



# Archdiocese of Birmingham

## INSPECTION REPORT

### ST CUTHBERT'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL BIRMINGHAM

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Inspection dates 27<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> March 2014  
Reporting Inspector Paul Nutt

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Type of School	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3-11 years
Number on roll	212
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Maureen Edkins
School address	Gumbleberrys Close Stechford Birmingham B8 2PS
Telephone number	0121 675 2205
E-mail address	enquiry@stcuthbt.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	March 2009
DFE School number	330 3386
Unique Reference Number	103470

**Headteacher** Mrs Sarah Hobbs

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DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



## Evidence

The inspection was carried out by 1 Diocesan Inspector. The focus of the inspection was on the effectiveness and use of the school's self evaluation of religious education (RE) and Catholic life. To validate the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation of teaching and learning, the inspector observed 4 full RE lessons, 3 with the headteacher, 1 with her deputy. In addition the inspector completed a work scrutiny and held a discussion with pupils to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time. He held meetings with the chair of governors and link governor for RE, deputy headteacher, and parish priest. He attended a whole-school Mass, school assembly and Lenten activities session, and undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of learning and teaching in RE, the presentation of the Catholic life of the school, and pupils' behaviour. He looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self evaluation such as RAISEonline, the school and RE development plans, teachers' planning, and assessment and progress records.

## Information about the school

St Cuthbert's is a larger than average Catholic primary school serving the parish of Corpus Christi in Stechford, Birmingham. The area around the school is mostly rented or council accommodation including high-rise flats, in the top percentile for deprivation. The number of Catholic pupils is currently 85%. The proportion of ethnic minority pupils is below average. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average: the numbers with special needs and/or disabilities are below national average. Attainment on entry is significantly below the national average overall.

## Main Finding

In its self-evaluation St Cuthbert's judges itself to be an outstanding Catholic primary school. The evidence gathered during the inspection fully confirms this judgement, and indicates capacity to raise standards and outcomes still further. The Catholic ethos, Catholic life and collective worship of the school are of a very high order, and all pupils contribute to, and benefit significantly from, their time in school. Generous support is given by both parish priests and by a parish sister, notably in sacramental preparation and wider pastoral involvements. Religious education is very well led by the headteacher, who encourages collaboration from a team of committed and experienced staff. Teaching is secure and consistent, and observations during the inspection confirmed the school's internal records over time, indicating that all teaching is at least good with outstanding elements. Clear internal procedures for planning, marking and development, recently introduced as a result of extensive consultation, are applied consistently with very positive results for learning and progress. The RE curriculum is balanced and engaging so that pupils enjoy their learning and make real progress at every stage. Leadership is very positive in all areas. The senior leadership team, together since September 2013, gives clear strategic guidance and leads by example. The school is well supported by its governors, who have a very clear understanding of priorities and high expectations, with a commitment that extends into the parish community.

## School self evaluation

The school's evaluation of its Catholic life, collective worship and religious education is rigorous and accurate. The school self-evaluation document is extremely well presented, with a precision of evaluation and evidence sources. The inspection visit confirmed the school's internal judgements and revealed considerable capacity for further improvements. There are systematic processes in place for monitoring and evaluating religious education and Catholic life, with a strong emphasis on collaboration. For example, in RE in addition to

learning walks and lesson observations by senior staff and the link governor, all staff are involved in a programme of work scrutiny and moderation. It would enhance these practices if they took place more frequently. Input from all stakeholders, including pupils, governors and parents, is sought, through questionnaires, surveys, minuted meetings and pupil interviews; the outcomes are recorded and subsequently evaluated. There is a weekly newsletter which supports this process. Self-evaluation is reliable as it is planned, thoroughly and rigorously carried out, and discussed by school leadership. Again, the school is encouraged to consider increasing the frequency of these stages, now that there are rigorous processes in place. The headteacher presents the outcomes to full governors' meetings. This produces an action plan, which is reviewed and evaluated annually and informs target setting. There is an agreed monitoring cycle, which links directly to the cycle of staff meetings and helps to shape focuses for staff professional development. Lesson observations and book scrutiny are undertaken by the head and her deputy, with outcomes recorded and fed back to individual teachers. All staff are involved in moderation of pupils' work, producing recommendations for in-house training, moderation and assessment sheets that support levelling and shared understanding. There is currently a focus on fine-tuning the consistency of agreed assessment for learning practice, though the inspection indicated very effective use of formative feedback by staff and pupils in all classes.

