

# DIOCESE OF LEEDS



## DIOCESAN BOARD FOR INSPECTIONS

### **CANON LAW 806 FINAL INSPECTION REPORT INCORPORATING SECTION 48**

#### THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL  
Swires Road, Halifax HX1 2ER

School URN

107546

Date of Inspection and OE  
grade

7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> June 2017 : 1 (Outstanding)

E-mail address

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Chair of Governors

Mr A Lombardi

Headteacher

Mr Mark Brennan

RE Subject Leader

Mr Mark Brennan & Mr Neil Tomkinson

Date and grade of last S48  
inspection

28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> June 2012 : 2 (Good)

Section 48 Inspector/s

Alan Dewhurst

# INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Inspection Grades: 1 is Outstanding, 2 is Good, 3 requires improvement in order to be good, 4 is Inadequate

**OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS:** how effective the school is in providing Catholic Education.

1

*The above judgement on overall effectiveness is based on all the available evidence following the evaluation of:*

- *Outcomes for pupils,*
- *The provision for Catholic Education*
- *Leaders and Managers*

**OUTCOMES FOR PUPILS**

1

**THE PROVISION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

1

**LEADERS AND MANAGERS**

1

**Summary of key findings:**

## **This is an outstanding Catholic Primary School**

- The headteacher, staff and governors of St Mary's Catholic Primary are fully committed to ensuring that the Catholic mission of the school is given the highest priority, and is owned and cherished by all of its community.
- The headteacher's vision for the school is communicated effectively, encompassing a desire to give pupils the best possible Catholic education and to grow in their knowledge and love of God, whatever their background or belief. It is shared by all of the staff.
- School leaders have striven successfully to improve standards in Religious Education (RE) over time. From a relatively low starting point, pupils make good progress, with some of it outstanding as they move through the older years.
- The quality of teaching in RE is securely good, and some of it is outstanding. Excellent teaching is characterised by good subject knowledge, high expectations of pupils' achievement and carefully structured learning opportunities that lead to imaginative and engaging tasks. Other teaching is very thorough in its coverage of the RE curriculum but is less varied in approach and sometimes misses the chance to develop pupils' understanding more deeply, particularly through dialogue between pupils.
- The RE curriculum, based on the diocesan recommended scheme 'The Way, The Truth and The Life', has been enhanced by exciting experiences and activities that successfully promote pupils' spiritual and moral development. The school's holistic approach to educating its pupils allows them to develop their understanding about religion, to apply their learning to their own lives and to "develop as a human being", as one recent pupil wrote.
- Pupils are proud of their school, and recognise that it is one community to which they all belong and contribute, united in their diversity. They are caring and compassionate,

and enthusiastic about taking on responsibilities that build the community and develop its Catholic Life. Parents echo pupils' praise of their school.

- Collective Worship (CW) is outstanding. It is central to the school's life, is well planned and seeks to give pupils a wide variety of experience within the Catholic tradition. The prayer life of the school is very evident throughout. The parish priest is a frequent and welcome visitor to the school.
- Pupils respond with enthusiasm to the strategies adopted to ensure they are actively involved in CW, and older pupils are proficient and confident in leading liturgies for younger classes. Further opportunities for younger pupils to develop their skills are in an early stage of development.
- The school takes its responsibility towards its more vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils very seriously, and has created effective systems for ensuring that their needs are met and that they are supported with great care and expertise.

### **What the school needs to do to improve further.**

In order to continue to raise standards, the school should:

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching in RE by
  - the sharing of excellent practice from within the school and in partnership with other schools
  - giving more opportunities for pupils to explore their learning through dialogue and to present their understanding orally in greater depth
- Continue to develop pupil involvement in the planning and leadership of CW in the classroom, particularly in Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2.
- Ensure that the priorities identified in the cycle of self-evaluation of RE and the Catholic Life feed directly into school improvement planning documentation.

### **Information about this inspection**

The Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School was carried out under the requirements of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Leeds Diocesan Framework and Schedule for Section 48 Inspections approved by the Diocesan Administrator of Leeds. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the school is in providing Catholic Education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation and the inspection schedule follows the criteria set by the National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers (NBRIA 2012).

The inspection was carried out by one inspector over one and a half days. During the inspection:

- A sample of 6 RE lessons and 4 acts of Collective Worship were observed including a class Mass and a Key Stage assembly.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy head teacher, Chair of governors, school chaplain, nurture officer, Special Educational Needs coordinator, parents and pupils.

