



INSPECTION REPORT

St Mary's Catholic Primary School
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DfE Number: 8665220

Head teacher: Mr A Henstridge
Chair of Governors: Fr M Mc Andrew

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: 24th -25th June 2015
Date of previous inspection: 31st March-1st April 2010

Reporting Inspector: Mrs A Barrett
Additional Inspector: Mrs C Dolan

Description of School

St. Mary's is a larger than average sized primary school with 309 pupils on roll of whom 98% are baptised Catholic. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Others come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. A high proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. Many pupils have their cultural roots in Europe with some coming from first and second generation Italian, Polish and Goan families. The school enjoys an excellent relationship with the parish of St Mary's and strong support from parents. The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (which provides additional funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children in local authority care) is below average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is well below average. From September 2013, the school has formed a hard federation with St Catherine's Catholic Primary School, which also serves the parish of St Mary's with whom it has close and proactive links. The former executive head teacher retired at the end of April 2015. A new executive head teacher took up the role from 1 May 2015. The staff are predominantly Catholic.

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 1

This is an outstanding Catholic school because:

- The inspirational leadership of the former executive head teacher in the promotion and monitoring of the Catholic life of the school has ensured that its Catholic mission is at the heart of all that it does.
- The governing body is highly effective in promoting the Catholic life of the school and RE.
- The associate head teacher and other senior leaders provide strong religious direction.
- The school is an inclusive community where all work effectively together to promote a culture of welcome and belonging and pupils benefit considerably from the Catholic life offered.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school's work and the inclusive, caring Catholic ethos it provides and value the strong links between school and parish.
- Teachers are strongly committed, enthusiastic and skilled in teaching RE. The consistently high quality of teaching across the board results in good and often outstanding progress in learning.
- Pupils are exceptionally well behaved and extremely proud of belonging to the Catholic family of St Mary's. They speak enthusiastically about how much they enjoy RE, taking part in assemblies and meditating daily.
- Pupils are provided with rich opportunities to develop and experience prayer in its many forms and their active participation and interest in prayer is a clear strength of the school.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

- The new executive head teacher is unreservedly committed to building on this tradition and leading the school through the next stage of its journey. This bodes well for the future.
- The school has made excellent progress in addressing all the issues highlighted in the previous inspection.
- Parents, staff and pupils are highly supportive of the school.
- The governing body continues to work closely with the executive head teacher to ensure that the catholicity of the school is an integral part of all aspects of its work

What the school should do to improve further

- The new executive head teacher should continue to appraise the school's strengths and areas for improvement with a view to building on the strong Catholic foundation he has inherited and put in place appropriate structures to support this on the next stage of its journey.
- A chaplaincy team should be formed with a view to working more closely with St Catherine's and St Joseph's Catholic College, their secondary partner.

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

Grade 1

This is a school where pupils joyfully live out their mission statement, seeing Jesus as the role model for all that they think, say and do within school so that their lives are a living witness to the Gospel. Pupils participate wholeheartedly in all school activities, are respectful to others and are immensely welcoming. The strong Catholic ethos underpins and permeates every aspect of school life as evidenced daily in the relationships between staff, pupils, parents and governors. There is a strong sense of everyone growing in faith together. Pupils are hugely proud of this exceptional Catholic school and take full advantage of the many opportunities it provides to enable them to develop in their faith.

Many opportunities are made available and taken up by the pupils to live out the school mission statement, for example, looking outwards to people through raising money and collecting and distributing food to elderly neighbours, Swindon Food Bank and The Women's Refuge and playing a full part in supporting CAFOD. Links with St Mary's parish are immensely strong and highly valued by pupils, resulting in a strong partnership between home, school and parish, working together as partners in the spiritual formation and education of children. Pupils value the regular visits of the parish priest who is a prominent and active member of the school community.

Pupils respond enthusiastically to the wide range of voluntary prayer opportunities at break and lunch times provided by a dedicated teaching assistant in the chapel area. They are interested and confident in discussing themes of fairness and injustice in their lessons showing increasing depth as they progress through the school combined with high levels of empathy and compassion for others, including those of different faiths and beliefs.

At the end of Year 6 pupils' attainment and achievement in RE is high due to effective and sustained quality teaching, regular training and exceptional leadership of the previous executive head teacher and the associate head teacher. Consequently all groups thrive in the rich and challenging environment and activities provided by teachers and other adults. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make excellent progress due to the highly effective support of teaching assistants.