The school collaborates with a cluster of other Catholic schools, and is forging closer partnership with Corpus Christi within the parish. Leaders including the link governor undertake learning walks to monitor school practice both within and outside the classroom. Sound two-way communication with staff contributes to the improvement cycle. Outcomes are recorded, along with outcomes from formal lesson observations. The headteacher reports termly to governors on RE and Catholic life; they are thus able to hold her to account and oversee the production of documentation towards continuing school improvement. An annual audit, feedback from parental questionnaires, pupil surveys and from the school council, are shared with governors and again inform improvement planning.

Collective worship is monitored informally by the headteacher, the parish priest and the governors, who discuss regularly the school's programme of assemblies and Masses. Collective worship forms part of the termly headteacher's report to governors, the occasion for formal evaluation and improvement identification. During the inspection, Mass was attended by a significant number of parents, and good numbers of pupils were directly involved in its preparation and delivery.

The school assesses attainment in RE to be outstanding. There is much valuable evidence to confirm this judgement. Baseline records indicate that nearly all pupils enter the school with little knowledge and understanding; however, incremental progress is evident across both key stages, delivered through relevant learning and teaching and closely targeted support from a strong team of classroom assistants. Attainment data indicates that outcomes in RE are close to other core subjects before the end of Key Stage 1, and are broadly comparable with literacy by Year 6. The quality of learning and understanding in RE is outstanding for many, as indicated in lesson observations, pupils' exercise books, the range of evidence available, and in discussions with school council, who speak positively of their lessons and teachers. This judgement was shown to apply to all groups within the school.

Leadership and management are currently a strength of the school and justifiably judged outstanding. The headteacher and her deputy have a clear vision of the nature of Catholic education, the importance of continuing to raise standards and the promotion of individual faith development for pupils and staff. Strong and committed leadership is evident at all levels within the school. As indicated earlier, there are effective procedures in place for

monitoring and evaluating both Catholic life and religious education, leading to focused planning for school improvement. Staff meetings afford opportunities for discussion and targeted professional development. The governing body plays a significant role in challenging and supporting school leaders and staff. Individual governors visit the school when commitments allow, and the link governor has been involved in a learning walk and observations. They monitor and evaluate the work of the school; receive termly reports from the headteacher; oversee the production of documentation; maintain active involvement in school improvement.

Internal evaluation of teaching and learning, together with records of internal observations over time, is secure in its judgements. The head and deputy have a clear understanding of current practice in school. Assessments in RE are structured, books regularly marked, and effective use is made of this information for planning. There are target sheets in exercise books, and pupils are helped by the consistent application of assessment for learning strategies orally and in books. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge, and use a wide range of strategies, including IT, music, drama, prayer and scripture, to secure engagement and very good progress. All children benefit significantly from the breadth and appropriateness of the school's curriculum, as well as the many opportunities to develop a maturing understanding of the faith and learning about other world religions. This judgement was borne out during the inspection, notably in conversations with pupils and governors.

### **Overall effectiveness of the school<sup>1</sup>**

Outcomes and provision for all pupils are outstanding. Baseline evidence indicates that most pupils enter the school with very low levels of knowledge and understanding, but that progress is developed across both key stages, bringing it close to literacy for many pupils before the end of Key Stage 1. By the end of Year 6, outcomes are broadly in line with literacy and national expectations. Learning and progress are very good throughout the school. Lessons are well planned and incorporate a range of high-quality resources that interest and engage the pupils. These include music, drama, scripture and IT, with a consciously-planned balance between learning about and learning from religion. All classrooms are well resourced and have excellent displays which are relevant and colourful, with celebrations of pupils' work and prayer corners. The close work and support given by the parish priest plays a significant part here, as well as in the areas of Catholic life, collective worship and wider pastoral involvement. The headteacher, as RE subject leader, has attended training offered by the diocese and cluster meetings of local Catholic schools, which ensures that colleagues are conversant with current trends and new initiatives.

Teaching is secure and well planned, with all lessons at least good with outstanding elements. Assessments in RE are well structured, and effective use is made of this information for planning, though total consistency has not yet been achieved, and is currently, therefore, judged to be good. Teachers and support staff demonstrate very good subject knowledge, and lesson observations indicate that teachers use a range of learning opportunities, questioning techniques and clear differentiation; books are marked regularly. As a result pupils participate enthusiastically in RE lessons, where relationships, as around the school more generally, are positive, empathetic and consistently appropriate. The use of prayer and reflection contributes significantly to this. Pupils speak confidently about the positive impact on them; they enjoy school and feel safe and valued.

