



INSPECTION REPORT

St Mary's Catholic Primary School
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Head Teacher: Mr Andy Tarrant
Chair of Governors: Mr Seamus Brogan

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Clifton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: 2-3rd December 2015
Date of previous inspection: 4-5th July 2011

Reporting Inspector: Mr J Skivington
Additional Inspector: Mrs Ann Fowler

Description of School

St Mary's is an average sized Catholic primary school within the Diocese of Clifton, serving the Catholic community close to the centre of Bath. There are currently 201 on roll, of whom 87% are baptised Catholics. The majority of pupils come from relatively affluent households. The percentage of pupils from ethnic minorities has increased in recent years and stands at 28.4%. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is 10.6%. The school is oversubscribed with very little fluctuation in pupil numbers.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Requires improvement in order to be good; Grade 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

This is a good school because:

- governors and all leaders are fully committed to improvement, working together as an effective team to ensure that the promotion of the school's Catholic life is at the centre of all that it does. The governing body are increasingly more challenging.
- the head teacher, although a recent appointment, has already made a significant difference to the quality of Catholic life as well as the provision and outcomes in RE. Pupils' behaviour is excellent and they can discuss the quality of their learning fluently and with impressive insight.
- the school is highly regarded by parents, who feel the school listens to their views and acts upon them.
- the quality of teaching in RE is good, resulting in good progress in lessons and achievement over time.

The school is not yet outstanding because:

- formal structures and rigorous processes to monitor and evaluate the quality of Catholic life and RE are not all fully in place.
- the pace of progress of pupils at Key Stage 2, especially in their written work, is not as strong as at Key Stage 1 in terms of raised teacher expectations and challenge.
- topic and lesson planning need to reflect more accurately all areas of the curriculum

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

- The areas for development highlighted at the last diocesan inspection have been largely addressed. Assessment procedures are now better understood and are well embedded. The school is working still further to improve the standards of writing and presentation, particularly in terms of more opportunities for extended, reflective writing.

- Leadership and governance are becoming much more effective in promoting, monitoring and evaluating, both the provision for the Catholic life of the school and religious education. Staff morale and commitment is very high, and the school leadership has the full support of parents and pupils.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure learning objectives in lessons are challenging and build on prior knowledge so as to deepen understanding. Assess progress through extended reflective writing tasks and supplementary questioning in lessons.
- Carefully plan topics and lessons to reflect all areas of the curriculum.
- Leadership and governance to develop robust structures and processes of monitoring and review, in order to measure and evaluate the impact of actions taken to promote Catholic life and religious education.

How good are outcomes for pupils, taking account of variations between different groups?

Grade 2

The pupils benefit enormously from the Catholic life of the school and make a significant contribution towards the ethos of the school, not least by their excellent behaviour and care for each other. They are involved in planning and evaluating their prayer life through the chaplaincy team, and are able to express their voice and opinions through verbal feedback and questionnaires. Twelve chaplaincy leaders were commissioned by Bishop Declan in November 2014 and ten more this November, drawn mainly from Years 4, 5 and 6. They meet weekly to discuss how they can be involved further in the spiritual life of the school, and as a result have organised assemblies, become active 'Leaders in Faith', and work jointly with teams from other schools in the federation. They also take the initiative in fundraising events supporting local and global charity organisations. One particularly fruitful consequence of their efforts has been a closer involvement with life in the parish and growing participation in the Sunday Mass, with enthusiastic servers and readers. As a consequence the community feels and thinks of itself as part of the wider mission of the Church. The parish priest is a very welcomed, inspiring, supportive and frequent presence in the school.

Learning from religion, as well as about religion, is a key element in the school's approach and it is evident in their care and support for others, their role modelling, and the support of the older pupils for the younger ones. Clearly they have internalised the values that the school strives to inculcate and can make what they learn relevant to their daily lives. The school's plans to involve even more pupils in chaplaincy initiatives, and perhaps consider a whole school community revisit of the school mission statement to reflect on and interpret what it means to them and the part each individual can play. The school has already planned to obtain updated feedback from a range of pupils in January 2016. This will be invaluable - as the interview with the pupils during the inspection proved. They were impressively reflective, honest and articulate in identifying what made them learn better, what teaching challenged, engaged and excited them, and what approaches left them rather disengaged and uninvolved.

Pupils involve themselves with enthusiasm in collective worship, in the Mass, in assemblies, hymn practice and class prayers. They are confident when challenged to be creative and meaningful in their worship. The invitation to participate is inclusive- all are invited to take part regardless of faith background - and they do. They have taken on the challenge of planning and evaluating prayer and liturgy and are eager to be left more to use their initiative. The chaplaincy team help the little ones to pray and model stillness and reflection very effectively. As a result the reception children very quickly come to see prayer as a special moment with God and understand the lighted candle as a symbol of Jesus as the Light of the World. Pupils over all the Years can formulate simple, heartfelt prayers, which then find their way to the class prayer areas. They are keen to do more to become animators in the school: for instance, one said they 'wanted to make RE more special'. A further need expressed was for a dedicated area for quiet prayer and reflection, and despite the real shortage of rooms in the school the leadership are working out a way to realise such a facility.

