

The Catholic Diocese of Northampton



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

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

**ST JOSEPH'S VOLUNTARY AIDED
CATHOLIC JUNIOR SCHOOL**

Gardenia Avenue, Luton, LU3 2NS

DfE School No: 821/3356

URN: 109635

Head Teacher: Mrs J Lee

Chair of Governors: Mrs D Main

Reporting Inspector: Mrs M Betts

Associate Inspector: Mrs M Everington

Date of Inspection: 3 December 2013

Date Report Issued: 17 December 2013

Date of previous Inspection: July 2010

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

Information about this school

St Joseph's Junior is a four form entry school for pupils aged 7 to 11 years. There are 477 pupils on roll, 81% of whom are baptised Catholics. 78% of the teachers and 79% of the support staff are Catholic. The school serves the parishes of St Joseph, Holy Ghost, St John and Holy Family in Luton. Just over half of the pupils are from minority ethnic heritages which is much higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is also above average. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is below the national average.

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Joseph's Junior School is an outstanding Catholic school. The extremely strong Catholic identity permeates the school's daily life. The outstanding partnership between the school, the home and the church very effectively promotes the high quality care and well-being of the whole school community. Relationships within the school are excellent and reflect Christian respect and concern for others. Pupils described their school as "like a family". The pastoral provision for each individual child is one of the school's great strengths. As a result pupils' personal, spiritual and moral development is outstanding. Prayer, Mass and worship are of pivotal importance in the school's life. Staff are committed to the very high profile given to religious education. Pupils make good progress throughout their school life in knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

The last inspection report suggested that there were no major improvements needed. The school has not remained complacent but has continued to make further developments. Pupils and staff have designed and established an attractive courtyard prayer garden and outside classroom for community as well as school use. They are close to achieving the Fairtrade School Status award. The school has continued to develop RE assessment procedures and now tracks more thoroughly each child's individual progress. Special achievement books now record and celebrate pupils' individual gifts and talents so enhancing their self-esteem and confidence.

The school's self-evaluation is derived from rigorous monitoring by the headteacher, senior staff and RE subject leader who thereby gain a very good overall view of the school's strengths and development needs. The inspectors concurred with the majority of judgements made by the school. Appropriate improvement actions are fed into the whole school development plan.

The headteacher, leadership team and governors plan strategically and thoroughly in order to continue to promote their vision for the school's Catholic life and RE to the whole of the school community. Staff, pupils and parents appreciate the values and ethos of the school and fully participate in its spiritual and pastoral dimensions. All staff are committed to achieving high quality religious education and are willing to improve their skills through training opportunities. Governors have also attended local and diocesan training events. The school remains dedicated to promoting, developing and leading collaborative working within the Deanery schools to sustain effective Catholic partnerships for the benefit of all. The current leadership of the school is strong with a very good capacity to further improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils more responsibility for developing their own spiritual lives by providing opportunities for them to prepare and plan their own class acts of worship.
- Raise the quality of teaching further by the teachers being more creative in adapting RE plans so that input and tasks fully engage and motivate the learning of all groups of pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 1

The extent to which pupils benefit from the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. They know and understand the school's mission statement and strive to achieve it in all areas of their school life. Pupils are proud of their school and show concern for the well-being of others. They appreciate the gospel values taught especially mentioning the need to show forgiveness to others. Pupils' personal, spiritual and moral development is outstanding and this is reflected in their very good behaviour and their positive attitudes to learning. They demonstrate a respect for the cultural diversity within the school community. Pupils willingly undertake responsibilities and are given many opportunities to act on their own initiative and ideas, for example in Anti-Bullying Group, Play Leaders, Fairtrade team and as Pupil Chaplains. Pupils' achievements are recognised and valued. Pupils praise the friendly, caring attitude of the teachers who listen to them and help solve any problems they may have.

All pupils respond well to worship and the prayer life of the school. They participate respectfully and with ease. Pupils have opportunities to create their own prayers as part of their RE learning. They enjoy worship especially the lively songs which they sing extremely well. They appreciate listening to or presenting class assemblies based on an RE topic. Pupils have a good understanding of the liturgical year and enjoy experiencing its celebrations such as the Advent liturgy observed during the inspection. They contribute to the presentation of Mass. The pupil chaplains are involved with the planning of some liturgies; a further development for the school is to now involve all pupils in the preparation, organization and leading of class acts of worship.

Chaplaincy provision makes a powerful contribution to the spiritual life and the well-being of the whole community. The members of the team are known well to pupils who respond enthusiastically to the liturgical and pastoral experiences provided. Pupils feel safe, secure and cared for in school and are aware of the procedures and personnel to help them resolve any problems. The individual needs of each child are well-catered for by small nurture groups and specially organised clubs which are targeted at specific children to raise self-esteem. Parents appreciate the approachability, care and friendliness of all the staff.

