

# Catholic Diocese of Northampton



## Inspection Report of Denominational Character and Religious Education

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

### **St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School**

Tewkesbury Lane, Monkston Park, Milton Keynes, MK10 9PH

DfE School No:	826/3383
URN:	134318
Headteacher:	Mrs Jane Zamora
Chair of Governors	Mrs Mary McGowan
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Jane Crow
Associate Inspector:	Mrs Pauline Cotton
Date of Inspection:	26 <sup>th</sup> November 2021
Date previous Inspection:	7 <sup>th</sup> October 2015

The school is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and in partnership with the St Paul's Liaison Group of Catholic Schools and Milton Keynes Local Authority.

## Information about the school

St Bernadette's is a voluntary aided Catholic primary school and nursery catering for pupils aged 3-11 years. It opened in September 2005 and serves the parishes of Christ the King, Our Lady of Lourdes, and St Mary's in Woburn Sands. 64% of teachers are Catholic. There are 425 pupils on roll, 46% of whom are Catholic. The percentage who speak English as an additional language is 49%, significantly above the national average. The proportion who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the percentage of pupils who qualify for pupil premium funding is below average.

## Key grades for inspection

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

## Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

**Grade: 1**

St Bernadette's is an outstanding Catholic school because leaders and governors are deeply committed to the Church's mission in education and model this commitment to the whole community. Its distinctive nature as a Catholic school is visible in the relationships between staff and pupils across the whole curriculum. It has a high profile in every aspect of daily life, resulting in pupils who are reflective, religiously literate and have a strong affinity to their school. Pupils learn to respect themselves and others, and this translates into an inclusive school where the vulnerable are supported and valued. Pupils are rightly proud of their school and enjoy belonging to a community where they can learn about their faith, achieve high standards and are offered many opportunities to become involved in chaplaincy activities and charitable fundraising. Pupil behaviour is exemplary. Parents are highly appreciative of the school's ethos, academic standards and rapport with staff. Governors are very regular visitors and are fully involved in the life of the school, carrying out their responsibilities very effectively.

## The school's capacity for sustained improvement

**Grade: 1**

Since its last inspection, St Bernadette's has not been complacent. Its Catholic life and collective worship have gone from strength to strength. RE improvement recommendations from the last report are being systematically tackled. The marking and feedback policy is used to good effect with KS2 pupils but younger pupils need further support or a different system to ensure teachers' comments are used to secure improvement. Appropriate challenge for pupils from their starting points is evident for most but the school needs to continue to develop teaching opportunities that stretch more able pupils to working at greater depth in RE.

The headteacher, senior staff and governors are all highly motivated advocates for Catholic education and have maintained the very high standards achieved at the time of the last Section 48 inspection. The SEF-RE is accurate, comprehensive and stems from strong monitoring systems involving senior leaders and governors. It is evaluative and links directly to the identification of school improvement priorities but would benefit from being more concise.

Leaders have a successful induction programme for inexperienced teachers and those without specialist RE knowledge, ensuring that the school's ability to attain high quality pupil outcomes is sustainable in the long term. There is a very strong capacity for the current leadership to maintain the school's well deserved outstanding judgement for overall effectiveness.

## What the school needs to do to improve further

To improve further, RE teaching needs to be consistently and securely outstanding across all key stages by ensuring that:

- The sequencing of teaching strategies throughout a lesson considers how best to work with a young person's limited span of attention.
- It includes more opportunities for pupils to achieve greater depth by promoting child-initiated questioning, more time to embed skills at a deeper level and application of learning in different contexts.
- Younger pupils are helped to use the teacher's feedback to secure improvement.

## CATHOLIC LIFE

**Grade: 1**

The Catholic life of the school is outstanding because all leaders, including governors, are deeply committed to the Church's mission in education and make it their number one priority. As a result, all pupils highly appreciate the Catholic life of their school and greatly benefit from it. Relationships between pupils are characterised by true Christian respect and love for others. This underpins the school's approach towards all its pupils but especially the most vulnerable. Pupils embrace the Catholic tradition of the school, joining in collective worship enthusiastically regardless of their own faith background. Chaplaincy provision is extensive and pupils talk excitedly about their involvement in the Mini Vinnies Prayer, Community and Eco Teams. They are developed as leaders who take on the planning and implementation of fundraising and prayer opportunities for their peers. For example, they lead Stations of the Cross, class prayers and *Come and See* end of unit celebrations.

