



## 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 101662

St Mary's Catholic Primary School  
Westgate Road  
Beckenham  
Kent BR3 5DE

Inspection date: 7 February 2014

Chair of Governors:	Mrs Elizabeth Jones
Headteacher:	Mrs Isobel Vassallo
Inspectors:	Mr Stephen Beck Ms Margaret Wosiek

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# SECTION 48

# Introduction

## Description of the school

The school is voluntary aided. It is situated in the Bromley Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Bromley Local Authority. The principal parishes which the school serves are St Edmund's, Beckenham; St Mark's, West Wickham and Our Lady of the Rosary, Hayes. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 100%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in both Key Stages.

This two form entry school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 429. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free schools meals is well below average. Around 19% of the pupils receive extra support in class. The majority of pupils are from White British families. The percentage of ethnic minority group pupils is slightly above average at 32%. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is well below average.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

# Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education

GRADE  
1

St Mary's was deemed to be a good school with many outstanding features at the time of its last inspection and it has maintained and successfully built on this high level of effectiveness. It is marked by a strong collegiate approach that secures a warm and welcoming feeling from the moment of first contact. Leadership and management are of a high order with the home, school and parish partnership being a significant strength. The Headteacher provides a real clarity of vision bringing out the very best from her talented leadership team. The school's mission statement remains the effective driver for the work of the school. Its Catholic ethos is explicitly pervasive with Gospel values being intrinsic to every aspect of life. In St Mary's, there is an appreciation of the importance of the distinctive role that this Catholic school plays in the community. School leaders at all levels work with determination to ensure that the inclusive Catholic life and character of the school is maintained.

The school recognises the individuality of the faith journey and works with commitment to assist pupils in deepening their understanding and appreciation of the beliefs and traditions of the Catholic Church. Prayer, worship and reflection are central to the calm, everyday life of the school. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards prayer and worship throughout their life at St Mary's. The school makes good use of a small Oratory which is situated at the heart of the school where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. The Oratory is regularly used by the pupils and staff for prayer and reflection and for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The school's chaplain, who provides outstanding dedicated support, is a visible presence, regularly working with pupils, staff and parents. The three parish priests and parish sisters are frequent visitors to the school. These links are highly valued by the school and support a vibrant chaplaincy for the whole school community. Moral and spiritual development is formally promoted throughout the curriculum. The impact of this is evident in pupils' respectful relationships with each other and their readiness to accept responsibility. It is commendable that in the school's recent Ofsted report pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development were described as being extremely effective, impacting on pupils' attitudes and relationships, which were described as being a strength of the school. It is to the credit of St Mary's that Section 48 inspectors were likewise able to validate this view.

Teaching and learning in Religious Education are never less than good and are frequently outstanding and as a result of this, pupils attain very well. Religious Education planning is based on 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' scheme and teaching is differentiated to ensure that the needs of a majority of pupils are met.

Pupil behaviour is exemplary, reflecting the high expectations of behaviour that are communicated to pupils, clear, consistently-applied policies for behaviour, anti-bullying and equality and an emphasis on self-discipline and reconciliation. Parents are involved at the earliest opportunity and, on the rare occasions where difficulties with behaviour arise, are willing partners. Highly effective Pastoral Support Programmes are put in place for pupils with particular difficulties. As a parent wrote, *'Excellent Catholic ethos. The children are able to learn, care for one another as well as respect each other's opinion'*.

## **The effectiveness of any steps taken to promote improvement since the last inspection**

St Mary's has worked well in addressing the areas identified in the last inspection. Planning now includes a range of activities to meet the specific needs of ability groups.

Areas of identified good practice could now be usefully shared across the school to secure greater consistency. Very good progress has been made in developing the range of resources available to support Religious Education.

The school now tracks and assesses Religious Education onto their school tracker in line with the other core subjects. Each year group follows the 'other faiths' topics in accordance with the published scheme of work. Visits to and visits by members of other faiths and cultures are planned for each year. Whole school and community international days are also planned annually.

