



Diocese of Westminster

INSPECTION REPORT

Ss Alban & Stephen Junior School

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DFE Number: 9193421
URN Number: 117491

Headteacher: Helen Hill
Chair of Governors: Dr Jane Halpin

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Archbishop of Westminster
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: 9th November 2011
Date of previous inspection: 16th June 2008

Reporting Inspector: Dee Mansi

Description of School

Ss Alban & Stephen Junior school is an average size school for pupils aged 7 to 11 years serving the eastern and central part of St Albans in the parish of Ss Alban & Stephen. Some children travel great distances to school within an 8 mile radius. Of the 237 pupils on roll, 96% are Catholic. Pupils come from variety of backgrounds. Almost two thirds of the pupils come from a range of White backgrounds, nearly a third of pupils are from minority ethnic groups, and the remainder are a small number of Asian children and some from the Traveller community. The proportion of pupils entitled to receive free school meals and those who need extra help with their learning is below the national average. There are 10 full time and 9 part time teachers in the school of whom 8.3 (53%) are Catholic. 3 teachers hold the Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies (CCRS) qualification. The school has received the Investors in People award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Ss Alban and Stephen Junior School is an outstanding Catholic Primary School. The strength of the Catholic ethos permeates every strata of this community ably led by the Headteacher, Deputy and Governors who can articulate strongly how they maintain and promote the school's Catholic identity. Relationships between staff, governors, parents and pupils are of a high order, with staff expressing how their colleagues had helped them through difficult times. A parent added that they cherished the teachers "They've made parenting easier". The children's confidence in and love of the school is explicit. One pupil said "I would love this to be my Secondary School so I could just carry on." The pride in the rich and varied opportunities on offer is evident in the children's enthusiastic responses, and they know the stories of both of their patron saints well. The pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding. Religious education is led and managed exceptionally well. Very good progress is made by the pupils in religious education.

Grade 1

Improvement since the last inspection

The last inspection report stated that the school was 'A good school with many outstanding features'. Areas for development related to assessment procedures and extending opportunities for pupils to improve their work. The school now has a fully embedded system of planning and tracking pupil progress and has extended marking procedures so that pupils are aware of how to improve their work. Formative "diagnostic" comments were particularly good in demonstrating how pupils could enhance their work.

Grade 1

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

The school has an excellent capacity to continue to improve due to the clarity of their development plans. All staff have a strong view of how hard the school has worked to reach this point, and a Governor expressed that "We thought hard about how to tip the school over from being very good to outstanding" Parents' views are sought on the Catholic ethos of the school and parents were able to articulate how the "higher moral compass" of the staff inspired them to believe the school would continue to improve and develop.

Grade 1

What the school should do to improve further

- To provide more opportunities for the more able children to further develop their higher order critical thinking skills.
 - To ensure that the Chaplaincy Team continues to build on good beginnings by engaging with all members of the school community
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The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

The Headteacher and governors form a very effective partnership for developing the strong Catholic ethos of the school. A governor said " I feel that the Junior School is a tremendous and powerful asset to our Parish in the way that it helps to pass on the faith to the children..." citing numerous examples of wonderful practice seen in action "making a seamless link between school-church-parents" which personifies the School's Mission Statement 'Building God's Community of love and learning'. Active, involved governors act as critical friends, helping the Headteacher and Deputy and senior staff provide very effective leadership. Relevant displays in class and the corridors and hall emphasise the Catholic ethos. Pupils views are taken into consideration throughout including The School Council, The Eco Team and The Chaplaincy Team. Leadership promotes pupils' spiritual and moral development very well. Pupils enjoy the support of adults and peers alike when needing help in the playground or classroom situations. Pupils' achievements are recognised and valued. Parents are very supportive of the school, and a governor explained that the school's Leadership is accessible and warm because "parents know they can ask if they are in trouble". The school has very strong and close links with the parish. Teachers regularly organise pupil participation at parish Mass. The priests, deacon and catechist play an effective pastoral role in liaison with the school and are very well known by the school community.

Grade 1

The Prayer Life of the School

Worship and prayer are a strength in the life of this school community and make a very good contribution to the spiritual and moral development of pupils. Pupils are respectful during assembly, acts of worship and readily engage in writing their own prayers and expressing their own intentions. The Parish Priest tells of how children will mime the gospel during mass, do liturgical dance, the readings, prayers, sing and are fully involved. He feels particularly welcome in the school, and feels comfortable interjecting in classes. All pupils are involved regularly in assisting with parish, school and year group Masses. The senior leadership team supports teachers with their worship planning. The priests, deacon and catechist make very significant contributions to the worship and sacramental life of the school. There is an all embracing prayerfulness in this community.

