



INSPECTION REPORT

Saint Catharine's Primary School
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**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**

Headteacher: Mr M. Sessarego
Chair of Governors: Mrs M. Whitehouse

Date of inspection: 17-18th September 2007
Date of previous inspection: 19-20th February 2002

Reporting Inspector: Mr J. Skivington

Description of School

St. Catharine's is a smaller than average primary school, which welcomes pupils from the town and surrounding villages. There are 156 pupils on roll, of whom 46% are baptised Catholics. Pupils come from generally favourable socio economic backgrounds, with few free school meals. The number of pupils with learning difficulties is well below the average. Pupils enter the school with above average standards of attainment, although this varies from year to year, with the whole range of ability present. The school chaplain, from a neighbouring parish, provides vital support in nurturing the Catholic life of the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

St. Catharine's is a good school with outstanding features. The strong and effective leadership of the head teacher is reflected in the wholehearted support of the governing body and the commitment of the staff and parents in realising the mission of the school. The provision for collective worship, as well as the spiritual and moral development of the pupils, is excellent, and creates a strong Catholic ethos. The quality of the provision for religious education is good. Good teaching promotes good learning because it generally meets the learning needs of the pupils, although the more able pupils would benefit from greater challenge in their work. Assessment for learning is becoming a clearer focus, although its impact on achievement is not yet fully realised. Leadership and management of the subject are good.

Grade 2

Improvement since the last inspection

The areas for development outlined in the last inspection report have been addressed, and the improvement is good. The quality of teaching is now consistently good. Strategies for developing the assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress are in place although not yet sharp and focused enough to show the individual pupil how they can improve, particularly in extended writing. The link between parish and school is still weak, but the spiritual life of the school is not significantly compromised, thanks to a very supportive chaplain and the school's efforts to provide the best possible solutions in the less than ideal circumstances.

Grade 2

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

This school knows itself well. The areas for further developments have been correctly identified, and achievable objectives set out in the school improvement plan, the success of which is well monitored. Ongoing professional training for the staff, who are already well qualified to teach religious education, keeps them up to date with the latest developments. There is a willingness to embrace best practice by seeking advice from outside agencies, such as the diocesan advisors, so as to be better equipped to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and this is work still in progress.

Grade 2

What the school should do to improve further

- To ensure closer monitoring of pupils' work so that they know more clearly where they are, and what they must do to improve
- To provide greater challenge in written work, particularly for the more able pupils

Catholic Life of the school

Leadership and Management

The quality of the leadership of the head teacher and senior staff in leading and developing the Catholic life of the school is good. The governing body and school chaplain are very supportive in maintaining the Catholic ethos and mission of the school, which reaches out beyond the school to the parents and the wider community. The mission statement is clear, displayed around the school, and reflected on at the beginning of every academic year. At the heart of the school is an openness and welcome for all, and an invitation to participate fully in all that goes on. The inclusion of all learners is central to its vision, through its belief that all are created in the image of God. The participation of all pupils, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, in the Mass and assemblies, for example, is an indication of this. There are very good links with parents as well as external agencies to reinforce the high standard of care, guidance and support the school provides

Grade 2

Collective Worship

The quality of the provision for prayer and collective worship is excellent. There are ample opportunities for prayer at the beginning and end of the day, and during lessons. The pupils invariably show great reverence and put feeling into their prayers, making

the Sign of the Cross carefully and listening attentively. The liturgical life of the school is good despite the infrequent use of the parish church. A special effort is made to celebrate the liturgy well and class Masses are particularly popular. For example, the Mass during the inspection was a joyful celebration, with well-prepared readings and prayers, and the singing was enthusiastic. An impressive number of parents participated, and their presence was both an affirmation of the importance of the Mass as well as excellent role modelling for the pupils. Pupils themselves prepare and lead acts of worship with confidence, skill and enthusiasm from their earliest years. Collective worship contributes enormously to their spiritual and moral development. The effect of the homilies they hear, the messages from the parables and the life of Jesus, as well as the many daily exhortations to respect life and care for others, is evident in the pupils' care for others and their good behaviour around the school. It is also seen in the many charities and good works supported by fundraising, such as CAFOD, Shoe Box appeal, and the adoption by individual pupils of children who were victims of the tsunami in Sri Lanka. Their work with Welcome Hill children is a valuable dimension to their own growth, confidence and maturity.

