



INSPECTION REPORT

St Mary's RC Primary School

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DfE Number: 8655208

Headteacher: Mrs S Wembridge

Chair of Governors: Ms L Wilkie

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: 5th-6th February 2015

Date of previous inspection: March 2008

Reporting Inspector: Mrs A Barrett

Additional Inspector: Mrs M Marshall

Description of School

St Mary's is an average sized Catholic primary school serving the parish of St Mary's Chippenham. The school has a Catholic population of 62%. The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium is below the national average as is the proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. The proportion of pupils with other ethnic heritages or who speak English as an additional language is also below the national average.

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 (summary statement)

Grade 2

This is a good Catholic school with outstanding features because of:

- the strong commitment to developing the Catholic life of the school provided by leaders and governors who act as role models for others and meet all statutory and canonical responsibilities
- the highly effective leadership of the headteacher and RE subject leaders in improving the quality of teaching across the key stages
- the good and improving provision and outcomes for pupils
- the exemplary behaviour and attitudes to learning by pupils
- the exceptionally strong links with the parish, especially the rich opportunities provided by the parish priest to develop pupils' understanding of the sacramental life of the church, complementing the school's RE programme
- the strong parental support for the school
- the high quality support provided by teaching assistants
- the pride and strong sense of loyalty and respect pupils display for the school's Catholic tradition and strong links with the parish community.

The school is not yet outstanding because:

- although most pupils are making good progress overall, variations are evident in standards in upper key stage 2. Improving consistency of continuity and progression should continue to be a key priority
- there is a need to embed the current monitoring and evaluation process to ensure that analysis of data continues to support outcomes for all pupils
- the school needs to fully develop and embed the work of chaplaincy across the school
- pupils are not yet fully involved in reviewing the prayer life of the school in a planned and systematic way.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

This is good because:

- the headteacher and governors have the vision and commitment, and provide the effective leadership, to improve outcomes for all
- parents and the parish community provide ongoing support
- the school self-evaluation is honest and challenging, identifying key areas for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further:

- Continue to work on improving progress overall in order to eliminate variations in upper key stage 2.
- Embed the current monitoring and evaluation to ensure that analysis of data continues to support outcomes for pupils.
- Further improve the excellent provision for developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural and vocational development. This can be achieved by formally mapping the provision across the curriculum to ensure continuity and progression.

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

Grade 2

Pupils benefit substantially from the Catholic life of the school. They have a strong sense of pride in their school and are enriched by the close links the school has with its founding order, the Poor Servants of the Mother of God. High standards of behaviour and respect, based on Gospel values, encourage pupils to be alert to the needs of other, seeking justice for all within and beyond the school community. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the exceptionally strong links with the parish, which are central to school life. These links with the parish, and the regular contact with the sisters, enable them to feel part of a wider global community. Pupils benefit from their association with the mission of the order and its outreach work in a school in Kenya. In this way, the prayer and mission of the school are being strengthened and deepened.

Chaplaincy is an area of growth within the school as demonstrated by the work of the prayer council. This group was recently formed to help review the school's prayer life and was commissioned by Bishop Declan in November 2014. The group, which consists of pupils from across the school, impressed inspectors with their enthusiasm for developing future activities, including running a weekly bible story group and Gospel assembly. Pupils involved in the council are developing an increasing confidence and understanding of prayer, enabling them to take a more active part in leading prayer at assemblies and school Mass. Plans are in hand to reinstate the diocesan chaplaincy award scheme which was successfully run previously with Y6 pupils completing the gold level.

Although most pupils are making good progress overall, leadership are aware of the variations in standards in upper key stage 2 and are working hard to address this. In addition, the high quality of firm foundations that are being set in the early years will enable these pupils to accelerate at a faster rate. Assessment data has significantly improved and is in line with other core subjects. Data analysis is now being effectively used to highlight strengths and areas for improvement, with excellent support being provided for teachers by the subject leaders in RE. This includes training in moderation and assessment to ensure that all are assessing at the correct level. Most pupils are growing in confidence in their ability to use religious language in a meaningful way and understand and are able to make links between faith and life. One year 5 pupil explains, 'I use what I have learnt about Jesus and it inspires me to persevere; for example, when I find school work tricky or if I have a friendship issue.' Discussions with older pupils about the role of priests, bishops and laity demonstrate a developing understanding and use of religious vocabulary to express what religious commitment means in everyday life and how it shows itself in the actions and lifestyle of believers.

There are well planned opportunities for pupils to reflect on our faith story in relation to their own lives. This, and the close links with the parish, has created a culture of pupils naturally

sharing key events that are important to their family and celebrated in their life, such as the Sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion, and Marriage. Pupils are encouraged to value and respect the faith and traditions of other religions and ask searching questions in order to further deepen their religious understanding.

Overall, pupils demonstrate high levels of motivation and concentration, work at a good pace and produce good quality work. They respond positively to their RE lessons, showing an enthusiasm and interest in their learning. An older pupil commented 'We are now learning much more about bible stories and other religions and I really enjoy that'. Another commented 'It is good to really think about what you believe and why'.

