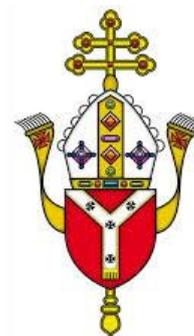


St Alban and St Stephen Catholic Infant and Nursery School

Vanda Crescent, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 5EX

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 26 January 2017



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is good

- The school ensures that all aspects of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory are met.
- There is an updated, recently introduced scheme of work, which is supported by a range of additional resources and the school approaches the teaching of religious education in a creative and challenging way.
- Most pupils make good progress over time.
- Pupils are engaged and enthusiastic learners.
- The religious literacy of the pupils across the phases is good, and demonstrated in their ability to articulate their growing religious knowledge and understanding.
- The overall quality of teaching is good, through delivery of a range of activities, strategies and creative opportunities.
- Teachers create a positive climate for learning.
- The school has generously ensured that high quality resources are available to enhance the learning of the pupils.
- The headteacher and the subject leader share a clear vision and commitment to ensure that the Church's mission for education is foremost and classroom religious education is given a high status in the school.

Classroom religious education is not yet outstanding because

- Assessment strategies are not yet robust, nor rigorously applied.
- There is not yet enough challenge for the more able.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The mission statement of 'building God's community of love and learning' is lived through the excellent ethos across the community.
- The school ensures that the curriculum delivery in religious education meets the 10% requirement from the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
- Prayer and worship are central to the daily life of all in the community.
- The school has a very clear understanding of its call to serve and promote 'human flourishing'.
- Pupils are actively engaged in and understand their many opportunities to serve their communities locally, nationally and globally.
- The headteacher, in partnership with the governing body, has a clear and incisive vision, ensuring continuous improvement for pupils in all aspects of their spiritual development.
- The recently appointed, enthusiastic leader in religious education is also influencing the very clear positive direction for the way forward in the Catholic life of the school.
- Partnerships between home, school and parish and the wider community are outstanding and highly valued by all stakeholders.
- There was an overwhelmingly positive response from the parental questionnaire and the parish representatives.
- Children are offered a rich variety of experiences of the Catholic tradition, beliefs and practice, across the phases.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

The school has implemented a more creative approach to learning in religious education (RE) across the phases. They have purchased a range of ICT equipment and resources to support the learning opportunities at age-appropriate levels. They have begun a deanery moderation network to support and validate the assessment of Levels of Attainment in religious education, against the Agreed Understandings. There has been a significant change in staffing, including at senior leadership level. The recently appointed substantive headteacher has rigorously set out the school's agenda for improvement in all aspects of the delivery of religious education. This includes the appointment, in September 2016, of a leader for religious education, which has assisted in the smooth transition to effective leadership.

The content of classroom religious education is good

The school provides a good range of content to deliver the religious education programme. They have recently introduced a scheme of work, supported by a range of additional resources at the end of Key Stage 1. The school has planned to extend this to all age groups. The school has a creative approach and is meeting the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. A good range of resources supports the delivery of religious education, for example in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYF), dressing up props and role play are effectively used, to re-tell scripture stories. There is evidence in the school's accurate self-evaluation that they have identified the key areas for action to improve the provision, by embedding and expanding their new scheme and its related activities, across all ability groups.

Pupil achievement in religious education is good

Good progress is made by most pupils; however there is a lack of challenge for the more able to stretch their knowledge and understanding. This impacts on how they make the links in their learning to the Levels of Attainment in religious education. Overall, pupils' religious literacy is good. They demonstrate enthusiasm and a keenness for learning and can articulate their religious ideas and knowledge. There were many instances where pupils were confident in their use of religious language. From the scrutiny of the work in the books, pupils know and understand what they have to do to improve their work. The marking and feedback are consistently applied, as for other core subjects. The recent introduction of the scheme of work being implemented across the phases has supported the effective age-appropriate use of Scripture, to empower pupils to attain to the higher Levels of Attainment in religious education. Staff are committed to accessing the diocesan training and attend all relevant diocesan moderation sessions. The school has recently developed its deanery networks, particularly for moderation of learning over time and to empower colleagues to discuss levels of learning in religious education with other deanery schools.

