



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL BICESTER

Inspection dates	11 th - 12 th March 2014
Reporting Inspector	Dominic Collins
Assisting Inspector	Susan Shannon

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4-11 years
Number on roll	263
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Fr John Batthula
School address	Queen's Avenue Bicester Oxfordshire OX26 2NX
Telephone number	01869 252035
E-mail address	head.3824@ocnmail.net
Date of previous inspection	December 2010
DFE School number	931/3824
Unique Reference Number	123207

Headteacher	Miss Patricia Pickering
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Evidence

The inspection was carried out by 2 Diocesan Inspectors. 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 inspectors observed 3 full RE lessons with the headteacher. In addition they completed a work scrutiny and held a discussion with pupils to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time. They held meetings with the headteacher, the chair of governors, who is also the parish priest, the RE link governor, subject leader, staff and parents. They observed the celebration of a school Mass, collective worship 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. They looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self evaluation such as RAISEonline, the development plan, teachers' planning, and learning journals.

Information about the school

St Mary's is a larger than average sized Catholic primary school serving the parish of The Immaculate Conception, Bicester. It is the only Catholic primary school in the locality and therefore draws from a wide catchment area including the surrounding villages. There are 263 children on role of whom 77% are baptised Catholics. The majority of pupils are from white British heritage, although the number from minority ethnic groups is increasing. The number of children identified as having a disability and/or special educational need is below average. The level of attainment on entry is broadly average. The school is well supported and popular within the community. The majority of pupils transfer to Blessed George Napier Catholic School in Banbury. Since the last inspection the governors have recruited several new teaching staff and a new parish priest was appointed by the Archdiocese in September 2013.

Main Finding

In its self evaluation the school correctly judges the effectiveness of and pupil response to its Catholic life and religious education to be outstanding. Evidence obtained during the inspection confirms that a continuous momentum of development has been achieved over time, through the successful establishment of a comprehensive range of processes in order to monitor and evaluate its Catholic life and RE provision. These systems are effective in providing a reliable profile of quality assurance, the outcomes of which inform the continuing cycle of self evaluation. As a result, pupils are able to benefit from a rich, high quality religious education and the effective assessment and tracking of their progress ensures outcomes are at least good and some exceptionally high.

School self evaluation

School self evaluation is securely based upon effective and well established systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality and impact of Catholic life and RE provision. A broad dimension of formal and informal processes is consistently applied and the outcomes shared by staff and governors, consequently a thorough and accurate profile of the school's current position, informs priorities for future planning. An analysis of the systems used, that include audits, monitoring of lesson planning, teaching, scrutiny of pupils' work and group/individual pupil tracking, are meticulously recorded by the subject leader. Good practice and areas for development towards the agreed overall RE improvement plan are examined and appropriate action is taken to provide whatever support is necessary in order to maintain quality assurance.

Central to the accuracy of school self evaluation is the clear link between monitoring, evaluation and using outcomes to inform future developments. This is evident in the excellent RE improvement plan that highlights areas of focus, a succinct profile of steps taken to achieve these aims and success criteria that are practical and informative. This cycle, involving staff, governors, pupils and parents, is always viewed as work in progress and has been adopted and refined over time by the subject leader. It represents a consistent momentum of continuous improvement that has a very positive impact on Catholic life and RE provision within the school and reflects the commitment, drive and vision of its leadership.

The school self evaluation judgement that pupils' attainment and progress is good, is reliably based upon the evidence of a variety of pupil tracking data derived from end of unit assessments, that are monitored and analysed by the subject leader. In addition, a profile of comparison reveals that in both key stages, attainment in RE is in line with other core subjects, which is above national expectations. In order to build upon these established processes, the school plans to introduce a system which will measure progression within individual RE units relating to the Diocesan Strategy, thus extending the scope of pupil tracking information.

