



## **INSPECTION REPORT**

St. Mary's Catholic Primary School  
Churchdown, Gloucester, GL3 1HU  
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DfE Number: 801 3417  
URN: 138465

Headteacher: Mr Liam Jordan  
Chair of Governors: Mr Richard Wallace

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

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Date of inspection: 28-29<sup>th</sup> November 2019  
Date of previous inspection: July 2014

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

## **Description of school**

St Mary's is an average size primary school with 217 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are White British and come from a mixed socio economic background. The school serves two parishes; St. Patrick's Brockworth, and Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, whose church lies adjacent to the school. Links with the parish are strong. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups, and pupils with English as an Additional language (EAL), are both below average. The proportion of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are also below average. The school is a member of the Gloucester Catholic Schools Partnership. In December 2017 the school received a RE Monitoring Visit.

## **Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)**

**Grade 2**

### **This is a good school because:**

- The quality of teaching in RE is good with some outstanding practice observed. Pupils' achievement and progress are good overall. The leadership and management of RE in monitoring and planning for improvement is also good.
- The outcomes, the provision, and the leadership and management of the prayer life of the school are overall good. The provision for the prayer life of the school is outstanding. The effectiveness of the leadership and management in monitoring and evaluating the provision for the prayer life of the school is good.
- The outcomes and the provision of Catholic life are overall outstanding. The pupils' behaviour towards each other, in lessons and around the school, is outstanding.

### **The capacity of the school community to improve and develop is good.**

- There is a stable teaching staff who are highly committed to the mission of the school, and who are undertaking, with enthusiasm and determination, the relevant training and courses to improve their subject knowledge and expertise. Staff morale is high. Parental approval, appreciation, and support for the school is unanimous. The Governors are fully committed to the School and see maintaining the Catholic ethos of the school as a priority.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Review the SEF to ensure it is a more evaluative document
- Actively invite and inspire all pupils to contribute, in a planned and systematic way, to the school's evaluation of its Catholic life and mission, and then to allow the pupils to take a clear lead in planning improvements to it
- Encourage an even greater involvement of the chaplaincy team members, and all pupils, in initiating, planning, and evaluating their prayer life and collective worship
- Improve further the quality of teaching (and consequently learning) by raising teachers' expectations and challenge in lessons, evidencing progression of learning through planning and tasks which deepen their knowledge and understanding
- Ensure lesson observations and book scrutinies by senior leaders have a sharper focus on the quality of learning and the impact of previous action points.

### a) The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school

- Pupils appreciate the Catholic life of the school, as expressed in the school's mission statement: 'Love Learn Serve'. They have come to live the values the school promotes and contributed to the recent whole school revisit of its mission statement. They are able to articulate what is special about being in a Catholic school and are given opportunities to express their feelings. They need, however, the opportunity to contribute in a more planned and systematic way to the school's own evaluation of its Catholic life, and to take a greater lead in planning improvements to it.
- The pupils' outstanding behaviour conduct and attitudes around the school reflect its Catholic character. Their care for one another, particularly the older pupils for the younger children, is an embedded behaviour and demonstrates the values inculcated by the school. They willingly assume roles of responsibility if and when they are offered, and through this have a growing understanding of vocation.
- Most pupils accept the responsibilities of living in a Catholic school community. They take on positions of responsibility for a variety of charities and outreach the local community, through the school council and the chaplaincy team. They live out the school mission of service and stewardship by supporting global charities such as CAFOD and Mission Together, but also local projects such as the Gloucester City mission for the homeless and local foodbanks. The chaplaincy team has taken up CAFOD'S 'Live Simply' Laudato Si Plan based on A Future full of Hope. Some of the work they have done in Bringing Hope to Others and combatting climate change is appropriately displayed in the corridors.
- The links with the parish are strong. The church of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour is close and well used for Masses, special liturgies, and as an excellent learning resource.
- The chaplaincy team meets regularly and are increasingly taking the lead in the daily prayer life of the school. They have planned and presented whole school assemblies, but they are also very keen and would be quite capable of doing much more on their own initiative, with confident support from their teachers: perhaps running class assemblies for the younger children, monitoring the quality of the prayer tables in classrooms, keeping their own meeting and planning records, and evaluating the impact of their activities on their audience and listeners, in order to improve further. The chaplaincy team are enthusiastic and have an ability to be independent. Their success and role modelling could be extended further to involve almost all children, rather than limited to the chaplaincy team or older pupils.
- Pupils are happy, well-rounded individuals and well prepared for the next stage of their physical, emotional, and spiritual development.