Inspectors were impressed with the high levels of reverence and respect demonstrated by pupils during assembly and class prayer. They sing joyfully, reflect in silence and join in community prayers with confidence. A range of opportunities is provided for pupils to develop their skills in leading and planning prayer and worship, depending on their age and experience. For example, in the foundation stage children begin by sharing their own prayers with the class and help set up focal areas for class prayer using a range of resources which they choose with the help of their teachers. In years 5 and 6 many are confident in helping to plan and lead collective worship for their class or whole school, with older pupils regularly writing their own bidding prayers and showing an increasing independence in choosing scripture and music. They responded positively to rewriting the school's mission statement which is now more accessible to them and known and understood by all. As the role of the prayer council evolves, more opportunities such as this could be provided to involve them more fully in reviewing and evaluating the prayer life of the school and in reporting to leaders and governors.

Opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of the sacramental life of the church are outstanding, with the parish priest working closely with the school to ensure that school Masses are accessible to all and pupils helped to understand and appreciate the importance of symbols, scripture and traditional prayers. This is complemented by the RE curriculum which provides well planned opportunities for pupils to grow in their understanding of liturgy as they progress throughout the school, making connections between the prayer life of the school and that of the Church as a whole. The strong links with the parish means that the school benefits from committed teaching assistants several of whom prepare many pupils for First Holy Communion as parish catechists. Many of these children later go on to make their Confirmation. Pupils engage in a wide range of charitable fund- raising activities and groups of year 6 pupils attend a monthly event in the church hall where they serve lunch to the elderly.

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

Grade 2

The Catholic mission of the school is a priority for all leaders and governors who ensure that all statutory and canonical responsibilities are met. They meet regularly to discuss improvements in relation to the faith life of the school and are kept informed, through the headteacher's reports, about ongoing developments in relation to the school's Catholic life. The link governor for RE works closely with the headteacher, foundation governors and trustees to oversee the promotion of the school's Catholic tradition as expressed in its mission statement.

The RE phase team leaders use data effectively to monitor outcomes for different groups of pupils in order to agree and use targets to improve outcomes. Under the leadership of the headteacher, they are systematically addressing the variations evident in upper key stage 2 and have put effective systems in place to support teachers in their understanding and use of assessment in RE. This bodes well for future outcomes. The school improvement and self-evaluation plan for RE is honest and challenging, with a clear focus on celebrating strengths and addressing weaknesses. The highly effective phase team leaders are not only accountable for collecting data and moderating work but are involved in monitoring and evaluating all aspects of RE. This includes providing support and training for teachers and working closely with the link governor. The next stage is to embed the current monitoring and evaluation to ensure that analysis of data continues to support outcomes for all pupils.

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Grade 2

The effective leadership provided by the headteacher and subject leaders has played an important part in improving the quality of teaching across the key stages. Teachers now have a much clearer understanding of the importance of success criteria and ensure that learning objectives are clearly linked to assessment. Consequently the quality of teaching is good with some outstanding features and continues to improve. Teachers are developing a strong subject knowledge and are effectively challenging and engaging their pupils through well planned tasks, which enables them to make good progress in relation to their starting points. They are becoming more effective in providing feedback and marking which enables pupils to improve their learning, with appropriate time being set aside for them to respond to their teacher's marking. The practice of verbally assessing pupils who do not achieve well in English but who have a good knowledge of scripture or a deeply spiritual understanding is highly effective. Induction of new staff includes support from subject leaders and headteacher through team-teaching and guidance on marking, which ensures clarity of expectations.

Pupils are focused, engaged in lessons and exceptionally well behaved. They demonstrate an ability to work both independently and co-operatively. Pupils benefit hugely from the excellent support they receive from teaching assistants whose good subject knowledge as parish catechists further enriches their experience.

The RE curriculum meets all *Bishops' Conference* requirements, is based on the *God Matters* programme, and is an ongoing focus for development. In addition, cross curricular links enable RE to be explored through dance, drama, music and art and these play an important part in pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and vocational development. This could be further improved by formal mapping across the curriculum to ensure continuity and progression. Teachers also provide opportunities for pupils to explore themes of fairness and injustice, which enables them to be alert to the needs of others and to seek justice for all within and beyond the school community. Study of other world faiths is an important element of the curriculum and is effective in promoting tolerance and understanding of other faith traditions. Provision for relationship and sex education is in place and approved by governors.

The school provides good opportunities through its prayer life for pupils to develop spiritually. This includes daily acts of worship and prayers at key points of the day with an ever increasing focus on encouraging pupils to lead and organise these. The Church seasons and feasts are focal points in the school's life and are enthusiastically celebrated by all. The school has worked effectively with the parish priest to agree a progression in the teaching of traditional prayers. Parents and parishioners responded enthusiastically to invitations to attend class and whole school Mass. Opportunities are provided for pupils to write their own prayers and to reflect on class worship and to participate in an annual retreat programme.

Displays in and around the school are vibrant and supportive of the school's Catholic life and child centred.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 30 parental questionnaires received. The majority were extremely positive about the school, highlighting its Catholic ethos strong sense of community, caring staff and links with St Mary's parish. A small number of parents requested more information being provided on RE and relationship education and being kept informed about their child's progress in RE.

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

'Because I wanted my children to attend a school with a strong Catholic ethos'

'A school where values and morals are the same as those at home'

'So my kids would improve not only academically but religiously'

'The Catholic ethos and morals of the school are first class. The children learn to respect each other and themselves'

Some typical responses to the question 'What is distinctive about this school?' included:

'Its strong ties to St Mary's church'

'Its warm community ethos'

'Pastoral approach. Children treated as individuals'

'The multicultural aspect and the appreciation of all faiths and beliefs'

'It feels like a family unit'

'Good teachers'