



# Archdiocese of Birmingham

## INSPECTION REPORT

### ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Manor House Road, Wednesbury, Sandwell, WS10 9PN

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Inspection dates	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> July 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	254
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mr Paul Piddock
Telephone number	0121 505 3595
E-mail address	office@st-marys.sandwell.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	June 2010
DFE School number	333/3305
Unique Reference Number	103993

<b>Headteacher</b>	<b>Mrs Kathryn Hill</b>
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Previous inspection:	3
This inspection:	2

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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 3 full lessons with the Headteacher or her deputy. In addition the inspector completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time. He held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher as RE co-ordinator, the chair and RE link governor, and the parish priest. He observed a whole-school prayer service and a Year 4 prayer service in the prayer garden, 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, Data Dashboard, the post-Ofsted development plan, teachers' planning, and internal records.

## Information about the school

St Mary's is an oversubscribed, one-form entry Catholic primary school serving the parish of St Mary's on the Hill, Wednesbury. The majority of parents are in low income jobs or unemployed; Wednesbury North has 25.2% of its working-age population receiving benefits. A significant number of children are from one-parent families. The number of Catholic pupils is currently 45%. The proportion of ethnic minority pupils is above average at 38%, while 24.9% do not speak English as first language. 22.3% are eligible for free school meals. Attainment on entry is well below the national average, and a high proportion of pupils entering nursery have poor language, communication and social skills.

## Main Finding

In its self-evaluation St Mary's judges itself to be a good school overall, with some outstanding features and no weaknesses. The evidence gathered during the inspection supports this evaluation; indeed, there are positive indications that the school has improved greatly since the last section 48 inspection in 2010, continues that improvement and has good capacity to sustain it. The school has acted upon the recommendations in that inspection. All teaching is now thoroughly and effectively planned, offering challenge pitched appropriately for pupils of all abilities. Self-evaluation is thorough and coherent, presenting an accurate picture of integrated processes and outcomes that contribute to school improvement. The school should now take steps to increase the frequency and more formal use of key processes to enhance its evidence base over time. The Catholic ethos, Catholic life and collective worship of the school are of a high order and all pupils contribute to, and benefit significantly from, their time in school. Generous support is given by the parish priest and governors, notably in sacramental preparation, wider pastoral involvements and strategic oversight. Religious education is very well led by the deputy headteacher as co-ordinator. She encourages collaboration from a team of committed and mainly experienced teaching and support staff. Teaching is secure and well-planned, and observations during the inspection confirmed the school's overall internal judgements of at least good, with some outstanding practice. Clear internal procedures for planning, marking and feedback are applied with very positive results for learning and progress. The RE curriculum is well planned 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 gives clear strategic guidance and leads by example. The school is well supported by its governors, who have close links to the school, 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 broadly accurate. It is overall a good school, with significant strengths and no causes for concern. The school self evaluation document is descriptive rather than evaluative and analytical in a few places and there are some examples of confusion and overlap between RE and Catholic Life. The inspection visit confirmed, however, the school's internal judgements and revealed considerable capacity for further improvements. There are now systems 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, all staff are involved in work scrutiny and moderation. Individual support by the RE co-ordinator and targeted professional development opportunities are well used. The school should now increase the frequency and formal recording gathered by these processes. Input from all stakeholders, including pupils, governors and parents, is sought, through questionnaires, surveys, meetings and pupil interviews; the outcomes are collated and subsequently evaluated, shared with staff and governors, and included in school improvement procedures. Again the school would benefit from increasing their frequency and formalisation. The head and parish priest meet regularly, whenever possible, to review Catholic life and collective worship, and there is a school newsletter to communicate with families.

Self-evaluation in religious education is reliable as it is planned, thoroughly carried out, and discussed by school leadership. The headteacher presents outcomes to full governors' meetings. This informs target setting and produces an action plan, which is reviewed and evaluated annually. There is an agreed monitoring cycle which links to the programme 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 that support levelling and shared understanding. Books are marked regularly and positively, and good use is made of gap tasks. Learning and teaching would be enhanced by increasing the quantity of assessable written tasks and opportunities for structured writing. The school is a member of a cluster group with 3 other Catholic primary schools. This affords benefits in both religious education and Catholic life, as indeed does the school's regular attendance at diocesan events. Key elements of recommended best practice have been introduced by the current leadership team. Leadership, including governors on occasion, undertake informal learning walks and drop-ins and record judgements. Sound communication at all levels, much of it informal, contributes to the improvement cycle. Records were available during the inspection, along with outcomes from formal lesson observations and meetings.

The headteacher reports termly to governors on RE and Catholic life; they are thus able to hold the leadership team to account and oversee the production of documentation. An annual audit, feedback from parental questionnaires, pupil surveys and from the school council, are shared with governors and staff. Collective worship is monitored informally by the headteacher and governors, but there is some recording of evaluations and reporting to governors. There was some evidence available to show the school's involvement in charitable works, though this could perhaps be presented more coherently and systematically. The children are very sensitive to the suffering and needs of others, locally, nationally, and internationally, and they are very able and willing to talk about mission and individual vocations, and how these impact upon their own lives and beliefs. There were examples during the inspection of explicit consideration of vocations, notably in the Year 4 prayer service.

The school assesses attainment in RE to be good. There is evidence to confirm this judgement. Baseline records indicate that nearly all pupils enter the school with little knowledge and understanding of RE or the Catholic faith; however, progress is achieved incrementally across both key stages, so that, by the end of Year 6, outcomes are broadly in line with diocesan expectations and Literacy. Progress in RE is good, as indicated in the range of evidence available, and in discussions with children. It is evident across both key stages, delivered through relevant teaching and learning opportunities and closely targeted support from a strong team of classroom assistants. The quality of learning and understanding in RE is good, as indicated in lesson observations, pupils' exercise books, and in discussions with pupils, who speak positively of their lessons and teachers, and who clearly benefit greatly from all aspects RE and Catholic life. This judgement was shown to apply to all groups within the school.

