



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

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

## **ST JOSEPH'S & ST GREGORY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL Biddenham Turn, Bedford, MK40 4AT**

DfE No: 822/4601

URN: 139547

Headteacher: Miss L Sumpter

Chair of Governors: Mr C Donnellan

Reporting Inspector: Mrs Pauline Cotton

Associate Inspector: Mr Mark Holdsworth

Date of Inspection: 27 March 2019

Date Report Issued: 08 May 2019

The school is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and is part of the  
St Francis of Assisi Academies Trust

## **Information about the school**

St Joseph's and St Gregory's Catholic Primary School is the result of the merger of St Joseph's Lower School and St Gregory's Middle School with effect from September 2017. It is located in the heart of Queen's Park and on the boundary of Biddenham Village, West Bedford. There are 513 pupils on roll including 39 Nursery children, of whom 217 are Catholic (42%). The school is two form entry; however, the upper primary consists of three classes in each year group through new arrivals to the school each year. The school serves the parish of St Joseph's, with pupils also coming from the five other parishes in Bedford. 10% of the pupils attending are White British with 90% of the school population coming from other ethnic heritages. 73% of the pupils have English as an additional language. Queen's Park is among the most income-deprived areas of the country (33% against a national average of 21%). The number of in-year admissions is relatively high. Formerly part of the Bedford Federation of Catholic Schools, St Joseph's and St Gregory's Primary School is now a member of the St Francis of Assisi Academies Trust with an executive principal. Prior to the restructure, the headteacher served as assistant headteacher in St Gregory's Middle School, and then led St Joseph's Lower School from January 2011.

## **Key grades for inspection**

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

## **Overall effectiveness of this Catholic School**

**Grade 2**

St Joseph's and St Gregory's Primary is a good Catholic school with outstanding features. The headteacher has led the transition from lower and middle schools to a full primary school, ensuring neither school lost its identity in the merger to a functioning, cohesive unit. The significant changes are not to be underestimated; they have provided major challenges. The vision and the ethos of the school community are shared by pupils, parents and staff. Parents from many other faiths, particularly Muslims, choose St Joseph's and St Gregory's, because the school enjoys a good reputation in the local community. The children are enthusiastic learners and readily discuss their faith, while the staff have a demonstrable 'team spirit', witnessed in staff reflection time and through conversations. The senior leadership team gives strong support to the headteacher. This is a highly inclusive school with all staff, of whom around a third are Catholic, working hard to promote the spiritual, moral and social development of the children.

## **The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**Grade 2**

Since the last inspections (St Joseph's June 2012 and St Gregory's October 2015) the school has undergone a major restructure and reorganisation. Following her appointment in November 2016, the headteacher of the combined school has provided stability and direction in promoting the Catholic ethos of the school. Staff were offered positions within the new structures and encouraged through training opportunities, meetings and visits to take up different roles and were supported in the transition. This in turn supported the pupils' transition, especially in the first year when the Year 7 and 8 pupils were still on site until September 2018. The school appears to be compliant in teaching time allocated to RE and the work of the chaplaincy team is evident.

The headteacher and staff are clearly reflective practitioners and are constantly reviewing their practice, for example, improving the format and delivery of the singing assembly. Their self-evaluation shows an understanding of the aims and objectives for the pupils and good systems are in place to communicate the vision of leaders and ensure it is acted on.

The headteacher has managed to ensure that communication and organisation across the sites are good. In both buildings there is a visible understanding about the nature of a Catholic school and its role in the community. All work together as a Catholic community to provide good outcomes for their pupils irrespective of ability or background. Pupils are supported to achieve their best. All are recognised as being made in God's image; they are valued and are prepared well for the future.

