



# Westminster Diocese Inspection Report

## St Dominic's Catholic Primary School

Ballance Road, Homerton, Hackney, London E9 5SR

Date of inspection: 21 January 2016

### A. Classroom Religious Education

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

**Overall Grade 2**

Overall, the effectiveness of classroom religious education is good. Typically, the quality of teaching is good which enables pupils to make good progress over time. As a result of the friendly and caring ethos within the school, pupils have good attitudes to learning. Relationships between staff and pupils and the pupils themselves, are positive. Catholic faith is at the heart of the school's curriculum where a strong emphasis is placed on developing pupils' experiences of sacramental celebrations. The commitment to its Catholic identity is evident in all aspects of its work. Staff regularly attend training events and conferences organised by the diocese, in order to keep up to date with the latest developments in the teaching of RE. The headteacher, together with the RE leader have ensured that the planning, content and delivery of RE lessons are carefully linked to the Curriculum Directory. Teaching and learning are monitored regularly and staff attend moderation sessions to check the accuracy of their judgements of the standard of pupils' work. Parish clergy make a strong contribution to the delivery of religious education lessons. Governors have a good grasp of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, and are able to offer both support and challenge in equal measure. Religious education makes a strong contribution to the Catholic life of the school.

### B. The Catholic life of the school

**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 I**

Pupils receive an excellent all-round Catholic education and have very worthwhile experiences of the faith and of Catholic traditions. The school's mission statement, 'In Jesus we love, learn, hope, trust and care', permeates all areas of school life. Religious education is highly valued as the heart of the curriculum and all the requirements of the Bishops' Conference are in place. Worship and prayer are central to the life of the school and this is clearly evident in the caring and respectful ethos and nurturing environment. Attractive and stimulating classroom displays around the school seek to articulate the Gospel call to human flourishing and to live joyfully the life of Jesus. The school has formed strong partnerships with the parish and deanery, and works very collaboratively with the diocese. There is a strong commitment to the Common Good with pupils having a mature appreciation of the Church's social teaching and always willing to undertake fundraising for international, national and local charities. The headteacher, together with the leadership team, has a vision for this Catholic school that permeates all of its work. Governors make a very significant contribution to the work of the school and its Catholic life in order to sustain and develop this Catholic community.

# **Introduction**

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspectors spent one day in school, visited six lessons, two acts of worship, carried out one learning walk with the headteacher, and held interviews with school staff, pupils and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, the scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

The Inspection of St Dominic's Catholic Primary School was carried out under the requirements of the Canon 806 and Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Framework 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.

## **Inspection Team**

David Scott	Lead Inspector
Norah Flatley	Associate Inspector
Kathleen Gilbert	Associate Inspector

## **Description of School**

St Dominic's is a two-form entry Catholic Primary School in the LA of Hackney and the locality of Homerton. The school serves families from the parishes of The Immaculate Heart of Mary and St Dominic, Homerton, and St Jude's, Lower Clapton.

The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 95.6%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 4.2% and from other faiths is 0.2%. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is approximately 90%. There are 434 pupils on roll, with 14 pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education, Health & Care Plans (EHC). The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well above average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is well above average. Two hundred and twenty five pupils are eligible for the pupil premium grant which is well above average. Over half of all pupils are eligible for free school meals, this being above average. Two members of staff hold the CCRS.

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DFE Number:	204 2900								
URN Number:	133669								
Headteacher:	Ms Deirdre Finan								
Chair of Governors:	Ms Eileen Bryant								
Date of previous inspection:	2010								
Previous Inspection grades:	Good								
<b>Key for inspection grades:</b>	<table><tbody><tr><td>Grade 1</td><td><i>Outstanding</i></td></tr><tr><td>Grade 2</td><td><i>Good</i></td></tr><tr><td>Grade 3</td><td><i>Requires improvement</i></td></tr><tr><td>Grade 4</td><td><i>Causing Concern</i></td></tr></tbody></table>	Grade 1	<i>Outstanding</i>	Grade 2	<i>Good</i>	Grade 3	<i>Requires improvement</i>	Grade 4	<i>Causing Concern</i>
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Grade 4	<i>Causing Concern</i>								

## **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 has improved in classroom religious education since the last inspection?**

The last Diocesan inspection report identified three improvement points in relation to classroom religious education:

- Refine further target-setting in religious education so that it better supports individual pupils' spiritual development.
- Make better use of teachers' regular marking by ensuring that pupils follow up on areas to improve.
- Continue the drive to improve the pupils' writing skills through ensuring they have good opportunities for extended writing in Religious Education.