A range of the school's policy, monitoring and assessment documentation was scrutinised, including pupils' workbooks.

The inspector reviewed in detail the following aspects:

- The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.
- How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

- How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship.
- The quality of teaching and marking and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education.
- The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning.
- The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school.
- How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate provision and plan improvements.

### Information about this school

- St Mary's Catholic Primary School serves the parishes of St Mary's and St Alban's in central Halifax and St Columba's, Pellon. It educates pupils between the ages of 4 and 11 years.
- The school admits 45 pupils per year. There are currently 288 pupils on roll, of which 43% are baptised Catholics. Of the remainder, most of the children are Muslim or from other Christian denominations. A small number of children are Hindu.
- The school has an ethnically diverse population, with 52% of the pupils identifying themselves as White British, 21% from south Asian backgrounds and smaller numbers from Eastern European, Filipino, African and Chinese backgrounds.
- 60% of pupils have identified English as their first language, which is low compared with the national average (85%).
- Approximately 60 children are entitled to pupil premium funding.
- There are 12 full time and 2 part time teachers, and a classroom support staff of 18 (full time equivalent). 6 of the teachers are Catholic, 2 of whom hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies.
- School staffing is generally very stable, although the RE coordinator has recently left following a move to another Catholic school. The headteacher has been in post since 2009.
- The school was judged as 'good' in its most recent Ofsted inspection in October 2013.

## Full report - inspection judgements

### Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils are outstanding

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.	<b>1</b>
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.	<b>2</b>
How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.	<b>1</b>

- Pupils are well aware of the school's mission as a Catholic school, and are enthusiastic in playing a full part in ensuring that it is "A Community where we Live, Learn and Laugh Together in God's Love", as stated in the school motto.
- Pupils are keen to take responsibility for shaping the Catholic character of the school in a variety of ways.
- They are very pro-active about involvement in charitable activity: The school has raised several thousand pounds for a variety of causes, most recently CAFOD and Catholic

Care, and older pupils are about to embark on a sponsored event for Alder Hey Children's Hospital. There has also been support for local homeless people, with collections of household hygiene items and tins of soup.

- During Lent, pupils organise their own stalls and games activities for the Lent Fair, showing ingenuity and imagination in their efforts. Under the school's house structure, house captains and their teams organise events and competitions on a half-termly basis to engage with their members.
- The pupils understand the needs of others, and their duty to help those less fortunate. "It feels good when you know you're helping someone", as one pupil remarked.
- There is a genuine feeling of unity and acceptance of each other among the school's diverse pupil population. "We respect each other and we respect our teachers," pupils said. They know that those with different faith backgrounds may hold other beliefs, but are still part of the "family" that makes up the school, summed up in the remark: "You don't have to be a Catholic to be part of a Catholic school".
- "I feel welcome. They don't judge me. They always take care of me", was a typical comment from a non-catholic pupil. This view, of a community that cares for each other whatever the belief or background, was strongly reinforced by parents' comments.
- Older pupils take on a number of responsibilities in helping the younger children. These include the 'Positive Playground Ambassadors', the 'Buddies' and the School Council, which also has younger children represented.
- Pupils are proud of their backgrounds and their membership of the school. They acknowledge the benefits of its Catholic Life. As one recent pupil wrote, "I've had opportunities to develop as a human being".
- Standards pupils achieve in Religious Education are mostly above average by the time they reach the end of Key Stage 2.
- Pupils enter the school with lower than average levels of attainment, which continue through to the end of Key Stage 1, despite good progress. However, they show accelerated progress through Key Stage 2.
- Within RE lessons, pupils are keen to do well, stay focused, and work diligently. Where teaching is outstanding, they show increased engagement and a penchant for tackling challenging activities. In these instances, they are able to converse with each other at length, discussing the content of their learning, and thus able to embed their understanding. This helps them to grow in confidence and to extend their learning.
- Where learning is less carefully structured, pupils have fewer opportunities to develop their ideas orally, and their response is limited within more narrow tasks.
- All pupils, regardless of belief, are actively involved in acts of Collective Worship.
- They benefit from a variety of opportunities to engage in prayer. There is ample evidence of their ability to express their thoughts, requests and praise in raising their minds to God, particularly in the displays of children's own prayers throughout the classrooms and other areas of the school, and in their workbooks.
- They are very reverent, showing due respect when praying with others. The school's encouragement of pupils praying within the Catholic tradition or within their own world faith tradition, but together as a community, has a positive effect on pupils' development.
- Older pupils are skilled and confident in planning and leading worship in the classroom, for their own and other classes. They know how to use scripture, symbol and artefact appropriately. They take on specific roles enthusiastically, such as being part of the choir or an altar server for example. Younger pupils' skills in contributing to planning and leading classroom worship are not currently being developed so prominently, although they have teachers and older pupils modelling this very effectively.
- The school's emphasis on actively involving all age groups in the celebration of Mass has helped all pupils to learn about its importance and to engage with confidence.