## **b) The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school**

- The provision for the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. The school's mission and Catholic ethos are at the centre of all the school does and this is very evident in the environment and the colourful displays around the school. This is more widely shared through the parish and on the school's website.
- St. Mary's is a welcoming and inclusive community where all are valued and invited to participate. As a result, all have a strong sense of belonging to a community that celebrates difference and diversity. The displays around the school indicate the pupils have a strong sense of their place in the wider Church and worldwide issues.
- Very effective pastoral support and care is given to all and this is a real strength. This is effectively modelled by governors, senior leaders and all adults involved in the children's lives. All staff are helped through example and CPD to understand the Catholic nature of the school, and as a result they become fully committed to its mission and are real role models for the children.
- The parish priest is a frequent visitor and has an involved presence in the school and is a vital support in developing the spiritual life of the school and parish community. Stronger parish links have been developed with the introduction of whole school reflection days in the form of Experience Reflective Stations such as 'Experience Easter' or 'Experience Harvest', involving the whole community.
- The new Relationships and Sex Education programme is being planned in conjunction with the Gloucestershire Partnership and will be in place for the start of the new term in September 2020. The school also provides many opportunities for the pupil's spiritual and moral development across the curriculum.
- Improved provision and new ideas are well supported by the school's fruitful links with the local Catholic Schools Partnership including St. Peter's Secondary school. The school is open to new ideas and diocesan support and training in order to sustain the high quality of Catholic life and involvement in the wider mission of the Church; and to live out the values and aims embedded in Catholic Social teaching, such as the challenge of food poverty.

## **c) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school**

- Leaders and governors are strongly committed to promoting the Catholic ethos of the school as their first priority, and they are closely involved in the school. There are strong links with the parish and both leadership and governors regularly attend Sunday Mass and parish functions. They offer excellent models of good practice as leaders of Catholic life.
- The quality and frequency of induction and CPD for staff to develop their understanding and commitment to the Church's and the school's mission is very effective, with frequent Inset both in school, and with the Catholic Schools partnership, on Catholic life and RE.
- The governors monitor the quality of Catholic life regularly and it is a standing item in the Governors Minutes. They visit the school and attend assemblies and liturgies both formally and informally. Their evaluation of Catholic life, in terms of the quality and range of opportunities for pupils' and staffs' spiritual and moral development, and their understanding of it, has led to more involvement

of parents, opportunities for staff and pupil retreats reflecting a concern for the spiritual development of the whole school community.

- Leaders and governors are well thought of by the parents in their feedback, and they offer models of good practice and commitment to the Catholic ethos of the school. The parents are given regular opportunities to comment on their views of the school and its effectiveness.
- Governors are aware of the Pastoral Vision for the Diocese – Future full of Hope - and keep themselves involved through diocesan training, such as the Foundation Governors' Focus day. They are open to advice and collaboration with the other partner Catholic schools in the Gloucester Schools Partnership, showing real practical support and concern for partner schools experiencing change, such as St. Dominics in Nailsworth.

### a) How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

- Pupils come to the school from varied backgrounds and with different levels of knowledge and understanding. They make a good start in the early years thanks to effective teaching and a creative use of drama, role play, and art, making good progress for their starting points.
- Pupils with special educational needs or with disabilities make good progress thanks to the help they receive from very supportive teaching assistants, and planned intervention. Pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) quickly catch up with their peers in terms of literacy and make similar good progress.
- There are some examples of real learning through group work; for instance, in a Year 5 lesson, pupils had a task comparing scriptural texts from Isaiah and John on the theme of Advent. This was a challenging and outstanding example of independent thinking and group work which stretched the pupils and showed their real potential.
- Where the progress of learning is slower it is often because the learning tasks are not sufficiently differentiated or challenging, or do not reflect and support the stated learning outcomes.
- The pupils' religious literacy develops well as they go through the school, particularly at Key Stage 1, but there are gaps in understanding key concepts in the late years. For example, pupils are able to name the different Sacraments but find it difficult to explain or define what exactly a Sacrament is. They are, however, able to make the link between belief and action, between the topics they are studying, and their own lives and experiences. This is evident in their excellent caring behaviour towards others.
- Pupils say they enjoy their RE lessons, working well in pairs, and in groups. Their presentation of written work is variable in its neatness and quality reflecting the level of care and pride they take in their work, and their teachers' expectations. Despite variability in the range and quantity of writing, there is evidence of progress over time. There are opportunities missed to encourage them to write more reflectively and in depth, supporting their statements with quotations and examples from the Scriptures.
- The school's data on progress and achievement of pupils is detailed and extensive but, does not always match the written work scrutinised in the pupils' books or in the evidence provided.
- Pupils however are able to discuss topics quite fluently with insight and their verbal input into discussions and off book tasks could fruitfully be referenced by teachers to secure recorded evidence of their achievement and progress. Assessment for learning is effective