The well-developed RE programme, high status of the subject and strong parish links have developed high levels of religious literacy, knowledge and understanding for all and enabled pupils to think spiritually and theologically, appropriately to their age. Pupils demonstrate high levels of understanding and critical reflection as demonstrated in their oral responses in lessons, written work and discussions with inspectors. They are developing, according to their age, a knowledge and understanding of the mystery of God and of Jesus Christ, of the Church, and of the central beliefs which Catholics hold. They are continually encouraged by their teachers to reflect on our faith story in their own lives and develop a respect and appreciation of other Christian traditions and some major religions. Pupils are highly motivated and enthusiastic learners who are unanimous in expressing their enjoyment of RE and are keen to improve and extend their learning through reflective questioning and engagement in the subject.

There is a palpable and infectious sense of enjoyment, enthusiasm and interest in pupils learning in RE as evidenced in lessons and discussions with them. They take a huge pride in their work and love to sing and worship God. This is fostered through a rich learning environment with each classroom having prominent wall displays on RE and a prayer corner with a range of appropriate religious texts, religious artefacts and aid for meditation.

Prayer is central to the life of this school, with pupils encouraged and supported in actively planning and participating in prayer and worship in a variety of forms. This has resulted in pupils who are developing a strong understanding of its importance both in their personal life and as members of the school community. The practice, which is now embedded across the school, of spending time in meditative prayer based on the early Christian monks at the beginning of the afternoon, has been highly effective in enriching the prayer life of all. Pupils participate wholeheartedly in this prayer and actively look forward to this daily time of contemplative prayer. There are planned opportunities for pupils to prepare and lead assemblies, with pupils having increasing say in how liturgy is celebrated in the school. For example, they do this through the *Nurturing Human Wholeness Scheme* which articulates a value for the week, in which, on a rota basis, a class each week presents this value to the whole school through readings, PowerPoints, hymns and prayer. In addition, each class participates in a Friday assembly leading the whole community in prayer and worship. Pupils are confident, reverential and at ease when praying, both in class and with the whole school community. Singing hymns is a joyful and prayerful experience and an integral feature of school life.

Daily meditation, combined with reflection points in RE lessons and assemblies, access to Mary's Haven outdoor spiritual area, are all highly effective in supporting and developing pupils' private and public prayer. This rich provision enables them to have a good understanding of the importance of scripture in their prayer life, which is evident from their clear articulation of the meaning of the scriptural reading of the week. It is read aloud each day, revisited in assemblies and prominently displayed on prayer tables in the classrooms. The school's prayer room (The God is Here Room) is regularly used by pupils during playtimes and lunch times. The school benefits from having a committed teaching assistant, who has volunteered to be responsible for this, offering pupils opportunities to pray and engage in other spiritual activities.

Opportunities for pupils to review and evaluate the prayer life of the school is beginning to become a feature of school. For example, members of the school council, which has representatives from each class, have recently been involved in discussions on how to further improve spiritual development across the school. This has resulted in pupils asking the Friends of St Mary's to provide seating in Mary's Haven to enable RE lessons to take place there.

The well planned RE curriculum, where a sacramental theme is studied each term combined with an inspiring assembly programme and Mass, enables all pupils to develop a good understanding of the sacramental life of the church in relation to their age.

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

Grade 1

St Mary's shares its foundation governors with its sister parish school, St Catherine's, which ensures a shared vision for both schools in relation to their Catholic life and strategic direction. Leaders and governors have a strong commitment to developing the Catholic life of the school and act as role models for others. All strategic decisions taken by governors clearly reflect the diocesan guidelines *People of Hope* with a clear focus on deepening prayer, enabling communion and strengthening mission. All *Bishops' Conference* requirements are met. The school improvement plan, which sets out its strategic direction, is explicit in its commitment to spiritual development with a clear statement of intent that *Creating a Culture of Vocation* should underpin every aspect of school life. The school's self-evaluation is clear and accurate.

The inspirational leadership of the former executive head teacher, supported by the associate head, other senior leaders and governing body, in the promotion and monitoring of the Catholic life of the school has established a clear direction for its Catholic mission. This remains at the heart of all that the school does and a priority along with pupils' spiritual and moral development. The new executive head teacher has carefully appraised the school's strengths and areas for improvement with a view to building on the strong Catholic foundation he has

inherited. He benefits from the support of a well established and effective leadership team and together they continue to provide clear religious direction for the whole school through their proactive involvement in assemblies, hymn practices and leading staff prayer. Parents and pupils hold the Catholic life of the school in high regard. The vision of the leadership team is effectively articulated to all staff and pupils through these assemblies, and to their families through school Masses and assemblies, which they are invited to attend. There is a clear expectation of all teachers, through performance management, that they support the Catholic ethos by explicitly contributing to the spiritual, moral and social development of pupils through participation in RE training, delivery of RE lessons and the preparation of Masses and assemblies.

Governors are effective in monitoring the Catholic life of the school and RE through regular reports from the executive head teacher and regular learning walks with governors, which include work scrutinies. This range of monitoring and reporting strategies is effective in enabling leaders and governors to gain an accurate understanding of strengths and areas for development. This is then articulated in specific targets for spiritual development as a whole school area as well as specific targets for RE.

