



SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the
Archbishop of Southwark and Inspection of
Denominational Education under Section 48
of the Education Act 2005
URN 118782

St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Greenfield Road
Gillingham
ME7 1YH

Inspection date: 6 June 2013

Chair of Governors:
Headteacher:
Inspectors:

Mr Patrick Johnston
Mrs Bernadette Long
Mrs Angela O'Connor
Mr Roger Tapley

EDUCATION COMMISSION

St Edward's House, St Paul's Wood Hill, Orpington, Kent BR5 2SR
Tel 01689 829331 Fax 01689 829255
Director of Education: Dr Anne Bamford

SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

St Mary's Catholic Primary School is voluntary aided. It is in the Chatham Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Medway LA. The principal parish which the school serves is Our Lady of Gillingham. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 59.8%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in all Key Stages. The school takes pupils from 3 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 420 plus 59 pupils in the Nursery. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is well below average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Around 21% of the pupils receive extra support in class, which is well above average. 49% of the pupils are from ethnic minorities and the proportion of pupils from homes where English is an Additional Language is above average, with 14% being at an early stage of language acquisition.

Publication date ... 11 July 2013

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

GRADE

1

St Mary's is an Outstanding School which is committed to high academic achievement and the all-round development of the pupils. The school has strengths in many different areas. Leadership and management are excellent. The leadership and management of the Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher and governors are outstanding and a key ingredient in the success of the school. The pupils are exceptionally well behaved. They are polite, friendly and considerate of others. The highly committed staff have great pride in their school, and work hard to ensure that all the pupils enjoy school, and make progress and achieve well. Teaching and Learning are excellent and there is a warm and vibrant atmosphere in each classroom. The spiritual life in school is very strong and is at the heart of all that they do. The support staff are an intrinsic part of the staff team and are a real strength of the school. Every area is full of colourful and vibrant displays of high quality and communal areas such as the library, prayer garden and outdoor area all contribute to an outstanding environment for the school community. Parents are overwhelming in their support for the school and very appreciative of all that they do. One parent spoke for many as they said "The ethos of the school offers my child the opportunity to develop spiritually. My children have flourished spiritually and academically at St Mary's."

All the issues from the previous Inspection have been addressed and any areas for development have been identified. The strong leadership and supportive staff team ensure that the school has an excellent capacity to continue to improve.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, headteacher and staff should:

- Implement and develop 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' ensuring that assessment procedures are embedded, information from the tracking system is used to inform future planning and standards continue to rise. This has been identified through their own self-assessment.

The Catholic life of the school

Leadership and management

GRADE 1

Leadership and Management is outstanding. The highly effective and inspirational Headteacher is an excellent leader and manager of this larger than average primary school. She and the Deputy Headteacher provide strong and committed leadership. Together with the senior leadership team they share a clear vision of Catholic education which is communicated to all the staff and so has created a dedicated and cohesive staff team. The Chair and governors know the school well and have a good understanding of the strengths of the school and areas to develop. They are closely involved in the life of the school both formally and informally. Relationships throughout the school community are excellent. Care and support for the pupils is outstanding and pupils feel safe and well cared for in school. One pupil said, "This school is a safe place to be. We are looked after and there is always someone to talk to". Pupils are lively, polite and friendly and their behaviour both in the school and playground is exemplary. The home/school relationship is flourishing and parents are very supportive and appreciative of the school. As one parent wrote, "The support and guidance they have been offered has played a huge part in helping them to become the sensitive, caring and thoughtful children they are". The Parish Priest is a regular visitor and is involved in the Catholic life of the school, for example helping to prepare the many liturgies in school and the parish Mass that is attended by different classes each week. The parish is funding 'The Wednesday Word' for the whole school which further enhances the links with the parish community. The Catholic ethos is celebrated in the many stunning and high quality displays and artefacts around the school. For example, in the corridor each class had contributed a large collage and writing of a saint to contribute to a whole school display on Heroes. The mission statement is displayed prominently around the school and the pupils know and understand its purpose.

Quality of provision for personal and collective worship

GRADE 1

Prayer and worship is central to the life of the school. There is a rich programme of Masses, liturgies and assemblies. During the week there are a variety of assemblies, including whole school assemblies, Key Stage assemblies, class assemblies and hymn practice.

There are many opportunities for reflection during the week. The Key Stage 2 meditation observed was outstanding and gave the pupils strategies and opportunities for thought and prayer. The focal point, music and reading all contributed to this very prayerful and awe inspiring meditation. There was a great sense of spirituality. The pupils entered and exited quietly and peacefully in the spirit of the meditation.

Prayer corners are excellent and evident in each classroom. They are colourful, vibrant and very well used. They were the starting point of every lesson with candles, music and opportunities to pray.

The liturgical year is closely followed and marked by appropriate celebrations, and pupils have opportunities to take part in liturgies and Masses in school and the parish church. Each week a Key Stage 1 class participates in a class liturgy which is attended by the Parish Priest. In the reception liturgy observed, which was on God's World and was age appropriate, all the pupils were involved with singing, reading bidding prayers and contributing artefacts to the central display. Masses for Key Stage 2 pupils are held each week either in school or in the parish church. Whole school Masses are celebrated for Holy Days of Obligation, beginning and end of school year and other school celebrations.