### **What steps need to be taken to improve further?**

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Continue to evaluate the school's assessment and tracking procedures for Religious Education to raise attainment still further.
- Review marking to secure a more consistently formative approach across the school to further pupils' depth of spiritual understanding.

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## **The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school**

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is excellent. The mission statement is central to the life of the school and is fully embraced by all pupils in their daily school life. Extensive opportunities to participate in the evaluation of the Catholic Life of the school are provided through the very effective school council and during Religious Education lessons. Pupils have a deep sense of belonging to their 'school family' and they all strive to do their best to promote the strong ethos within the school and in the wider community. They are well aware of the needs of others, both locally and globally, seeking to support them through awareness raising assemblies and fundraising. Pupils take full advantage of the opportunities provided by school for their personal support and development and are given a wide range of opportunities to take on responsibilities, such as, prefects, team captains and school council. They do this with enthusiasm and skill. Pupils are happy, confident and secure in their own stage of spiritual and emotional growth. An effective programme for Education for Personal Relationships and Sex Education, incorporating aspects of the SEAL programme, allows pupils to develop and foster excellent understanding, appropriate to their age and understanding within a Catholic context. It may be timely to revisit this programme to ensure a linked whole school approach from Reception to Year 6, enabling parents to understand the programme's context. Pupils are explicitly proud of their religious identity, deeply valuing the Catholic nature of their school and its links to the parish community. They are regularly involved with parish and Diocesan celebrations, benefitting from staff involvement in school and parish activities. The school is a prayerful and fun loving community that provides a stimulating learning environment, to reflect the school's mission and Catholic character. Pastoral care for pupils is outstanding as a result of the commitment of all stakeholders and through having clear policies and structures in place.

## **How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education**

Excellent leadership and management are shown by senior leaders in promoting pupil achievement and learning.

The monitoring and evaluation of Religious Education provision is increasingly rigorous, and is targeted at securing improved outcomes for all pupils. The evaluation of teaching and learning is robust and this has led to clear priorities for development, which are planned for appropriately. These were clearly evidenced in the school's self-evaluation documentation provided for this inspection. Staff give tirelessly of their time and energy to play a full and active role in the ongoing development of this school and ensuring continuous improvement of outcomes for pupils. This is in turn reflected in the school's Mission Statement, which is prominent round the school, in documentation and in pupils' books. Some very good display work, for example in the main school hall, marks the school's distinctively Catholic ethos. The school creed was well represented in this area. Class focal points, whilst prominent and used, would benefit from the inclusion of more pupils' work. The values of the School Mission Statement are evident throughout the school. There are very good links with the local parishes, deanery, with the Diocese as a whole and with the wider community in the surrounding area. There is ongoing work to secure links with other faiths. The school supports a range of charities both home and abroad. These have included, St Christopher's Hospice, Love in a Shoebox, the Evelina Hospital, HCPT, Myeloma UK and a partner school in Ghana.

Pupils enjoy learning and take pride in their work. Work in Religious Education is of the same expected high standard as work in other areas of the curriculum. Pupils attain well across the Religious Education curriculum, gaining knowledge, skills and understanding, at a good rate. Most pupils meet age appropriate targets and some achieve above this. Pupils' attainment on entry is broadly average. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Several pupils with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities are on the school's Able, Gifted and Talented register for Religious Education and there is no significant variation between groups of pupils.

### **How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship**

Pupils' responses to and participation in Collective Worship is outstanding. There is a variety of prayer opportunities provided, thus ensuring that prayer is central to the life of the school. From a young age pupils are able to lead and respond to prayer in different ways. They are reflective and focused during prayer and Collective Worship. Pupils enjoy singing and are enthusiastic benefiting from the use of a range of musical accompaniment. They speak highly of the different ways they pray in school and through participation in prayer, dance and song they demonstrate their understanding of the Gospel message. The pupils have a good understanding of religious seasons and festivals and of the Church's liturgical year and are able to apply their knowledge and understanding to class discussions and Religious Education lessons.

