

Westminster Diocese Inspection Report

St Mary and St Michael Catholic Primary School

Sutton St, Stepney, London E1 0BD

Date of inspection: 3 March 2016



A. Classroom Religious Education

What is the overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy?

Overall Grade 2

The overall effectiveness of classroom religious education (RE) at St Mary and St Michael Catholic Primary School in developing pupils' religious literacy is good. The school has come through staffing changes in the past few years and has established, both through its governance and in its teaching force, a stable and sound curriculum in RE. The curriculum and the resources needed for its delivery are in place. Pupils make good progress in their achievement in classroom religious education and enjoy the subject. The teaching staff are well served by the RE coordinator who ensures their understanding and skills are regularly refreshed by in-service training, monitoring and the sharing of good resources. The parish priest is a regular visitor to the school and provides for both staff development and pupil enhancement by his contributions to the Catholic life of the school. The leadership and management of religious education on the part of the governing body, the headteacher and her senior leadership team, and the RE coordinator are good; there is regular review to ensure that they develop further. The school needs to provide greater theological in-service to provide deeper foundations for religious education.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?

Overall Grade 1

The quality of the pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing is outstanding. Every pupil experiences prayer throughout the day, enlivened by the liturgical seasons and is encouraged to be generous towards the poor in the name of Christ. Pupils are fully involved in both preparing for prayer and worship, and in organising events and displays to raise awareness and money for the needy. The governing body is clearly visible and strongly supportive in its promotion of the aims of this Catholic school, giving both challenge and encouragement to the headteacher and staff in their efforts to build an informed and caring school community. The school should consider developing awareness of its roots by promoting knowledge and insight into the charism of the Sisters of Mercy.

Introduction

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspectors spent one day in school, visited fourteen lessons and two assemblies, and carried out nine interviews with school staff, pupils and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with some parents and through a questionnaire, discussion with local clergy, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

The Inspection of St Mary and St Michael, Stepney was carried out under the requirements of the Canon 806 and Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Framework for Section 48 Inspections approved by the Archbishop of Westminster. The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the school is in providing Catholic education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation.

Inspection Team

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Mr Daniel Keane
Mrs Geraldine Pears

Lead Inspector
Associate Inspector
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Description of School

This Voluntary Aided school is a two form entry in the LA of Tower Hamlets and the locality of Stepney. The school serves the parish of St Mary and St Michael, Commercial Road in the area of Stepney. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 69%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 20%, from other Faiths number 9.7% and from no faith background 1.3%. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 74%.

There are 462 pupils on roll, with 13 pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health & Care Plans (EHCP). The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is well above average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is well above average. There is a well above average rate of families claiming free school meals. Two hundred and nineteen pupils receive the Pupil Premium.

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DFE Number: 211/2002
URN Number: 131936

Headteacher: Mrs Rachel Mahon
Chair of Governors: Mr Michael Killington

Date of previous inspection: 2 December 2010
Previous Inspection grades: 2

Key for inspection grades:	<i>Grade 1</i>	<i>Outstanding</i>
	<i>Grade 2</i>	<i>Good</i>
	<i>Grade 3</i>	<i>Requires improvement</i>
	<i>Grade 4</i>	<i>Causing Concern</i>

A. Classroom Religious Education

How religiously literate are pupils in the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith and how well do they know, understand and appreciate the importance of religious faith and practice in everyday life?

What has improved in classroom religious education since the last inspection?

The last inspection gave three points for the school to do in order to improve further. The first was for the RE coordinator to have more opportunities to monitor quality of teaching. The school has provided generously for this. The second was for class teachers to observe some of the outstanding practice in the school, and the school has made good progress in providing for such opportunities. The third was to encourage more use of ICT by pupils to further enhance the quality of religious education in the school. The pupils are using ICT to a great degree in religious education and the inspectors saw pupils using both twitter and blogs to develop their insight into issues in religious education.

How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?

