

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



Inspection Report of Denominational Character and Religious Education

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

Our Lady's Catholic Primary School

Amersham Road, Amersham, HP6 5PL

URN: 110479

DfES School No: 825/3375

Headteacher: Mr M Holdsworth

Chair of Governors: Mr D. Curtis

Reporting Inspector: Mrs M. Shinkwin

Associate Inspector: Mrs E. O'Brien

Date of inspection: 26th June 2018

Date of previous inspection: 5th July 2012

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and in partnership with
Buckinghamshire Local Authority

Information about the school

Our Lady's is a one-form entry primary school in Chesham Bois, Buckinghamshire. The school was founded by the Poor Servants of the Mother of God 60 years ago and stronger links have recently been forged with the order. It serves the parishes of Our Lady's, Chesham Bois, St Columba's, Chesham, St Aidan's, Little Chalfont and Immaculate Heart of Mary, Great Missenden. There are currently 218 pupils aged 4-11 on roll and the school is over subscribed. Approximately 88% of pupils are Catholic as are 50% of the teaching staff and all of the support staff. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below the national average.

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

Our Lady's Catholic Primary school is an outstanding school. Its mission statement 'A place of learning - a community of Christ' is translated into action by the loving relationships which exist between all members of the school community. One parent phrased it in this way: 'The Church's teaching about respect, care, love, service, thoughtfulness for others, charity and stewardship is evident in every member of staff and everything that the school participates in. I am eternally grateful that our children's formative years have been shaped with the support of such a community'. More than 100 questionnaires were returned and all were positive. Pupils are proud to belong to the Our Lady's community. Their attainment levels are very good and their personal, spiritual and moral development is outstanding. Year 6 pupils are determined to retain the values and attitudes they have learnt at Our lady's. The head teacher's personal faith and commitment permeates the community and is recognised by parents and pupils.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

The school has an excellent capacity for sustained improvement. Leaders have addressed the issues highlighted for improvement in the last inspection report and have made significant progress in all areas, though teaching and learning would be improved still further through greater consistency. The system for the monitoring and evaluation of work is effective in that standards in religious education have risen appreciably year on year and are at least as high, and often higher, than those in other subjects. Teachers have established a marking system which will enable pupils to identify the next steps in their learning and ensure that they are challenged by a wide range of oral and written tasks. The school improvement plan gives a time frame for the embedding of these initiatives.

The school has the realisable ambition to become the highest attaining school in Buckinghamshire in all areas of the curriculum. The governors and headteacher are currently exploring plans to form a multi-academy trust with other local Catholic schools. Self-evaluation is a continuous priority and progress is monitored to secure improvement. Communication between the school and home is frequent, sensitive and much appreciated. This will be further enhanced once information is added to the website promoting the richness of the Catholic life of the school. Teachers are highly motivated which in turn enthuses their classes and are, themselves, inspired by the respect and appreciation they receive from the headteacher and management team both in their daily work and more formal appraisal.

The commitment of the headteacher and leadership team to building the kingdom of God in their school is manifest. Prayer and worship are central to every-day life and the teaching of the gospel is evident in the behaviours and happiness of the pupils. A chapel is planned and a statue of Our Lady will be erected in the grounds. Parents are inspired by the school's aspirations and support them wholeheartedly. They share the headteacher's high expectations of their children in the classroom and applaud his insistence on the values which will form their futures. The school, under the present leadership, governance and management, has an excellent capacity to maintain and improve its effectiveness.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure consistency of challenge in lessons by teachers' observation of best practice both within Our Lady's and in other schools
- allow sufficient time for the writing component of lessons so that the pupils' response to the tasks may be more securely assessed and next steps suggested and monitored for progress.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 1

The school's mission statement is lived by the pupils whose kindness towards each other is apparent in their interaction in class and in the playground. They make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic life of the school by their behaviour and their understanding of the importance of God's love for every person. Faith Ambassadors prepare the worship corner for each class with candles and images; they inform their class of feast days and liturgical seasons. Each week they organise a prayer group which they promote to the whole school. Their work is much appreciated and respected by other pupils and they themselves evaluate and wish to improve the service they give. Prayer both formal and spontaneous is an integral part of each day.

The contribution and interest of every pupil is also evident in their focus at whole school assembly where the volume of singing and the response to open questions is enthusiastic and heartfelt. A talented pianist accompanied the orderly entrance and leaving and pupils took responsibility for the computer and the scripture reading. They held hands with each other and staff when praying. Each religious education lesson begins with a prayer often composed by the pupils although traditional prayers are also well known. The pupils are reverent and attentive to their friends' words and can pray in silence and meditate with ease from the earliest years. Those who have different beliefs share the same ideals of love and kindness expressed in the prayers and the school community is strengthened by the sincerity and power of the pupils' prayers.

The pupils' response to the excellent Chaplaincy provision is outstanding. Two Parish Priests visit the school regularly, say Mass and celebrate other liturgies, participate in lessons and are available to the pupils. They praise the school as a welcoming community, not only for the pupils and staff but also for parents and other visitors. Each year group has responsibility for a chosen charity and the school is engaged in the 'Building the Kingdom' programme. 'Mini Vinnies' is in the initial stages in Years 4, 5 and 6. The school has a fund raising link to Ecuador and pupils also organise charity events without adult intervention. The pupils' well-being is supported by skilled and trained staff who encourage openness through class discussion. A 'worry box' is located prominently in a central point in the school and in classrooms. A counsellor is available for pupils facing emotional difficulties. The message of love and kindness, which is the constant theme of teaching, prayer and example, contributes significantly to the security and happiness of pupils.