Grade 1

How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?

The school is part of a thriving and active extended schools consortium (10 schools) 'which seeks to offer opportunities for developing community cohesion' (SEF). The school strongly articulates that everyone is recognised for their uniqueness and 'valued as God's child' (SEF). A

recent parents' questionnaire resulted in 99% declaring that they strongly agreed or agreed that the school provides their child with opportunities to develop their spiritual growth and faith and 100% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on their child and are in keeping with the Catholic ethos of the school. This whole school attitude permeates through all the numerous activities, and the school can demonstrate is embedded in the culture of the school. Children readily show compassion for others through their Harvest gifts to the local homeless shelter, cake sale for St Francis hospice and connections with a school in the Gambia and the celebrations during One World Week when pupils contribute food and costumes from their own traditions as well as European Language Days. Pupils have opportunities to collaborate with others from different backgrounds by taking part in sporting, musical and academic events. There are good links with the local Catholic and County schools and university. The school has also built links with other Christian church communities. Provision for spiritual development within worship provides reflection opportunities for all to link the theme with their own experiences. The school welcomes local people's involvement in its daily life and visitors from the local community are used as an extra resource for the learning. Pupils are engaged in community projects and local residents and parishioners are invited to join events and celebrations. The school premises are used by local groups. Religious education includes study of other world religions.

Grade 1

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Pupils make very good progress in the school. Most achieve age appropriate levels of attainment and many exceed this. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The pupils' books are well presented and all demonstrate full coverage of the curriculum. There are many opportunities for combined work such as whole class work on Recipes for Friendship, Death and New Life, Fire and Wind, Poems for Pentecost and Wanted a Good Leader! Pupils obvious enjoyment and ease with Religious Education is evident.

Grade 1

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

The quality of religious education lessons is outstanding because of tight planning, secure teacher knowledge and imaginative teaching methods and resources for engaging the children. Teachers' use of "hot seating" children acting out biblical characters to answer other children's questions was particularly lively and effective. Overall there was a strong use of ICT in each lesson, all using interactive white boards, teachers using visualisers and others microphone headgear to include all children in the activities. The lollipop system of choosing children to respond kept children focused, and there was ample opportunities for pupils to express their opinions and also work out responses through "Talking partners." Extra support by staff or adapted work ensures that pupils of all abilities make progress with their learning. Assessments are made at the end of each topic and compared with national expectations. Teachers mark to the learning objective and praise pupils' work and offer formative remarks so pupils know how to improve. Parents receive information about religious education topics and how they can support learning at home.

Grade1

Quality of the Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is very good and fulfils the requirement of the Bishops' Conference using 10% of curriculum time for Religious Education following the "Here I Am" programme and work linked to the liturgical year. A full range of cross-curricular subjects such as literacy, drama, art, ICT, PSHCE are employed to enrich the school's Religious Education. The priests and deacon, parish catechist, as well as the church building itself, are used extremely well as an integral resource for learning, strengthening and ensuring the pupils spiritual and moral development. A Bible study club enriches learning and is extremely popular. The new Chaplaincy team consists of volunteer senior girl pupils, and their fervour shines through. The key components of the Religious Education current topic of Signs and Symbols, relevant part of the liturgical year with supportive key vocabulary is evident with each teacher personalising it to her class's needs and wishes. World faiths are studied, are well resourced and speakers invited in to ensure depth of knowledge.

Grade 1

Leadership and management of Religious Education

The Headteacher and Deputy work excellently together to ensure cohesive delivery of the curriculum, assessment, moderation, delivering Assemblies and in depth monitoring and evaluation of all aspects. The Assembly, led by the Headteacher, based on Remembrance Day offered a wonderful insight into how confident the children felt in expressing their own personal achievements, local knowledge, curricular connection to Signs and Symbols and the spiritual aspect of the event was delivered well. The Deputy who is the Religious Education Co-ordinator has worked unceasingly to bring the provision from very good to outstanding and is extremely well placed to build on present success. Her thorough staff induction programme has borne fruit and ensures that new staff and non-Catholic staff have the confidence of delivery that is consistent throughout the school. The governors are very well informed, formally feeding back to the whole Governing Body and are able to cite many positive examples of good practice. The Religious Education budget this year was used to replace the school's stock of bibles, and the amount allocated is equivalent to other core subjects ensuring that this aspect of school life is well resourced.

Grade 1