## The provision for Catholic Education is outstanding

The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education.	2
The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning.	1
The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school.	1

- Teaching in RE is securely good, with some that is outstanding.
- Teachers ensure that they cover the RE curriculum thoroughly, paying close attention to the requirements of each topic. For the most part, teaching is pitched appropriately for the needs of the pupils, with consistent attention paid to the RE levels of attainment via focus on the 'Driver' words.
- Where teaching is outstanding, there are very high expectations of what pupils can achieve, but also lessons are carefully planned to engage pupils through imaginative approaches that seek to involve them actively in their learning. They are given a series of tasks that give them the chance to collaborate with their peers, participate in discussion and build understanding before taking on challenging activities that allow them some measure of independence or choice in how their learning is presented.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is generally strong, and collaborative planning between classes of similar age is having benefits in sharing best practice and encouraging innovation.
- When written tasks are introduced too quickly, or too frequently, without the opportunity for children to engage in reflective discussion, purposeful learning is more restricted. Some overuse of printed worksheets was also apparent in limiting pupils' response.
- Marking is very thorough and positive, challenging pupils or seeking further explanation, and pupils regularly respond to feedback in order to extend their learning or demonstrate understanding.
- Good and imaginative use of resources, including technology, is helping pupils to engage with their learning. Teaching assistants give skilful and well judged support to individual pupils or groups, in close partnership with teachers.
- The school has given careful reflection and imaginative thought to the provision of the curriculum. The consistent approach to utilising the RE scheme 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' has been enhanced with a range of opportunities that are aimed to develop pupils holistically.
- The RE curriculum is synchronised effectively with the seasons of the liturgical year, and to activities in school, so that pupils see its relevance and application in their own lives.
- Special ventures, such as the Lampedusa Project, which was carried out in collaboration with partner Catholic schools, brought the plight of refugees into pupils' awareness. A visit to the Holocaust Centre in Newark has been particularly memorable for Year 6 pupils, who remarked with wonder at the learning experience they had, and how meeting holocaust survivors had made them think about that period of history and the issues it raises.
- There are also beneficial retreat opportunities, residential experiences for Years 4 and 5, in a spiritual setting, which have clearly been awe-inspiring for the participants.
- The 'Dangerous Curriculum', developed by the school, is an innovation that helps pupils to learn actively and to tackle unusual or practical tasks, enriching and expanding their experiences.

- The support provided by the school for its more vulnerable pupils is also outstanding. Pupils in need benefit from interventions that target their self-esteem or social confidence, and this support extends into time outside the classroom timetable.
- Through the curriculum provision, pupils have a range of excellent opportunities to develop themselves and their spiritual and moral understanding.
- The school has a carefully planned timetable for acts of Collective Worship, in order to give all pupils the opportunity to develop their prayer lives.
- Much thought has gone into ensuring that the celebration of the Eucharist is at the heart of the school, and that all pupils can actively engage within its parameters in ways appropriate to their age and beliefs.
- A class Mass that was observed during the inspection was an example of how pupils participate with respect and reverence, and how they are confident in engaging with dialogue offered by the celebrant.
- Prayer opportunities for staff and pupils are frequent and varied. There are special prayer sessions at the start of the day at significant times of the year, such as in Lent, Advent, May and October, when pupils and their parents may come into school early to pray.
- Other special events are particularly prized, such as the Passion play before Easter, and the Stations of the Cross outside in the school grounds.
- The school is presented very attractively to high quality, with colourful and varied displays, interesting exhibitions and celebrations of children’s work, as well as a beautiful sacred space within the hall. Prominent throughout are examples of a ‘call to prayer’ through the display of children’s own prayers, common traditional prayers, shrines to Our Lady, ‘Walls of Prayer’ and many religious works of art. Children’s chance to pray for others is helped in some classrooms by the provision of prayer cards and a prayer box.
- Members of staff come together in prayer at the start of each week, and all plan and lead prayer in turn, with each other and with pupils. They also benefit from staff development days set aside each year, sometimes with other schools, to reflect and develop their own spirituality.
- The school’s sacramental programme is well organised, ensuring support for pupils and working in partnership with parents and parishes. The school is prepared for the changes in preparation that will occur next year with regard to first reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Holy Communion and Confirmation.

