

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Michael's is a Roman Catholic voluntary aided primary school in the Diocese of Salford. It serves the parish of St. Michael in Whitefield. The school is situated in the large Contours housing estate in the Besses Ward, regarded as a deprived area of Bury. The school draws its pupils from varied socio-economic backgrounds the majority of whom live in private owner occupied properties while others live in local rented housing. The age range of pupils is 3 to 11 years and the indicative admission number is 30. There are 232 children on roll of whom 227 (98%) are baptised Catholics. 16% are known to be eligible for free school meals and 17 pupils have been identified as having special educational needs with 2 children having a statutory statement of special educational need. All 10 teachers (100%) are Catholics and 9 hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies or equivalent. 1 teacher is currently studying for the qualification.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Michael's is an outstanding school with a strong Catholic ethos. Excellent leadership and dedicated staff and governors ensure that every child matters. This results in a warm, caring, vibrant and inclusive environment in which all aspects of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent. The Religious Education programme is well planned and further enhanced by the provision for prayer and worship, the quality of relationships and the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers are well supported by the good deployment of teaching assistants, administrative and janitorial staff. All are good role models for the learners and demonstrate excellent levels of care. Teachers work hard and successfully make activities practical and fun and they match what they teach to the needs of different abilities in their classes. Learners are well behaved, friendly and polite. They have good attitudes to their learning and respond well to the quality of teaching they experience. Strong home, school and parish links ensure learners are well supported on their faith journeys. The school supports the parish led Sacramental Programme.

Improvement since the last inspection

The last Section 48 inspection in November 2007 judged the school to be outstanding. The school has maintained this standard. On the promotion to headteacher in another Catholic school the deputy head's position has been replaced by 2 assistant headteachers from within the school. The school has achieved the Healthy Schools and Basic Skills Quality Mark awards. The premises are in excellent condition with many new facilities including extended teaching rooms and extensive playground facilities. The "Prayer Garden" has been upgraded by the pupils themselves and provides an inviting and quiet environment for the school community to sit and pray. Before and after school clubs are in place and are very well attended.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is thorough, objective and realistic. Leadership and management have a clear, focused vision for the school. There is a genuine commitment to ensuring all involved in the school community recognise the important role they play in the future development of this successful Catholic school as it lives out its Mission Statement. The school's capacity to improve is therefore outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