The quality of Collective Worship is a priority for the school. It is effectively monitored and evaluated and a suitable policy is in place that ensures the spiritual needs of all pupils are met. Prayer is at the heart of the school community and is inclusive and reflective. It is evident that from the beginning of their school life, pupils are encouraged to have a special relationship with God through prayer. Staff show skill in planning a range of opportunities to ensure that pupils are able to participate in prayer in different ways. A variety of good liturgical and prayer opportunities enable parents and the parish communities to join the pupils in worship and prayer. A good example of this was the Year 2 Mass which was marked by a high level of parental attendance. Pupils were reverent and the celebration was uplifting, in part due to their beautiful singing and clear expressive reading. They spoke with clarity, understanding and confidence. Pupils had composed bidding prayers that were heartfelt. The school is very fortunate to be supported by Fr Ashley who celebrates a weekly Year led Mass and gives a significant amount of time in supporting Religious Education and the wider life of the school. Collective Worship has a significant impact on the spiritual and moral development of pupils. As a parent wrote, *'St Mary's is a brilliant faith school which strongly reflects our Catholic values. Attending Mass fills your heart and soul with joy emanating from our children – every time.'*

In different ways all staff follow the excellent example of the school's leadership team in modelling best practice when leading Collective Worship ensuring that this has a good impact on all pupils. They expose pupils to all aspects of the Liturgical year and ensure that there are many opportunities for pupils to share in these. As a consequence pupils respond well to all that is provided for them. The headteacher and senior leaders have a clear vision for the further development of Collective Worship. Very good strategies are in place to monitor this aspect of school life and as a result the quality of Collective Worship continues to further develop and improve.

## **How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils**

Leadership is deeply rooted in a personal commitment to Christ and his Church. Promoting the Catholic life of the school is given the highest priority by leaders and governors, who have embedded the concept of their school's mission of service, enabling all members of the community to grow in faith. Religious Education is rightly placed, and seen to be placed, at the core of the curriculum.

Catholic life at St Mary's is exceptionally well promoted, monitored and evaluated. The provision for the Catholic life of the school and in the way it is planned and implemented secures ongoing improvement to outcomes for pupils.

Its aims and practical objectives direct and guide every aspect of school life and are a useful tool by which the school evaluates its effectiveness. The Headteacher provides excellent focused leadership and lives out her vision successfully creating a caring and hardworking community.

The school's self-evaluation is accurate and excellently managed. It provides strong evidence of the school's monitoring and self-challenge and demonstrates a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development. It could be usefully reviewed to align it with the current inspection framework as part of the school's ongoing self-evaluation programme. Governors know their school well and fulfil their responsibilities. They have effectively helped to shape the direction of the school and continue to do so. They take pride in the school's very close and well established links with the parish community and move the school forward encouraging a 'genuine faith journey.'

The Parish priests and sisters are a central part of the school family. They are fully supportive of it, visit regularly to celebrate Mass and other liturgies over the course of the school year and regard school worship as an "uplifting experience". The governing body includes a trustee who is parish sister from the order of, The Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, this order founded the school. The school is proud of these links which remain prominent and provide a real connection which was noted in the celebration of the Sacred Heart in the Year 2 Mass.

There are positive relationships at every level within the school. The Religious Education coordinator has a clear vision for her subject. She has been proactive in developing her role and a new school cluster. She has quickly settled in to her role and has a strong capacity to move her subject forward. This seamless transition is a reflection of the role played by the school's Deputy Headteacher in the induction of the new coordinator.

Parents are consulted regularly and involved in a variety of ways in the life of the school, for example, regular newsletters and a half termly Religious Education newsletter. With a very high percentage of parental questionnaire returns at 55%. It is noteworthy that virtually 100% were positive.

