



Diocese of Westminster

INSPECTION REPORT

St Albert the Great Catholic Primary School

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Headteacher: Louise Flemming
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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

Date of inspection: 01 July 2011
Date of previous inspection: 12 March 2008

Reporting Inspector: Mrs S Nolan

Description of School

Saint Albert the Great Catholic Primary School provides for a one-form entry cohort of pupils, mainly from the parishes of Our Lady Queen of All Creation, Bennetts End, and Saint Mary and Saint Joseph, Boxmoor. There are 222 pupils on roll, including those who attend the Nursery. Pupils are predominantly of White British heritage but the school population also includes a small number of pupils from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few are at the early stages of learning English. The majority of pupils are from Catholic families but just under a fifth of the pupils have other Christian backgrounds. A very few pupils have non-Christian backgrounds. Of the 14 full and part-time teachers, around three quarters (11) are Catholics and two hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (CCRS) or other Catholic qualifications. An average proportion of the pupils has special educational needs but only one of these 39 pupils has a statement of special education need. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is slightly below average. Since the last inspection, the senior leadership team has stabilised and a substantive headteacher is in post. The school rejoices in its well understood mission statement: 'The more I learn about the world in which I live, the closer I grow to God.'

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

St Albert the Great is a good Catholic school. The headteacher has built up a very committed staff team who want the school to be the best it can. This strong community spirit and Catholic ethos involves not only the staff and children but increasingly also the parents. This is exemplified in the way that parents are more and more involved in assemblies and liturgical celebrations. Standards overall are close to average with Religious Education similar to that of English. Children's writing skills are stronger in Religious Education than in other areas of the curriculum. Children achieve steadily because of generally good teaching. Checks on children's performance and progress in Religious Education are carried out regularly through whole-school tracking procedures similar to those for literacy and numeracy. The school, however, recognises that there is still work to do to make its target-setting practice more effective to support individual children's religious development as fully as possible. Prayer and worship underpin the Catholic life of the school so that children's spiritual, moral and social development is strong and they mostly behave very well. They are helped to understand the Church's global mission through their support for many charities and through their involvement in local projects both within and outside the school and parish community.

Grade 2

Improvement since the last inspection

At the last inspection, the school was asked to develop its assessment practice, both the guidance to pupils on how to improve written work and set targets for pupils. It was also asked to track pupils' progress using the agreed diocesan levels of attainment and establish formal procedures to induct new teachers into their roles within a Catholic school. There has been good progress on all of the above areas. Current systems to assess progress are detailed but

have not been in place long enough to show that attainment in Religious Education is consistently high. The whole school marking procedures are implemented effectively within Religious Education. A thorough Catholic induction for new staff members, supplemented by the helpful staff handbook, ensures that all new staff understand their responsibilities within a Catholic school. The commitment of the senior team, still under strength, is a major factor in the successful creation of a strong Catholic ethos within the school as is the sterling work of the members of the governing body in supporting the school through recent challenging circumstances. The school has correctly identified, however, that it has further work to do in setting individual targets for pupils through one-to-one discussion and in further developing teachers' skills in assessing pupils' understanding in religious education lessons.

Grade 2

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

Senior leaders have been very successful in nourishing a school community that rejoices in a shared vision to maintain a friendly and welcoming ethos where all members understand and strive to live out the mission statement in daily interactions with each other. The monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice and pupils' work in Religious Education is regular, accurate, and well used to identify priorities such as ensuring greater differentiation and challenge for the most able within the religious education curriculum. The impact of the work to improve religious literacy is already evident in the improved writing in the pupils' work books. Close parish links and good communications support well the current drive for improvement. The involvement of the parish clergy as governors, as well as their regular visits for liturgical and other events, assists in embedding improvements in Religious Education. As a result, the school is set fair to sustain its current improvements and develop even more in the immediate future. The school has a good capacity to improve both the spiritual life of the school and the achievement of the pupils in Religious Education.

Grade 2

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine further target-setting in Religious Education so that it better supports individual pupils' spiritual development.
- Encourage more of the staff to gain a Catholic qualification in Religious Studies.

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

The Catholic life of the school is well led and managed by the headteacher and senior team in partnership with the staff, governors and parents. There is a very positive and close relationship with the local parish as well as with neighbouring parishes. Leaders at all levels have a good understanding of the nature of a Catholic school and have guided the school community to give real assent to the school's mission. This has had the impact of creating a caring and compassionate ethos which makes pupils and their families feel welcomed and involved. Numerous parents, for example, attended the Year 4 assembly on the morning of the inspection. Pupils' views are noted and valued so that pupils form very trusting relationships with adults and respond well to the prayer life of the school. St Albert's knows clearly its strengths and areas for improvement. The school has taken on board the issues raised during

diocesan reviews and at the last inspection and continues to work assiduously towards their implementation, particularly with regard to assessment practice.