Since that time the target setting process has been refined so that it is linked with attainment targets for each unit in religious education. In addition, teachers have adopted 'green pen' questions in their marking which are designed to probe children's learning, to help them with strategies to improve their work. The school's checks on pupils' work indicate that pupils' writing has improved, as a result of good opportunities for extending their writing skills in religious education.

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

#### **Grade 2**

Provision for religious education meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. Additionally, this is supplemented by units of work and resources, written and compiled by an external consultant. This is reviewed regularly by the RE leader and headteacher to ensure it not only complies with the requirements of the Bishop's Conference, but more importantly, it meets the needs of the pupils in the school's care.

Effective training, led by the RE leader, makes sure that lesson planning is carefully cross-referenced to the Curriculum Directory. For example, before a new topic is introduced, staff attend twilight training sessions followed up by phase meetings, to ensure consistency of planning and delivery of the religious education curriculum across the school. Parents receive regular newsletters outlining their child's religious education curriculum for the unit, and meet with teachers formally twice a year, to discuss their progress.

Regular internal moderation of pupils' work and teachers' assessment and the sharing of good practice and resources, ensures the religious education curriculum is continually refreshed so that it remains relevant to pupils. Outside speakers from different faith leaders and visits to the Synagogue and Jewish Museum, make sure pupils gain a mature appreciation of faiths that are different from their own.

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

#### **Grade 2**

Pupils' achievement is good. By the end of Year 6 their attainment in religious education is slightly below that of other core subjects. During 2014 and 2015, there was a small decline in the number of pupils reaching Level 4. Also, although the proportion of pupils gaining Level 5 increased by seven percentage points, nevertheless, it was still half that which was achieved by pupils in other core

subjects. This is because the new curriculum has helped to provide further challenge for pupils. Pupils are enthusiastic learners who are increasingly confident in using religious vocabulary. Work in pupils' books indicates good positive attitudes to religious education. From the school's own information older pupils make faster progress than younger ones. Also, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers. However, the most able pupils do not always achieve their full potential. Internal moderation sessions, led by an external consultant, have ensured greater consistency and increased understanding of the levels of attainment.

## The quality of teaching

### Grade 2

Overall, teaching in religious education is typically good. Children's religious experience is enhanced as they move through the school. In all lessons observed during the inspection, there was a calm, purposeful atmosphere for learning. Teachers make careful links with prior learning at the beginning of lessons and ensure that all groups are engaged and interested. For example, in one Reception class, pupils used small world toys to lead them into a thanksgiving prayer for God's creation. In a Year 2 class, pupils re-enacted the Last Supper, linking words and actions to Scripture.

Teachers demonstrate good knowledge of Scripture. Stimulating resources were a common feature of all the lessons observed. Modern technologies are carefully integrated into activities to enhance the quality of teaching. Pupil questionnaires indicate that pupils particularly enjoy drama and role-play activities. Support staff are very well deployed and they make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. In a Year 6 class, support staff were effectively used to stimulate pupils' discussion where each group focused on questions about living out their faith as Christians.

Relationships between staff and pupils and between the pupils themselves are excellent. Teachers provide pupils with regular feedback on the quality of their work. However, not all staff provide pupils with sufficiently detailed advice to enable them to make more rapid progress in RE. Scrutiny of pupils' books indicates growing levels of religious literacy. However, for some pupils, opportunities for extended writing are limited. Also, teachers do not always ask sufficiently probing questions to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding, particularly for the most able. Homework is regularly set which enables pupils to make good progress and deepen their knowledge of religious concepts.

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

### Grade 2

The leadership of religious education is good and is reflected in the good progress pupils make in the subject. The leadership team has a clear vision and sense of Catholic purpose, who place pupils at the heart of the school's work. They have high aspirations which focus on pupils' achievement, the development of their faith, including their spiritual and moral development. This vision is understood by all staff and governors. New assessment arrangements for tracking pupils' progress have been recently introduced. For example, sub-levelling of information about pupils' progress was introduced in September 2015, in order to track pupils' progress more accurately so that support or challenge can be given when needed. However, while progress has been made, it is too early to judge the full impact of this initiative. Also, the school's self-evaluation of the success of the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in religious education, is slightly generous.

