



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL BREWOOD, STAFFORDSHIRE

Inspection dates 13th – 14th June 2011
Reporting Inspector Rev Michael Dolman

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School Voluntary Aided Primary

Age range of pupils 4-11 years

Number on roll 93

Appropriate authority The governing body

Chair of governors Kevin Byrne

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Date of previous inspection May 2008

DCSF School Number 860 3455

Unique Reference Number 124345

Headteacher Mrs Jayne Keegan-Hobbs

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one Diocesan Inspector. The inspector visited 4 religious education (RE) lessons to observe teaching and learning and pupils' behaviour. He held meetings with the parish deacon, members of the governing body, the headteacher and groups of pupils. He observed the school's work, including Mass and looked at a range of evidence, including key documentation such as the school's improvement plan, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in RE, and pupils' work.

Information about the school

St Mary's is a much smaller than average primary school that serves the rural parish of St Mary, Brewood, drawing pupils from a wide area including Coven, Penkridge and Wheaton Aston. There are 93 pupils on roll of whom 66% are baptised Catholic with the majority of other pupils coming from the Christian denominations. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds has risen and is now above average. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is very small and the proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average.

Overall effectiveness of the school as a Catholic school

St Mary's is a good Catholic school with a caring family atmosphere. The school mission is well known by the children and they are able to relate it to the different areas of school life. Pupils' attainment in RE is broadly average as they move through the school with some attainment that is above average in Key Stage 1. Most groups of learners make good progress. Pupils' behaviour is excellent; they respond well to the school's Catholic ethos and show concern for each other and generosity in supporting charitable causes. Children are eager to take responsibility in the school's life and they contribute to its development. Pupils recognise the importance of prayer. Their participation in collective worship and their own written prayers show a growth in confidence and maturity as they move through the school.

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is mostly good with some that is satisfactory. The well planned and enjoyable lessons offer appropriate challenge to mixed age groups although there is not always a strong link between the attainment strands, 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion. Informal and formal assessment is developing well and gives a broad sense of how pupils are doing in RE. The RE curriculum is satisfactory: it generally meets the needs of learners and makes good links with other areas of the curriculum. The relationship between short term and medium/long term planning is not always secure and sacramental preparation requires a more integrated approach. Opportunity to explore some aspects of other world religions is a positive development in the curriculum. The provision for collective worship is good and offers pupils a broad experience of Catholic prayer and devotion. However, on days when there is no whole school Mass or assembly/hymn practice class teachers pray with the children but the act of collective worship could be more substantial on those occasions.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement in its Catholic life is good. The headteacher and her dedicated staff team have made significant progress against the areas for further improvement identified during the last inspection. The headteacher has identified those priorities that will continue to improve the Catholic life of the school and the RE curriculum. The good support and encouragement that comes from governors and parents means that the school will be able to continue to make good progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Secure relationship between short and medium/long term planning to ensure coverage of the diocesan strategy.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to plan and lead collective worship.

- Provide training for governors in relation to their strategic leadership of the school.

How good outcomes are for individuals and groups of pupils

Baseline assessment on entry shows that many children have limited formal religious knowledge or understanding. Overall pupils make good progress as they move through the school. In Key Stage 1 pupils make excellent progress in their knowledge and understanding and achieve average attainment with some that is above average. Pupils are able to sequence and give a simple re-tell of many New Testament stories. Some are able to identify the message in some of Jesus' parables. They recognise some of the sacraments of the Church like Baptism and the Mass and they have a basic understanding of them. For example, in baptism they know that we become a part of God's family and in the Mass they know that we celebrate Jesus who died on the cross for us; we praise God and listen to the Word of God. Pupils are familiar with some of the feasts in the liturgical year such as the Ascension and Pentecost and they know what they commemorate. In Key Stage 2 pupils continue to make satisfactory to good progress and attainment is variable but above average by the end of the key stage. Children develop a broader and deeper knowledge and understanding of stories from the Old and New Testaments. They are able to reference bible passages and re-tell these in an empathetic way using a variety of genres. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils are able to compare and analyse passages from the Gospels. They understand the significance of the seven sacraments of the Church for the growth of faith and they begin to appreciate the way in which God is revealed as the Most Holy Trinity. Children are highly motivated and have great enthusiasm for RE. They are inquisitive and interested in their learning. Pupils with SEN benefit from carefully matched activities and good support from teaching assistants so that they make good progress in their knowledge and understanding.

