

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



## **INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

### **ST VINCENT'S VOLUNTARY AIDED CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL** Hammersmith Gardens, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 5RG

DfE School No: 109631

URN: 820/3348

Head Teacher: Mr J Carroll

Chair of Governors: Mrs C Donohue

Reporting Inspector: Mrs M Betts

Associate Inspector: Mrs E O'Brien

**Date of inspection: 22 March 2018**

Date report issued: 20 April 2018

Date of previous inspection: October 2012

### **Information about the school**

St Vincent's Catholic School is a one-form entry primary school with nursery provision for pupils aged 3 to 11 years. There are 222 children on roll, 79% of whom are baptised Catholic. 45% of teachers are Catholic. The school serves the parishes of St Vincent's Houghton Regis whose church is adjoining the school, St Mary's, Dunstable and St Elizabeth's, Toddington. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is 9.4% which is below the national average. Around two thirds of pupils are from a range of diverse ethnic backgrounds. During the last two years the leadership of the school has changed twice. The school has very recently become part of St Alban Catholic Academies Trust.

### **Key grades for inspection**

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

### **Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school.**

**Grade 2**

St Vincent's School is a good school committed to enhancing the spiritual and academic development of all pupils. The school has a strong Catholic ethos and respect between all staff and pupils demonstrates the school's mission statement "Jesus be the centre of our lives". One pupil explained "we feel safe here within one big happy family". Worship and prayer are central in the school's life. Pupils' spiritual, moral, and social development is very good and this is reflected in their excellent behaviour and very positive attitudes. Religious education (RE) has a high profile and is led by an enthusiastic and dedicated leader. Pupils make steady progress in this subject throughout their school life.

### **The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**Grade 2**

The school has a good capacity for sustained improvement. The executive headteacher, staff and governors are committed to raising the standards of pupils' learning in religious education. Leaders are implementing a new teaching strategy which should give all pupils the opportunity to reach their full potential. The school has adopted a more rigorous system for gathering achievement data, better enabling staff to identify areas for improvement. Both strategies are evidencing a rise in attainment. Staff are well supported in all aspects of their role relating to the religious nature of the school.

The school has progressed well in addressing the areas for improvement highlighted in the last Section 48 inspection report. The diocesan RE scheme is now fully embedded and teachers have received comprehensive training and deliver the curriculum with confidence. Senior leaders and governors are now more proactive in evaluating the school's Catholic life. Governors attend religious celebrations, undertake learning walks and take opportunities to challenge and question the senior staff. The school's self-evaluation is derived from monitoring by the senior leaders who thereby gain a good overall view of the school's strengths and areas for development. This information is employed to further improve pupil outcomes. St Vincent's is developing contacts with the other schools in the Trust, anticipating valuable opportunities for training and further development through these links.

### **What the school should do to improve further:**

- share best practice within the school to ensure that good RE teaching consistently includes a greater number of outstanding features
- increase pupils' involvement in worship by providing opportunities for groups of pupils to plan, prepare and present their own small acts of worship and thus develop their knowledge and understanding of the elements of worship whilst also enhancing their own spiritual development
- improve the website to better promote the school's strong Catholic ethos and the high profile of religious education.

## **Outcomes for pupils**

## **Grade 2**

Pupils benefit well from the school's Catholic ethos. Their growing awareness of the Catholic faith is fostered as is their understanding of how this might be lived out. Pupils realise the importance of key moments of celebration throughout the liturgical year. The school's 'statements to live by' are understood well and pupils strive to make them a daily reality. These impact well on pupils who demonstrate good behaviour and respect for each other. The school regularly celebrates any pupils who are seen to demonstrate these values. Pupils also show an understanding of the need to forgive and some mentioned this in relation to the school's behavioural expectations. The school promotes social development very well; pupils are generally confident in expressing their own opinions and views. Older pupils willingly undertake responsibilities and appreciate being able to help the younger children, for example, as playtime buddies. Their achievements are recognised and celebrated by the whole school community.

All pupils respond well to worship and the school's prayer life. They participate respectfully and with reverence. Worship contributes well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Pupils know a variety of traditional prayers and write prayers as part of their learning in religious education. They enjoy worship especially when helping to present it and when visual material and drama are used to enhance the message. During worship observed pupils listened well to the story and reflected quietly how they could show Jesus' light to others. They sing extremely well and this adds to the worship experience. At present worship is organised by staff although pupils, as Faith Ambassadors, assist in the presentation. If pupils planned worship their understanding of the various elements required to produce a meaningful spiritual experience would be enhanced.

