



INSPECTION REPORT

St George's Catholic Primary School

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D/E Number: 5207

Headteacher: Mrs Louise Croker

Chair of Governors: Mr Paul Bennett

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

Date of inspection: 22nd to 23rd May 2013
Date of previous inspection: 11th to 12th March 2010

Reporting Inspector: Mrs Maisie Foster

Description of School

St George's Catholic Primary School serves the parish of St George's Warminster and St Bernadette's, Westbury. Most of the Catholic pupils come from St George's parish. Links with the parish are strong. Of the 136 pupils on roll at the time of inspection 48% are baptised Catholics.

The pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds with a growing number of families facing challenging circumstances. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of children with special educational needs (SEN) is above average as is the proportion supported at school action plus and those pupils with statements of special educational needs. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM) is rising. The school has developed effective links with the privately run pre-school provision on the school site.

There is significant movement of pupils in and out of the school partly due to Warminster being a garrison town and therefore there is high parent mobility. This means, for example, that by the time pupils reach the end of Key Stage 2, under half of them will be those who entered the school at the beginning of Foundation Stage 2 or Key Stage 1. The school manages this high level of mobility exceptionally well. There is a new housing development close to the school from which pupils are also drawn.

The school has experienced a period of turbulence with several changes of Headteacher and individual members of staff in a relatively short time. The present Headteacher was appointed in January 2012.

The school has a number of awards including the Active School award and the intermediate stage of the International Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

St. George's is an outstanding Catholic school. The exceptional Headteacher is supported by capable and hard-working staff who share a common vision for the school and hopes for their pupils' futures. The school is strongly supported by a zealous governing body led by a clear-thinking and effective Chair who spares no effort for the good of the children. The school's self-evaluation is accurate, recognising its strengths and identifying clearly areas for improvement. Teaching in Religious Education is outstanding and as a result pupils make very good progress and develop into thoughtful and compassionate young persons who love their school. They understand that they are valued as individuals who are part of a community and treasure what it does for them.

One pupil in Year 6, when asked what she would miss most about the school, replied:

"I will miss the comfort the school gives me", and another responded:

"Teachers make so much effort to make sure we enjoy our learning."

The school may justly be proud of all it does.

Grade 1

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

The school's capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding. It has made improvements since its last very good inspection. Central to this capacity to improve is the inspirational headteacher whose clarity of vision and capacity for achievement underpin the school's drive for excellence. In this objective she is most ably supported by a strong and hard working school team including the Governing Body and staff. Promising appointments have been made for September 2013 which will further strengthen the leadership and management of the school. The overwhelming support of parents is witnessed by such comments as:

"The school is a very happy and nurturing place where education and pastoral care are given equal importance. Faith is at the centre of the school's ethos and this is to me, the key to the school's success".

Pupils' behaviour is outstanding: they develop into highly effective learners who love coming to school.

The school has excellent capacity to improve.

Grade 1

What the school should do to improve further

As the school has accurately identified in its School Development Plan (SDP) it should:

- disseminate the existing good practice of *assessment for learning* to ensure that assessment is consistently good or outstanding in all year groups
- continue to strengthen the effective systems for pupil self-assessment, so that progression through the year groups shows reflection and sound evaluation

How good are outcomes for pupils, taking account of variations between different groups?

Pupils benefit greatly from the Catholic life of the school. They know that they are formed personally by the Catholic influences around them and that their shared values bring a depth of growth in relation to God and each other. As a Year 6 pupil asserted:

"When I joined the school I discovered a whole new world. It was just amazing. A Catholic school brings your life on - it makes a difference to what you are."

Pupils are increasingly able to express themselves with confidence and clarity. They understand and can articulate the distinctive nature of their school and the impact on their relationships. They know that they are part of a Christian community, with Christ at its centre and that this affects their behaviour and their daily lives:

"The school helps you to have faith in God and in each other. It helps our relationships to grow."