Pupils' contribution to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school is very good. Children are happy to be at their school and they understand how the values and routines at St Mary's are related to the mission and teaching of Jesus. They value and enjoy those aspects of school life that contribute to the Catholic ethos and appreciate the caring family environment. Through the school council pupils have a means of contributing to the school's development. They have ownership over the school mission and have helped to establish features such as the Marian garden. Children at St Mary's have a sense of responsibility for their actions: what is right and wrong; the importance of saying sorry and showing forgiveness. They have a care and concern for one another's wellbeing that underlines the family character of the school. This awareness is shown as older children take responsibility as buddies and prefects in school.

Pupils' response to and participation in collective worship is good. Children have a natural appreciation for the place of prayer in the life of the school and in their own lives. They are at ease with times of meditation or silent reflection and demonstrate reverence during acts of collective worship. During the celebration of Mass pupils were very attentive and reverent. They participated confidently as readers and altar servers. They sang with enthusiasm and were familiar with the responses of the Mass. Pupils' books show that they are able to express themselves well in their own prayers of praise, thanksgiving, sorrow and petition. They have a very good knowledge and understanding of the traditional prayers and devotions of the Church and are aware of the significance of the various seasons and feasts of the liturgical year. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to prepare and lead acts of collective worship in their own class setting. Overall, collective worship makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the school

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are good. The new headteacher has been enthusiastic in developing and improving St Mary's as a Catholic school. Very good relationships have been established with staff, governors, parents and children. The new mission statement has been well promoted and inspires and shapes the life of the school at all levels. The new buildings have greatly improved accommodation and this environment reflects well the Catholic

identity of the school. The headteacher knows the school well and has accurately identified key priorities for improvement in the school development plan. Staff are generous in their commitment to the school and are dedicated in working together with the headteacher to bring about improvement. One objective in teachers' performance management is always linked to the development of the RE curriculum or the Catholic life of the school.

The headteacher is also the RE subject leader which gives RE the high profile that is expected in a Catholic school. There is very good monitoring of the subject through lesson observations, book scrutiny, learning walks and planning scrutiny. These have brought about improvements in teaching and learning in RE and in the quality and standards of work achieved by pupils. Support from the diocesan adviser and Catholic cluster group of schools have provided resources used to develop the subject. Regular staff meetings provide opportunity for good practice and expertise to be shared amongst staff to foster improvement. Areas identified for improvement in RE respond to the headteacher's evaluation and are detailed in the school development plan.

The governing body is very involved in the life of the school and has a hands-on knowledge of its improvements and areas for development. Governors are committed to the Catholic identity and life of the school and the appointment of new governors means that they draw on a broad expertise in their undertakings. There are good relationships with staff and parents; governors have sought parents' views through questionnaires to which they respond together with the headteacher. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's Catholic life and RE curriculum is carried out through reports from the headteacher, feedback from the newly appointed RE link governor and involvement with the construction of the school's improvement plan. Training from the diocese will enable more strategic leadership in developing the Catholic life and RE curriculum.