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<sup>1</sup> As the quality of the school self evaluation has been affirmed, the judgements in this section of the report conform to those of the school.

Catholic life is identified as the outstanding strength of the school. There is a clear ethos, all pervasive throughout, and an evident commitment in all – staff, pupils, governors. The school motto is central to its life, and there are artefacts, statues and displays prominent throughout, with links to the liturgical life of the Church. A Marian shrine is planned for Christopher's Garden. The contributions of two priests, and a parish sister, are hugely significant in relation to Catholic life, but specifically to Sacramental preparation, collective worship, prayer life and aspects of curriculum. Whole-school Mass is celebrated each week, and there are 2 whole-school assemblies and a hymn practice. There are also retreats for pupils as part of sacramental preparation. There is considerable pupil involvement in the faith life and collective worship of St Cuthbert's, notably in preparing and leading Masses, but also in support for a range of charities, at home and internationally. It is pupils who are organising the programme of Lenten activities weekly during Lent, to raise money for Acorns, Fr Hudson's Society, CAFOD, and Marie Curie. The school is mindful of its demographic, and ensures a multi-faith, multi-ethnic dimension in the wider curriculum. There are visits to local mosques, temples and synagogues. All pupils benefit greatly from these opportunities, not least in the high level of behaviour and interpersonal relationships at all levels. The prayer life of the school is outstanding, with prayer featuring significantly throughout the school day. The purposes and development of prayer are taught progressively year by year, and all pupils are encouraged to compose their own prayers for particular occasions. The recently-introduced prayer bags are helping to develop links between school and home.

Leadership and management are a strength of the school. The senior leadership team was completed in September by the appointment of the deputy headteacher, and the collaborative model of management consolidates and strengthens processes for self-evaluation and school improvement. There is a clear vision, sense of purpose, and direction which are shared at all levels throughout the staff and governing body, whose enthusiasm and close knowledge of the school bring support and challenge. The priests and sister are regular visitors and these regular contacts help to inform understanding and the monitoring and evaluation cycle. Communication is very strong and includes families and the parish community through meetings, letters, newsletters and questionnaires. There is a keenness to consider suggestions and initiatives with the continual aim of improving provision and outcomes for all pupils.

### **Recommendations**

- Catholic Life: enhance the place and profile of vocations in school beyond the priesthood and religious life.
- Review the schedule for monitoring religious education.



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March 2014

Dear Parents and Carers

**Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School, 27<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup>  
March 2014**

I am writing this letter to share with you the findings of the diocesan inspection of your children's school. Diocesan inspection now explores in detail the school's own view of itself as expressed in its self-evaluation. For this reason, much of the report is more technical than used to be the case. You are still entitled to have a copy of the full report should you want one and it will be available on the school website or by request from the school office.

St Cuthbert's is an outstanding Catholic school whose Catholic life and collective worship are especially to be celebrated. The leadership of the headteacher and her team is very positive, giving clear strategic guidance to all the staff. The school is well supported in this by its governors, who have a very clear understanding of priorities and high expectations, and by priests and parish sister. The headteacher and staff make accurate and well-founded judgements about the quality of the school's Catholic life and RE taking the views of both pupils and parents into account.

The pupils speak with enthusiasm about the school, enjoy their learning and feel safe and happy. When they first arrive at the school many children have limited religious knowledge but they make excellent progress and, by the time they leave, they have achieved very good standards. They are developing a secure knowledge of Christ's teaching and understand the basics of the Catholic faith as well as some understanding of other world religions. They know and can talk about a number of Bible stories and miracles, and have a good understanding of the importance of personal and traditional prayers. All teaching is good or better which enables the pupils to make excellent progress.

I have recommended that, in order to further its outstanding work, the school could continue to develop and refine its already secure processes and outcomes in RE, and enhance the place and profile of vocations in the pupils' learning.

It was a pleasure and a privilege to spend time in your school and see how well your children are doing. I was made really welcome by everyone, and was very impressed by the collaboration and mutual support between the school and the wider community to ensure that all the children live happy and enjoyable lives.

Yours sincerely

Paul Nutt  
Diocesan Inspector