## How well leaders, governors and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education and plan and implement for improvement to outcomes for pupils

Leaders and governors are rigorous in promoting, monitoring and evaluating the provision for Religious Education at the school. The subject leader is successfully continuing and building on previous good practice in managing and leading Religious Education. She shows great commitment in her role and introduces new initiatives when appropriate. She is accurate in her review of strengths and areas for development for Religious Education. As a leader she has benefitted from the role model provided by the Deputy Headteacher, who has played a central role in the ongoing development of the school's strong Catholic ethos. A good range of continuing professional development opportunities are provided for staff. Communication between the headteacher, staff, parents and governors is very effective. The Self Evaluation document is clear in identifying targets, timescales and lines of accountability. The Religious Education governor is outstanding in his passion and commitment to St Mary's. He is proactive in challenging Religious Education at the school and has regular meetings with the subject leader to ensure a productive working partnership. Monitoring data is used and its impact is evident in school performance and plans for future improvements.

Teaching and learning is monitored regularly and appropriate feedback and support given as necessary. Good and outstanding practice is shared and celebrated. Formal assessment tasks are undertaken in line with the chosen scheme, 'The Way The Truth and the Life'. Assessment information is collated and tracked by the subject leader and is shared with the leadership team, with governors and with parents as appropriate. Achievement and effort at St Mary's is always celebrated. Curriculum outlines are provided for parents who are consulted on different issues depending on the topic being covered. Parents feel well informed and therefore able to support their children's religious formation.

Lessons are very well structured and include well developed and appropriate cross curricular links which the school plans to develop further. Lessons make excellent use of scripture. A reception lesson developed pupils understanding of miracles and sacraments through looking at the Wedding Feast at Cana. Years 3 and 4 explored the theme of understanding and forgiveness through the parables of the Prodigal Son and the Unforgiving Servant. Year 1 utilised the Presentation in the Temple and 'Hot Seating', which would have benefitted from modelling to maximise pupil learning.

As one parent wrote, *'St Mary's supports the children in all that they do. They grow up to have a fantastic understanding of right and wrong, how to respect others and the world. The staff are very caring as well as being firm and supportive.'*

### **The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education**

The quality of teaching and purposeful learning is good ensuring that pupils are interested, engaged and make good progress. Teachers' planning on the whole is effective in meeting the needs of the pupils, however evidence in books shows that there are some inconsistencies. This could be addressed in some classes by planning for a wider range of differentiated tasks rather than an over reliance on pupil outcomes. This will add value to the already high expectations of all pupils, in addition to consolidating, building on and extending pupil knowledge, skills and understanding.

Teachers display very good subject knowledge and deploy a range of teaching styles. Pupils are challenged and inspired which enriches their enjoyment of Religious Education. There is clear evidence that a majority of teachers reflect on pupils' prior learning when planning Religious Education lessons. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge, make excellent use of questioning skills and are very affirmative with pupils.

Lessons are very well planned and good use is made of time and resources. Technology is used very effectively, together with the support provided by other adults to optimise learning. Good use is made in a number of classes of opportunities to support pupils undertaking their own research. Teachers have excellent rapport with pupils and high quality teaching is marked by excellent open ended questioning, good development of Religious Education vocabulary, appropriately differentiated tasks and a 'learning buzz' that permeates lessons. A Year 5 class made excellent use of 'talk homework' that saw them bring discussion at home on a scripture passage, into the lesson discussion on the true meaning of the word 'love' to widen their understanding.

Pupils are positively affirmed throughout their lessons. Marking informs pupils of their progress and would now benefit from the development of a more consistently formative approach to make 'next steps' clearer and further deepen pupils' depth of spiritual understanding. Effort and achievement are celebrated. The school has implemented assessment strategies including levelling, which provide information on the achievement of all pupils and portfolios of work are kept. The tracking of pupils' work in Religious Education has been maintained over a period of time with trends showing that standards are improving steadily. Moderation takes place across the school. Where appropriate the subject leader supports this on a one to one basis, which the school feels has added to the developing quality assurance of this curriculum area.

