



Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

INSPECTION REPORT

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Beauchamp Road

Molesey

Surrey

KT8 2PG

Telephone: 020 8979 5893

e-mail address: admin@stalbans.surrey.sch.uk

DfES Number: 936/3921

Headteacher: Mr Martin Brannigan

Chair of Governors: Mr Ben O'Connor

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Bishop of Arundel & Brighton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: 16th June 2011

Date of previous inspection: 3rd June 2008

Lead Inspector: Mr Michael Sheridan

Associate Inspector: Mrs Catherine Walker

Description of School

St Alban's Roman Catholic Primary School is voluntary aided and is situated in the Weybridge Deanery of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. It is maintained by Surrey Local Authority. The principal parish which the school serves is St. Barnabas, Molesey. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics at 60.6% is slightly higher than during the last inspection. The average proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 198. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average at 10.6%. Around 18.9% of pupils receive extra support in class. The majority of pupils (75%) are of White British heritage. The remainder come from a wide range of mainly White cultural heritages. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is around average at 15.6%. The current headteacher took up post in January 2011, following the retirement of his predecessor.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

St Alban's is a good and improving school. The school recognises the uniqueness of each individual and strives to promote their self esteem and self confidence. It is committed to enabling all pupils to realise their potential socially, personally, academically and spiritually. The care the school provides for its pupils is good. The gospel values of forgiveness, reconciliation, tolerance, compassion and service permeate the relationships between all members of the school community. These supportive and respectful relationships create an environment where pupils feel safe and happy. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development is good. Pupils enjoy coming to school. When asked what one thing they would change to make it a better school, one pupil replied, 'You can't. It's already a great school.' Pupils are well behaved, polite and friendly. Their attitudes reflect their enjoyment and appreciation of all the school has to offer them. They have many opportunities to develop a sense of responsibility through the school council and to take leadership roles both within the classroom and in the school itself. The mainly positive response to the parental questionnaire illustrates parents' appreciation of the school. One parent summed up the general feeling by saying, 'We are so happy with St Alban's and have been very impressed with the religious and PSE education our daughter has already received.' Partnership between home, school and parish is improving. Since the relatively recent arrival of the new parish priest, one parent commented, 'Links are getting better with the parish.... There could be more focus on the link between school and parish'.

The school has worked hard to implement the Religious Education levels of attainment and have introduced an effective system of tracking and recording pupils' progress. This is in the early stages of implementation and needs further development if it is to make a significant impact on pupils' attainment. The school has identified the importance of developing a more creative approach to the teaching of Religious Education. This has been successfully introduced but now needs further development in order to challenge all pupils, particularly the more able.

Grade 2

Improvement since the last inspection

The school has successfully addressed most of the issues raised in the last inspection. There are now a number of challenges evident in the planning for the most able, although the pace at which their learning progresses through the key stages requires further development. Evaluative marking is now more evident in Religious Education and consistently applied according to the school's marking policy requirements. There is a whole school cross curricular policy with reference to the Diocesan policy on sex and relationships education in place.

Grade 2

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

Since the recent appointment of a new headteacher and other key appointments to the governing body, the drive for raising standards is beginning to be realised. Key strategies relating to relationships between governors and senior leaders, which the school identified in the Spring term 2011, now need to be progressed and embedded to ensure that standards will continue to rise. Once these priorities have taken place, the inspectors believe the school has a good capacity to improve further.

Grade 2

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that Governors further develop their role as critical friends to senior leaders as a matter of urgency so that challenge is given as high a priority as support
- Further develop the provision for community cohesion by ensuring that the recently established national and global links are effective and rigorously evaluated
- Further develop the monitoring and evaluation of the teaching and learning of Religious Education and embed evaluative marking which clearly informs pupils what is required to progress to the next level
- Ensure that outstanding practice in teaching and learning is shared amongst all members of the Religious Education team