Grade 2

The content of classroom religious education meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory (RECD). Both the RE programme followed in the school, together with extension programme, ensure that the four strands of the RECD are well covered. The RE coordinator keeps a running file of topic and lesson groups taught across the school, matched against the specific detail of the RECD which was seen in the course of the inspection. The school ensures close linkage with the levels of attainment – AT1 ‘Learning about Religion’ and AT2 ‘Learning from Religion’. With respect to the coverage of world faiths, each autumn term there is a two week unit on Judaism and during the summer term another faith for a further two weeks. The linear approach of the programme which allows the content to be adapted, developed and differentiated was seen to be in place in the course of the inspection.

Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education

Grade 2

The pupils are making good progress and reaching satisfactory levels of achievement in religious education. There is an adequate process of assessment in place regarding pupils’ levels and attainment. It is developing and is informing planning which is impacting on raising standards. EYFS recognises the wide variety of pupils on entry and makes good progress in terms of religious literacy. At present assessment is centrally recorded by the RE coordinator and is effective. However, it needs to be devolved to individual teachers recording and uploading their assessment outcomes. Planning and assessment tasks have been developed to enable more pupils to reach higher levels, and teachers are focussing on challenge and differentiation so that the expected number of pupils will reach them.

The quality of teaching

Grade 2

Teaching of RE at St Mary and St Michael is judged to be good overall. This was seen in classes observed, in pupil books, in pupil responses and in recorded progress. Most teachers have secure

subject knowledge of Catholic teaching with good bible use in many classes; this needs to be consistent across the school. Teachers are being provided with support from the RE coordinator and this has already impacted on the quality of teaching. Good examples of RE teaching were evidenced. Pupils are given feedback both orally and in marking. Twitter has been introduced in one year group and its impact is being monitored. ICT has supported RE. There could be further opportunities for pupils to deepen their knowledge and increased challenge, for all abilities. A good start has been made in tracking pupil progress in RE, however marking needs to be developed further. The school now has strong and stable SLT with a strong focus on the teaching of RE. Pupils show good levels of engagement, and display a positive interest in RE. There was a calm, focussed climate for learning. Reflective music was used with purpose. Pupils were eager to learn. Behaviour was always good. Pupils commented that they did enjoy their RE lessons.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade 2

The leadership and management of religious education are effective and good. Over the last four years the school has experienced a substantial upheaval in staffing. The staff is generally young with many having less than three years' experience. However the headteacher, the senior leadership team and the RE coordinator have provided the environment in which the staff have found their feet and are making good progress in building team and cross curricular approaches to delivering the religious education programme. The RE coordinator has shown exceptional skill and commitment to building up the confidence and knowledge of the more recently arrived staff in the content and delivery of religious education. He makes himself available to provide support when requested and has shown originality and flair in developing the use of ICT in religious education. The governors have been unstinting in their support and governance of RE while the parish priest, who is also the RE link governor, provides the school with input and support on both the content and progress of religious education through his regular visits.

What should the school do to develop further in classroom religious education?

- Continue the development of the staff's knowledge and skills in the religious education programme the school has adopted.
- Improve the consistency of marking, and in particular further develop feedback to the pupils on how they could do better.
- Find further opportunities to nourish and develop the teachers' understanding of the theological aspects of the topics they are teaching.
- Find strategies to help pupils reach higher levels of attainment through challenge and questioning.

B. The Catholic life of the school

How well do pupils experience the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing through all areas of school life?

What has improved since the last inspection?

The Catholic life issue mentioned in the last report was the need to involve the children more in the planning of school Masses and collective worship. Good progress has been made in addressing the issue. Last year staff were introduced to the 'Collective Worship Toolkit' – including prayer resources and ideas for pupil involvement. Pupils now plan one classroom collective worship session per week. The parish priest involves the pupils in the preparing for the class Mass which each class has per term. The quality of Catholic life displays in classrooms and corridors was of a high order.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget

Grade I

The governors, headteacher and senior leadership team communicate outstandingly to the whole school community the central place of religious education in the life of the school and as the core of the curriculum. Pupils know and understand the school mission statement: "Learning together hand in hand with our friend Jesus". The school ensures that 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education fulfilling the Bishops Conference requirements. Inservice time is regularly given to new staff to develop their knowledge of Catholic life and ethos. The bibles, the artefacts, the displays all tell the story that the school considers its Catholic life as important and to be celebrated. The budget for religious education is generous and the governors ensure that what is needed to promote the Catholic life of the school is available as far as possible. The school's identity in its documentation and relationships breathes its Catholicity.

