



DIOCESE OF PLYMOUTH

INSPECTION REPORT

St John's RC Primary School
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Executive Headteacher: Mr R Meech
Chair of Governors: Mrs J Trott

This report to the Bishop of the Diocese under Canon 806 of the Code of Canon Law is also the report to the governors of the school on religious education. For Catholic maintained schools, the report also fulfils the requirements of Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Date of inspection: 15th September 2022
Date of previous inspection: 14th & 15th June 2018

Reporting Inspector: Mr J Skelton
Additional Inspector: Mr P Cotter

Description of school

St John's RC Primary School Tiverton is a smaller than average setting with mixed age group classes. It is a mixed sex school with and benefits from onsite nursery provision. The school has recently appointed a Head of School and the whole is overseen by an experienced Executive Headteacher who manages an additional two settings.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

Grade Good

This is a Good school because:

- The caring Catholic nature of the school is visible and tangible. All members of the community are respectful and caring towards one another. It is a happy, joyous, safe place for the children with a very strong sense of community.
- Pupils act with reverence and are keen to participate in collective worship. They sing joyfully, reflect in silence and join in community prayer appropriately and with confidence. Children are regularly involved in the delivery of liturgies.
- Pupils understand that the school community is committed to following the teaching and example of Jesus as expressed in the Gospels and in the social teaching of the Church. As a result, there was ample evidence that pupils develop in virtue, accepting their personal responsibility to care for our common home, pursue the common good and serve those in need.
- Leaders, staff and governors are committed to the Church's mission in education and ensure that Christ and Catholic teaching are at the heart of the school.
- Leaders plan the curriculum to provide sufficient opportunities for learners to progress sequentially through the RE subject content, and the majority of RE lessons are taught well enabling children to make good progress, both academically and spiritually. Catholic virtues, values and social teaching are interwoven throughout the wider curriculum. Importantly support staff play a big role to this regard.
- Pupils appear to enjoy their learning and approach their lessons with interest and enthusiasm. They are keen advocates for the school in general. Consequently, behaviour in (and out of) lessons is good because most pupils enjoy Religious Education and are engaged with ensuring the caring ethos of their school.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop is Good

- The school leadership team, Governors and Diocesan RE and Catholic Life adviser are all working closely together to continually improve the RE provision for all pupils, staff and parents. There is a clear improvement plan to address some slight malfunctions in RE provision. This unified and committed approach means that the school is always striving to ensure that it is the best it can be. Governors were particularly impressive, not least through the obvious passion they showed for ensuring the school continues on its upward trajectory. Additionally, the RE lead is confident and experienced and is clear about the ongoing CPDF needed within the setting.

What the school should do to improve further

- Governors need to hone their understanding of assessment data and in particular how the data from St John's school performs, in comparison to similar schools both in the diocese and further afield. A good understanding of comparing RE assessment data with other core subjects in the school would also be beneficial and school leaders need to ensure governors have easier access to this information.
- The school should formally analyse the impact of the various Catholic life initiatives on the children's outcomes to help develop these yet further.
- Ensure all teachers have well developed subject knowledge and employ a range of pedagogical techniques. In particular, a further focus on effective questioning in RE, so children can investigate their own relationship with the material presented would be beneficial to outcomes.
- Maintain and expand opportunities for all children to prepare and lead acts of worship.
- Ensuring ongoing support is in place for the new Head of School as she develops her role in leading on Catholicity.

a) The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school

- Children at St John's school are aware of and engaged with, the Catholic character of the school, using their own initiatives and thinking to develop and interpret the charitable nature of Catholic social teaching. Children exhibit a strong sense of service
- Pupils speak openly and with commitment about the caring nature of their school community. They recognise that they are part of a bigger world and understand their role within it as part of God's creation.
- Almost all pupils show a deep respect for themselves and others who they understand are made in God's likeness, Pupils work well with school-based adults to develop community links and share the manifestations of their faith, through both parish links and the wider local community.

b) The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school

- Provision of Catholic Life at St John's RC School is outstanding with a strong prayer culture and excellent relationships are evident. The school environment reflects the setting's mission in a very high-quality way.
- The school's mission statement is clear and unambiguous. It is also clear in the way it demonstrates that all they do is because of the Catholicity of the setting. Pupils act in a way that embodies the part of the mission statement particularly pertinent to the children's actions, *'we are learning to grow into God's family, where there are no outsiders, where all belong and aspire to achieve the best they can.'* The school exudes care and kindness with adults and staff clearly working for the same goal and the sense of family is palpable. Evidence from interviews and questionnaire responses indicate it is clear parents share this view.
- The learning environment, student chaplaincy and community itself has a clear Catholic identity with ample visible and tangible examples of each on display. The new student chaplains are keen and enthusiastic and clear about their responsibilities and

advocacy. Canon Paver (as parish priest) is well known to the children and has a strong supporting role in the life of the school.