The quality of teaching is good

Teachers create a positive climate for learning. There is a rich range of resources available at age-appropriate levels. Generally pupils are engaged and enthused in their learning. In those lessons where teaching was most effective, the pupil responses were valued and used effectively as a teaching tool. In the most successful lessons observed, teachers had strong subject knowledge, which inspires pupils and contributes to their good progress. This was particularly evident in an EYF class, where the teacher's questioning enabled pupils to recall prior learning and use effective religious vocabulary. Another example of a high quality learning opportunity is through the pupil voice, where pupils interact with each other, share each other's ideas, so extending their learning. Pupil voice is used consistently across the school. During the inspection the lessons observed did

indicate some variability in teaching across the school. Where the learning opportunities in the lessons observed were missed, pupils were not fully nor actively engaged. They did not receive enough challenge in the tasks set for the higher ability levels. These lost opportunities for cementing their learning and making effective links, including through use of Scripture, have been identified by the school as an action priority.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education is good

The headteacher has ensured, through her strategic actions, that the leadership and management of religious education is good. She has a clear vision and commitment to ensure that the Church's mission is foremost and is given high status in all aspects of the school improvement agenda. The newly appointed subject leader works very hard to empower the pupils to take responsibility for their daily life within the school. The pupil voice strategy is highly effective in ensuring that even the youngest pupils are confident in both discussing their religious literacy and articulating their faith and their spiritual journey. The school self-evaluation is both honest and accurate. The senior leadership have a determination to strive for excellence in religious education across the phases.

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

- Provide effective challenge to the more able so that they can achieve the higher Levels of Attainment in religious education, as they do in other core subjects.
- Develop the role of the other adults in the classroom, to ensure all pupils are actively engaged in their learning.
- Widen their networks with other diocesan and deanery schools in order to observe models of excellent practice and so improve the confidence of the teachers for empowering the higher ability groups.
- Effectively track rates and pace of progress across all phases.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

The new senior leadership of the school has developed a clear strategic vision for excellence in all areas. The school has invested well to improve access for effective ICT provision. This has had an impact also on the development of the spiritual and prayer life for all pupils. The newly re-constituted governing body has been highly successful in ensuring the budget was made available for meeting the action points from the previous inspection. The governor responsible for religious education and the parish sister, in partnership with the parish priest, provide excellent opportunities for all pupils and staff to access a good range of liturgical and sacramental experiences.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is good

The school fully meets the 10% requirements as laid down by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. A subject leader has been recently appointed and her enthusiasm and dedication to the post has been well received. She is acting as a model of excellent practice, for less experienced teachers, and those new to the school and not of the Catholic faith. The headteacher has effectively evaluated the key action points, which include the on-going development of the Catholic and spiritual life of the school. She has ensured that a range of in-service training includes the introduction of the new scheme of work and the importance of improving the skills of teachers to moderate accurately. The governors who met with the inspectors were able to outline clearly their full commitment to generous budgeting, in order to meet and implement these identified priority areas.

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

is outstanding

There are excellent opportunities offered by the school daily for pupils to pray, be reverent and to reflect on Catholic worship. In an assembly observed during the inspection, the headteacher portrayed the importance and value of Scripture. This was particularly relevant to match the school's exploration of their current topic on 'Books'. There were excellent links made to other curriculum areas and there was clear evidence that pupils are growing in their knowledge and understanding through recall from earlier learning. The interaction from the pupils was powerful in the way they demonstrated awe and wonder from the high quality visual prompts and resources used to engage them fully throughout. They were offered opportunities for quiet prayer, reflection and links to their everyday lives and experiences. The parish priest and parish sister explained how well the children can articulate their spiritual awareness and their deepening knowledge and religious literacy. The parish priest described how, 'they have a thirst for learning more about their faith and how it applies in their daily lives.' Parents who met the inspectors were eager to share their high appreciation of how their children are being nurtured in their faith and spiritual journey, as one parent outlined that, '...all lessons are Jesus centred, and our children are encouraged to ask quite probing questions'. 'teachers also lead by example in their spirituality...'. The chair of governors described how he sees how the school 'inter-weaves faith into all that it does, including in the curriculum.'