The headteacher, her leadership team and governors present a shared vision for the school and are constantly seeking to achieve school improvement. The buildings and grounds have been carefully reorganised and developed to provide good resources and learning areas for the children and staff, including setting up new libraries in both sites. As a 'new' school, it will obviously take more time for many of their initiatives to become embedded and to be able to fully assess their impact. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

#### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Use a range of media to deliver RE lessons and develop higher order questioning to challenge and interest all children, providing opportunities for interactive and independent learning.
- Ensure quality and consistency of all RE marking so that pupils are clear about 'next steps' and disseminate good practice across the school.
- Analyse the new Age-Related Standards in RE considering the many different groups and use this to inform planning and raise attainment.
- Develop the outdoor prayer environment and the involvement of parents/carers in the prayer life of the school

The pupils obviously value and have a deep respect for the Catholic tradition of the school and its links both with the parish and local community. Many families attend a termly Mass in St Joseph's Church, where the children take an active part and each school in the town in turn is the focus of parish prayer. Pupils are active in school Mass, being readers, taking part in the offertory and singing parts of the Mass. Catholic life permeates the running of the school, with daily collective worship and the availability of the chapel in the upper primary building and designated prayer focus areas in the lower primary building. Here children have time for reflection and may leave their own prayers on the table or prayer tree. They are confident in talking about their personal, religious and cultural identity and beliefs. The school council is very active, and children are proud of their achievement in being elected. They publish a report once a term, monitor the suggestion box and bring points to be discussed at regular meetings. Year 6 pupils give their time at lunchtime to talk with and assist younger children on the lower primary playground. They are considerate of the needs of others and support a wide range of charities, both local and worldwide. Pupils were planning a variety of fund-raising events at lunchtime to support the CAFOD Lenten appeal, for example, a penalty shoot-out and selling popcorn. Behaviour is good: they respect each other and show consideration for others' feelings and an ability to listen, give thanks and forgive, expressed in conversations with both school council representatives and the junior chaplaincy team. Prominently displayed across the school, the new mission statement composed for the merged schools is 'One body, many parts.' (1 Corinthians 12). This was a collaborative effort from children, staff and governors. It is developed in three strands: excellence together, uniqueness, education for all. The three elements are regularly discussed with pupils at an appropriate level for their age and stage.

The junior chaplaincy team have been trained to lead assemblies, prayer times and reflections. They are pleased to have been invited to take on this role and aim to show exemplary behaviour. The pastoral inclusion team provides support for children in school, for parents in times of need and for staff, celebrating success and supporting in difficult times. They liaise with many other agencies and have developed an extensive network to support their work, for example, with Rainbows, SALT and dyslexia experts. Their fortnightly meetings are minuted and include a time of reflection, when the inclusion blessing may be focussed on a particular child. The strong inclusion culture is recognised in the community and underpins the ethos, which is communicated through their actions and words. One member of staff said, "This is a magical place to work. I can sincerely say that Jesus is present." Staff participate willingly in prayer and reflections. Relationships among staff and between staff and children are supportive and respectful. A Worry Box is available to share concerns in both sites and the school follows the wellbeing development plan, a Trust initiative.

Directors and governors are known to the school community through regular visits and are in touch with strategic plans regarding Catholic life. At the start of the year all subject leads wrote a statement to ensure teachers understand how to interweave the Catholic ethos through curriculum teaching, a process which is now being embedded. Leaders and directors monitor Catholic life through learning walks, discussions, scrutinising curriculum maps published termly by each class, and looking at books and data. They attend parish and school Masses, local community events and participate in diocesan events and training. The school is developing strategies to encourage parental involvement, for example, a Mothers' Day event and a community Pentecost picnic.

## Religious Education

## Grade 2

Pupils from all faith backgrounds are extremely respectful and participate fully in religious education, and data shows that all pupils achieve equally well, making good progress from a low start point to achieve the expected level of development. They write independent prayers and responses to assemblies, showing evidence of their ability to reflect on faith and moral issues. Considering the high percentage of EAL pupils, they demonstrate a good level of religious literacy and teachers are working to develop oracy and deepen their thinking so that they can articulate their ideas. There is a high level of engagement in RE lessons and behaviour for learning is good, with pupils eager to share their ideas and work collaboratively. Teachers could extend their use of a range of media when delivering RE lessons and further develop higher order questioning to challenge the pupils.