The headteacher, together with members of the senior team, regularly observe RE lessons and provide staff with feedback. However, although records of these visits indicate what needs to be improved, they do not always specify what support will be provided to help the teacher, and the timeframe for improvements to be made. Staff regularly attend diocesan training events and conferences which have included moderation sessions to check the accuracy of teachers' judgements of the standard of pupils' work. Parish clergy make a strong contribution to the delivery of religious education lessons. For example, younger children have attended 'dry-baptism' sessions while others have explored the significance of the layout and symbolism of ecclesiastical furniture, in the church. Both priests regularly attend staff inset days. Governors visit the school often to conduct focused

learning walks and observe pupil progress meetings, in order that they are able to challenge leaders about the school's performance.

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

- Improve the teaching and pupils' progress still further by ensuring teachers:
  - set work at the right level that allows sufficient time for pupils to work on their own in order to develop their extended writing
  - provide pupils with more detailed feedback on how to improve their work
  - use questioning more effectively to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding, particularly of the most able.

## **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 has improved since the last inspection?**

There were no recommendations made at the last inspection in regard to the Catholic life of the school. Since this time the school has provided specialist training designed to both reflect and promote the Catholic life of the school. In addition, the school has supported a number of projects such as Lenten and CCS prayer books, HCPT prayer book and fundraising appeal to support a pupil and her brother to visit Lourdes, which have further enhanced and encouraged the prayer life of the school. In June 2015, leaders introduced a 'Prayer and Spirituality Week' which was supported by performances from Ten Ten Performance Group to explore themes that help pupils reflect on their faith. The school has purchased additional resources to enhance the Catholic life of the school. The school's website has been developed to inform parents of all that is happening at the school.

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

**Grade I**

The school meets and exceeds the Bishops Conference of England and Wales requirement in allocating 10% curriculum time to the teaching of RE. The subject is given the highest priority within the school with teachers being well supported by the headteacher and RE leader in the delivery of the curriculum. For example, staff are well supported and inducted into the Catholic life of the school by attending the annual Commissioning Mass at the start of each academic year. Here staff share a commitment to guide the pupils and are presented with candles as a symbol of their task. However, in discussion, pupils told inspectors that they would like to be able to attend more visits that are related to their religious education topics. Inspectors agreed, and suggest that leaders and governors explore the possibility of introducing a retreat programme.

For 2015/16, the subject received double the amount of funding than other core subjects. The commitment to the development of teachers' skills and knowledge of religious education is supported by the use of the generous budget allocation to provide in-service training within the school. In addition, one inset day per year is focused on the development of the RE curriculum and the Catholic life of the school, which is attended by all staff, parish clergy and governors.

St Dominic's has recently been refurbished following serious flooding in September 2015. As a result, the environment has been greatly enhanced to include spaces for display which support the spiritual development of the pupils. Stimulating classroom displays throughout the school are thought provoking and are of the highest quality.

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

**Grade I**

Prayer and worship are a regular feature throughout the school day. The school's mission statement, 'In Jesus we love, learn, hope, trust and care' is displayed prominently throughout the school. As a result, it is well known by pupils and are able to describe how they can live this mission out in their daily lives. Pupils are involved in the preparation of worship in their classes and they have the opportunity to lead their class on some occasions. For example, Year 6 pupils help to prepare the Lenten and Advent liturgies and the leavers' Mass. Music, dance and drama are important aspects of liturgical celebrations. Pupils speak of the importance of prayer in their lives and in the life of the school. They enjoy writing their own prayers. Pupils are able to experience a variety of different

worship styles ranging from class to whole school, which allows for personal reflection and community response. The liturgical cycle is well known to pupils. Mass and the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation are part of the school's worship programme. Last year, the school was very well supported by the presence of a Deacon, who was preparing for ordination in the parish. During this time, he was a welcome and regular visitor to the school who made a strong contribution to enhancing the Catholic life of the school, by leading Masses, assemblies, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In addition, he team-taught lessons with school staff and provided invaluable advice about the development of the RE curriculum. The school is well supported by the clergy from both feeder parishes and the importance of community is a priority for all stakeholders. Governors have an accurate view of the strengths and areas to be improved. They have good informal arrangements in place to monitor the Catholic life of the school. However, there is scope to strengthen systems to monitor the Catholic life and to judge the success of future liturgical events and celebrations, more effectively.