This in turn contributes to their awareness of the needs of others around them and in the wider world. They develop a growing sense of personal responsibility, for example in such tasks and caring for younger children, ensuring that the school's *Buddy scheme* is an integral part of their conduct. Pupils learn the concept of stewardship of the Earth's resources through practical action. For example, the Eco-warriors monitor the amount of electricity used and encourage their peers and staff to be frugal. They are interested in and respect other religious beliefs and know how important these qualities of understanding are to people of other faiths.

The school is particularly effective in re-engaging pupils who have failed to thrive in other schools: rekindling their interest and ability to learn while developing their sense of self-worth and value as individual people loved by God and part of His family.

The school works hard to develop spirituality in its pupils. It teaches them to value their prayer life. Prayer is an integral and central part of the life of the school. It is inclusive: the whole school community prays together. Pupils demonstrate reverence and respect in prayer. They respond to each other's needs and recognise that prayer connects us to each other, as well as to God. Pupils use prayer as a first, natural response to any problem. They share prayers with each other and support each other in prayer.

They are taught traditional prayers, the new texts of the Mass and pray spontaneously and sometimes, in the form of poetry. Teachers model how to pray, reflect on and contemplate the mysteries of our faith. Pupils learn from this guidance and lead their own Collective Worship with reverence, a sense of the presence of God and utter trust in his power to answer our prayers. Pupils increasingly develop the skills and abilities to lead prayer and Collective Worship both in class and for the whole school. They are able to compose and lead the Bidding Prayers for Mass, and in this and in reading the scriptures, the older pupils provide role models for younger ones pupils to emulate, moving forward on their own faith journeys.

Liturgy is a significant strength of the school. In one liturgy led by Year 6, pupils selected texts to explain the story of Pentecost. They used a PowerPoint presentation to the whole school, reading and explaining the points they wish to make. Music contributed to the prayerful atmosphere, which culminated in a liturgical dance to portray the symbols and power of the Holy Spirit. It was entirely moving and inspirational, and showed not only the pupils' commitment but also their integrity and trust in the responses of their peers. Church and feast days are a focal point for celebration in school life, including drama and music to engage pupils' interest and to use their talents to praise God.

On entry to school some pupils are below what is expected nationally for children of their age. By the time pupils are in year 6 their attainment is mostly good. Standards in Religious Education are good, and better and pupils make good progress. Standards in other core subjects are more variable, from above the national average in English to below it in Mathematics. In this subject interventions to improve pupils' progress have shown a marked improvement that the school is determined to take even further. Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) or with English as an Additional Language (EAL) make good and better progress, relative to their starting points, because teachers know their pupils well and they benefit from the excellent support they receive from highly skilled Teaching Assistants (TA). The school acknowledges that those pupils supported by the Pupil Premium have individual needs which they address through individualised programmes and targeted support. Rigorous and frequent monitoring has been put in place to ensure that progress is tracked and appropriate interventions made.

Pupils enjoy RE and this is clear from their highly effective attitudes, behaviour and responses to learning. They enjoy the creative teaching approaches and the research opportunities they are offered. They respond with a high level of engagement, motivation and hard work. They are aware of the importance of Religious Education in their lives and in their relationship to God: As stated by a Year 6 pupil:

"We learn RE and it brings us closer to God. In our school we feel connected to God. We are not only eco-friendly, we are God friendly."

They become religiously literate and are confident in using religious terminology by the end of Key stage 2. Pupils enjoy researching their own chosen focus of work and use technology confidently for their own learning, and for sharing learning with their peers. Good quality Power-point presentations not only reinforce the knowledge of the pupil-researcher, but are easily shared by peers in class, or the whole school, contributing to other pupils' learning. They understand what religious commitment means in their lives and in the lives of people of other faiths.

Pupils' achievements are acknowledged and celebrated through celebration assemblies to which parents are invited to share their children's success.

Grade 1

How effective are leaders and managers in developing the Catholic Life of the school?