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

The newly appointed headteacher's vision and drive for excellence is well articulated and shared with others. He is ably supported by the senior leadership team and, as a team, they have accurately identified areas for development. The Mission Statement, which is prominent in all documentation and around the school, and the school motto, 'Lead the way', succinctly express the vision of the school. The school undertakes an annual review of its Mission Statement, which is shared with parents and pupils. The governors are very supportive and work closely with the headteacher to promote the Catholic ethos of the school. Governors are committed to serving the school and now need to develop their role as 'critical friends' to the senior leadership team, striving to find the appropriate balance between support and challenge. They acknowledge that there are still many processes to put in place and that further training is required to empower the governing body to carry out their strategic role more effectively. Out of these objectives a timetable for action is planned and key performance indicators are to be identified so that governors can elevate their role to a higher level and more readily hold senior leaders to account.

The parish priest is a regular visitor to the school and actively supports the spiritual life of the school. Relationships within the school community are excellent. These are particularly positive amongst pupils and between pupils and staff, including teaching assistants and lunchtime supervisors. The impressive displays and iconography observed during the inspection mark the school as distinctively Catholic. Parents feel that visitors are made to feel welcome. The Chair of Governors and the parish priest, who is also the link governor for Religious Education and the school ethos, are regular visitors to the school. The school has started to implement plans and a number of initiatives to provide a programme of off-site retreats and to develop pupils' awareness of the faiths and cultures of peoples from other nations.

The impact of some of the changes introduced has yet to be fully realised and assessed. There are a number of recently appointed governors who have added to the existing drive to embed more rigorous monitoring and to evaluate the impact the new initiatives will have on the Catholic life of the school and on attainment. As a result, the inspectors agree with the school's assessment that this will lead to further improvements in standards.

Parents are kept abreast of developments in school life through a very informative weekly newsletter, sent to parents and carers in hard copy and also posted on the school's impressive website, which covers news items such as feast day Masses and charitable fundraising.

Grade 2

The Prayer Life of the School

The school is a Christian community which lives out its Mission Statement, offering '...to each member the opportunity to grow in knowledge of the Father through Jesus His Son with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, fostered through prayer, worship and awareness of the scriptures...' There is a range of formal and informal opportunities for staff and learners to engage in prayer and acts of collective worship. Religious Education lessons commence with a prayer. There is a well-planned schedule of assemblies, Masses and other celebrations based on the liturgical calendar and linked to the 'Here I Am' Religious Education programme. The parish priest

celebrates Masses for the school both on-site and in the parish church. Parents and parishioners are also invited to attend.

Pupils act with reverence and are keen to participate. They prepare and lead acts of worship with confidence. For example, Year 5 pupils planned a Lenten liturgy and were involved in readings, leading prayer and reflections. Pupils are becoming skilled in the use of scripture, religious artefacts, hymns and other forms of prayer. In an impressive whole school assembly on 'Pentecost: The Gifts of the Holy Spirit', led by the headteacher, pupils were engaged in 'signing' during the opening hymn. They were actively involved throughout the assembly, having also taken responsibility for setting up the visual aids, focus table and PowerPoint presentation. A group of pupils acted out a scripture passage and diversity was celebrated by pupils sharing prayers in their mother tongues.

Staff regularly review the school's provision and seek to improve it and ensure that it is appropriate to the age and family backgrounds of learners. Good use is made of liturgical opportunities provided by the parish. The parish priest provides good leadership in the liturgical life of the school and is highly valued by staff and pupils. Accordingly, collective worship makes a good contribution to the spiritual and moral growth of the pupils

Grade 2

How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?

The promotion of community cohesion in the school is good. The school promotes a 'ministry of welcome', which is evident as a visitor enters the school. Pupils are considerate and courteous toward visitors and relationships between the staff and pupils are warm and positive as are relationships among pupils. Pupils are able to express their identity with pride and without fear. There is a common sense of belonging. Leaders respect difference, value diversity and ensure equal opportunities for all. Pupils from different backgrounds are given opportunities to work together. Provision for spiritual development celebrates, reflects and respects the religious diversity within the school community. Acts of Collective worship leave room for the other person's spiritual identity, their modes of expression and their values. Pupils' diverse backgrounds are recognised and valued in Religious Education. Pupils are equipped with skills which enable them to take a full and active part in their neighbourhood and develop relationships with people from different backgrounds. Governors take into account the needs of other schools and of the community in general. Co-operative links exist between the school, other schools, the parish and local community. In the Autumn term, senior citizens were invited to the Infants' Christmas play and were treated to mince pies and Christmas cake during the singing of carols afterwards.