Strong and committed leadership is evident at all levels within the school. Monitoring and evaluation, leading to focused planning for school improvement, takes place, but too infrequently at present or informally. The close links of individual governors with the school, and effective processes and procedures in place for the governing body, ensure that there is a balance between the twin functions of support and challenge, with clear ideas for ways forward. 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. 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. They have close personal links to the school; monitor and evaluate its work; receive and discuss termly reports from the headteacher; oversee the production of documentation; maintain active involvement in school improvement.

Internal evaluation of teaching and learning 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. Learning outcomes are good. There were some elements of outstanding teaching. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge, and use a wide range of strategies, including IT, music, prayer, scripture and higher order questioning to secure engagement and sound progress.

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

Outcomes and provision for pupils are good. Baseline evidence indicates that most pupils enter the school with very low levels of knowledge and understanding, but that progress is secure and sustained and, by the end of each key stage, almost all children are working at or above average levels. Learning and progress are good throughout the school and for all groups. Lessons are well planned and incorporate a wide variety of approaches that interest and engage the pupils. These include prayer, IT, hot seating, collaborative work and role play. All classrooms are well resourced and have excellent displays which are relevant and colourful, with celebrations of pupils' work and prayer corners. The deputy headteacher, as RE co-ordinator, attends training offered by the diocese and meetings of local Catholic schools. In full consultation with the headteacher, she sets the strategic direction for RE.

Teaching is secure and well planned, with all lessons at least good, with some outstanding practice. Assessments in RE are well structured, with a range of self and peer

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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.

assessments. They are used to inform parent-teacher consultations and annual written reports. 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, and effective use is made of gap tasks. Pupil tracking identifies individual pupils who may need targeted support, and appropriate interventions. Pupils speak confidently about the positive impact on them; they enjoy school and feel safe and valued.

Catholic life in school is outstanding, both how pupils contribute to and gain from it. It has developed as a result of regular monitoring by the leadership team and governors. There is a clear, positive ethos, inspired by the Gospels and reflected in the school's mission statement and an evident commitment in all – staff, pupils, and governors. There are artefacts, statues and displays prominent, with links to the liturgical life of the Church. Pupils participate actively in the many aspects of Catholic life, within the school and community; for example, the sign language group visited the Deaf Centre and signed Christmas carols to the deaf community. All faith groups are treated with dignity, and pupils enjoy opportunities to discuss matters of faith, and gain greatly from studying other faiths and visiting places of worship. They develop honesty, have respect for others in society and the wider world, and are fully involved in religious activities inside and outside school. The parish priest plays a significant part, notably in the areas of Catholic life and wider pastoral involvement. There are regular whole school prayer services, where all pupils engage fully. There is significant pupil involvement in the faith life and worship of St Mary's, notably in Masses and the children's liturgy group. They also take a lead in fundraising events during Harvest, Advent and Lent. Children are encouraged by the parish priest to attend benediction, and numbers are increasing. As strong links exist between the school and the parish, children and their families attend Mass in increasing numbers at weekends, and there is a well-attended children's liturgy led by the link governor for RE. All pupils benefit greatly from all these opportunities and demonstrate high degrees of behaviour and interpersonal relationships at all levels. The prayer life of the school is strong, with prayer featuring significantly throughout the school day. The purposes and uses of prayer are developed year by year, and all pupils are encouraged to compose their own prayers for particular intentions. Prayer bags help to develop links between school and home, and the ladies' group, which gives regular support to sacramental preparation in Years 3 and 6, have recently made new bags for each class.

Leadership and management are good. Leaders and governors are proactive in working with others to promote and develop the Catholic life of the school, as a result of their personal faith and commitment to the Church's mission in education. The three members of the senior team operate a collaborative model of management, which consolidates and strengthens processes for self-evaluation and school improvement. A clear vision and a sense of purpose and direction are shared at all levels amongst the staff and governing body. Communication is good at all levels, including with the home and the parish community through meetings, letters, newsletters and questionnaires, and informally before and after school. Leaders ensure that there is an extensive up-to-date range of high-quality resources available, and all staff are expected to participate fully in the life of the school and its further improvement.

### **Recommendations**

- Increase the frequency and systematic use of key processes (e.g. formal observations and work scrutiny) to ensure reliability and inform future planning
- Increase the quantity of assessable written tasks and opportunities for structured writing



July 2014

Diocesan Education Service,  
Don Bosco House,  
Coventry Road,  
Coleshill,  
B46 3EA

Dear Parents and Carers

**Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> July 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 good Catholic school whose Catholic life is especially to be celebrated. The leadership of the school is strong, 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 the parish. 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 good progress and, by the time they leave, they have achieved good standards. They are developing a secure knowledge of Christ's teaching and understand the basic tenets of the Catholic faith. 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. Teaching is always at least good; some of it is outstanding. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge, and use a wide range of strategies, including IT, music, prayer, scripture and higher order questioning. Pupils participate actively in the many aspects of Catholic life, for example engagement in prayer services. They enjoy opportunities to discuss matters of faith, and gain greatly from studying other faiths and visiting places of worship. Collective worship is of good quality.

There are no major issues resulting from this inspection. However, I have suggested that, in order to improve further, the school should increase the frequency and systematic use of key processes, and the quantity of assessable written tasks and opportunities for structured writing.

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