Students' attainment and achievement in Religious Education is good. From a low baseline, pupils make rapid progress through the early years and Year 1; so that by the end of Key Stage 1 they are meeting diocesan expectation. In Key Stage 2 progress is not as strong in encouraging pupils to achieve more than expected levels of knowledge and understanding of the Faith. There are some gaps in understanding the sacramental life of the Church which the RE leadership acknowledges and will be filled in. Teachers are nevertheless clearly committed to bringing about improvement across all outcomes for students. They understand that there is a need to question more, to check understanding but also to enable pupils to go deeper into the subject. A classic example is the explanation of the significance of, say, the Advent wreath which can stay at the same simple level from Year 1 to Year 6 without any real deepening of understanding. It would be helpful for pupils to have more time in lessons to write reflectively at length, which would match {and record} over time their already secure learning from religion, and the relevance that it has for them. There is no significant underachievement from any group of students. Pupils with special learning needs are very well supported by proactive learning assistants. Behaviour for learning in lessons is outstanding.

There are numerous opportunities in the curriculum for pupils to participate in the prayer life of the school, including Masses, whole school liturgies, assemblies, chaplaincy, and retreats, which the pupils enjoy and appreciate. The liturgical year is lived fully season by season as is clear in the many displays around the school, and the wealth of photographic evidence and assembly records. Classes followed the events of Holy Week through their God Matters programme and responded through Penitential Services and the Stations of the Cross. The Advent season was marked by a short, special Advent service at the end of the day to reinforce the significance of this time. The school has plans to widen the involvement of pupils in celebrating the key moments in the Church's calendar. The RE syllabus includes a study of other religions and is planning to organise more visits to other places of worship and faith.

How effective are leaders and governors in developing the Catholic Life of the school?

Grade 2

Governors and leaders work together to ensure that the promotion of the school's Catholic life is at the centre of its strategic direction. Provision for staff induction and INSET, which further develops an understanding and commitment to the Church's mission in education, is strong. Two further teachers have completed the diocesan training in Catholic education. Other teachers have completed the Theology for Teachers course last year. Links with the diocese are effective and all Bishops' Conference requirements fulfilled. Self-evaluation of the school's Catholic life is becoming more robust, challenging individuals to be objective and ambitious about what can be developed, as well as being clear and concise about achievements. The head teacher and RE coordinator meet regularly with other leaders in the Federation to share ideas, and this included the Pilgrim Unit, Year 5 retreat and Inset days. One Inset day each year is dedicated to reflection and evaluation of the Catholic identity of the school and RE. There is a further Inset day planned for January 2016 to reflect and plan action for the Year of Mercy. The head teacher provides clear, focused and increasingly collaborative leadership. Annual surveys ensure that the views of students and parents inform future planning. Links with parents are especially strong. The school is highly regarded by parents, who consider it to be excellent in its provision and Catholic ethos.

Governors maintain oversight of Religious Education and acknowledge the annual report on RE. It would be helpful to have a record of their analysis of reviews and reports and what feedback was given in terms of questioning, challenge and action to be taken. The governing body was reconstituted this year and the Chair has been in post for a year. With assistance from the diocese and the head teacher they are becoming a more knowledgeable and critical group who hold the school to account through processes which are rigorous, robust and dependable.

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Grade 2

Teaching is consistently good over time and leads to good progress across both key stages. Teachers are knowledgeable and have a strong rapport with the pupils. They use paired discussion well to allow every child to contribute and from this one can hear a good degree of religious literacy. Pupils enjoy those lessons where they do not have to sit listening but after short, focussed discussion and direction, can get on with their written task. Pupils are extremely well behaved and sustain high levels of concentration in class, even when they have not been inspired or challenged. On occasions teachers assume understanding without checking by supplementary questioning that all have understood, and then challenging them to make real intellectual effort. Lesson observations, learning walks and book scrutinies could be more frequently and fruitfully carried out to raise the level of teaching to outstanding.

Assessment for learning is leading to improved teaching and learning. Vital to this process is to check for accuracy especially in referencing level of attainment. Marking of students' work is well embedded, providing them in the main with clear, formative comments. Time set in lessons for pupils' response will the better enable them to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

The Religious Education curriculum meets all Bishops' Conference requirements and is responsive to diocesan guidelines. The school works closely with the parish on the sacramental preparation programmes. The curriculum is fully inclusive and meets the needs of students of all ages irrespective of their backgrounds. Differentiated resources are produced for each scheme of work and adapted by teachers for each group, enabling students to build on prior knowledge and experience and make appropriate progress in relation to their ability. Opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and vocational development are promoted well.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 14 parental questionnaires returned. All were positive in their views of the school, highlighting a strong sense of community, Catholic ethos, inspiring leadership, respected in the local community, praise for the new head teacher, caring staff and strong moral Christian values. One other expressed reservations about the lack of religious values in the EPR programme, but noted with satisfaction, after speaking to the head teacher, that a review of this programme is planned.

Some typical responses to the question 'Why did you choose this school' included:

'Catholic ethos is demonstrated through the practice of the Faith'

'Catholic ethos is not just a mission statement, but a way of being'

'The school is respected in the local community'

'This school practises what it preaches'

'It has a big heart'

'Teachers really care in this school.'

'My children develop a really good understanding of the Faith'