Catholic Religious Education includes study of other denominations of Christianity and other world religions. Parents with different backgrounds are involved as fully as possible in the life of the school. In addition, the Catholic life of the school promotes a culture of forgiveness and respect to which both pupils and staff subscribe.

Pupils readily support local, national and international charities. For example, two Year 3 pupils are embarking on a twenty-five mile trek in the Cotswolds during the Summer holidays to raise money for a cancer charity. CAFOD too is regularly supported. Moreover, parents are involved in some of the charitable activities and events organised at school. A recent cake sale raised funds to support the Pakistan flood appeal. The Parent-Teacher Association raises money to help the school to purchase resources. The impressive signage around the school site is a testament to the parents' support of the school.

Following their attendance last term at an International Day in the locality, three Year 5 pupils were inspired to organise the setting up of a Fair Trade stall in school. They have been in dialogue with a Fair Trade coordinator and have sample products to gauge the interest of pupils in their own year group. They hope to establish the stall soon and roll out the sale of the products across the school.

The school has strong links with neighbouring primary schools, the secondary school to which a number of pupils progress and the local college. For example, pupils attended a celebration Religious Education day at the secondary school. Senior leaders are very aware of the need to extend links to communities both nationally and abroad. Currently the school sponsors a girl in India and have registered with an online organisation, called Global Gateway, for a link with a school abroad.

The staff have held a 'Lead the Way' evening to generate other ideas to extend their provision to national and international links. The school is planning to hold Festival of Light celebrations in Molesey next year in partnership with the local community, including local schools, other Christian groups and other faith communities, with the procession finishing up in the school.

The school has come a long way in a short time and, once the new initiatives bear fruit, they will need to develop rigorous impact measures in order to evaluate the success of their interventions.

Grade 2

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Attainment on entry is average. Standards are high, given the capability and starting points of pupils in the school. The school has already met, and in some instances exceeded, its target of bringing Religious Education levels into line with Literacy levels. Whilst some learners, especially lower ability pupils, progress at a good rate, year on year progress is not as developed for all learners, particularly the most able. Therefore, the inspectors agree with the school in its assessment that it should target continued improvement of the proportion of pupils attaining Level 5 in Religious Education.

Most pupils are able to discuss issues and extend their thinking and understanding. Empathetic skills are well developed. They are able to use cross-curricular links where appropriate. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and good listening skills.

There is no significant difference in progress by ethnicity or gender. Pupils' books are well presented and show consistency across year groups and progression. Their work covers a good range and is recorded in a variety of ways, including good narrative writing and, particularly in Year 5 and Year 6, digital photographs.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons is of a high standard as a result of well-planned learning opportunities. Pupils enjoy their Religious Education lessons. When asked for her opinion about her teacher, one pupil said, 'Even the boring stuff ... she makes exciting.'

Grade 2

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Teaching is generally good with many outstanding features. High expectations, good questioning skills, use of information and communication technology (ICT) and differentiated activities which are challenging were evident in the best lessons. Good class organisation and behaviour management enables effective teaching to take place. All teachers clearly articulate the learning objectives at the beginning of each lesson and revisit them throughout the lesson. Where lessons are outstanding, pupils' progress is enhanced through tasks which promote deep learning, particularly for the most able, and the pace of the lesson is brisk. As identified by the school, it is recommended that outstanding practice is shared and promoted in order to increase the rate of progress for all pupils.