Grade 1

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Pupils join the school with broadly average levels of religious knowledge and understanding. By the end of Year 6 standards of attainment are above average. This represents good achievement and progress over time. Those with special educational needs achieve as well as the others because of the extra support they receive in lessons. By the end of Year 1 the pupils are able to sequence stories and recognise special places and times, such as the class altar and prayer. Year 2 pupils are able to compose their own prayers and respond in short sentences to the topics they are studying. In Year 3 and Year 4 they quickly develop the ability to write empathetically, for example, a letter to Pontius Pilate, or the post Easter narrative. The work set, although usually well done, does not always challenge the pupils, the more able particularly. The marking of pupils' work is on occasion unhelpful, because it does not really show them what they must do to improve. The knowledge and understanding of pupils in Year 5 is sound, although they do not have many opportunities to write at length in response to what they are learning. This is the case also in Year 6 although they do have a very good understanding of the main tenets of the Faith and can discuss, using appropriate religious terms, the significance of the Eucharist, the events leading up to the resurrection, the divinity of Jesus, and the meaning of prayer. Statements such as 'Jesus is the Bread of Life' are well explained. Pupils work hard in their lessons and their behaviour is excellent.

Grade 2

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Both teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use a variety of strategies to engage the pupils. For instance, a lesson where a letter of advice from a relative was used to introduce Paul's letters to the early Christian communities. The pupils were able to understand better as a result. Drama and power point were used very effectively to get across the topics, and teachers took care to explain clearly and question frequently to check understanding. The pupils themselves enjoyed lessons where they were able to participate, but did not find 'lots of drawing and colouring' challenging enough. They said that teachers 'did not mind us not writing much if they thought we had got the point'. The marking of written work is generally congratulatory, and not fully used to encourage improvement and greater intellectual effort, especially in becoming more aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life. The school is working on refining assessment procedures, and knows it has to monitor performance and assessment for learning more rigorously.

Grade 2

Quality of the Curriculum

The curriculum is balanced and meets external requirements. It is based on the diocesan guidelines, and the syllabus is adapted to the particular needs of the pupils. Other faiths and cultures are explored through topics on Judaism and Islam. The new course on sex and relationship education 'In the Beginning ' has been successfully introduced. Pupils are prepared well, over a two-year cycle, for their First Communion. The curriculum is further enriched through many activities in which pupils take the initiative, for example, through the work of the school council, and prefects who look after the younger children. Pupils and parents respond wholeheartedly to charitable appeals, with concerts and other fundraising events. These activities make for social cohesion in involving pupils in the wider community, including overseas, with their links to Sri Lanka and Peru. The curriculum makes a good contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils because it raises their awareness of the needs of others, and offers them the opportunity to exercise in practical ways their feelings of compassion and generosity. All pupils, regardless of ability and background, are fully involved.

Grade 2

Leadership and management of Religious Education

The leadership of the subject is well focused on the school's Catholic mission, and this has been effectively shared with all staff who teach religious education. Development needs have been acknowledged and carefully planned for. Professional development is encouraged through Inset sessions specifically on the subject, and despite a sense of isolation from the centre of the diocese, there is a commitment to learn and incorporate what is best practice. A more structured approach to the subject needs to include a

marking policy, which really challenges all pupils, to achieve excellence, but also shows them how to improve by providing them with some level indicators, or yardsticks of progress, and subsequent targets to aim for. Resources are adequate and managed well, with effective use of information technology to encourage independent learning. The governors discharge their responsibilities towards religious education well, and plan a closer support by naming a governor specifically for this role. All statutory requirements are met. They are fully committed to the future of St. Catharine's, and to maintaining its strong Catholic ethos, while fully accepting and welcoming everyone to play a full part in the life of the school.

Grade 2