Leaders and managers know the school well and have a deep commitment to its ethos and values. The leaders and managers of the school are resolute in making the Catholic life of the school its central priority. With new leadership and the restructuring of the Governing Body they strongly focus on sustaining and developing even further the Catholic dimension. The clear sighted and rigorous approach of the new headteacher ensures that the school environment, curriculum and activities reflect the importance of the school's Catholicity at every level. The school leaders have a good range of systems to ensure they are well-informed about the school's Catholic life. These include the formal and informal monitoring of the Catholic life through learning walks; school visits; and time spent in classrooms. Governors attend school regularly joining with parents as members of a worshipping community at assemblies and liturgies, including the celebration of Mass. Governors see themselves as "defenders of the faith" and use their time in school to appreciate as well as monitor the Catholic atmosphere and the spirituality they see around them.

Effective systems are in place for review and development with new appointments taking place in September. Governors see this as another opportunity to review and evaluate their systems.

The Governing body is dedicated to the school's mission. Governors know the school well, its strengths and the areas it needs to develop, and are committed to supporting the school's leaders as they strive towards excellence. They tackle the issues identified with single-mindedness and endeavour. They build effectively on the school's strengths: its ethos; the pastoral care of its community; the spiritual well-being of pupils and staff, and the quality of the school's prayer life. Foundation Governors know and implement their responsibilities as representatives of the Bishop. Leaders and managers attend relevant meetings and courses run by the Diocese and Local Authority (LA). This ensures they are up to date with legislation. At least one Inset day is dedicated to the Catholic dimension of school life.

Governors discharge their statutory, canonical duties effectively. They are a visible presence in the school and are active in their support of staff and of the work they do.

The recent history of the school has been a source of challenge, with disrupted leadership and staffing issues. School leaders have strengthened their effective monitoring systems and are addressing weaknesses in middle management level with determination and rigour. The school leadership is meeting current challenges, aware that the well-being of the pupils and staff must consistently be informed and shaped by the values of their school.

The school has systems for parents' and pupils' views to be heard and responded to appropriately. The deep rooted Catholicity and the embedded supportive values hold the school secure.

The provision and promotion of community cohesion continues to be outstanding. The school remains a strong example of what it is to uphold the common good. Inclusion is a strength of the school. Everyone, from whatever background, is welcomed, cared for, with no distinctions made in relation to race, creed or colour.

Relationships are excellent at all levels and pupils develop into well rounded, adjusted and happy individuals in their time at school. Vulnerable individuals and families are well supported by staff and specialist agencies. The school has committed some of its budget to supporting some parents through the help of a Family Link worker. Parish links are strong. The headteacher and chairman of governors talk to parishioners from the pulpit about the school and the work it does. Volunteers from the parish help in school and provide a model for the pupils of service in the community. The parish priest is a governor and regularly visits the school to celebrate Mass and give the school his support. The school has excellent arrangements for transition to the secondary schools to which its pupils transfer.

A climate of mutual trust has been developed with parents whose support for the school is overwhelming. They readily voice their appreciation of the dedication and expertise of the staff which has such a beneficial impact on their children's development:

'My child went to different schools and thrives at St George's. He has learned more in the two terms he has been there than in the last two years at his previous school. My son has benefited greatly from the spiritual and moral teaching. Great impact on his life.'

The school is sensitive to the needs of its community, for example its close links with the garrison and its work supporting 'Help for Heroes' which was suggested by the School Council as a focus for aid.

The school reaches out to other local groups through activities such as their carols and Nativity Play for senior Citizens in a nearby residential community and in their distributing of harvest parcels. Invited guests from different sections of the community also benefit from the excellent culinary skills of the school cook and her team at a celebratory Christmas lunch. Pupils develop an understanding of the inequalities in the wider world as they willingly raise funds for charities supporting the developing world, such as CAFOD; the Saint Vincent de Paul Society and the street children of Columbia. Through this aspect of the school's work older pupils develop a strong sense of social justice.

Grade 1

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Prayer is central to the life of the school and forms a key element in all school celebrations and meetings. Pupils are eager to pray, to talk to God and draw closer to Him - spirituality is a strength of the school. It is almost tangible. Pupils are taught to pray from the moment they start school; they learn the appropriate behaviour and are able to contribute to calm, purposeful liturgies from a young age.