Planning is a strength of the school. Teachers annotate and assess in order to evaluate progress and raise attainment. Assessment is developing well. Pupil tracking is now in place and beginning to impact on attainment. In accordance with national guidelines, work is regularly assessed against the levels of attainment. Moderation of work by staff is progressing well. Pupils' work is marked carefully with affirming comments. Some marking is formative with good replies from pupils and there is some evidence of peer and self assessment. These practices need to be shared throughout the school to embed evaluative marking which clearly informs pupils what is required to progress to the next level.

There is an electronic whiteboard in each classroom. In outstanding lessons, these are used to great effect where, not only the teachers, but also the pupils interactively engage with the technology to enhance their learning. For example, in a Year 4 lesson on 'How people can be great in God's eyes', pupils were invited to use the electronic whiteboard to select options on Jesus' response to the disciples request for places of privilege in the kingdom of heaven. One pupil from this group said, 'It made the lesson more interesting and made me want to learn more.' These opportunities should become a regular feature in Religious Education lessons throughout the school.

Grade 2

Quality of the Curriculum

All aspects of the 'Here I Am' Religious Education programme are fully covered. Quality time is given to Religious Education lessons and meets the recommendations of the Bishops' Conference and the Diocese. Teachers provide a range of interesting activities, which are matched to pupils' ability. Prayer and reflection are embedded in lessons. All teachers plan work using the 'Here I Am' Religious Education programme planning format which they have accurately annotated to inform next steps. The Religious Education policy is a helpful and informative document.

Staff make good use of ICT to promote learning. Teaching of other faiths is well taught as evidence from the pupils' books shows. Homework is used effectively to support the curriculum. Pupils had to research other faiths and share their knowledge with others in an assembly for World Religion Day. The school is currently exploring opportunities for visits to other places of worship, particularly from different faith backgrounds, and for visitors from other faiths. They already have this link with Hinduism. The provision of circle time, Education for Personal Relationships (EPR), and the Rainbows programme to support pupils in times of loss, for example, family bereavement, illness or divorce, enhances the curriculum. Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) is taught throughout the school and is set in the context of the Church's teaching and values. The policy has been ratified by governors and endorsed by the

parents. The school has a wide range of good quality resources to support all aspects of the 'Here I Am' Religious Education programme, including sets of bibles which enable older pupils to engage in independent study. As a consequence, the personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is significantly enriched.

Grade 2

Leadership and management of Religious Education

The leadership team and subject leader have overseen rapid developments in teaching and learning in the subject and complement each other's work very well. The inspectors endorse the school's recent Ofsted report which highlights the fact that 'classroom monitoring is now more rigorous, but there has not been time for the recent improvements to make a sufficient impact on how well pupils are doing.' Consequently, one of the areas for development identified in the last inspection is now in place through systematic monitoring and evaluation of underachievement. As a result, assessment for learning is now operational in the department and staff are aware of the importance of diagnostic marking. Emphasis now needs to be placed on robust evaluation of assessment for learning and recording the impact it has on pupils' learning.

The Religious Education coordinator is line managed by the headteacher. She works collaboratively with the chaplain in planning discussions with pupils relating to moral, spiritual and cultural issues. School governors and the senior leadership team should now address issues relating to measuring the impact which new initiatives and developing interventions have on learners, in order to effectively enhance their self-evaluation process. They should also keep in mind the accuracy of their grading in the document. This, in turn, will lead to further improvements in the quality of provision and planning. The Religious Education coordinator has recently returned to school after a long period of absence. She is both well qualified and knowledgeable and has attended Diocesan training regularly prior to this period. She plans to resume this training in the near future. Teachers speak positively of the support she gives them in the subject. As a consequence, the sharing of good practice and information is likely to impact positively on the continuing development of assessment for learning in the subject. This will help to drive up standards in the school.

The link governor for the subject is the parish priest, who liaises with the staff and reports back to the governors on a regular basis. Religious Education is viewed by the school's leadership as a core subject. The department receives a budget comparable to English and mathematics and can bid for increased funding in line with the school improvement plan and the subject's planned priorities. Thus Religious Education in the school has parity of status with the other core subjects.

Grade 2