

Report of the Denominational (Section 48) Inspection of
Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

St. Louis Catholic Middle School

DFES No:935/4602
URN: 124863

For Catholic Diocese of East Anglia



Chair of Governors: Mrs S. Watson

Headteacher: Mrs R. Heap

Denominational Inspectors: Mrs R. Barker & Mrs K. Pereira

Date of Inspection: 10th December 2013

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Information about the school.

St. Louis Catholic Middle School, Bury St Edmunds is the only Catholic middle deemed secondary school for pupils from 9 to 13 years in the Diocese of East Anglia. It serves the Catholic community of West Suffolk as well as the borders of Cambridgeshire, Essex and Norfolk. Pupils are drawn from parishes in the Deanery of St. Edmund's.

There are 434 pupils on roll of whom 77% are Catholic, 18% are from other Christian denominations and 1% from other world faiths. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. Approximately 12% of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities. An increasing number of pupils have English as an additional language (16%). 6% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is below the national average.

Key grades for inspection.

1. Outstanding 2. Good 3. Requires improvement 4. Unsatisfactory

Overall Effectiveness. How effective is the school in providing Catholic education?

Grade: 1

The overall effectiveness of this Catholic School is judged to be outstanding. Outcomes for pupils, the effectiveness of leaders, governors and managers in developing and sustaining improvement in the Catholic Life of the school and the provision in promoting Catholic education at St Louis Catholic Middle School are judged to be outstanding. Students benefit greatly from attending this school. They participate fully in the Catholic life of the school and value being members of this very caring community. Their attainment and progress over time in Religious Education is outstanding.

What the school needs to do to improve further:

- Increase the curriculum time for Religious Education so that it meets the requirements of the Bishop's Conference.
- Fully embed the school's new marking system to ensure consistency in written feedback to students and embed the practice to further develop the written learning dialogue between students and teachers across both key stages.

Outcomes for pupils.

Grade: 1

Pupils take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the school in shaping its Catholic life. Members of the school council help to evaluate the Catholic life of the school and RE. Pupils contribute to the common good by taking responsibility for supporting charities such as CAFOD through cake sales for the people of the Philippines and Father Tim Peacock's mission in Zimbabwe. Pupils articulate effectively how and why they serve others in need. Pupils take part in Diocesan events such as the Year of Faith Masses and Bishop Alan's Installation. They also represent the school at joint Catholic school events such as Carol Services and Walsingham Pilgrimages. Pupils take full responsibility for their behaviour and show exceptionally positive attitudes towards each other and the Catholic character of the school. They support each other, feel safe, happy and know that they are valued and listened to. Pupils are proud of their faith, share a sense of belonging and are happy to share their beliefs with others confidently.

Pupils' response to the school's collective worship, sacramental and prayer life is outstanding. Their participation in collective worship is reflective, willing and attentive. Pupils make the sign of the cross confidently, write their own form prayers and pray the school mission prayer daily. They know what is expected of them and often exceed these expectations. The Mission Statement is known. They show a deep appreciation of the

Sacrament of Reconciliation and of the formal opportunities for worship provided by the school. Pupils enjoy retreat days. Mass is central to the life of the school and pupils help to plan and lead aspects of these although more pupils could attend the voluntary mass on the first Friday of the month. The very well attended liturgy group makes an impressive contribution to the quality of worship at the school and in turn to the pupils' spiritual and moral development. During an observation of one Year 8 tutor group and in the absence of their usual form tutor the attitudes were exceptional. They demonstrated independence and personal leadership. A student led the afternoon reflection by reading out a personal prayer she had written and the class participated fully.

Pupils are confident in expressing their beliefs and asking questions. They recognise that their teachers put in a lot of time and effort on their behalf. They told us that they enjoy the opportunity to explore their own faith, and recognise that their opinions are valued by teachers and students. The excellent relationships foster an environment of enthusiasm and enjoyment for learning in the majority of students. Most pupils recognise the importance and relevance of RE and described RE as 'relaxed.' Behaviour in lessons and relationships with staff are exceptional. In Key Stage 3 however the inspectors would like to see pupil progress in lessons accelerated especially for the second RE national attainment target by giving pupils more opportunities and time to explore the impact of religion in their own lives and in the lives of others. Questioning is searching and probing but pupils' opportunity to get to higher level thinking is restricted mainly by time. The vast majority of pupils are keen to achieve and behaviour of pupils in and out of class is outstanding. The school's own analysis of its tracking in Religious Education shows that pupils generally make outstanding progress over time. The inspectors agree with this. Key Stage 3 pupils make at least the recommended two levels of progress.

Leaders and Managers.

Grade: 1

A fully committed staff under the strong leadership of the headteacher together with the senior management team, RE leader and governors are at the core of this successful school. Provision for Catholic life is outstanding. The head teacher's vision for continuous improvement and personal, spiritual and moral development is in no way compromised by the uncertainties of the reorganisation of Suffolk schools currently at the consultation phase. The Catholic ethos is tangible in the interactions between all members of the school community, both adults and children. An induction process is in place for new staff, and a guide to working in a catholic school 'At ease in God's presence' produced by the RE leader, ensures all are familiar with and able to participate in the prayers, traditions and practices that underpin this ethos.

Communication within the school and the wider community is outstanding. Morning pre-school briefings for staff, 'notes for the day' given to pupils at registration, text and email notifications for parents keep all stakeholders fully informed and up to date. A significant number of pupils are drawn from surrounding villages and towns and travel to school by bus. The home/school diary provides an easy contact for raising concerns, advising needs and particular circumstances, as well as celebrating success. The parish bulletin includes appropriate school events and news, and pupils in school are encouraged to support parish initiatives.