The pupils know the traditional prayers of the Church and have opportunities to write their own prayers. For example, in a Key Stage 1 class there is a book of the pupils' 'Thank You' prayers. The prayers were simple but expressive. As one pupil wrote, "Thank you God for being there for me, for being with me".

An internal courtyard in the library is set up as a spiritual area and this is used during the year for individual and group prayers and reciting the rosary during the month of October. A prayer garden has been established which again is used for individual or group prayers.

Every morning there is an opportunity for the staff to join in morning prayer, and this is always well attended.

Community cohesion

St Mary's is a very inclusive school. It is warm and welcoming and celebrates the uniqueness of the individual and the wide cultural heritage it serves. For example, there is a display 'Our Language Wall' which has the word 'Hello' translated into all the different languages present in the school. Special times and feasts such as Diwali and the Chinese New Year are acknowledged and observed.

The pupils and families are very well supported right from the time they join the school. The school has invested in counselling services, therapy and personnel such as the very effective Inclusion Manager so that each child can flourish and succeed. For example, an onsite counselling service 'Place2be' has had a very positive effect and is highly regarded by the parents and the pupils.

The School Council is very proactive and involved in several projects to develop their social conscience. For example, they are involved in a local education project 'Love Medway' to improve the local environment. The older pupils also undertake roles such as Play Leaders and Lunchtime Monitors. Relationships with the local community are good and there are good links with the other schools in the Deanery. For example, Year 6 pupils spent a morning at the local Catholic secondary school learning about different cultures.

Several charities are supported by the school, such as CAFOD, World Vision, Caring Hands and Cabrini. This allows the pupils to develop a responsibility to others less fortunate than themselves. The parents are very supportive and involved in school life. There is a thriving Parent Teacher Association which fund raises and organises events to which the whole community is invited.

Religious Education

Achievement and standards in Religious Education

GRADE 1

Attainment on entry to school is well below average with significant communication problems. The pupils settle into school well, and because of the many levels of support available make good progress by the end of the Foundation Stage. They continue to make good progress across the year groups so that standards by the end of Key Stage 2 are in line with national expectations. Achievement, considering their starting point, is excellent.

There are no significant differences in achievement between various groups of pupils. Pupils with additional needs are very well supported so that they are able to access the curriculum and make progress.

Workbooks are of a good standard, are well presented, show differentiation and some evidence of independent work.

Books are regularly marked with points of development to which pupils are encouraged to respond.

Religious Education makes a positive contribution to the moral, spiritual, social and cultural development of the pupils.

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

GRADE 1

The quality of teaching is at least good with several outstanding features. Teaching was dynamic and contributed to a lively learning environment. Teachers had very good subject knowledge and planning is very thorough and comprehensive and classroom organisation and management is excellent. There is a good variety of teaching strategies and the use of cross curricular links is strong. For example, there is evidence of persuasive writing, Art and Craft as in Year 1 where they had been making Rosary Beads, and a good use of Information and Communications Technology. The pace of lessons was lively with an interesting variety of activities which ensured the pupils concentrated and remained on task. The teachers modelled behaviours and attitudes from their personal lives, which enabled the pupils to also relate the lessons to their own lives. For example, in a Key Stage 2 lesson on the theme of Change the teacher related events from her morning showing how they affected her.

Behaviour in lessons is exceptional. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and work hard at all times.

Teaching assistants are a strength of the school. They were well briefed, involved in assessment and ensured that all pupils were accessed the curriculum and were on task.

Learning objectives and success criteria are shared with the pupils at the beginning of each lesson so that pupils knew what they had to achieve to make progress. Assessment is regular and consistent and pupils own self-assessment is clearly seen in their workbooks.

The Religious Education curriculum

GRADE 1

The curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference and 10% of the timetable is allocated to the teaching of Religious Education. The curriculum builds on prior knowledge and provides excellent opportunities for spiritual and moral development.

The school follows the 'Here I Am' scheme at present but are planning to move to 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' in September. Preparations are well underway and the School Improvement Plan shows planned inset and staff meetings to support the introduction of the new scheme.

Excellent cross curricular links such as Art, Technology and Literacy enhance the curriculum.

The use of Audio Visual aids, such as music, photos and the use of the whiteboard is excellent and apparent throughout the school.

The policy for Human Love is in line with Diocesan requirements.

Leadership and management of Religious Education

GRADE 1

The very experienced Religious Education coordinator is very proactive, very knowledgeable and responsive to the needs of the staff. She is very committed to the role and has a strong sense of spiritual purpose. As the Deputy Headteacher and a member of the Senior Leadership team, she works closely with the Headteacher ensuring that Religious Education has a high profile in the school. Her monitoring role includes lesson observations, learning walks, book scrutiny, talking to pupils, assessments, staff meetings and inset. The monitoring of all aspects of Religious Education is very comprehensive and gives a very clear picture of the schools strengths and areas for development. She has a well-planned programme for implementing 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' ensuring that staff will be well supported with knowledge and resources.

She attends Coordinator meetings in both Diocese and Deanery and is involved with the local consortium. She liaises regularly with the link governor for Religious Education so that he is well aware of standards and areas for development. Parents are kept well informed through regular newsletters and reports and information on the website

Everyone works together to create a stimulating, safe and supportive environment which truly celebrates the work of this Catholic community.