Pupils know RE is an important subject and through it develop a sound knowledge of the Catholic faith. They achieve age appropriate RE levels of attainment and progress is in line with national expectations. Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons especially when given practical tasks. An example was when pupils were enthusiastically engaged together prioritising elements associated with Advent and were very interested in comparing their own ideas with those of other groups. They enjoy sharing opinions with each other and work well together. Pupils are keen to learn about other faith traditions. Work is presented well and demonstrates a range of written tasks. Pupils' responses in lessons and RE books show evidence of their growing depth and maturity of thought and opinions.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors are deeply committed to promoting the school's Catholic life. The school mission statement "Building up God's Kingdom together" is clearly communicated and inspires all in the school community. Very attractive displays and good quality artefacts around the school confirm the Catholic identity. The school is a welcoming inclusive community where all members are respected and valued. Pupils are encouraged to show compassion for others through their fundraising for charities, for example their Advent charity is for Cafod. Governors fulfil their statutory and canonical responsibilities. They are very supportive and kept well informed about the work of the school through visits, meetings and the headteacher's regular report. Governors attend Diocesan training and meet with other governors in the Deanery partnership. The headteacher and senior leaders have conducted a range of monitoring activities related to the school's religious life and this provides a firm basis for areas of future development. The school works in partnership with parents who responded extremely positively to their autumn term questionnaire. Parents mentioned the friendly and family atmosphere of the school. They feel welcome and are invited to celebrations and the weekly family prayer and reflection services. The school has strong links with the church through the close involvement of the parish priest and parishioners. For example parishioners helped pupils to make the school Advent Wreaths. The learning of traditional prayers has been effectively promoted by the priest in his role as RE governor and each child has been provided with a daily prayer card.

The religious education subject leader is one of the school's assistant headteachers and is very well supported by the school leadership. This ensures RE has a high profile. All aspects of religious education teaching and learning are monitored regularly and rigorously and a clear direction for improvement has been set. Pupils are assessed regularly and the levels of attainment are broken into sublevels so that pupil progress can be tracked in more detail. The school plans to involve pupils more in linking their achievement to national expectations. Moderation of pupil assessments is undertaken within school and through collaboration with the local Catholic partnership. The chaplaincy team and the RE governor regularly receive reports concerning RE curriculum, monitoring and pupil achievement data. The religious education subject leader frequently leads training and, along with other experienced Catholic teachers, provides firm support and guidance to the staff. The budget provided is generous and often above that given to other core subjects. Religious education is very well resourced and every class has devised an attractive Advent display with a calendar to promote the pupils' religious observance throughout this Church season.

Provision

Grade 1

Worship and prayer are integral to the school's life. Worship is well planned using visual presentations well to develop pupils' thinking. The children learn a variety of traditional prayers. Very attractive classroom prayer tables are used well as a focus for worship. Chaplaincy provision is outstanding and provides very effective spiritual and pastoral support to staff, parents and children. Regular exchanges of information ensure that communication is very good. Musical opportunities provided by the chaplaincy team are of a high standard, with music specialists teaching a range of hymns from different cultures. The pupils attend Mass regularly in the parish church and contribute to presenting the liturgy. Priests and a deacon from the parish along with other local priests support the school for special events and make significant contributions to its spiritual life.

The quality of religious education lessons overall is good. Teachers demonstrate sound subject knowledge and lessons are planned well with clear learning intentions. Where teaching was best visual presentations; open questioning; talking partners; and practical

outcomes, were all effectively used to motivate and interest pupils allowing them to work with enthusiasm and independence. Also the pace of the best lessons was lively but still allowed pupils to have time for reflection and to contribute their ideas before answers were given. Differentiated tasks were set that allowed all pupils to achieve. Teaching assistants gave good support to groups of pupils. Formal assessments are undertaken regularly and linked to national expectations. However pupils are not yet advised as to how they might strive to attain the next level. Work is well marked with praise and affirmative comments given. Questions posed and time given for pupils to consider their response further, effectively extends the learning.

The quality of the religious education curriculum is very good. It fulfils the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. 10% of curriculum time is used for religious education following the "Come and See" programme. Scripture is used very well during teaching. Pupils are encouraged to become aware of the demands of religious commitment and this was very explicitly linked to the Church's season of Advent. A variety of activities are planned and enjoyed by pupils; for example, discussion, writing, drama and art work. Year 6 pupils enjoyed using art to portray Advent messages and Year 3 pupils used drama to demonstrate how they could take the message of Advent into their own lives. The curriculum contributes very well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Other faiths are studied twice a year. Islam has specifically been chosen as an informative link to the local community. The school has formed a good liaison with local Muslims and visits to the Mosque have been undertaken. Attractive religious education displays around school give added value to this core subject. The school provides a variety of clubs and other enrichment opportunities which are highly valued by pupils.

The inspectors wish to thank the headteacher, staff and children for their very warm welcome and for contributing to their very enjoyable and interesting visit.