There are no issues to address. The headteacher and governors are fully committed to build upon their success and develop each initiative to ensure the realisation of the Mission Statement.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. The Mission Statement, reviewed by staff and governors, permeates all aspects of the life of the school and is prominently displayed throughout the premises. The success of St. Michael's is due chiefly to the exceptional team spirit pervading the school which enjoys strong leadership by the headteacher, dedicated assistant heads and wholehearted support of the staff and governors. The school benefits to the full from a knowledgeable and supportive parish priest and chair of governors together with a governing body which discusses and revises Religious Education policies on a regular basis. A shared vision for the ongoing development of the school as a Catholic community is reflected in governor appointments of committed Catholic teachers to the staff. The parish priest and designated governor for Religious Education are very regular visitors demonstrating excellent knowledge of school life. The headteacher and governors work as an effective team. They ensure that all pupils, regardless of race, religion, ability or social standing, have equal opportunities in a cohesive and supportive environment which is accessible to pupils with a wide range of additional needs. The school is firmly at the heart of the parish it serves and enjoys close links with other schools in the area and in particular the associated Catholic High School.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship is outstanding. It is a key feature of the school pervading all aspects of its life and underpinned by a clear Religious Education policy which includes prayer and worship. Learners, parents, staff and parishioners are offered a range of rich and meaningful opportunities to develop their relationship with God whilst fostering an understanding of their needs and the needs of those in the wider community. Mass is celebrated at the beginning and end of each term, on Holy days and special occasions. Assemblies and non-eucharistic services reflecting the liturgical calendar are celebrated with the parish priest, governors, parents and parishioners. These include the Stations of the Cross during Lent, the Holy Rosary during October, the honouring of Our Lady during May and Christmas celebrations. Classes take responsibility for the organisation of these celebrations which are meticulously recorded by the headteacher and co-ordinator for Religious Education. Pupils, regardless of race and culture and from all age groups and abilities, take part in the liturgy. No child is withdrawn from prayer and worship which is successfully linked to curriculum Religious Education and often expressed through areas such as literacy and art. Children display confidence and pray with respect and reverence thus demonstrating a developing awareness of the importance of prayer in their lives. The excellent assembly observed during the inspection was based on CAFOD literature and the Pope's message "Hearts Speaking to Hearts". There was good use of drama, speaking and listening, art, hymn singing and bidding prayers all of which were led by the children.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education are outstanding. Learners enter Early Years Foundation Stage with skills which are broadly typical for their age. Excellent progress is made in Foundation Stage and by the end of Key Stage 1 they demonstrate excellent knowledge of their faith. Learners are able to relate verbally and in their pictorial work the bible stories they have heard and a number of them are able to write short accounts. They have good recall on the Holy Family. They know that God has made and loves them and that by the sacrament of Baptism that they are members of God's family. Key Stage 2 learners have excellent factual knowledge of their faith. They are familiar with the Old and New Testaments and are able to produce outstanding quality written work using appropriate language according to their age. All learners know the difference between right and wrong and are developing a strong sense of responsibility. The school council, prefects and "buddies" who are allocated to each class have enhanced this. A number of world wide and local charities are supported. Learners understand that they have a responsibility to protect God's creation including respecting people of other faiths and cultures. Across the whole community there is a feeling of self-worth and self-esteem. Very clear strategies and systems are in place to ensure that the religious aspect of the school's life and curriculum has been prioritised in order that high standards be achieved and maintained.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The inspector agrees that the quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is outstanding. Teachers have high expectations for themselves and their learners and work hard using a variety of interactive strategies with which to enthuse their learners. They demonstrate excellent subject knowledge, an understanding of Religious Education and make good use of diocesan guidelines. Detailed planning with clearly stated objectives and outcomes, which are explained to the learners, lead to well structured lessons incorporating an excellent range of activities and effective use of resources. Assessment procedures are well established to evaluate teaching and learning and provide a focus for future planning. Levelling and tracking of learners' work are also well established and a profile of learners' work is readily available. Information communication technology is widely used to support teaching and learning and teachers capitalise on opportunities to link Religious Education across the curriculum. Management and organisation in all classes are excellent. Behaviour is exemplary when pupils are working co-operatively or independently. All lessons observed during inspection were outstanding with pupils' learning at its optimum. Children of all ages enjoy their lessons and are eager to learn. No child is withdrawn from Religious Education lessons.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The inspector agrees with the judgement of the school that the Religious Education curriculum is outstanding. Religious Education has a high profile in the school both as a key element in school improvement and financial planning. At least 10% of teaching time is allocated to the subject. Teachers' planning is thorough and, together with children's learning, is monitored by the headteacher and the Religious Education co-ordinator who undertake lesson observation and scrutiny of pupils' work. All children have equal access to the Religious Education programme. Diocesan guidelines are followed. As part of the school's contribution to social cohesion world faiths are taught using the diocesan recommended guidelines. Additionally there are themed days and weeks marking cultural festivals and visiting speakers help learners gain insight into other cultures and faiths. There are links to Gambia for Year 6 pupils and to Kenya for Year 3 pupils. An impressive range of extra-curricular learning opportunities further enhances the curriculum. This includes sports, music, chess and gardening clubs. Year 6 children have a retreat day at the Marist centre and a residential at Boreatton Park Activity Centre in Shropshire.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school has assessed the leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education as outstanding and inspection evidence supports this judgement. The co-ordinator for Religious Education has outstanding knowledge of her subject, a clear vision for her role within the school and provides strong leadership and direction. She leads by example and has furthered her previous outstanding work. She continues to keep excellent records of teaching and learning and prayer and worship. Records include the use of monitoring, assessing and tracking of pupils' work using the recommended guidelines from the diocese. The subject leader leads staff through regular meetings and continues her own professional development by attending diocesan courses and through the involvement of diocesan teacher advisers. She is fully supported by the headteacher, the parish priest and the staff. Governors are kept informed of Religious Education and prayer and worship by written and verbal reports from the headteacher, co-ordinator and the parish priest and also by their frequent visits to the school. Resources for Religious Education and collective worship are excellent. Attractive prayer focal tables in classrooms and numerous beautiful displays around the school premises reflect the faith life of St. Michael's where Religious Education and prayer and worship have a high profile.