Pupils have a clear understanding of the school's mission statement "*Loving, serving and growing together with Jesus*" which is prominently displayed around the school. They proudly explain how the school's values impact on their own attitudes and behaviour, which is exemplary. They are able to talk confidently about the message in their headteacher's inspiring assembly on the value of trust.

Chaplaincy work is strongly supported by leaders, including the parish priest /RE link governor who is a frequent visitor and well known to all the pupils. Staff are acknowledged by pupils and parents as excellent role models, totally committed to promoting the Catholic ethos of the school. Their well-being is given high priority by leaders and in turn staff willingly provide extensive opportunities for the moral and spiritual development of the pupils. As a result, this is a joyful, welcoming and supportive community with strongly positive relationships between colleagues and with the pupils. Since the last Section 48 inspection, the school has invested in a new prayer garden and an extension to its stunning chapel so that the school's Catholic character is immediately obvious on arrival and impacts on all. Every classroom and corridor hosts lovely displays celebrating Catholic principles – a testament to the centrality of Catholic life in this community.

The school has received a number of awards in recognition of their work including: the *Live Simply Award* – which led to praise from the Bishops' Conference and CAFOD, the Green Flag Award for protecting God's creation, and diocesan recognition as a 'Champion School' for social action and mission. Leaders are involved in sacramental preparation in parishes, and during the period of Covid closures they supported charities and liaised with supermarkets to supply food and hygiene products to those most in need. The school also works closely with the Tommy Flowers SCITT to promote working in a faith school and developing pupils as leaders.

Leadership is inspirational and sees the development of the Catholic life of the school as a key responsibility. This commitment was not shaken during Covid lockdowns when the delivery of collective worship and the full RE curriculum was maintained online. The response to the parental questionnaire was overwhelmingly positive about the school and leaders, indicating that parents hold the school in very high esteem. Almost all of the responses say that they value St Bernadette's because of its strong Catholic Christian values, wonderful teachers and high quality pastoral support. A typical quote from parents was, "*Great team led by a wonderful headteacher*". Relationship and Sex Education is a concern for a tiny minority of parents. It was not observed during this inspection, but scrutiny of pupils' books and planning indicates that it is well designed, carefully sequenced and adapted to meet the needs of the pupils. It is in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

**Grade: 1**

As a result of the pandemic, there is limited access to RE data (diocesan or national). However, evidence from teacher assessments and the progress being made by the vast majority in the *Come and See* curriculum indicates that achievement is strong in each key stage. This is a very inclusive school and SEN/D pupils are well supported in lessons by skilled adults and effective scaffolding. As a result, this group have very high levels of achievement with 100% making at least expected progress and 4% making accelerated progress. All pupils are engaged in RE lessons which they find interesting and enjoyable. KS2 pupils particularly like opportunities to use their bibles and the 'post-it challenge' in their lessons. These older pupils also make good use of extensive marking and feedback from teachers in their books that identifies 'next steps', helping them to improve knowledge and understanding. However, it is more difficult to find evidence of younger pupils using the teacher's feedback to improve. They might benefit from a more verbal approach to feedback in lessons to ensure they can respond and improve as a result. The quality of pupils' written work is good across the whole school, although there is little evidence of pupils working at greater depth.

Teachers have very good subject knowledge and demonstrate high expectations for pupils to achieve well in religious education. This is evident in all, including less experienced staff and those for whom RE is not a specialism, because of a strong induction programme and the support of an experienced and dedicated RE lead. As a result, the quality of the responses in class indicate pupils have a very high level of religious literacy. Careful planning promotes varied teaching strategies and well sequenced lessons in most year groups but this was not consistently the case. On occasions, although pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive, they lost concentration as a result of being kept listening passively for too long. Frequent praise however is used regularly to celebrate achievement and motivates pupils to strive for more. Most teachers use questioning skilfully during lessons, using direct questioning to elicit an understanding of each child's learning and reframe their explanations when they detect misconceptions. The teaching of RE benefits from very high quality resources, including very competent teaching assistants who are well deployed to optimise learning for individuals.