Chaplaincy has an impact on the spiritual experience of staff and pupils. The RE team, with the special needs co-ordinator, are responsible for pupils' pastoral support. Pupils are well aware of the procedures and personnel there to help them resolve any problems. They feel confident that these will be dealt with. Pupils feel safe, secure and cared for in school. Parents appreciate the caring nature of the staff and the encouragement for pupils to develop knowledge of their faith and to witness to Christian values.

Pupils make good progress in RE. The majority now achieve expected levels and some achieve higher. In one year group a significant proportion, just over a quarter, achieved attainment greater than that expected for their age. Pupils are learning to assess how well they are doing by use of "I can" statements. They enjoy their religious education lessons especially when given practical and creative tasks and when they have opportunities for discussion. Pupils feel confident to express personal views, and show respect to others while listening. Examples were observed by the inspectors of pupils demonstrating deep and thoughtful reflection. After discussing the Good Friday Liturgy, one pupil said that she had learnt that new life can come out of death, and a younger pupil, learning how Jesus washed the disciples' feet, wrote "this was a bizarre thing for a King of Kings to do". Pupils' books are very well presented and evidence a range of written tasks, including extended writing.

## **Leaders and managers**

## **Grade 2**

The executive headteacher, senior leadership team and governors are deeply committed to promoting and maintaining the school's Catholic life. A clear and effective vision is demonstrated by the richness of pupils' Catholic experiences which promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social development and faith awareness. The school is a welcoming, inclusive community where all members are individually respected and valued. Governors fulfil their statutory and canonical responsibilities. They are supportive and kept well informed about the work of the school through visits and regular reports. However, the strength of the school's Catholic ethos and the high priority that is given to religious education is not promoted on the school website. Pupils are proud of their school, especially mentioning their

teachers who they say are trusting, listen to them and support their learning well. Parents responded extremely positively to the inspection questionnaire. 99% of parents were happy with the RE curriculum and supportive of the school ethos, and of the Christian values taught. The school has strong links with the parish through the close involvement of the former parish priest. The new priest is eager to maintain these links. Parishioners regularly attend school Masses.

The religious education leader, being well supported by senior leaders, ensures the subject has a high profile. She is enthusiastic and committed, keeps herself informed of ongoing developments and helps to guide teachers in their RE curriculum planning. She also organises a weekly reflection which takes place in the prayer room. The senior leadership team conduct a range of monitoring activities including RE learning walks, regular planning and book scrutinies as well as evaluating RE data. Moderation of pupils' work has been undertaken with other partner schools in order to ensure consistency of judgements. The school is piloting the new diocesan assessment framework in one year group. The RE budget is in line with that given to other core subjects.

### **Provision**

### **Grade 2**

Worship, Mass and prayer are central in the school's life. The school delivers a rich programme of prayer and worship linked to the Catholic tradition. Pupils are able to contribute their own prayers to the prayer room board. Worship themes reflect the school's values and the liturgical year. A calm reflective atmosphere is created for worship. Visual presentation and scripture are used well and a clear message is delivered. KS2 pupils regularly attend Mass offered by the chaplain.

The quality of classroom religious education overall is good. Where RE lessons were best, teaching was clearly focused on the learning objective, instructions were clear and links were made to the "Big Question" of the topic. In these lessons visual presentations, imaginative planning, open questioning, a lively pace, talking partners and practical activities were all employed to motivate and engage pupils. Teachers' RE subject knowledge is sound and they have high expectations for pupils' outcomes. Teaching assistants gave good support to groups and to individual pupils. Formal assessments are undertaken regularly and linked to national expectations. These are now being recorded on Target Tracker which enables staff to have a more detailed knowledge of pupil progress. Marking offers justifiable praise and often encourages pupils to extend their 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 given to religious education following the 'Come and See' programme required by the diocese. Scripture is often an important ingredient in or focus for a task. For example, inspectors observed a higher ability group comparing and contrasting the same event from each of the four gospel accounts. However, within written responses pupils do not readily back their answers with links to their Bible knowledge. Pupils are encouraged to become aware of the demands of religious commitment as demonstrated in an RE lesson when, learning about Simon of Cyrene supporting Jesus, pupils considered ways they might also give their time and energy for the sake of others. The curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Religious education is often linked to other curriculum areas particularly to literacy and art. Other faiths are studied. The priests are used as extra resources for learning. Attractive RE displays give added value to this core subject and the "respond" sessions of the RE programme take place in the Prayer Room. A prayer garden is currently being developed which will provide further opportunity for meditation and quiet reflection.

The inspectors wish to thank the school's senior leaders, RE lead, staff and children for their very warm welcome and for contributing to their informative and interesting visit.