Outcomes from self evaluation leads the school to judge that the monitoring and evaluation of its Catholic life to be outstanding. Inspection evidence confirms this view. The school's leadership is deeply committed to the Church's mission in education and through a variety of broad, thorough self evaluation processes and any subsequent action taken, are extremely successful in developing the Catholic life of the school. These include: formal and informal contributions through audits, discussions, pupil interviews, learning walks and recorded observations. An example of how pupils make a valuable contribution to the evaluation of Catholic life is evidenced by a well organised group of Year 6 pupils called, 'Holy Spirit in Action', who are currently examining ways of improving prayer life across the school. Through discussion, views of peers and audits, their endeavours have initiated a weekly programme of older pupils, planning and leading worship for younger pupils. This had a very positive impact when observed during the inspection.

The headteacher and subject leader organise an annual retreat in order to develop the spiritual well being of all staff, thus presenting an opportunity for them to review and evaluate the Catholic life of the school together. The headteacher, senior leadership and RE subject leader have established a very effective liaison with the parish priest, with whom all RE monitoring and evaluation outcomes are shared and future developments discussed. His appointment as chair of governors has significantly influenced the evaluation of provision and outcomes for all pupils.

The RE link governor also meets with the subject leader to discuss aspects of Catholic life and RE provision. This, in addition to governors' regularly visiting school for Mass, events and celebrations, keeps them fully informed. Governors are knowledgeable, well organised and supportive; there is clear evidence that they make a significant contribution to the evaluation of Catholic life and RE provision. The school engages effectively with parents and parishioners. Their opinions regarding Catholic life are also sought and appreciated.

The provision of and pupil response to collective worship is regularly audited and evaluated by the subject leader and all staff, formally and informally through focused observation, review and pupil voice. These processes are well developed and consistently applied. Outcomes are judged by the school to be outstanding, a view reliably based on evidence, including the quality and range of opportunity for prayer and worship and the manner in which pupils respond, observed during the inspection.

The systems used for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning to determine the impact of the school's work in RE are well developed. They are based upon areas of focus that are annually discussed and agreed with governors, in relation to the overall RE improvement plan. Findings from school self evaluation judge these systems to be effective and contribute to a reliable and accurate profile from which future developments can be devised. Evidence from inspection validates these judgements which arises from a variety of well structured processes that include; scrutiny of lesson planning, assessment and moderation of children's work, pupil voice and lesson observations. These are used by the headteacher and subject leader to monitor the quality of RE provision and evaluate the overall impact it has on pupils learning.

The quality of teaching, monitored by the headteacher and subject leader, is judged to be good, in accordance with evidence of the detailed monitoring records that show a consistent trend of good and outstanding teaching over time. This is further strengthened by the quality of professional feedback and the sharing of good practice that is implicit in the excellent way outcomes of self evaluation are conducted by the school leadership. An annual cycle of formal lesson observations in addition to intermittent class visits and organised learning walks is established in order to provide quality assurance and maintain the high standards expected. In view of the high quality of the school self evaluation and the areas for development that have been identified therein to build upon the already effective practice, the capacity for sustained improvement in both Catholic life and RE is excellent.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

Outcomes for pupils in RE are excellent. The evidence of assessment data and the high quality of work recorded in pupils books, demonstrates consistent progress in their knowledge and understanding of the faith. Pupil tracking shows that levels of attainment at the end of each key stage are above diocesan expectations. These outcomes reflect the effective systems the school employs to monitor and evaluate the quality of RE provision. The rich and varied curriculum follows the Diocesan Strategy and is carefully planned and adapted so that all pupils can engage fully. Those pupils with learning needs receive excellent support and achieve well following a structured programme, while more able pupils are encouraged to tackle higher level challenges and work more independently. Learning is further enhanced by the outstanding quality of relationships throughout the school and the excellent guidance given by all staff. They work and support each other as a team, with a common purpose to ensure the best possible outcomes for the children for whom they place spiritual and moral development as the highest priority. They are excellent role models and together foster a happy, secure and caring environment in which all children and adults can learn and pray together.