### **The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning**

Governors are actively involved in the Catholic life of the school and ensure continuous improvement through both informal monitoring and evaluation and more formal reporting at governing body meetings. Governors know the school very well and they speak about it with passion and knowledge. They articulate their desire for the school to have an impact on the wider community and are dedicated to ensuring that the Catholic ethos is sustained and celebrated. Governor strengths and skills are broad and are effectively deployed. School leaders ensure that the school participates fully and actively in developing a variety of partnerships and activities which promote Catholic learning. These partnerships involve pupils at all levels and abilities marking St Mary's out as a very inclusive community. The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning is developing well particularly in regard to meeting pupils' individual needs. The school uses 'The Way,

The Truth and The Life' programme. Of the total curriculum time at least 10% is allocated to Religious Education in all Key Stages fulfilling the requirements of the Bishops of England and Wales. Planning ensures full coverage of the Religious Education programme with imaginative and well planned strategies being deployed at times to enrich pupils' learning. The school implements new curriculum developments as appropriate and this is being customised to meet the needs of groups and individuals. St Mary's ensures that there is variety and innovation in the way they present the curriculum through the arts, their school environment and planned themed weeks throughout the year. The Religious Education curriculum provides excellent opportunities for pupils' spiritual and moral development and vocation. Enrichment activities such as the wide variety of after school clubs, competitions, visits and visitors to school have a positive impact on the pupils' enjoyment of the curriculum. The school has a variety of excellent links with a Catholic schools cluster within the Deanery and a neighbouring Deanery which support both Religious Education provision and subject coordination. Pupils have explored the beliefs and values of other faiths. Judaism is taught each year along with either Hinduism or Islam. This helps to promote tolerance and respect for those who think differently. St Mary's welcomes visitors from other faith backgrounds. The school is active in its outreach work to others and families are very involved in school life. The school is growing in cultural diversity. St Mary's, therefore, makes a conscious effort to foster within the children a genuine understanding of, and respect for, other cultures. This has also been reflected in an increase in culturally diverse staff. It is noteworthy that the school has an appointed Cultural Diversity leader who has responsibility for developing this area. Impact measures show that children have an increased knowledge and understanding of the customs and traditions of other countries and other cultures within the UK through planned opportunities within the curriculum. An International Day is an established part of the school's calendar and a French Day occurs every July. Consideration could be given to using the school's web site to further celebrate the extensive religious life of the school. Pupils understand the importance of prayer in their own lives; they enjoy collective worship and are attentive and responsive. Liturgical life, prayer and collective worship provide a template for pupils' spiritual and moral development. The increased attendance at weekly Class Masses by parents and families is setting a great example to the children and is very much welcomed by the children and staff.

### **The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school**

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school is outstanding. It reflects the Catholic character of the school and is inclusive for all pupils at St Mary's. Collective Worship has a high profile and is central to the life of the school. It plays a key part in meeting the spiritual needs of the pupils. The school provides many opportunities for staff to develop their skills in planning, leading and evaluating Collective Worship. Staff regularly take part in celebrations linked to the Religious Education programme in addition to the liturgical year. The teachers provide appropriate resources and opportunities to help pupils acquire the skills necessary to plan, lead and participate in Collective Worship. Pupils are enabled to pray formally and informally using a variety of prayer methods and styles. Opportunities are provided to enable full, active and conscious participation for the whole school community. For example, there are regular end of topic celebrations and the school holds regular class and whole school Masses with opportunities provided for parents, carers, the local and wider faith communities to participate in a variety of celebrations. A carefully planned programme of Masses, assemblies and class based celebrations ensures that prayer and worship are central to the daily life of the school.

The diversity of provision afforded to pupils ensures inclusive engagement with learning and personal faith development both within the formal class setting and wider corporate

life of the school. In year group Masses children are directly involved in the planning and preparation of the Mass by choosing hymns, writing and leading bidding prayers and psalms and taking part in the offertory procession, while older children serve at Masses and are directly involved in developing themes for their Mass.

During whole school Masses Year 2 children are responsible for the offertory procession, Year 5 children prepare the introduction and Year 6 read the lesson, serve and take responsibility for the OHP with all year groups preparing and reading a bidding prayer. During communion, the Reception and Key Stage 1 children sing whilst older children receive Holy Communion.

As a parent wrote, *'Even if a parent is a non-Catholic, the school and church are very supportive and welcoming'*, with another parent articulating this view at a meeting held with parents.

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