



# Diocese of Westminster

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## St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School

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DFE Number: 919 3977

URN Number: 117498

Headteacher: Mrs D. Ross

Chair of Governors: Mrs. P. Perschky

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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

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Date of inspection: 15<sup>th</sup> February 2013  
Date of previous inspection: November 2009

Reporting Inspector: Mrs M. Betts

## Introduction

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, acting headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspectors spent one day in school, visited 10 lessons and 2 assemblies, and carried out 5 interviews with school staff, pupils and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, discussion with local clergy, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons, examination of school documents, and attendance at religious services where possible.

The Inspection of St Vincent de Paul, Stevenage was carried out under the requirements of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Framework and Schedule 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.

## Description of School

The school is a two form entry in the LA of Hertfordshire and the locality of Stevenage. The school serves the parishes of St Joseph's, Bedwell and the shared church of All Saints, The Oval; the Church of the Transfiguration, Old Stevenage and the shared church of Christ the King, Symonds Green. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 94%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 5% and from other Faiths 1%.

There are 472 pupils on roll, with no pupils with statements of Special Educational Need. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is well above average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is above average. There is a below average rate of families claiming free school meals.

### Key for inspection grades:

*Grade 1\*: Outstanding;*  
*Grade 1: Very Good;*  
*Grade 2: Good;*  
*Grade 3: Requires improvement;*  
*Grade 4: Causing Concern.*

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

**Overall Grade: [3]**

The acting headteacher and the RE co-ordinator of the school are well aware of the school's RE strengths and the areas needed for improvement. The capacity of the school to improve is good and appropriate plans have been made which can be undertaken as soon as the school leadership team is fully complete and the RE co-ordination plan is realised. Pupils are gaining religious literacy at a satisfactory rate and most pupils achieve the national expectations. Good teaching was observed but this standard was not consistent across the school. Most pupils enjoy their religious education lessons especially learning more about God and Jesus. One pupil, describing the impact RE learning has on his life, said: "It helps me to be a better person".

### **What has improved in classroom religious education since the last inspection and what should the school do to further improve in classroom religious education?**

The actions for improvement from the last inspection have been fully achieved. ICT and new technologies have been used to make learning tasks engaging and creative. RE teaching is now regularly monitored.

To further improve in classroom religious education the school has identified the following areas for development and the inspector concurs with these:

Ensure teachers include in their planning challenging tasks for the more able pupils so they can achieve their full potential in religious literacy and so that the older pupils are able to attain Levels 4 and 5.

Develop marking and pupil feedback so that pupils know how well they are doing and what they must do to improve.

Map, monitor and evaluate the school's RE curriculum to ensure that appropriate content from the Curriculum Directory is taught, monitored and assessed.

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

**Grade [2]**

Teachers have been made aware of the importance of following the Curriculum Directory to guide the planning of their lessons. There is as yet no evidence of this within medium term planning or lesson planning. The school has purchased a new RE scheme to be used from next term. This follows more closely than their previous scheme, the four areas of the new Curriculum Directory. The school plans to map the learning in this programme to the Curriculum Directory and then evaluate its implementation. RE learning and resources are made relevant to the ages and abilities of the pupils in the majority of the lessons observed, as evidenced by the very youngest children using drama to re-enact a small part of the Mass with correct liturgical words, priest's vestments and a church-like environment.

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

**Grade [3]**

Most pupils are making only satisfactory progress with some making good progress. However, good progress is not yet consistent across the school and a number of pupils are under-performing due to the lack of challenge for more able pupils. This is especially true with the older children, where teachers need to develop further their own understanding of attainment levels 4 and 5 to more effectively challenge and extend their pupils. Whilst pupils work steadily and with interest, they are not yet able to articulate an understanding of the importance of attainment in religious education and are not able to say what they need to do to progress. RE books are well-cared for and well-presented with evidence of satisfactory coverage.

### **The quality of teaching**

**Grade [3]**

Teaching results in most pupils making some progress. Where teaching was observed to be good, teachers engaged pupils in active learning, referenced key words and made good use of creative and cross-curricular learning opportunities. This was seen in a Year 3 class, when pupils explored the key elements of the scripture passage telling of Christ's temptation in the desert through Design & Technology, ICT and drama. However, teaching is not yet consistently good across the school. Teachers need to fully understand the elements that contribute to outstanding teaching, especially in the older year groups. In addition, whilst assessment is taking place regularly, more needs to be done to ensure that assessment outcomes are used more effectively to inform teachers' planning, so that the gaps in pupils' learning are addressed promptly. Pupils are informed reasonably regularly of their progress and given some suggestions of how they can improve. This is done in a supportive way, but a more consistent approach is needed, especially in Key Stage 2. Some feedback comments were in the form of closed questions and did not allow the pupils to extend their learning or understanding.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education**

**Grade [3]**

Overall the leadership of religious education requires improvement. The time available for the co-ordination of RE is very limited, yet within these restraints the co-ordinator fulfils her role adequately and works hard to keep up to date with diocesan and deanery initiatives which she effectively disseminates to the teachers. The school has appropriate plans to increase the number of RE lead teachers by appointing a second one alongside the current part-time post holder. A suitable candidate has yet to be appointed. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and with the strong support of the acting headteacher, plans have been made to give clear direction to the subject's improvement. Monitoring through observations of RE lessons takes place regularly but there is no evidence that monitoring of teachers' plans and pupils' books are included within the quality assurance. Governors monitor RE lessons and are kept regularly informed of the RE developments. All teachers have a performance management target linked to the RE development plan.