St Mary's is a welcoming and inclusive Catholic school and its outstanding Catholic ethos ensures that every pupil is valued and integrated into the school community. Pupils are able to articulate its distinctive mission and the evidence of their positive attitudes, values, relationships and immense pride in their school, is testimony to the way they embrace it. Pupils recognise how much they are valued and that they too have a responsibility to show respect and care for each other. The school initiative of promoting a 'focus of the week' helps them to encourage an awareness of others. An example would be; 'give someone a compliment', 'show an act of kindness' or 'help someone today'. As a result, pupils' spiritual and moral development is outstanding and their behaviour is exemplary.

¹ 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.

Prayer and worship is central to the Catholic life of the school. It is very well developed through formal and informal monitoring processes and is a significant strength. Children are confident to share their own prayers and intercessions with others and participate enthusiastically in all aspects of collective worship with sincerity and reverence. They are encouraged by caring staff, who always ensure that times of prayer are conducted in a calm, reflective atmosphere. Each pupil is valued as one of God's children and is gently nurtured to embrace Gospel values. This is developed through whole school Gospel assemblies each Monday, where the Sunday Gospel is explored and discussed. In this way children are able to relate our own daily lives to the way Jesus lived, showing love, trust and forgiveness. Each week the celebration of Mass is led by classes or phases. Pupils are involved in choosing the musical liturgy and composing bidding prayers. Older children are cantors for the psalm and support the joyful singing by playing a range of musical instruments.

The school leadership provides clear directional guidance, strives to provide the very best Catholic education for all pupils and constantly seeks ways to develop it further. RE is well led and managed by the subject leader who works closely with the headteacher to support colleagues with their knowledge and understanding of what is required to ensure high quality provision and outcomes for RE.

The school has established strong links with the parish community, who are very supportive. They regularly join the children for the celebration of Mass in school and the parish catechists give of their time so generously to be involved in preparing children to receive the sacraments. The parish priest visits the school regularly, has a thorough knowledge of its Catholic life and is effective as a key partner in planning its development.

St Mary's is effective in fostering a close partnership with parents who are very supportive of the school and the high quality of Catholic education their children receive.

Recommendations

- Strengthen the sacramental education programme within the school which has a significant role to play in the sacramental preparation process.
- In order to improve assessment for learning, share good practice of high quality success criteria and detailed, developmental marking.



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March 2014

Dear Parents and Carers

Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, 11th & 12th 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. Mary's is a welcoming and inclusive school and its outstanding Catholic ethos ensures that every pupil is valued and fully integrated into the school community. The children are immensely proud of their school. The high level of care and encouragement your children receive from the headteacher and her staff allows them to develop as happy, confident learners. They thrive in the secure and happy environment which the school provides.

The quality of teaching of religious education is good and sometimes outstanding. This ensures that pupils achieve high standards in their work. Their learning is enhanced by the outstanding quality of relationships throughout the school and the excellent guidance given by all staff.

The Catholic mission of the school underpins all aspects of its daily life and the evidence of pupils' attitudes to work, their exemplary behaviour, values and spiritual development is demonstrated by the way they embrace it. They are fine ambassadors for the school. Their contribution to the Catholic life, their participation in and response to collective worship are excellent. Your children make rapid progress in their faith journey, because of the good teaching and rich experiences they receive which are supported by thorough monitoring and assessment. This firm foundation will enable them to continue their development as maturing Christians.

Although the school warmly acknowledges the support given by the parish catechists in preparing children for the sacraments, I have recommended that the school's provision for sacramental education should run in parallel with that in the parish.

It was a pleasure to inspect St Mary's School. I enjoyed my visit very much and was made most welcome by all. Your children are a credit to the school, to their families and those who care for them.

Yours sincerely,

Dominic Collins
Diocesan Inspector