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

is outstanding

All pupils are fully aware of their responsibility and stewardship towards others and caring for God's creation. The school ensures that a range of visitors support their commitment to the Common Good and social justice. The school encourages pupils to be actively engaged in responding to the

call for human flourishing, locally, nationally and globally. These include Cafod, Catholic Children's Society, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and their fundraising for the Santa Maria Education Fund in Paraguay. They have collected for the Harvest food bank, had fundraising activities such as 'Operation Christmas Child,' Cafod World Gifts and the 'Maths Bring and Buy' sale for purchasing two nursery boxes for refugee children. The pupils, even at this young age, spoke poignantly about their passion for supporting others less well off than themselves. The very supportive parent body has raised significant funds for various charities and actively support the school in all of its efforts. Parents also offer their services on Saturdays to work on the school garden with their children. The Forest School project supports their commitment to sustaining their Eco Schools award and making links through Pope Francis's appeal, inspired by *Laudato Si*.

The partnership with parents, school and parish, and collaboration as an integral part of the diocese through its relationship with the diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

is outstanding

The partnerships developed through a range of collaborative networks is outstanding. An example of the school's outward looking approach is demonstrated well by the networks developed by the headteacher, enabling her to benefit from support and professional dialogue with experienced colleagues across the deanery and diocese. The school is actively involved in all aspects of the parish life. The parish sister and the parish priest were glowing in their praise of the work of the school in developing the pupils' spirituality and faith life. This was highly endorsed by the parents, 'the school pays an exemplary role in making a valuable contribution to the spiritual and social growth and development of its pupils – our children'. The parents who met with the inspectors were very appreciative of how the teachers keep them informed of the progress of their children, and of their invitation to all assemblies, celebrations and events. They marvelled at how their children are 'encouraged to ask probing questions.' They believe the teachers 'lead by example in their spirituality'. The parents outlined how the 'school is seen within the community as the essence and moral compass for their children.' The children are taught to respect others, to be kind to people from their youngest ages. The newly appointed chair of governors outlined how the governing body is fully dedicated and committed to its ecclesial mission in the Church. The governing body are actively engaged with all aspects of the diocese and in particular to receiving regular guidance on diocesan, national and local duties and regulations.

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

is outstanding

The outstanding leadership and management of the school is testimony to the way the governing body, in partnership with the headteacher, have a shared vision and determination for ongoing excellence in the Catholic life of the school. The highly effective support includes how well they challenge the leadership team. The designated governor for the Catholic life spoke confidently and enthusiastically to the inspectors about how well informed she is on a termly basis. This is from her regular visits, learning walks, book scrutiny and termly meetings with the leader for religious education. The honest self-evaluation, with the accurately identified priority areas, is testimony to how well the school leadership is on a continuous drive for excellence.

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

- The school has identified how they intend to further develop the environment to enhance the opportunities for pupil personal reflection.

Information about this school

- The school is a two form entry Catholic Infant and Nursery school in the locality of St. Albans and the local authority of Hertfordshire.
- The school serves the parish of St. Alban and St. Stephen in St Albans.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 95.7%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 2.6 % and from other faiths is 0.8%. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 30.8%.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 2.
- There are 6.4% of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 1 have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is average.
- There is a below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 13 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (5.6 %) and 2 pupils receive the Early Years Premium.

Department for Education Number	919 3362
Unique Reference Number	117450
Local Authority	Hertfordshire

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	3 - 6
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	233
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr David Miveld
Headteacher	Mrs Bernadette Dempsey
Telephone number	01727 854643
Website	www. ssasinfants.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@ssasinfants.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	08 November 2011
Grade from previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out (i) under the requirements of the Canon 806 and (ii) in accordance with the Framework for Diocesan Inspections 2015 approved by the Archbishop of Westminster and (iii) under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

- The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection.
- During the inspection 8 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended 1 assembly and a number of acts of worship.
- Meetings were held with school staff, pupils and governors.
- Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

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