Pupils enjoy religious education lessons and are focused on the tasks. Lessons are planned and prepared in detail and groups of pupils are able to work independently. School data indicates that achievement in religious education is very good. Behaviour is excellent and time is generally used constructively although in some lessons the pace could be quickened and the content more demanding. Most pupils enter the school with skills and knowledge at or above expected standards, allowing scope for the high level of challenge identified in some lessons. A Year 3 pupil who, when studying Rembrandt's 'The Prodigal Son', recognised the older brother as jealous, was asked why that might be. She replied, "Because he wanted a hug too." In writing tasks many pupils choose the most advanced questions because they are ambitious to extend themselves and to succeed.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

Leaders, managers and governors are deeply committed to the Catholic life of the school and live out the mission statement in their direction and organisation of the curriculum and in providing opportunities for the faith development of pupils and staff. Governors have encouraged the Headteacher to enrol in the National School of Formation attending their annual retreat so that, through the deepening of his own spiritual resources, he may enrich the school. They are often present at assemblies, Masses and other liturgies. The religious education link governor works closely with the subject co-ordinator, contributing to and evaluating the SEF-RE which reflects accurately the centrality of Christ himself in Our Lady's school. The Catholic ethos permeates every aspect of school life and parents praise "the leadership which filters down to every child: aspirational, disciplined, loving, nurturing - exceptional". The leadership, staff, pupils and parents unite to

create 'a community of Christ'. The headteacher is held in high esteem for his communication of the values of the gospel in his words, actions and example.

The religious education subject leader, in consultation with the headteacher, Chaplaincy team and governors, is highly effective. She has a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the pupils' range of ability and beliefs. All staff have attended training on delivering the 'Come and See' programme and staff who are not Catholic are given continuous support. The course is carefully monitored and evaluated through regular meetings. Teachers are confident in assessment. Where lack of challenge is identified, measures are taken to remedy this. The headteacher chairs the Buckinghamshire Catholic Schools Partnership and has supported the religious education subject leader in initiating a new moderation process across partner schools. Selected pupils' books have been used by the local authority as exemplars of high standard, though not all books scrutinised reached this level. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the meticulous preparation of lessons and contribute purposefully to learning activities. They are eager to declare their enjoyment of the subject and display knowledge of a wide range of bible stories. Learning Ladders have been introduced to allow pupils to monitor their knowledge of the main prayers of the church. Secondary schools have commented on the depth of religious understanding found in pupils coming from Our Lady's. All groups attain well in religious education, including those with English as an additional language and disadvantaged and ethnic minority pupils. The majority make better than expected progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2. Data is scrutinised regularly to measure and track improvement. Plans are already in place to ensure more consistent assessment and to increase the social action in which the pupils engage. It is hoped that space will be allocated for a chapel to encourage in the pupils a love of private prayer and meditation.

Provision

Grade 1

The provision for collective worship and the prayer life of the school is outstanding. In addition to whole school assemblies, which are planned to expand on the theme of the previous Sunday's readings, pupils attend and contribute to regular Masses and seasonal liturgies. During Holy Week the school came together to present the Passion using 'Born for This'. Christmas is marked by the enactment of the nativity in each class and the feast of Corpus Christi was made memorable by a school procession. Parents are invited to these services and are alerted through social media. Staff and pupils pray together regularly and prayer is part of all school celebrations. Meetings, including governors meetings, begin with a prayer. Pupils, encouraged by the parish priests who visit the school, are increasingly involved in parish Masses where they serve and read. The Chaplaincy team is also excellent in its accessibility and practical service, promoting the ethos of love and kindness by their example. Pupils extend this concern to those people who are in need in our own country and in other parts of the world. A collection of food was made during Lent for the Catholic Workers' Farm and the school community gives generously to CAFOD. Pupils use their own enterprise and initiative to fundraise. For example, an Early Years pupil wrote a poetry book with his friends, and sold copies, donating the money to Refugee Action.

The best of the teaching is outstanding and all teaching is at least good. During inspection the week's theme of forgiveness was made relevant to each class through prayers, meditation and discussion. Stories from scripture, either read or watched as a cartoon, show God's forgiveness and his example is applied to the lives of the pupils. Deep learning has clearly taken place, both in knowledge of the gospels and in ways of behaving towards each other. Year 2, having written on a sheet in the shape of a 7 (because Peter was told to forgive seventy times seven) an incident they found hard to forgive, went on a forgiveness walk to a fire in the school garden where each one threw in their 7 and with it the incident. This made a deep impression on each. Teachers grade the challenge of written work and pupils are encouraged to extend themselves by choosing the more demanding exercises. In some cases, greater explanation of requirements, together with modelling of expectations, would enable some pupils to achieve even more. Written work does not always reflect the high quality of teaching either in length or in depth, though excellent learning and understanding have also been observed. High quality resources, including technology, are used very effectively and teaching assistants offer excellent support. Most pupils remain focused and highly motivated throughout lessons and are eager to discuss their learning afterwards.

The school has adopted the 'Come and See' programme which is supplemented with other material when needed. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the content. The programme is regularly monitored and staff find the Diocesan training sessions invaluable. The required 10% of curriculum time is devoted to classroom religious education and parents of all beliefs support the school in its mission and appreciate the values engendered in their children. Other faiths are studied and visits to a mosque and other places of worship are

planned. Colourful and informative displays in classrooms and corridors are constant reminders of the fact that this is a school committed to its Catholic vision.

The Inspectors would like to express their gratitude to the headteacher, governors, staff and pupils of Our Lady's for the warmth of their welcome and their willingness to answer questions. We very much enjoyed our visit to this outstanding school.