



INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

ST GREGORY'S VOLUNTARY AIDED CATHOLIC MIDDLE SCHOOL

Biddenham Turn, Bedford, MK40 4AT

DfE School No: 820/4601

URN: 109696

Head Teacher: Mr R Mundy
Chair of Governors: Mr C Donnellan

Reporting Inspectors: Mrs P O'Byrne and Mr J Welsh

Date of Inspection: 16 and 17 June 2010

Date Report Issued: 2 July 2010

Date of previous Inspection: January 2009

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and
in partnership with Bedford Local Authority

Description of the school

St Gregory's is part of the Federation of Catholic Schools in Bedford. The school is the only middle school in the diocese and takes pupils aged 9-13 from four parishes. There are 398 pupils on roll, 65% of whom are Catholic, a further 17% are Christian; parents of the majority of the other pupils have specifically chosen to send their children to the school because of its Christian values.

Key for Inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade: 2

St Gregory's is a good Catholic school. The head teacher, senior leadership team, Religious Education (RE) subject leader and chaplain ensure the mission statement, "Living, learning and growing with Jesus", permeates the work of the school. St Gregory's is a worshipping community where prayer and celebration of the Eucharist is central to the life of the school. The strong sense of mission and moral purpose, modelled by the head teacher, is obvious throughout the whole school community. Standards of achievement in RE are satisfactory and should improve with the appointment of the new subject leader. Pastoral care is a strength of the school and pupils' behaviour is very good in class and on the playground.

Improvements since the last inspection

Grade: 2

In the eighteen months since the last inspection, the school has moved forward on all the areas highlighted in the previous report. A new subject leader has been appointed; chaplaincy provision has been extended; the raising attainment plan (RAP) has Catholicity and RE at the beginning; there has been some expansion of the retreat programme and a faith tour has been introduced for Year 6; parents are offered more support to enable them to help their children with RE; staff have benefited from effective INSET on RE levels of attainment. The profile of RE has been raised and pupils are now aware that it is a core subject. Seven members of staff currently teach RE and all form tutors lead key stage collective worship. As part of the school's 50th anniversary celebrations, a new chapel has been developed which enriches both the liturgical life of the school and other areas of the curriculum.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

Grade: 2

The school's capacity to continue to improve is good. Members of the senior leadership team, together with the new subject leader and the support group of governors, are fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and have already implemented some strategies to improve the provision, for example using the RE levels of attainment, next step marking.

What the school needs to do to improve further

To improve further the school should:

- develop the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good
- embed the new assessment arrangements so that they inform teachers' planning
- ensure work is differentiated and matched to pupils' needs
- develop the role of teaching assistants
- develop an on-going review of the RE Self Evaluation Form (SEFRE) so that it is a collaborative, working document.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school's mission statement permeates the work of the school; it provides the structure for the school development plan and the associated RAP, it is very clear on documentation and in the day-to-day life of the school. The head teacher is passionate about inclusion and sees each individual as unique and created in the image of God; he is a very good role model. The senior leadership team is committed to raising standards and promoting the individual development of every child. All subject

leaders are looking at ways of ensuring spiritual development opportunities are included in their curriculum area. Recent changes in the arrangement for key stage collective worship have resulted in all staff being more involved in promoting the school's Catholic mission. Numerically, the grades in the SEFRE provide a fairly accurate picture of the school but, in many sections, it lacks evidence to support the judgements. The Federation's governor support group has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weakness and was impressed by the School Council's presentation on bullying and the pupils' determination to ensure it is dealt with effectively. The governor support group is asking the Federation's Access and Community Cohesion committee to contribute towards the cost of transport to enable pupils to transfer from St John Rigby lower school. Last term, the Federation appointed an executive principal to work with the four member schools to oversee standards, provide strategic direction and support governors.

The prayer life of the school

Grade: 2

St Gregory's is a worshipping community where prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist are central to the life of the school. Whole school, key stage and class masses are celebrated regularly throughout the school year for feast days and special occasions, for example Remembrance Day, Oscar Romero's feast-day. During Lent, pupils also have the opportunity to receive the sacrament of reconciliation. The new chapel provides an ideal venue for year groups and class celebrations. The attached priest and the lay chaplain provide good leadership in the liturgical life of the school and they are highly valued by staff and pupils. Collective worship makes an important contribution to the spiritual and moral development of pupils; it is arranged through whole school gatherings and key stage groups in the hall, and individual class based reflections. The recent involvement of all form tutors in leading the key stage collective worship has enhanced the prayer life of the school. During collective worship the pupils are quiet, reflective and respond well to the focal stimuli. Besides the morning daily act of worship, prayers are also said as part of RE lessons, at lunchtime and at the end of the day.