- Pupils and staff are cared for pastorally and professionally at St John's and this is evidenced through interviews, conversations, displays, interactions and parental feedback
- Children are very clear on what behaviours are expected in school. More importantly they understand why these behaviours are important and how they link to the overall ethos and values of a Catholic school. Children are calm, polite, enthusiastic and interact superbly with each other, showing genuine care and compassion to all members of their community.
- Pastoral programmes, PSHE and RSE are faithful to Catholic teaching and present a holistic vision of the human person. They are planned in line with the diocesan protocols and the Bishop's vision.

c) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school

- Leaders and governors are enthusiastic and effective in promoting the Catholic life of the school. They speak with pride and energy about how well their pupils engage with this central tenet of the school's mission. They display a clear vision and promote this vision with passion.
- Catholic Life and Mission is a standing item on the agenda of every Local Governing Body meeting. Plans for improvement are thorough and realistic and evidence shows that overtime, constant improvement is being made.
- Parents see school staff as models of good practice in Catholic life and modelling and support of this area is discreet yet consistent. Leaders and governors are involved at all levels in inspiring, encouraging and developing the children in this area and this involvement gives good witness for the children to view.
- Leaders and governors are not happy to rest on what is being achieved and are keen to look at next steps. This is obvious through discussion, but as importantly through a trawl of Minutes, Diocesan Self Evaluation Form and Action Plans, where continuous improvement is given a priority over self-congratulation.

- The curriculum across the school has been developed and planned with clear links to the pupils' spiritual, moral, and vocational development. Links are made to Gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching throughout the curriculum. Children understand and act with surety around the virtues promoted by the diocese.
- The school leadership has been quick to implement the Diocesan 'Virtues Initiative' and is embedding it in the school effectively. It is a visible initiative, and the children and staff are able to discuss and explain it well when questioned.

Religious Education

Grade - Good

a) How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

- Pupils appear to enjoy their learning and approach their lessons with interest and enthusiasm. As a consequence, behaviour in lessons is good because most pupils enjoy Religious Education and are engaged. For a minority of pupils however, the knowledge, understanding and skills they are acquiring are, at times, insufficiently developed. In some cases, the lack of depth of understanding is affecting the potential progress of Greater Depth pupils. However, leaders are aware of the challenges and have clear plans to tackle this underperformance. That said, some teaching is outstanding and EYFS deserves particular mention to this regard.
- Most pupils show an understanding of religious literacy and are able to build links between their own lives and Bible stories and Jesus' teaching, although more nuance and depth in this understanding on occasion would be beneficial.
- Good support is shown through adult intervention and differentiation to promote the learning of pupils with SEND at St John's.
- Pupils' attainment at the end of each key stage is in line with national averages according to school data.

b) The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education

- Teachers are committed to the value of Religious Education and they communicate this effectively to their pupils. Classroom displays add to this feel. They are enthusiastic and the majority

of lessons have pace and an array of activities. However, some questioning is limited, particularly in enabling some pupils to develop their own understanding and this is affecting the progress of some pupils. Literacy and recall are often a strong focus but children are also able to respond to the material (with depth and nuance) from a personal viewpoint. Some additional CPDF to ensure all teachers follow this plan would be beneficial.

• Planning is generally linked to pupil's current (real time) assessment so that learning and progress is promoted. Explanations and adaptation of tasks in a methodical way to suit the individual learner's place on the continuum of understanding is in some areas slightly limited and this can make it more difficult (than necessary) for children to manage their next steps in learning. This is particularly noticeable in some Greater Depth students who are not always pushed to demonstrate strong understanding of the personal alternative meanings of scripture and Church teaching.

c) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education

- Leaders and governors ensure that the curriculum for Religious Education is a faithful expression of the RECD. Correct resources are given to staff and RE is taught for 10% of curriculum time.
- The Leaders monitor and understand the data for Religious Education and have a strong understanding of the areas which need development. Future improvements are being planned in a methodical way and support is being resourced and delivered where there is underperformance. The RE lead, however, has quite a limited window in which to monitor and carry out planned improvements and in the short term may benefit from additional time allocation to ensure all teaching in all classes is of the highest possible calibre.
- Issues around questioning and differentiation and their associated effect on a small minority of pupils have been identified and steps are being taken, through ongoing CPDF to help staff develop their own knowledge, skills and understanding in these areas of Religious Education pedagogy.
- The subject leader is knowledgeable and committed. She has a firm understanding of both the strengths and areas for development within Religious Education and has plans in place to ensure Religious Education remains a prominent element in

the life of the school. She speaks with genuine pride around the team's achievements in improving standards exponentially. I would again however, mention the limited time she has allocated to embed and monitor these improvements.