Grade 2

The Prayer Life of the School

The Church's liturgical cycle is well woven into the life of the school. The provision for prayer life and collective worship is carefully planned and matched to the pupils' stages of development. Prayer is central to the life of the school. Children are involved as fully as possible in the planning of assemblies, prayer groups, liturgical events and Mass. Pupils in Year 4, for example, used drama very successfully to demonstrate the story of St Paul on the way to Damascus. Daily prayers in class groups and meditation in religious education lessons are well linked to the Church's calendar. The prayer tables in each classroom reflect the colours of the liturgical season and are given real prominence, helped by the colourful balloons reminding pupils of the Christian values their class should promote. With the help of the parish clergy, children are regularly able to attend the celebration of Mass, both in class and whole-school Masses in the parish. They are able to participate in exposition and benediction, services of reconciliation, and Lent and Advent liturgies. Families are regularly invited to attend. Years 5 and 6 benefit from retreat and reflection days. Stimulating displays in classrooms and around the corridors provide children with further opportunities for thought and reflection. Traditions such as the rosary and Stations of the Cross are well embedded in the children's experience, and contribute well to enriching pupils' prayer life.

Grade 1

How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?

The school strives very effectively to create a harmonious in-school community and contributes well to supporting cohesion in its local community. Pupils have good opportunities to enhance their experience of traditions other than those of their own families through learning at first hand about the experiences of those of their companions who are from different faith groups. Pupils are led successfully to understand their place within the Church's global mission. They are involved, for example, with a school in India. Through active support for a wide range of local and overseas charities, including the homeless and those terminally ill, children grow in awareness of the international community to which they belong. Parents are very much welcomed into the school and attend in significant numbers for the weekly class events.

Grade 2

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

The achievements and standards in Religious Education are broadly average. Children make steady progress in Religious Education by the end of Year 6, similar to that in English. In discussion, and in their workbooks, pupils show a growing awareness of Catholic faith. Standards in written work in Religious Education are often higher than those in other subject areas. Children see their religious education work books as something special. Progression in understanding aspects of the Mass is good because of the helpful support of the parish clergy and the carefully constructed curriculum. Pupils, at their own levels, know the pattern of the liturgical year, are gaining familiarity with rituals, and are clear as to what is expected of a Catholic community. They have a very good grasp of traditional practices and are familiar with

their school and house saints. Year 3, for example, were able to talk confidently about the school patron saint and his work as a teacher and philosopher. The pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is particularly strong and their behaviour is generally excellent.

Grade 2

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is good. Pupils enjoy their lessons because of the wide range of activities they experience. Relationships between children and teachers are warm and constructive and contribute successfully to their obvious keenness to learn. The thoughtful use of periods of reflection and meditation were strengths of the lessons seen during the inspection. Teachers strive relentlessly to promote a good knowledge of the Catholic faith and lessons are regularly planned to develop themes relating to assemblies and newsletters. Pupils are assessed regularly in Religious Education but not always in relation to individualised targets. Nevertheless, pupils are often involved in evaluating their own learning and understanding. Some well-targeted questioning, together with a classroom ethos that encourages queries and explanations, supports children's language and communication skills. Marking is generally encouraging and regular and teachers and pupils are beginning to develop a written dialogue over the quality of their recorded work in Religious Education. Nevertheless, there were missed opportunities in the lessons seen to assess pupils' understanding of the ideas intended to be developed such as the contrasts between monotheistic and polytheistic religions in the context of the Ten Commandments.

Grade 2

Quality of the Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is very good. The well-resourced Religious Education department provides a curriculum which fully meets the diocesan requirements with regard to curriculum time. It is very well supplemented by daily prayer and worship. Music and drama are used well to enrich pupils' experience and develop their understanding. The religious education curriculum aims to develop the whole child and, thus, makes an invaluable contribution to building the school community. Schemes of work are appropriately constructed to ensure progression through year groups. This is helped greatly by the themed approach as in the current work on 'making choices' running through year groups. Pupils have very good opportunities to study other religious faiths, demonstrated in displays of recent work on Hinduism and Judaism. There are excellent plans to enhance even further the links with other religious groups and faiths and to strengthen the scriptural basis within units of work.

Grade 1

Leadership and management of Religious Education

Religious Education at St Albert's is well co-ordinated and managed between two members of staff. A senior leader takes responsibility for the spiritual and religious life of the school as a whole and the subject leader manages the pupils' classroom experiences and the curriculum. Monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice, teachers' planning and children's performance and progress are rigorous. Along with the core areas, the pupils' progress in the academic study of the Catholic faith is analysed carefully. The coordinators have a strong sense of the Church's educational mission and share this with the staff. Professional development opportunities are

accessible to all staff and well based on review findings. For example, the school has worked closely with the diocesan advisor to consolidate teachers' understanding of attainment levels. The school is also aware of the need to ensure more staff gain relevant Catholic qualifications. In the well-kept learning environment, the coordinators ensure that resources and staff are deployed very effectively so that all children are included fully in the religious life of the school.

Grade 2