## **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 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: [2]**

St Vincent de Paul is a good sound Catholic school and provides pupils well with experiences of the Catholic way of living and believing. Prayer and worship have a central role in school life. The school promotes pupils' spiritual and moral development well and this is reflected in their good behaviour and their respect for each other and adults. The pupils have a good understanding of the importance of helping others less fortunate than themselves and say they try to follow the example of St Vincent de Paul who gave all he had to others. Pupils are proud of their school and say: "Everyone is caring and friendly here". The school's mission statement underpins the life of the school and engages all staff and pupils in striving to fulfil this. The dedicated leadership of the acting headteacher and RE co-ordinator is instrumental in effectively maintaining the school's Catholic identity. The school has a clear vision for the future improvements.

### **What has improved since the last inspection and what should the school do to further develop the Catholic life of the school ?**

There were no Catholic life development issues from the last inspection. Since then the school has improved ICT facilities to support delivery of collective worship.

To further improve Catholic life the school has identified, and the inspector concurs, that pupils need to be more actively involved in preparing and leading acts of worship and Mass.

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

**Grade [2]**

Religious education has a sound standing as an important curriculum subject as seen by RE lessons receiving 10% of curriculum time and by equivalent funding to the other core subjects. This year religious education has received an extremely high budget to purchase the new RE scheme and facilitate the visiting Sion mission. Governors are committed to the importance of religious education as seen by the Chair of Governors undertaking the governor role of responsibility for RE. Pupils are aware that what they learn in RE impacts on their everyday actions and behaviour.

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

**Grade [2]**

Prayer and worship within the school day is considered important. The recent Sion mission week inspired and promoted pupils' spiritual growth and they very much enjoyed the lively songs and craft activities. Pupils know that prayer is an important aspect of their lives as Catholics and often compose their own prayers and liturgy as part of their RE learning tasks, as seen by the older children composing their own modern version of the Gloria. Extra prayer opportunities are

provided for groups such as the Lenten meditation group. Pupils have regular opportunities to attend Mass and each year group goes to the Church for this on a rota basis. At these services and during class assemblies, pupils take part in contributing to the liturgy or the presentation. However there are few opportunities given for pupils to plan and present their own acts of worship. Some celebrations take place linked to the Church's year such as the recent Ash Wednesday liturgy and the pupil lead Stations of the Cross. Staff ensure that liturgical celebrations are well prepared and meaningful for the pupils. More involvement of the clergy in the life of the school is being encouraged now that the priest resident locally is no longer there on a very temporary basis. Pupils are respectful during worship and participate with sincerity.

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

**Grade [2]**

Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of service and support for those in need. They are particularly aware of their ongoing support for a school in Uganda. One instance of this being realised was during a year 2 lesson on the topic of "Thanksgiving" when pupils were placed into a classroom situation with limited equipment for fulfilling their task. In this way they began to acknowledge the feelings of frustration felt when essential equipment is lacking. This proved a very good introduction to the school's Lenten charity. Older pupils were able to link their giving to the example of Jesus and their lives as Catholics. At present there are few opportunities given for pupils to undertake practical community service in the locality. Pupils are proud of their school and enthusiastically undertake a variety of responsibilities, one of these being as "Young Leaders". Their ideas are sought through the school council. Relationships within the school community are good. Pupils' pastoral needs are supported effectively and this contributes well to pupils' confidence, positive attitudes and good behaviour.

### **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 school has a positive relationship with parents who are supportive of the school, evidenced by the number of parents (77%) agreeing and strongly agreeing with all aspects of the school's RE and Catholic provision. The school works effectively in partnership with the other Catholic schools in the deanery and plans closer links with the Diocese through accessing more teacher and governor training. The school works hard to encourage parish links but until recently the permanence of the parish clergy has limited these. However the school supports local church initiatives such as the parish drama group and offering the school building for parish events.

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

**Grade [2]**

The school leaders are strongly committed to the Church's mission in education. The completed self-evaluation provides evidence of good awareness of the strengths of the Catholic life of the school and clear knowledge of the improvements to be made. Staff and pupils share a good understanding of their distinctiveness as a Catholic school. The Catholic identity of the school is shown through the many high quality and attractive displays and artefacts. The school regularly seeks and listens to all members of the community as demonstrated by the annual questionnaire to parents and to pupils. Governors are supportive and kept well informed about the work of the school.