An effective governing body with a wide variety of talents are active and involved. Sharing of data on school performance through the school website and at governor meetings enables informed questioning and challenge to promote the 'continuous improvement' vision of the head teacher. They visit the school regularly, attend masses and liturgical celebrations, and participate in a diverse range of school activities. The regular celebration of Mass and liturgy, in line with the church's liturgical calendar, both at the church and in school provide opportunities for pupils to plan, prepare and organise readings, offertory gifts, prayer, drama and music. The close co-operation of and support by the parish priest promotes services

where pupils are engaged and respond respectfully. They 'listen and watch' he observes. Many pupils are altar servers and readers in their own parish church.

RE is recognised as a core subject in school and the recently introduced system for data tracking of literacy and numeracy has been extended to include RE. Performance and progress by individuals, by classes, by boys or girls or identified vulnerable groups can be clearly seen. Analysis of the data with staff supports ongoing review of curriculum content, assessment tasks and teacher performance. As this monitoring is more fully embedded within whole school practice 'assessment for learning' will further secure 'continuous improvement'. Professional development opportunities for staff are well supported and also attendance at diocesan meetings.

Published curriculum schemes of work are used in conjunction with diocesan programmes. Around the school, pictures, prayers and quotes about Nelson Mandela were evidence of the use of extension material from everyday news and events.

A prayer garden is currently under development to provide greater opportunities for reflective and quiet times in Key Stage 2. Prayer tables in each classroom display books and religious artefacts relevant to the time of year, but could be enhanced and given a higher profile as a focus for RE and prayer within the classroom.

Provision.

Grade: 1

The sacramental and prayer life of the school is outstanding. There is a programme of whole year, key stage and class Masses, with optional first Friday lunch-time masses, whose themes link with the Church's liturgical year as in other liturgical celebrations; Service of Ashes and St. Louis Nine Lessons and Carols. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is made available in Advent and the summer term. Many positive views on reconciliation were expressed in pupil surveys following a retreat day. Pupils know and respect the traditional prayers of the Catholic Church, they also write their own prayers, many of which are bound into prayer booklets for the classroom. Pupils from across the year groups opt to join the liturgy group, giving up two lunch-times a week to be part of the music, song and drama of school assemblies, collective worship and services. A Year 8 pupil, a member since joining in Year 5 said, 'It really helps your relationship with God to grow.'

The school provides extensive opportunities for pupils to know and live out the school mission statement and pupils say the school mission prayer every day. The well established and systematic structure of form time enables students to start and finish the day in a calm and reflective way. Students use the prayer corner and the crucifix as a focus for their daily prayers but the inspectors would like to see these changed more regularly to reflect the liturgical seasons.

In Key Stage 2 lessons observed were good with outstanding features. Teaching on the symbolism of the Advent wreath was purposeful and pupils responded enthusiastically. Learning objectives were identified, and open questioning provided a good dialogue between teacher and pupils. Working with each other, pupils engaged in paired discussion, were on task and brought back thoughtful ideas for whole class discussion. One pupil commented 'This is a really nice way to do work' as he undertook the practical task of making his own Advent wreath and reflecting on the meaning of each element. A pupil said the new marking scheme, in evidence in books, was useful and helped them know how well they were doing.

In Key Stage 3 teaching in RE is generally good, with some outstanding teaching. Teachers are aware of pupils' differing abilities and learning requirements although there is a need to do more differentiation by task adjustment. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and there was some evidence of tasks that extend pupil thinking skills such as an excellent

starter on Martyrdom which challenged Year 8 students to consider what they might be prepared to make sacrifices for. Students are formally assessed using RE National Attainment levels termly and progress is tracked by the head of RE and centrally by the school. The inspectors saw some innovative and interesting use of resources and planned group work, but the reduced curriculum time means this is limited. To ensure more pupil progress in lessons it would be useful to incorporate more progress checks. To enable a more effective learning dialogue the inspectors would like to see a greater consistency in giving feedback in marking that enables pupils to respond and develop targets for learning.

The Religious Education curriculum is based on the Bishops' Curriculum Directory and provides well-planned opportunities for pupils to develop religious understanding, literacy and to explore different views. The curriculum provided encourages moral, spiritual and vocational learning. The RE curriculum time allocated is below the requirements of the Diocese. This is having an impact on learning and progress at Key Stage 3 in particular. Whilst the majority of the content for the knowledge element of the curriculum is taught thoroughly, learning from religion is not as evident. This means that students cannot make as much progress in higher order thinking as they move into Year 9. At Key Stage 2 however the impact is not as evident and aspects of the RE Curriculum are taught successfully through assemblies and other curriculum areas.



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Letter to pupils explaining the findings from the Diocesan Inspection

17th December 2013

Dear Pupils

Diocesan Inspection of St. Louis Catholic Middle School, Bury St. Edmunds

Thank-you very much for the warm welcome you gave to us when we visited your school. We enjoyed working with you and hearing your views about your school. We saw some of your RE lessons and looked at some of the work in your books. We attended Year 6 Assembly and the Liturgy Group Nativity rehearsal.

Some things we observed that we think are extremely important were:

- That you feel safe, secure and are well cared for.
- That your behaviour is excellent and you are kind and caring to each other.
- That you work hard and enjoy your RE and other lessons.
- That you participate with great singing and music at Mass and in other services.
- That your teachers, head teacher and governors work together to give you great opportunities.

Your school is doing very well but we have some ideas to help make it even better. We have asked your teachers to help your learning in RE by using the new marking scheme in all your work so that you know how well you are doing, and what to do to get even better. We have also asked your head teacher and governors to find some extra time for RE each week to give you more thinking time about what you are learning.

Thank-you again for the ways in which you helped us to understand your school. We wish all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Rosemary Barker and Mrs Kate Pereira.

Diocesan Inspectors