## The Leadership and Management are outstanding

<b>How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Catholic Education and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils.</b>	<b>1</b>
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- The Catholic mission of the school is a clear priority for the school leadership and the governing body. They are fully committed to ensuring that the school is continuously reflective of its role as a Catholic learning community and that it strives at all time to deliver the best possible Catholic education for its pupils.
- The school’s self evaluation procedures are thorough, built upon rigorous and varied monitoring of its provision and the impact it has on its pupils. The headteacher and deputy head teacher have worked in partnership with the RE coordinator, who has recently left the school, to ensure that standards are high, staff confidence and expertise is developed, and that best practice is shared.

- Current school improvement planning has recently been revised to address concerns relating to the departure of the RE coordinator, and thus does not link too clearly to priorities identified in the Section 48 self evaluation document. This link would be usefully re-established in the next cycle.
- Lesson observations of RE lessons, scrutiny of pupils workbooks, reviews of the quality of displays or of prayer focus tables, observations of acts of Collective Worship and rigorous maintenance of assessment procedures have all been key factors in ensuring improvement.
- Teachers have been supported in their delivery of the RE curriculum, particularly those who do not come from a Catholic tradition, through the Foundations of Faith programme for instance.
- The school has invested considerable funds in making sure that curriculum resources are up to date and of suitable standard, as well as ensuring that liturgical celebration is enhanced by the provision of artefacts of beauty and quality.
- Much time has been given to collecting and analysing assessment data regarding attainment in RE. This has helped the school to see where improvements can be made and to understand trends of achievement of different groups.
- The parish priest is a frequent visitor to the school, along with a parish deacon, playing an active part in acts of CW, but also monitoring and supporting RE. He is clearly appreciative of the work of the school in ensuring good links with its parishes, and welcomes the opportunity classes have to visit the church regularly.
- Leadership of RE and the faith life of the school is now being shared between the headteacher and the deputy head. They have an excellent understanding of the strengths of the school and where it might focus its improvement strategies.
- The headteacher leads the school by example, ensuring that the community is focused in working together and developing the school's mission. To that end, he is involving all stakeholders in a review of the school Mission Statement, and a special review day has been arranged for the beginning of the new year, facilitated by an external consultant.
- The governing body provides support and challenge, in appropriate measure, to the school leadership. They ensure that the school fulfils all of its canonical and statutory responsibilities.
- The school is participating in an effective partnership with the Calderdale Catholic Cluster schools. Joint staff development days, monitoring visits to each others' schools and meeting of RE subject leaders are some of its current activities. A peer review of St Mary's provision for the welfare of its pupils was a particularly beneficial recent example.
- The school ensures that Catholic social teaching's emphasis on 'preferential option for the poor' is implemented in the way that it organises its provision for its most vulnerable and needy pupils. Teams of school staff are expertly organised and efficient in targeting issues relating to safeguarding, intervention work, disadvantage and special educational needs. The 'Star Centre' is the hub of much support work, for both pupils and parents, and a place where they can feel safe and secure. The school has also provided the option of a free breakfast club to pupils eligible for the pupil premium.
- The school evaluates its performance in a number of ways. In addition to the monitoring procedures mentioned, it seeks out the views of its stakeholders, including pupils, to evaluate its provision. An excellent example is the chance given to parents and pupils who have recently moved on to secondary education to comment in writing on the strengths of the school and possible areas for improvement. This has yielded much valuable advice and strong affirmation of what the school has contributed to the pupils' development. Pupils wrote that St Mary's was where they "felt safe and looked after" and that they felt "school was their second family". Parents commented that "staff were very approachable and often went the extra mile" and that "we have felt welcome in the school".