

St Edmund's Catholic Preparatory School

Old Hall Green, Ware, Hertfordshire SG11 1DS

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 1 March 2017



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is good

- The school is well resourced and the curriculum fully covers the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory.
- Teaching is good overall and the pupils enjoy talking about their religious knowledge.
- School and subject leaders have worked hard to put the structures and systems in place which lead to the smooth running of religious education in the school.
- The pupils show a good knowledge of the Bible, both Old and New Testament. They can talk about the stories they have studied and link them with new stories as they learn them.
- Assessment takes place regularly, making sure that attainment is broadly in line with other subjects.
- A new marking policy is beginning to help pupils identify how to move their learning forward with the use of questions and instructions for next steps.
- The behaviour of the pupils around the school and in lessons ensures a good learning environment.

Classroom religious education is not yet outstanding because

- Higher ability pupils are not always given the opportunities to achieve their full potential.
- The tracking system for attainment in religious education does not yet highlight the progress pupils are making or should make.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- Religious education receives its full allocation of 10% of taught time at each key stage as required by the Bishops of England and Wales.
- The school makes full use of its extensive facilities and beautiful location to make prayer a central part of school life.
- Prayer, whether in the classroom, the school hall or one of the chapels available to the pupils, is evident throughout the school.
- The pupils are proud to be a part of 'the oldest Catholic school in England'.
- Leadership at all levels drives the emphasis for the Catholic mission in education and the pupils are able to articulate their role in this.
- Religious education is well resourced and whole-school and classroom displays celebrate the events of the liturgical year and the work done by the pupils.
- The pupils are given many opportunities to serve through a variety of roles and take these very seriously.
- The school supports many charities and the pupils not only choose these, but can also talk about what they do and why it is important to support them.
- The school works with other local schools and parishes and has created an environment where parents feel welcomed and included.
- Pupils and parents clearly relish the chance to be part of such a vibrant Catholic community.

A. Classroom Religious education

What has improved since the last inspection?

There have been many improvements since the last inspection in 2011. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant head have all been appointed and have put in place new practices including implementing the Levels of Attainment and a new marking policy which have had a positive effect on classroom religious education. The scheme of work has been reviewed alongside the Religious Education Curriculum Directory and is extended to make sure the more able have opportunities for higher-level learning and to include a two-year cycle for covering other faiths.

The content of classroom religious education is good

The content of classroom religious education at St Edmund's Prep School fully meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. In addition to a published scheme, the school uses other resources to enhance the learning of the pupils. As well as studying Judaism at an age-appropriate level each year, a two-year cycle of teaching of other faiths ensures that pupils have the chance to study Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Islam. The school is able to provide the pupils with creative experiences such as art, drama, and music which further enhance their learning in religious education.

Pupil achievement in religious education is good

Pupil achievement is good; they perform as well in religious education as they do in other core subjects. A new marking policy in religious education has placed more emphasis on helping the pupils to develop their answers fully and gives them the next steps in their learning journey. In the books where this is done consistently, and pupils are given the time to respond, it can be seen that this is making a difference. Staff meet to moderate work amongst themselves and take part in deanery and diocesan moderation. They have made good use of the diocesan advisor to help staff develop these skills. Data shows steady progress for most pupils, but could be used more dynamically to make sure that all pupils make as much progress as they can. The proposed introduction of progress targets will help in the monitoring of this. The school has begun to collect data for AT2 (Learning from Religion) by using 'Big Question' books to record the pupils' thoughts at all ages.