Teachers are encouraged to develop their subject knowledge and the RE lead regularly monitors lesson planning, reviews books and carries out lesson observations, which show that pupils enjoy their RE lessons. The good practice seen in some areas needs to be disseminated across the school so that marking is consistent and clarifies next steps for the pupils. Staff attend *Come and See* training with other Trust schools and assessment is carried out termly and moderated across year groups and across the Trust. They plan to analyse this data more fully and use it to inform planning and raise attainment. Each RE topic is celebrated in staff meetings and with the children, led by the junior chaplaincy team, and good quality resources are available. Displays are bright, interesting and often thought provoking. The school was awarded the REQM Gold Award in July 2016 for the second time

The school appears to be compliant with the time allocated to RE teaching in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and follows the diocesan programme *Come and See* and the RSE programme *A Journey in Love* across the whole school. The curriculum is well resourced and supported by trips out, including visits to a local mosque and Gurdwara, and by speakers or theatre groups in school. The RE subject leader is fairly new to post and is enthusiastically getting to grips with the role. She has management time and with the Catholic Life lead and Inclusion lead also reports to directors at Trust level. RE outcomes are included in teacher appraisal. Directors and governors and the leadership team work closely together to write the school key priorities, which are aligned to the mission statement. Community cohesion is promoted through assemblies, PSHE and charity work, such as Mission Together, CAFOD, homeless shelter, food bank, and the local hospice. Senior leadership are all involved in external groups to promote the attainment and achievement of all. Assessment records follow the pupils through the school with clear evidence of progress. Feedback marking is being developed to support a pupil's next steps in learning.

## **Collective Worship**

## **Grade 1**

Pupils consolidate and celebrate their learning in end of topic liturgies and prayer is an integral part of the school day. Singing assembly on Wednesdays is an enthusiastic and lively experience, bringing children and staff together to celebrate and give thanks for their learning. Staff felt it lacked direction and so created a proforma to help make it more structured and meaningful; they also take turns to lead it using different genres. Since their formation, the junior chaplaincy team (JCT), with support, plan and lead a school assembly monthly. The school chaplain, Canon Seamus, visits weekly and with the chaplaincy lead, they plan worship, events and activities. The school follows the Trust's Catholic Worship policy, but also has its own worship, spirituality and chaplaincy policies. Children write their own prayers to put in the prayer basket or hang on the class prayer tree, which are then shared in class or assembly. A Worry Box is strategically placed in both buildings, providing children and staff with an opportunity to share concerns. The pastoral inclusion team support this. The upper primary has a chapel which pupils can readily access, while the lower primary has dedicated attractive prayer areas for the children to use. The JCT are taking responsibility for developing an outside prayer space. Themed artwork linked to the mission statement is on display in corridors. Pupils are aware of the different cycles of the liturgical year. There is a sense of respect for those of other faiths reflected in the way they participate in prayer and liturgy.

Chaplaincy and collective worship have a central place in the life of the school. The chaplaincy development plan includes a schedule of events and foci for the year. There is a detailed plan for worship timetabled over the week and class assemblies include time for quiet reflection with prayers offered by individual children. Staff take turns to lead collective worship for the children and also staff reflection times. The school attends diocesan and local Masses and there is a programme of events during Lent, Advent and for other times in the liturgical year, including retreat days. They are working on producing a new school prayer book with traditional prayers and prayers from other faiths.

The adult school chaplaincy team, consisting of members of staff and parishioners, act as consultants and support colleagues. They take the lead in communicating with parents and the parish community and in evaluating collective worship. The Trust Catholic Life committee evaluates provision and informs governor and directors. Members of staff attend training at NORES (the Northampton Diocesan Office for RE, Catechesis and Schools) and within the Trust, and report back to share good practice. The headteacher assigned a member of staff to stock the staff library with Catholic formation materials and there is a good range of visual aids and artefacts available. Leaders and governors place the highest priority on the self-evaluation of collective worship and regularly review school performance.

The inspectors would like to express their thanks and appreciation to the headteacher, staff, governors and children for their warm welcome and for contributing to their very enjoyable and interesting visit.