

St John's Catholic Primary School

Berry Lane, Rickmansworth, Herts, WD3 7HG

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 9 June 2017



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is good

- Where teaching is at its best, activities are well matched to the abilities of the pupils, supporting those who need it and challenging the more able.
- The school has recently updated its scheme of work to ensure that it fully meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory.
- Pupils enjoy religious education and engage in their lessons.
- Religious education is well resourced and the pupils benefit from high quality books and artefacts.
- Pupils show good learning behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- Pupils make good progress across the key stages and it is in line with other subjects.
- Marking is regular and, in the best cases, moves the pupils forward in their learning.
- Homework is used to develop knowledge and understanding in religious education.
- Moderation takes place across a number of local schools in order to validate the school's own judgements.
- A tracking system now checks pupils' progress at more regular points of the year.

Classroom religious education is not yet outstanding because

- Recent improvements in practice are not yet fully embedded.
- The challenge and pace of lessons could increase to make most of all learning opportunities.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- 'Faith is the beating heart of our school and it makes the boundaries stronger' said one child. This is evident throughout the school.
- Religious Education receives 10% of curriculum time as required by the Bishops' Conference.
- The pupils are empowered to take an active part in all aspects of the Catholic life of the school.
- Prayer is an integral part of the school day and environment.
- The school makes full use of its setting to reflect the church year and mark celebrations such as Pentecost and Mary's month of May.
- The school has formed strong links with the local parishes and is supported well by the local priests.
- Groups, like 'Mini Vinnies' and the 'Apostles of Mercy', plan, organise and run charity events for the rest of the school.
- The school has developed links with a local day centre and has entertained them with carols at Christmas and flowers from The May Procession.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and value the work they do for the pupils.
- The pupils show great care for each other, especially those who may be new to the school.
- The school takes full advantage of the support offered by the diocese and participates in events held centrally, for example the Good Shepherd Mass.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

Religious education (RE) has developed a great deal since the last inspection. The staff have undergone training to make sure that they are applying the Agreed Understandings correctly and moderate their own work with that of other local schools to make sure their judgements are accurate. Work has also been done with these schools to look at how to enable the pupils achieve higher attainment levels in RE. Marking in the pupils' books is beginning to show that staff are challenging pupils to think at higher levels.

The content of classroom religious education is good

The school has recently updated its scheme of work to ensure that it fully meets the requirements of the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory*. Staff have received training on this and how it applies to the Attainment Levels and the Agreed Understandings. The school is well resourced and classes have access to a large number of Bibles to aid their work. Teaching assistants support the pupils in each class. The school is greatly enhanced by art work which reinforces teaching such as the Creation Story, the Corporal Acts of Mercy and Pentecost as well as information about the school's patron saint. Other faiths are covered during each school year, with the pupils covering Judaism and other world religions.

Pupil achievement in religious education is good

Pupils' attainment in RE is good. They make good progress over the key stages and attainment in RE is in-line with that of other subjects. The school has been able to take advantage of the diocesan training for upper Key Stage 2 teachers in delivering the scheme of work in a way which challenges pupils to achieve higher levels of attainment and the parish priests have worked with all staff to develop good subject knowledge. Assessment now takes place at the end of each topic and this data is being used to track progress from Years 1 to 6 more closely to ensure that the assessment is accurate and thus progress is as rapid as possible. This tracking now needs to be extended to include the Foundation Stage. Moderation with local deanery schools and at diocesan level helps to benchmark these judgements. Pupils show good religious literacy skills and are able to use language from the Mass and other forms of liturgy in their own prayers. Pupils say that they enjoy their lessons and particularly enjoy taking part in 'freeze frame' work around different Bible stories. In the best lessons, pupils are given work well matched to their ability, taking their knowledge and extending it through careful questioning. In some cases, the pupils do not move immediately onto this stage and lose time completing work they can already do.