•The diocesan directed 'Come and See' programme is used to deliver Religious Education in the school and direct support is given to ensure theological understanding for all teachers. This scheme is wholly appropriate for the groups of pupils at St John's school and the support given to staff's knowledge and pedagogical techniques by the entirety of the leadership group and Canon Paver, shows commitment to further raising standards.

Collective Worship

Grade Good

a) How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship

- Pupils are keen to be involved in the school's prayer life and do this respectfully and regularly. Children show a willingness to participate at all levels and the pupil chaplaincy team is something many are keen to be involved with. The school community sings enthusiastically and has a good understanding of the traditions of various liturgies.
- St John's school benefits from a strong pupil chaplaincy team with excellent adult support, but these children are new to the roles and are not yet preparing and leading worship. Over time this needs further development but it is clearly in progress and will undoubtedly be successful in further engaging the already reverent and enthusiastic pupils of the school. It is clear that the children are developing well with guidance, but also that they are driven by their own faith and beliefs.
- The experience of living and working in a faithful, prayerful community clearly has a positive impact on the spiritual and moral development of most pupils, irrespective of their ability or faith background. They have a deep sense of respect for those of other faiths and this is reflected in the way pupils prepare and participate in prayer and liturgy and the manner in which they talk about the prayer life of the school.

b) The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

- Collective worship is central to the life of the school and forms the heart of every school celebration. Praying together is part of the daily experience for all pupils and staff, regardless of their faith backgrounds. Themes and scriptures chosen are entirely appropriate and show a good knowledge of the Church's liturgical calendar.
- Staff are committed to helping develop children's skills in planning and leading worship but may need some further support in this area. The prayer life of the school demonstrates a range of access points allowing children of all ages and cultural viewpoints and backgrounds to develop spiritually.
- The Head of School shows commitment and skill at leading whole school acts of worship and may choose to share some of these skills with other staff to ensure all the adults within the school community upskill at planning and leading worship.

c) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the prayer life of the school.

- Leaders and governors are fully aware of the importance of high-quality prayer and liturgy activities and opportunities within the school. Some additional monitoring and evaluation of this provision (particularly when class based) to plan improvements and ensure it meets the needs of the whole community would be a worthwhile endeavour and could be used as a coaching opportunity for less confident members of staff. The Head of School showed genuine respect and skill in leading worship and she will benefit from receiving ongoing support and formation as she develops her essential and central role of leading on the Catholicity of the school.
- Leaders actively promote the inclusion of pupils in planning and leading collective worship but are also fully participatory on the prayer life of the school and are active in modelling good practice and supporting the practice of other staff members. An increase in the breadth of children invited to actively participate in whole school worship would be a positive next step.

- Leaders have a deep understanding of the Church's liturgical cycle, and this is evident through the school's prayer life, displays and classroom focal points. However, leaders also display genuine sensitivity to needs and backgrounds of the large number of non-Catholics in the school community which ensures all members are engaged and included.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 44 parental questionnaires received. When the size of the school is considered, this is a strong response and the strength of feeling from parents to support the school was very much mirrored in their responses.

All 44 were extremely positive about the school and they all mentioned the caring nature and Catholic ethos of the school. Staff were frequently praised for their interactions with the children and their friendliness and nurturing ways. Parents all mentioned that their children were happy at St John's and this was mirrored in informal playground discussions with parents before and after school.

A large number of respondents did disagree with the statement 'The school informs me what is taught in relationship and sex education', so this may be an area that school leadership (or the RSE coordinator) should address with some urgency.

However, this was the only statement that any significant number of parents disagreed with. One parent wrote eloquently that *'My son loves the school. He is nurtured well, encouraged and well taught. The Catholic ethos is balanced well in the curriculum and promotes life-long learning. St John's is a family. It's a loving school full of wonderful staff and families'*

This was a view echoed in one form or another by virtually all responding parents.