Chaplaincy

Grade: 2

The senior leadership team understands and values the important role that chaplaincy plays in the school. The chaplaincy team meets regularly to coordinate and develop activities for each term. The lay chaplain, despite restrictions on her time, provides clear leadership and support to all members of the school community, really enriching the Catholic life of the school. The retreat programme is being extended to Year 7 and it is being developed to give members of staff the opportunity for personal reflection. Pastoral care is a strength of the school and pupils appreciate the additional support available through the nurture groups, Rainbows, the Learning Lodge and the "Tardis", the learning support unit.

Community cohesion

Grade: 2

Community cohesion is seen as a central part of the school's mission. Leaders throughout the school promote respect for difference and value diversity. Classroom RE promotes mutual understanding and respect for all faiths and offers pupils the opportunities to explore other faiths and visit their places of worship. Pupils' behaviour in classrooms and in the grounds is very good; they are proud of their own identities. Throughout the year, the pupils demonstrate their concern for those less fortunate than themselves, both locally and globally, by their endeavours for the Prebend Street Centre, their response to the Haiti disaster and their ongoing support in El Salvador. Pupils from other faith communities feel respected and valued and they are integral members of the school. Parents from all backgrounds feel part of the school community and 93% of them are happy to recommend the school to other parents.

Achievement and standards in Religious Education

Grade: 3

Attainment on entry is below average but, overall, achievement and standards in RE are satisfactory. Pupils enjoy and understand the importance of the subject; they are becoming confident learners and benefit from the creative nature of some lessons. The school employs a large number of teaching assistants (TAs) to support the 22% of pupils with special educational needs, the 69% from minority ethnic backgrounds and the 38% who have English as an additional language. In two classes the TA support was good and enabled the children to progress but this was

not the norm in other lessons. Most pupils make satisfactory progress across Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. Some of the more able pupils benefit from well differentiated work and then make good progress.

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Grade: 3

During the inspection, the quality of teaching ranged from satisfactory to good with some outstanding aspects. Lessons observed were well planned, enhanced by the use of ICT and delivered in a variety of teaching styles. Where teaching was good, teachers were inspiring, had good subject knowledge, provided work clearly differentiated and matched to the learners' needs and deployed TAs effectively. However, discussion with staff and the work in pupils' books confirmed that differentiation was not the normal practice. New assessment arrangements have been introduced and these now need to be developed and embedded to raise attainment.

The quality of the Religious Education curriculum

Grade: 2

The RE curriculum fulfils the requirements of the Curriculum Directory for Catholic schools and is delivered through "Here I Am" in Key Stage 2 and "Icons" in Key Stage 3. The planned curriculum enables all pupils to make progress and it supports their spiritual and moral development: they are fully aware of their individual responsibility for caring for God's creation. They respect other faiths and cultures and the "faith tour", where Year 6 visit a Church of England church, a mosque and a temple, enhances their understanding. Each classroom has a focal point with a candle which is lit at the beginning of lessons. The subject leader meets each half-term with colleagues to discuss the concepts and ideas for forthcoming topics; they strive to make RE relevant and significant in the lives of learners. The involvement of the pupils in making the four hundred tiles for the walls in the new chapel, combined with Bishop Peter placing the last tile, has made the area very special and a lovely resource for RE outside the classroom. Year 8 have a retreat day at Buckden Towers and a quiet, reflective area is being developed within the school grounds; a pond and separate water feature are already in place. Each class has two hours of RE per week, 8% of the curriculum timetable.

Leadership and management of Religious Education

Grade: 3

The new, inexperienced subject leader, who has the potential to be outstanding, is the only member of staff with an RE qualification. She is very hard working and enthusiastic and has raised the profile of RE within the school. Leading a team of non-specialists, she is aware of the need to improve pupils' learning by developing practice so that all teaching is good or better. During the short period she has been in post, she has linked the levels of attainment with APP so that RE is assessed in the same way as other core subjects. She has introduced next step marking at the end of each topic/unit and she is aware that these recent initiatives need to be monitored and evaluated to ensure they impact pupils' learning.