The quality of teaching is good

Teaching is good with teachers showing increasingly high expectations of the pupils. Staff have good subject knowledge, supported by the parish priests and subject leader who prepare them in the topics. Pupils are engaged in their learning and enjoy their lessons; children in Foundation Stage were able to come up with messages to pass on about being joyful, after talking about the message of Pentecost. Lessons are planned to build on the pupils' existing knowledge; in one class, the lesson carried on from the previous lesson examining the Apostle's Creed and in another, pupils could draw on Bible stories they had covered the year before in order to share the good news about Jesus. The pupils work well in groups, pairs or on their own and are confident in giving answers and making suggestions; they are supported by the staff to develop their understanding. Marking has clearly been an area of development and, in the best cases, staff use it to challenge pupils to think more deeply around an area and give them time to respond to further questions. This needs to be consistent across the classes. Success criteria are used across the school to scaffold learning.

Homework is set in RE and adds to the depth of understanding the pupils can bring to their class work. Challenge and pace were evident in most of the lessons, with pupils supported in their learning when they needed to be. In some cases, the chance to move pupils straight onto higher level work was missed.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education is good

The head of school, who is also the subject leader, supported by his senior team and the executive head, provides good leadership and management of religious education. He has a clear understanding of what needs to be done to make further improvements in classroom RE and the evidence shows that this work has begun in many areas and will continue to impact on the progress and attainment of the pupils. The more regular assessments, tracking of data, monitoring of teaching and the growing consistency of policies such as the marking policy, will continue to improve the opportunities given to the pupils. The RE action plan, which forms a discrete part of the whole school development plan, makes clear the next steps in classroom practice. Regular monitoring by governors means that they are able to support and challenge the head in this work and the regular involvement of the parish priests supports staff in teaching RE. There is good support for non-Catholic members of staff. Self-evaluation by the leadership team shows a good awareness of the strengths of teaching and learning in the school and what needs to be done to develop them further, and the current position of the school on this journey with a stable and supportive staff would indicate that it well on the way to achieving these goals.

What should the school do to develop further in classroom religious education?

- Continue to develop relationships with local primaries in order to benchmark standards in RE.
- Fully embed all recent developments in classroom practice and monitoring of classroom RE.
- Continue to support the knowledge and understanding of non-Catholic staff.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

The classes are now fully engaged in planning and leading their own class acts of worship and all follow a common format. The parish priests from the local area are fully engaged with the school, with one of the priests serving on its governing body. Both are regular visitors to the school, supporting the teaching, celebrating the sacraments with the pupils and leading them on visits to Westminster Cathedral.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

RE clearly permeates the whole school, from the displays in the main areas, through the classrooms and in the way staff and pupils interact with each other. As one child commented 'Faith is the beating heart of our school and it makes the boundaries stronger'; another commented 'our school may not be the best looking, but it's what's inside which counts' showing a real understanding that the school is a place where the gospel values are lived out day to day by the community. The school gives the full amount of time required by the Bishops' Conference to the teaching of RE and has financed it well over the years. It is led by the head of school, giving it due importance within the life of the school. He is supported well by the governors and parish priests as well as the executive head of the school. The school makes use of its ground to provide a prayer garden, accessible to the pupils and to mark events like Pentecost and Mary's month of May.

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community

is outstanding

The school places a great emphasis on prayer and liturgy, starting lessons and staff meetings with appropriate prayers. The pupils are now used to planning their own classroom worship and show their familiarity with more formal liturgies by using that language in their own worship. Different ways of praying are presented to the pupils, with the chaplaincy group praying with younger pupils and leading the Rosary and pupils being given the chance to participate in guided meditation in class. In response to a request from the pupils gathered during pupil voice collection, each class now has the opportunity to visit the church for Mass. During the Year of Mercy, classes had the opportunity to visit Westminster Cathedral and pray "The Way of Mercy" led by the parish priest. The way in which the pupils still spoke about these visits show they have had a long-lasting effect on them. Pentecost is celebrated with the whole school wearing Pentecost colours and taking part in art and craft activities. The school works hard to make sure that non-Catholic pupils and staff feel included in all aspects of the prayer life of the school.

The contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice –

is outstanding

The pupils of St John's show an outstanding commitment to the Common Good. Through their various groups they plan and organise many events to reach out to others. The chaplaincy group organise prayer opportunities, the Mini Vinnies organise events to collect donations for the local food bank and to support charities working in their school. The school council supports national charities like 'The Passage'. In addition to this, the pupils recognise they can give of themselves as well as giving money. There are strong links with a local day centre where the pupils sing Christmas carols and donated the flowers for the May procession so that the users of the centre could make bouquets. The pupils treat each other with respect and courtesy and make new members of the school feel welcome. During the inspection, several pupils received awards in the achievement

assembly for making these new members of their classes feel at home so quickly. The display of the corporal acts of mercy was made by the pupils and is displayed prominently for all to see and act upon.

The partnership with parents, school and parish, and collaboration as an integral part of the diocese through its relationship with the diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

is outstanding

The school has strong links with the parishes of St John's, Our Lady Help of Christians and St John Fisher and works closely with the parish priests there. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive, not just of this work which they value greatly, but all of the work carried out by the school which is shown in their responses to the parental questionnaire. Parents told the inspectors that the pupils are encouraged to demonstrate their faith through their daily actions and the achievement assembly held during the inspection was very well attended. The school makes full use of the diocese to support and develop its work, sending staff on training and conferences, and attending diocesan events like The Good Shepherd Mass at Westminster Cathedral. The school has strong links with St Joan of Arc school with which it has a 'soft' federation agreement and many of the pupils spoke of their plan to attend this secondary school. It also works closely with other schools in its deanery group.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school

is outstanding

The outstanding leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school builds on a rich tradition at the school and has remained a high priority for all the staff. Events like the May procession and facilities like the prayer garden are part of the fabric of the school and are valued by staff, parents and pupils. They are 'learning and living God's truth in love' in every aspect of their school experience. There is no mistaking the centrality of Christ in the school. This is shown through the displays, the assemblies and the relationships modelled by the staff and taken up by the pupils. Pupils are given real opportunities to explore and develop how they can contribute to their school, parishes and the world around them, guided with a clear direction and a shared passion for the Church's mission for Catholic education by the head of school, the executive head, the school staff and governors and supported by their parents.

What should the school do to develop further the Catholic life of the school?

- Explore further opportunities for pupils from St Joan of Arc to support the prayer life of the school.
- Continue to develop pupil's involvement in the development of the Catholic life of the school and their service of each other in school.
- Continue to develop ways in which to involve all parents in the Catholic life of the school.

Information about this school

- The school is a one form entry Catholic Primary school in the locality of Rickmansworth.
- The school serves the parishes of St John's, Mill End; Our Lady Help of Christians, Rickmansworth; St John Fisher, Chorleywood and St Bede's, Croxley Green.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 91.1%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 4.4 % and from other faiths is 2 %. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 54.5 %.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 1.
- There are 11% of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom none have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is well below average.
- There is a well below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 21 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (10 %).

Department for Education Number	9193398
Unique Reference Number	117475
Local Authority	Hertfordshire

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	4 -11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	203
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Laura Sharp
Executive Headteacher	Mr Peter Sweeney
Head of School	Mr Anthony Hall
Telephone number	01923 774004
Website	www.stjohns705.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@stjohns705.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3 May 2012
Grades from previous inspection:	
Classroom religious education	Good
The Catholic life of the school	Outstanding

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out (i) under the requirements of the Canon 806 and (ii) in accordance with the Framework for Diocesan Inspections 2015 approved by the Archbishop of Westminster and (iii) under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

- The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection.
- During the inspection seven lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended one assembly and a number of acts of worship.
- Meetings were held with school staff, pupils and governors.
- Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

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Published by the Diocese of Westminster

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