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community

Grade I

Pupils experience a full life of prayer and worship at St Mary and St Michael. From the beginning of the day to the end, moments of prayer and reference to the presence of God surround them. There is the daily act of worship for each child, either in the classroom or in an assembly. The liturgical seasons are integrated into the life of the school. Two acts of worship were held on the day of the inspection and they both were witness to pupil involvement, prayerful stillness and joyous singing. Elements of drama were powerfully woven in and effectively used – especially in the assembly showing how women in so many countries spend hours carrying water. Liturgical dance has been developed so that the meaning of Christmas and the Passion, for example, is effectively shared. All staff and governor briefings and meeting begin with a prayer. Parents are invited and attend class Masses in the school and school celebrations in the parish church next door.

The commitment and contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice

Grade I

The commitment to the Common Good at St Mary and St Michael is overall outstanding. Central to the school life are the school's core values of perseverance, collaboration, compassion, respect and

self-worth and all were in evidence. Pupils feel that their ideas are valued and as a result they have a deep sense of belonging to the school and of service to others. The RE ambassadors shared with the inspector on the lines of: 'We show pupils what mercy is and in their ordinary lives.' 'Don't judge a book by its cover. Treat all pupils with respect'. Pupil behaviour is good and is rewarded through points listed on the 'good to be green' boards and bronze, silver and gold behaviour stars. As a result, within the school there is an understanding of the call to 'human flourishing' and this provides opportunities for pupils to celebrate their gifts and talents.

Charity giving includes CAFOD, Red Nose Day, Save the Children, Providence Row and the Royal London Hospital. The pupils explained that such giving is in response to Jesus' command to love one another. Both pupils and staff together show respect for each other. Leadership opportunities are offered both in class and through the school council. Some fund raising events have been organised by pupils, who have a developed sense of justice and peace. All staff are deeply committed to the pastoral care of pupils and relationships in the school are strong; all of this is based on Gospel values.

Enabling the authentic partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

Grade 2

The commitment to partnership and community in the school is good. One pupil made the comment 'You can count on the teachers'. The school has a close and positive partnership with the parents, both directly and through the parish. The parish church is next door and for the Catholic families there is a strong sense of home-school-parish partnership. The school works closely with the diocese and the deanery schools, in particular Bishop Challoner School which is in the close vicinity. The headteacher, the RE coordinator and other staff attend local and diocesan events. The restructuring of the governing body within the last eighteen months led to a renewed focus on the school taking its place in the wider Catholic community, for example taking part in the Year 6 retreat day at Wapping involving four diocesan schools. In time the school needs to encourage more teachers to obtain the CCRS (Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies).

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school

Grade 1

The leadership and management are outstanding in promoting the Catholic life of the school. The governing body is focussed on looking to see how to further promote the school's aims. The headteacher, senior leadership team and RE coordinator are vigilant and proactive in sharing the vision of a Catholic curriculum which draws on the Church's philosophy of 'whole person' Catholic education. The weekly updates to parents by the headteacher, the attractive and current website, and the friendly reception to visitors and parents all contribute to the welcoming Catholic ethos. The mission statement, with its shorter one line version, is familiar to staff and pupils and influences their outlook. With so many staff recently recruited, the school has been very effective in sharing the vision and approach which is defining of a Catholic primary school. The inset day last June was devoted to the distinctive nature of the Catholic school. As a further step, the school needs to become more aware of its founding charism 170 years ago, embodied in the community and life of the Sisters of Mercy.

What should the school do to develop further the Catholic life of the school?

- Building on the good progress made, the school should develop further different styles of prayer with the pupils.
- Make known and celebrate its founding charism embodied in the history and work of the Sisters of Mercy.