The quality of teaching is good

Teaching is good. In the best lessons seen, the pupils were challenged to develop their understanding through effective questioning and support from their peers. In this way, Year 6 could begin to understand why Peter was unable to walk on water with Jesus. In some lessons, questions and tasks were too closed for the pupils to be able to explore fully some of the themes which came up. Good subject knowledge is displayed by staff who often make links between previous learning and events in the life of the school; Year 1 was able to develop some themes from the assembly they had just been part of as they started their next lesson; Year 5 linked back to Fr Damien of Molokai and other people of faith they had already studied. Teachers and pupils have strong relationships; the pupils show good learning behaviour and respond positively to the encouragement they receive from the staff. The pupils are articulate and can use many examples from Bible stories and Jesus' teaching when answering questions or expressing their views. They are curious, and confident in asking questions. A child in Year 1 noticed that the Our Father ended in "Amen" and wanted to know why prayers did this. Music, art and drama are used to engage the pupils; role-play in Year 6 had pupils interviewing each other as disciples while Year 4 pupils examined different depictions of the events of Holy Week, including the Last Supper. Differentiation is evident in lessons and in the books seen but this sometimes limits the expectation of what individual pupils could achieve, especially when worksheets are used. Homework is set and is used alongside the work completed in class. More

open-ended tasks, available for all the pupils to attempt, would enable them all to maximise the learning in each lesson.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education is good

The leadership and management of religious education are good. There is a clear vision which comes from the headteacher, through the senior management team and subject leader to all the class teachers, which places religious education at the heart of the curriculum. The governors are kept informed of all developments within the subject and work with the head to ensure the centrality of religious education in the school. Recent improvements have seen the tracking of achievement in religious education develop and clear steps are planned to continue this with the introduction of targets. There is a clear programme of monitoring of teaching and books, and the school has made good use of the diocese to support this work. The subject leader supports other staff in the delivery of religious education, making sure they are aware of the resources available to them and offering specific advice when necessary. The school takes part in deanery and diocesan moderation to make sure that they are assessing the pupils accurately.

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

- Continue to develop open-ended questioning and tasks in order to maximise the learning for all the pupils, especially the more able, and to ensure they reach their potential in religious education.
- Use the tracking data more effectively by setting targets for pupils and monitoring their progress against them.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

The school has re-structured its leadership team following new appointments of senior leaders. Closer links exist with other schools in the deanery through a number of different initiatives which include religious education, but also sport, music and art. The school has created a chaplaincy team who have forged a strong role for themselves, assisting in assemblies and setting up a competition to design a new prayer garden in the grounds. Working with St Edmund's College, the school has been involved in missions marking the Years of Faith and Mercy which have seen the pupils putting these graces into action through their charitable works.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

The school places religious education firmly at the heart of all that it does. It has outstanding facilities, with a chapel open to the pupils in the heart of the school and grounds which are used to enhance the experience of prayer. Religious education is well resourced, with a budget which reflects its importance. Teaching time meets the 10% weekly entitlement, and there are regular assemblies. A recent change has moved most religious education teaching to the morning to promote its importance. Lessons and school meetings start with prayer, with themes planned out for each week of the term. These are shared with parents in the weekly newsletters.

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

is outstanding

Worship and prayer are experienced in a purposeful and meaningful way by the whole school community and are central to the life of the school. Pupils participate respectfully in acts of worship and engage fully through their responses and focused attention. During the inspection, pupils in the assembly were given a stone with which they constructed a prayer cairn; they did this quietly and respectfully. The school provides many opportunities for collective worship and the celebration of the Eucharist. Prayers are said at the beginning of each religious education lesson as well as at the beginning and end of each day and at lunchtime. The 'Chaplaincy Team' plays a significant role in collective worship, preparing readings and prayers in a thoughtful and reflective manner, through sharing and discussion. Mass is available in the school chapel each week; Masses on feast days and special liturgies, such as the Ash Wednesday service, are held in the chapel of St Edmund's College which helps to mark as special these the events of the liturgical year. Non-Catholic pupils are included in all aspects of the prayer life of the school; they were able to receive the ashes during the Ash Wednesday service and are given the chance to 'talk' with the Chaplain rather than take part in the Sacrament of Reconciliation which is available to Catholic students. Students from the Order of the Disciples of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary have worked with the pupils over the last few years and speak with them on a weekly basis about their faith and help them reflect on what this means. Parents are invited to school Masses and other events including those around Christmas and Easter and these are well attended. The parent questionnaire was very positive with one parent saying 'God given gifts are celebrated and cherished without showing off, [...] everyone is valued and treasured'.

The contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice –

is outstanding

The pupils are able to articulate their contribution to the Common Good and the school provides many opportunities for pupils to engage in the appreciation of the Church's call to action. One of the

pupils said, 'God sent us a Mission to be faithful, peaceful, loving and kind.' They spoke about participating in many fundraising activities for example, 'Paint yourself purple day,' book day and cake sales. They are knowledgeable about the various local, national and International charities they support such as Cafod, Willow Thorpe Care Home, the Isabel Hospice and RNIB and can say why, as a Catholic school, this support is important. The house captains decide which charities to support together with the heads of house. The older pupils in the school have the opportunity to lead and serve each other in many ways. They are invited to apply for positions such as house captains, school council, Chaplaincy team, sports leaders, art ambassadors, playground friends and prefects. To be appointed to these they must be able to explain how they will be good role models for the younger pupils in the school. The pupils spoke about how they help each other and, when mentioning escorting a hurt friend to the 'Swan's Nest', one child said, 'You can't have someone hurt on their own'. The school benefits from working with students from St Edmund's College, many of whom are former pupils, who come back to help with after school activities, providing the pupils with excellent examples of sharing talents with others. Together with these older pupils, they are able to be part of organising a Christmas party for local senior citizens.

The partnership with parents, school and parish, and collaboration as an integral part of the diocese through its relationship with the diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

is outstanding

Parents and pupils are all proud to be part of 'the oldest Catholic school in England'. Parents are very supportive of events in the school and work through 'The Friends' to organise events through the year. The school has worked hard to develop its links with the deanery and diocese. It has hosted training days for the schools in the Lea Valley deanery and has attended those at other schools. In addition to this, the school has used its facilities to host sporting days for other local schools and art training for teachers. It has taken part in national sporting events such as the Cardinal's Cup. The Prep music department, together with the College Music School, has hosted the directors of music from other independent schools. The school takes part in moderation of religious education with local schools and with the diocese. Links with the local parishes are developed through work such as the senior citizens' Christmas Party; the school works with a large number of different parishes, some of which are outside of the Diocese of Westminster. Recent work by the governors has seen more time given to the transition between the Prep school and the College, for example by looking at the sex and relationship education programme for Years 6 and 7.

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

is outstanding

The leadership and management of the Catholic Life of the school are outstanding. The head leads by example, setting out a clear vision for the Catholic Life of the school in which he is ably supported by his senior team and the governors. The mission statement of the school is not only clearly displayed throughout the school, but also clearly lived out by pupils through their work and commitment to the Common Good.

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

- Continue with the development of the prayer life of school through initiatives like the planned Prayer garden

Information about this school

- The school is a Independent Catholic preparatory school in the locality of Ware. It is one form entry from Nursery to Year 2 and two form entry from Year 3 to Year 6.
- The school serves a number of parishes, locally, nationally and overseas.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 39%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 47% and from other faiths is 1 %. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 41 %.
- There are three teachers with a Catholic qualification.
- There are 13 % of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom none have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is below average.
- There is a well below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- No pupils receive the Pupil Premium .

Department for Education Number	919/6115
Unique Reference Number	117633
Local Authority	Hertfordshire

Type of school	Primary
School category	Independent
Age range of pupils	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	207
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Patrick Mitton
Headteacher	Mr Steven Cartwright
Telephone number	01920 824239
Website	www.stedmundscollege.org
Email address	Prep@stedmundscollege.org
Date of previous inspection	3 February 2011
Grade from previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out (i) under the requirements of the Canon 806 and (ii) in accordance with the Framework for Diocesan Inspections 2015 approved by the Archbishop of Westminster.

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection.

- During the inspection 11 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended one assembly and a whole-school Mass.
- Meetings were held with school staff, pupils and governors.
- Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

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