Leaders and governors ensure that religious education meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference in every respect and every key stage. This is something that leaders are passionate about and consequently RE is given prominence as a core subject, with more than the required amount of curriculum time. The SEF-RE is accurate, comprehensive and stems from strong monitoring systems involving senior leaders and governors. It is evaluative and links directly to the identification of school improvement priorities but would benefit from being more concise. The constant striving to improve RE and the Catholic life of the school ensures that it is always a priority, leading to good quality professional development and resourcing. Leaders support and encourage staff to gain a deeper understanding of theology and three members of staff completed CCRS last year, with governor-prioritised funding. Many support staff participated in the *Catholic Basics* course. The RE lead is a member of SLT and also a governor. She has a clear vision for the development of teaching and learning, illustrated in her Raising Achievement Plan, which is precise and insightful. She feels that her role as curriculum lead is very well supported by governors, and written reports on RE and the Catholic life of the school are discussed at full governing board meetings.

## **COLLECTIVE WORSHIP**

**Grade: 1**

Praying together and other acts of collective worship are central to school life for both pupils and staff at St Bernadette's. As a result, all engage with genuine enthusiasm and respect. Very large numbers of pupils regularly volunteer to be involved, for example, with Mini Vinnies, who take a leading role in the organisation of liturgy. An application process is necessary as there are over 100 candidates annually and the school is able to involve a different group of pupils every year. These pupils lead Stations of the Cross, classroom prayers, assemblies and *Come and See* end of unit celebrations. Experiences of collective worship are high quality and genuinely uplifting. The headteacher's assembly demonstrated how pupils are helped to develop an extensive understanding of the liturgical year, feasts and sacraments, and included a wide range of prayer opportunities linking to Catholic tradition. It was inspirational in the way that it built up the pupils' understanding of our commemoration of the deceased in November, the nearness of Advent and the school's focus on the value of trust. Both in assemblies and classroom prayers, Catholic pupils and those of other faiths are at ease praying together and their wholehearted response greatly enhances these events.

The positioning of the chapel at the centre and entrance to the school is a deliberate statement about the very high priority given to collective worship in this school and is central to the work of leaders at all levels. It is a lovely, calm and reflective space for pupils, staff and parents alike and is used in class collective worship, end of unit worship and RE lessons. It is also used by the parents and the wider community, especially following bereavement. In summer, the prayer garden is also used by staff to help pupils to experience a wide variety of styles of prayer and by individuals for quiet reflection. Many of the senior leadership team, including the headteacher, RE lead and Early Years lead, are part of the school's chaplaincy group. It is innovative and resourceful in applying for funding from different sources as and when required; for example, during Prayer Week, they contacted a garden centre and persuaded them to supply a seed in pot for each child, and the Woodland Trust donated three trees for the Queen's Jubilee celebration. These will be planted in the Name of the Holy Trinity.

Leaders are prominent and visible advocates of collective worship, regularly modelling outstanding practice for their whole community. The local parish priest, who is also a governor, serves the school exceptionally well, helping pupils to develop their involvement in collective worship both within school and in parishes. Professional staff development includes liturgical formation and the planning of collective worship and results in prayer experiences that are accessible and moving for pupils. They ensure that the whole school fully celebrates diocesan initiatives such as the Year of Faith, Year of Mercy, Year of Prayer and Vocation, Extraordinary Month of Mission, Year of Missio and the Year of the Word. Pupils of other faiths or no faith participate happily because the headteacher spends considerable time with prospective parents, talking them through the beliefs and ethos of the school. The impact is outstanding. There are examples of pupils happily joining in prayer and Mass within a short period of time, when their parents were initially unsure about them attending a Catholic school.

*The inspectors wish to thank all staff and pupils for their very warm welcome, despite the logistical difficulties relating to Covid-19 infections, and for contributing to an informative and inspiring visit.*