide opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge through written tasks where they can demonstrate a language of faith that shows a deeper understanding of the implications of belief in their everyday life

How effective the provision is for Catholic Education

Grade 1

The school provides all pupils with rich opportunities for developing their prayer life. Prayer is integral to the school and a key strength in developing spirituality, enabling all pupils to open their 'hearts and minds to God'. This is due to the commitment, support and guidance provided by the leadership team who lead by example in their planning of whole school prayer opportunities which follow the liturgical year and cleverly weave in the themes from Here I Am, as well as responding to the needs of the children. Staff are supported in strengthening their own understanding and knowledge of prayer and

liturgy through inset, staff meetings and courses provided by the Diocese. All classrooms have prayer corners which both children and staff are immensely proud of and approach with reverence and respect, and are used as areas of quiet reflection. Pupils are eager to contribute to the preparation of class assemblies for the school and all classes have provision for pupils to plan class prayer that is age appropriate. Great care is taken to ensure that pupils with different religious beliefs are appropriately integrated into the prayer life of the school, are supported in their own faith development and are comfortable with participating in prayer and celebration. All meetings, including governors meetings, start with a prayer and are led by different staff on a rotational basis. Foundation governors are generous with their time in support of the prayer life of the school, enabling the school to benefit from their wealth of experience of prayer and liturgy. Families are encouraged to pray with their children through Advent and Lenten booklets and prayer bags which they take home with them. Links with both parishes are outstanding and an example of good practice. Local priests and friars regularly celebrate Mass, at school, throughout the year and lead the year 6 retreat. Deacons are active in their support of sacramental preparation and in leading services in school and at church. Other members of the parishes have been proactive through working with pupils in relation to Cafod projects and ecumenical links have been established with the Methodist community who are part of a medical team that supports three Ugandan villages.

The school provides an outstanding, challenging and imaginative religious education curriculum which fully meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference and makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Pupils' needs are effectively met in RE by taking into account their knowledge and understanding on entry to the school at EYFS and regularly assessing their progress as they move across the key stages. The school is constantly seeking ways to improve and enhance its RE curriculum providing a stimulating range of experiences which enables pupils to thrive in their learning. Art, music, drama and dance are also effectively used in the teaching of RE, providing different mediums for those pupils who are less proficient in writing. The school's recent focus on curriculum re-design has provided excellent opportunities for staff to further develop more effective cross-curricular links between RE and other areas of the curriculum, with a particular focus on writing and the development of pupils' team skills and ability to work independently. The school provides a good personal relationship curriculum which is in line with Catholic teaching.

The school is rightly proud of its strong tradition of fund raising at local, national and international levels which adds depth to the RE curriculum through raising pupils' awareness of wider issues as well as informing them of the international work of agencies such as Cafod and the national work of HCPT. This also plays an important part in supporting the moral development of the pupils and providing hands-on opportunities to put their faith into action. There are opportunities for pupils to study other faiths but this need to be done in a more planned and systematic way.

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is outstanding resulting in high quality and purposeful learning. Pupils are highly motivated because of teachers' good subject knowledge, enthusiasm and skills in facilitating excellent learning and progress for all. Teachers place a strong emphasis on challenging pupils to become independent reflective learners who are able to make links with what they have learnt and apply it to their everyday lives. They are especially sensitive to supporting those

children who demonstrate great spirituality through talk but lack the literacy skills to communicate these through writing. This was clearly evident in all lessons observed during the inspection period, where there were numerous opportunities for 'talk time', enabling all pupils to extend and develop their knowledge and understanding appropriate to their age and ability. Excellent deployment of support staff ensures that identified pupils achieve their best. Resources, including ICT, are very well used to make learning exciting and accessible. Assessment in religious education is part of the whole school policy and in line with diocesan guidelines. However the school needs to continue to embed the systematic assessment and evaluation of RE data to ensure outcomes for pupils are consistently good or excellent.

LEADERS AND MANAGERS

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

Grade 1

Leadership is outstanding in promoting the Catholic life and mission of the school. The head teacher is a committed and dynamic leader who has built an open and energetic leadership team who are a source of inspiration for the school community. Highly effective self-evaluation and challenge ensures that all aspects of Catholic life are continuously improving with the Catholic mission at the heart of all school development planning. Areas for development are clearly identified and plans for improvement in place. Pupils articulate a high level of understanding of this Catholic mission and are actively involved in shaping and supporting it. Very strong links exist between school and parish. The school works hard to ensure excellent links with families. Whole school, class assemblies and celebrations are open to them and are well attended. Parents are well informed about what their children will be learning in RE through the termly RE newsletter and all classes receive a termly overview of curriculum work to be completed.

Overall, governors make a significant and outstanding contribution to the work and Catholic dimension of the school because they are actively engaged in all aspects of school life. They are extremely well informed through regular visits to classrooms, pupil conferencing, attendance at Mass and assemblies. They are rigorous and highly effective in discharging their statutory and canonical responsibilities and provide invaluable support and challenge for the head teacher and all staff. As active members of their parish, they ensure clear channels of communication between the school and parish.

Leaders and managers are effective in promoting community cohesion which is central to the mission of the school. They have a well developed understanding of what it means to be inclusive and communicate this through strategic planning, formal meetings at all levels, informal conversation and role modeling. All pupils, irrespective of their faith commitment, are fully included in the whole life of the school.