The school's leadership promotes good community cohesion. The school promotes a strong family atmosphere that extends to all those who are connected to the school. The strong Catholic ethos underpins this and means that each child is valued, irrespective of background. All are encouraged to play a full part in the life of the school and older children are eager to take on responsibility. The link with St Mary's Catholic primary school in Brierley Hill is valued by the children as they have had the opportunity to interact with children from other cultural and faith backgrounds. A Mass together at Brewwood has been the high point of this developing relationship. The curriculum has begun to include some work on other world religions through 'Faith Fridays' in the summer term. This has allowed children in vertical teaching groups to explore aspects of some world religions through art, humanities and music. The school has good links with the parish, local primary schools and the local Catholic secondary school. Pupils are generous in supporting many charities and through this they learn to appreciate the difficult challenges that other people face.

The quality of the school's work in providing Catholic education

The quality of effective teaching and purposeful learning in RE is generally good with some teaching that is satisfactory. There is very good classroom management that allows pupils to move smoothly from one activity to the next and means that they understand what they have to do. Pupils of different abilities find the variety of learning activities interesting, enjoyable and challenging. ICT enhances both teaching and learning and its use as a resource is being developed. Very good relationships in class contribute to the pupils' excellent behaviour: they are attentive and motivated learners. Teachers' good subject knowledge and questioning helps children to develop their understanding. Marking is generally of a good standard and it includes encouraging comments, questions to promote further thinking and judgments that are related to pupils' knowledge and understanding. There are opportunities for reflection and prayer in lessons but there is not always a strong link made between 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion. Pupils' progress in knowledge and understanding are therefore limited in that respect. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to the quality of learning by supporting independent learning, group work and providing support for children in different ability groups.

The school's assessment in RE is satisfactory and improving. It has a broadly accurate picture of pupils' achievement. While the school has established formal summative assessment in Years 5

and 6 this is in the early stages of development and will be initiated through the school in September. The portfolio of moderated work for Years 5 and 6 provides clear evidence of pupils' standards in relation to national expectations. Class based assessment through plenary discussions, good marking and pupil target sheets mean that teachers and pupils know how they are progressing. They are aware of how they can improve through verbal or written comments given by the teacher.

The curriculum provided by the school is satisfactory. The diocesan strategy has been adapted to suit the school's four mixed age classes. This has resulted in a rolling 2 year programme. The RE co-ordinator has established a common framework for short term planning that includes adaptations to suit different groups of learners based upon the diocesan strategy. Although planning seems to offer reasonable coverage of the diocesan strategy, there is not explicit reference made to the learning outcomes that describe the content of each unit: consequently, this makes monitoring of coverage difficult. Planning does build upon pupils' prior learning, knowledge and understanding and so work generally meets the needs of individuals and groups within the school. The RE curriculum makes good links with assemblies, school Masses, art, music, SEAL, literacy and PSHE. Sex and relationship education has been developed in consultation with governors and parents. The school has adopted the Salford diocesan scheme, *In the beginning*, which has been very well received by all stakeholders. The sacramental preparation programme is delivered in school by the parish deacon whose commitment is an excellent benefit for the school. The course is based upon materials bought by the parish that can also be used with parents at home. The course runs independently of the RE curriculum and planning is not organised to allow an integrated approach with the respective units from the diocesan strategy. The 'Faith Fridays' initiative provides pupils with the opportunity to work in vertical teaching groups to explore aspects of other world religions. Overall, the curriculum makes a satisfactory contribution to children's moral and spiritual development.

The school makes good provision for collective worship that is rooted in its Catholic identity. Whole school Mass is celebrated each week with parents and members of the parish community in the adjacent parish Church. The Mass is well prepared by the school so that children are able to take responsibility for some aspects of the Mass such as reading, altar serving and presenting the offertory gifts. Children also take an active lead in the whole school assemblies that occur at the beginning and end of the school week. The school provides children with a broad experience of traditional Catholic prayers and devotions according to the liturgical season and these prayers are clearly displayed in the school hall. The school fosters within the children a particular devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary through the Marian Garden and the prayer of the Rosary in May and October. The headteacher has worked successfully with the parish clergy to review and develop the school's provision.