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

#### **Grade I**

The school is committed and passionate in providing opportunities for pupils to experience the Common Good. Pupils have a good understanding of the corporal works of mercy and are encouraged to put their faith into action through supporting local, national and international charities. Pupils are actively encouraged to know and understand the call to justice and service with pupils and families who may be experiencing times of crisis. This they do by responding generously to appeals from many charities which have included the local food bank, Comic/Sports Relief, St Mungo's, The Catholic Children's Society Westminster, HCPT and CAFOD. Pupils have the opportunity in Advent to visit and sing carols to adults living in local sheltered housing. The rich and diverse cultural backgrounds of all pupils are celebrated regularly. The school celebrates refugee and traveller cultures and was part of a special celebration at the Southbank Centre in 2015 which focussed on the music and dance of these cultures. Religious opportunities including pilgrimage, are provided for the traveller community through one of the feeder parishes. Pupils are able to lead in a variety of roles such as eco activists, school councillors, prefects, health ambassadors and advisers on the choice of play equipment for the younger pupils. The Church's call to justice and peace is understood well by all pupils, who appreciate well the importance of the place of justice and peace in the Church and its relevance in their everyday lives. Positive links are maintained with the local parishes, community, local authority, deanery, diocese, and local maintained schools. There are strong links with other Catholic schools. The headteacher has forged particularly strong partnerships working with other headteachers, to collaborate on initiatives, share good practice and to support each other. Pupils are proud of their community and understand the importance of working together. Through the school's assemblies, the talents, achievement and service of each individual pupil are celebrated throughout the year. The programme of liturgies and assemblies provide opportunities for all pupils to put into action the Gospel values, such as compassion and mercy.

### **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 I**

Partnerships between home, school and parish are strong. The school is committed to developing very positive relationships with the community it serves. On many occasions, it has reached out to families in need of support in times of crisis or distress. Surveys of parents' views reflect how positive they feel about the school and how caring and approachable they find staff.

The Wednesday Word newsletter actively links the parish, school and home with activities that nurture the growth of pupils' faith that parents might like to use at home with their children to enhance their understanding of what it means to be a Catholic. In addition, St Dominic's Gazette, published on the school's website, provides useful day-to-day information for parents about what is going on at the school. The school's website conveys a good deal of helpful information, which is easy to navigate regarding the Catholic life of the school with photographic evidence alerting parents of the work undertaken in class. Leaders and reception staff help to maintain an open-door policy so parents can talk through any pressing issues or concerns.

The school works very effectively with other schools in the diocese, particularly those located within the local deanery. During the last academic year the school was invited to present their innovative work on the 'Big Thinking Wheel' connected with AT2, 'Learning from Religion', to the Westminster Diocesan Inspectors. This work was very well received. Partnership working with the diocese is a strength. The headteacher together with staff regularly attend courses and conferences hosted by the diocese. Attendance at these events provides an opportunity for colleagues to reflect on current practice and to share ideas and resources. There are excellent links with both parishes. Parish clergy are regular visitors to the school and are always on hand to provide effective support and wise counsel. Parents are encouraged to participate in a wide range of activities and the school continually looks for ways in which it can engage families in its work.

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

**Grade I**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school is excellent. The headteacher, supported well by the senior team, teachers and governors have ensured that all aspects of the Catholic life of the school are reflected in the school's mission statement, 'In Jesus we love, learn, hope, trust and care'. This is demonstrated by the commitment of the leaders to the Church's mission in the promotion of the Catholic ethos of the school. This provides a firm foundation for what the school seeks to foster and encourage in the lives of pupils and staff. Leaders acknowledge that this aspect could be strengthened still further if more teachers were encouraged to gain the CCRS qualification. The liturgical year, together with the regular celebration of the Mass, Sacrament of Reconciliation and whole school acts of worship, shape and foster this welcoming and friendly community. The school places pupils at the centre of all that it does and strives for excellence in helping all pupils to live happy and worthwhile lives. The school is a vibrant and lively community where leaders and governors are committed to educating the pupils to acquire a discipleship for life. Governors are energetic and enthusiastic in their support of the school and in maintaining its Catholic identity. The distinctive Catholic life experienced by the pupils of St Dominic's Catholic Primary School is greatly valued by parents.

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

- Increase the number of visits that are related to pupils' religious education topics, and to explore the possibility of introducing a Retreat programme
- Increase the proportion of teachers who hold the CCRS qualification.