The highly effective and unequivocal Catholic leadership provided by the former executive head teacher in promoting pupils' spiritual and moral development, is to be commended. The new executive head teacher is unreservedly committed to building on this tradition and leading the school through the next stage of its journey. This bodes well for the future.

The parish priest is a prominent and active member of the school community who offers support to RE lessons through leading sessions on such topics as baptism and vocations. This is effective in ensuring that there is a close link between parish and school, which in turn helps develops pupils' understanding of the wider church.

The previous executive head teacher, in her role as RE co-ordinator, regularly attended diocesan meetings and ensured that all staff share a common vision through her clear promotion of RE. The executive head teacher is committed to this established practice in order to sustain and support all staff through dissemination of good practice. Data in religious education is collected on a regular basis and is used to highlight areas for development. This has been effective in securing high standards and along with the implementation of the RE scheme *Come and See*, continues to make a significant contribution to improving standards in RE.

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Grade 1

The consistently high quality of teaching across the board results in good and often outstanding progress in learning. Pupils are engaged, interested and enthusiastic about their learning and are motivated to succeed. This is due to the high levels of challenge provided by teachers which supports pupils in becoming independent learners. Teachers have a secure subject knowledge and they benefit from effective teaching assistants who share an interest and enthusiasm for RE. Group and paired work are effective strategies because they provided peer learning and assessment. Teachers are skilful in ensuring that success criteria is linked to the levels of attainment. The established practice of beginning all lessons with a short reflection is instrumental in helping to set the mood and create an atmosphere whereby children perceive the lesson to be special and have a high profile. The quality of marking is good, focusing on pupils' religious understanding and attainment and is regularly and accurately assessed.

Outstanding teaching in the Upper Phase was characterised by teachers' high levels of subject knowledge and ability which enabled them to successfully develop their pupils' religious literacy and spiritual development. For example, pupils were effectively challenged to untangle the symbolic language of St Paul in Ephesians 6: 10-20. Excellent teacher questioning combined with skilful modelled writing, using this text, led to rounded, informed answers with pupils

speaking confidently about 'growing strong in the Lord with the strength of His power', 'Putting on the full armour of God so as to be able to resist the devil's tactics', 'carrying the shield of faith' and taking on 'salvation as your helmet and the sword of the Spirit'. In addition, pupils made thoughtful links with other key Christians, such as Martin Luther King, who had undergone persecution and defended their faith and demonstrated an empathic understanding of putting their beliefs and values into action when they moved on to their new life at secondary school.

The curriculum matches the aims of the *Curriculum Directory* through following the programme of study outlined in *Come and See*. In addition, pupils benefit significantly from the school's adoption of the *Nurturing Human Wholeness* programme which further cements and enhances the distinctive Catholic nature of the school. This includes a weekly statement of belief rooted in Catholic principles with close links to PSHCE, the work of CAFOD and religious education. The skilful adaptation of these two programmes has been highly effective in providing a firm foundation for the teaching of Catholic doctrine and developing good levels of religious literacy in young people. Relationship education is taught in line with the Church's teaching, linking effectively with science and PSHCE, with contributions from the school nurse in Year 6 and a Catholic theatre group for young people.

Prayer is an integral part of this outstanding Catholic school and is woven into every aspect of its life. A wide range of opportunities, both formal and informal, are offered to and embraced by pupils, to help develop their own spirituality. These are provided through the daily meditative prayer after lunch, daily reading of simplified versions of the Gospel of the week (which is displayed throughout the school, school website and in each classroom) and regular inspiring, prayerful assemblies. No opportunity is missed to develop prayer and deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding of their faith, such as activities linked with CAFOD harvest and Lent fast days. All classes contain prayer areas which act as a focal point, with stimulating religious artefacts and displays linked with the Church's liturgical year. Standard prayers are taught and pupils regularly encouraged to make up prayers or to pray spontaneously. Singing hymns is a joyful and prayerful experience and an integral feature of school life.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 19 questionnaires received. All were extremely positive about the school, highlighting its strong Catholic ethos and high standards. Some typical quotes from the questionnaire when asked 'Why did you choose this school' are as follows:

'It is a good Catholic school. Christian values are at the core of education and students consistently succeed and exceed learning expectations'

'I wanted him to deepen his faith and understanding whilst at the same time having access to high quality teaching and learning'

'Jesus is at the centre of St Mary's school and this can be seen through the pupils and staff. St Mary's is a family where everyone is valued and flourishes – everyone is respected as an individual made in the image of God'

'The school seed the right values, it feels like an extended family, the children are loved and cared to the highest standard'

'It has a community feel; focused on progression and achievement; new headmaster has made positive changes in an impressive period of time.'

'The teachers are approachable and I always feel welcomed and involved'.