Pupils' liturgical formation is strong, well-planned and reviewed. The teaching approach is sensitive to their faith backgrounds and progression over time is evident. In leading Collective Worship pupils are guided by knowledgeable and sincere staff and they learn from the model provided by them and their exceptional headteacher. The themes chosen by the children reflect their knowledge of the scriptures and their understanding of the relevance to us in our lives. Pupils know the liturgical calendar and are helped to remember it by colourful displays which they themselves have made.

Opportunities to pray alone in a group, aloud or in silence are frequent. Pupils write prayers and share them; thinking of their own needs and those of the wider world. Their spiritual and moral development is enhanced by the liturgical life of the school.

Pupils make good progress in all aspects of their Religious Education.

All pupils make good progress in relation to their starting points and their ability. Cross-curricular approaches extend and enrich the RE curriculum helping pupil to make connections between different areas of their learning. In Year 6 pupils benefit from the provision of lessons in Philosophy which gives them opportunities to debate issues arising from RE and personal, social and health education (PSHE).

The relatively new programme of study for RE has been successfully implemented. It has been reviewed and evaluated and this process continues. It has led to improvement in the quality of overall provision. It provides more effective continuity and clearer progression for pupils of all abilities. Teachers value its scriptural emphasis and its more creative approaches which give pupils more varied and interesting ways in which to learn. They take care to choose supportive materials such as music and video clips to augment and enrich the programme of learning. Pupils respond very positively to these approaches which are immediate and engage and hold their attention. This creates a positive environment for learning. Other resources are readily available and used effectively to complement the core scheme.

The strong focus on the development of pupils' literary skills, particularly in oracy and writing has resulted in clear improvements in the quality of their work in RE. The use of ICT and by staff and pupils enhances the provision and brings an additional dimension to the teachers' range of approaches. Drama and art are used to interpret and explore aspects of learning in RE and bring a spiritual element to deepen the learning experience. Pupils have frequent opportunities to work collaboratively and cooperatively in pairs and groups to learn from each other and with each other. This contributes to both their individual and their social development.

Teaching in Religious Education is outstanding. The pace is brisk, topics are covered in detail and pupils are engaged and purposeful. Lessons are well organised and well prepared helping to ensure consistently high quality provision for pupils. Teachers build on pupils' prior knowledge and the learning objectives and success criteria are shared with the pupils so that they understand what they are expected to know and be able to do by the end of the lesson. Questioning is generally highly effective and teachers are adept at extending pupils' thinking by asking open ended questions which require them to expand their replies. This has been

identified as a focus for further development so that the more able pupils are more vigorously challenged.

Children mirror the care and respect shown to them by the adults in class. They listen to each other, take turns and are eager to help each other as learners, so that an atmosphere of mutual cooperation and calm purposefulness pervades. Many parents commented on the calm environment and excellent behaviour of pupils.

Good behaviour management strategies ensure that the focus is on the learning and not on managing negative behaviour. In some classes, pupils are encouraged to assess their own learning at the end of the lesson. This develops critical thinking and motivates pupils to reflect on their own performance and on how to become better learners. Pupil self-assessment is not yet consistent across the school and this is being addressed.

Teachers generally have strong subject knowledge and those that do not, have the resources of a conscientious and experienced Subject Leader to draw on, as well as a good range of resources.

Led by a hard-working subject leader and supported by a visionary headteacher the school has worked incredibly hard to put effective structures in place for assessment. Pupils' work is assessed regularly, they have portfolios, *I can do...* sheets and know what level they have reached. Older pupils progress in self-assessment as they go through the school and become more evaluative. They are developing further the skills to know precisely what they need to do next in order to progress to the next level. Some teachers are using "next steps" for pupils to reflect on and learn from. This is not yet consistent practice across the school and is being addressed as part of the school's R E Action Plan.

Assessment for learning is evident in some teachers' planning and is impacting effectively on pupils' learning. This area is identified by the subject leader for further development and is a focus for improvement.

Grade 1