when teachers plan closely with the teaching assistants especially to support weaker learners.

**b) The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education**

- The quality of teaching is generally good and promotes learning, as well as the enjoyment and progress of the pupils. Within this good judgement the inspection observed teaching that was better than good, but also teaching that could be more effective. Teachers use a good range of strategies including art, music, drama and role play which the pupils enjoy, and which helps them to learn.
- Where teaching is good and better, teachers have a good rapport with the pupils and have high expectations of effort. Questioning is strong where it checks understanding, but also challenges pupils to think more deeply and provide reasons for their opinions and make links to scripture and their life experience. Teachers would benefit from seeing outstanding practice being modelled by other teachers in the school and across the Schools Partnership.
- The school is well aware of teachers' confidence levels in teaching the subject, and it is a developmental objective with Inset both in the school and the excellent uptake of diocesan training and courses. Teachers are highly motivated and committed to the school and its values and are open to improving the impact of their RE lessons on their pupils' learning about, and learning from, religion.
- The marking policy is well embedded but not always challenging and successful in directing pupils' learning, evident in the varying quality of the teachers' comments and the pupils' responses. Some comments are purely congratulatory and do not offer the pupils opportunity to improve their work or to provide real challenge to think and write independently. The school is aware of this and is planning to introduce learning ladders so that progress can be more closely assessed, and pupils know where they are, and what the next steps are.

**c) How well leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education**

- The evaluation of RE provision is an area of leadership and management which although good could be more incisive and a better driver of improvement. Leaders and governors monitor and track RE through lesson observations and book scrutiny, and the systems are already in place, but their evaluation and any recommendations for improvement - and any follow up, could be more clearly evidenced in writing and seen to be making a difference.
- The RE subject leader, the head teacher, and the link governor for RE, are important supportive role models for the teachers in developing their subject knowledge. They, together with the support provided through diocesan training and collaboration with the other RE leaders in the partnership, are a great support especially for teachers new to the subject.
- The RE curriculum meets the Bishops' Conference requirements, as well as any additional requirements of the diocesan Bishop. The new diocesan scheme is having a positive and challenging impact and is steadily being adopted. The 'Come and See' syllabus is followed, supplemented by diocesan materials. Extracurricular enrichment is in place through visits and events. Other World religions such as Islam and Judaism are studied discretely, and the pupils appreciate learning about others' beliefs. They come to recognise that there are

many similarities and positive differences between differing belief systems. Parents have commented on this and how the school is a welcoming, fully inclusive community.

- Leaders and governors take into account the views of parents and pupils in evaluating RE through questionnaires and conferencing. Parents are very positive in their feedback to the school and could become even more involved in decision making and partnership. Their response to the inspection parental questionnaire was a remarkable 110 replies, an indication of their approval, gratitude and close interest in what the governors and leadership are providing for their children.

## a) How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's prayer life

- Every pupil regardless of faith background feels welcome to participate fully in the school's prayer life and collective worship. The pupils show great reverence at prayer and a willingness to play a part in assemblies and whole school celebrations. Their demeanour, body language, and attentiveness at prayer are outstanding. The classroom meditation in the Early Years was outstanding, the young children were still and reflective and obviously used to this form of prayer. Many pupils are also involved significantly in the prayer life and worship in the parish, particularly at the Sunday Mass.
- The whole school assembly observed during the inspection was clearly focused on the school's mission and values, and the quality of the music, and enthusiastic singing, were both excellent. There are occasions when the chaplaincy plan and present whole school collective worship and they are very keen to be invited to do more. The school needs to build on this chaplaincy modelling, so that in time all the children can become equally confident in planning, preparing, and leading worship, starting in their own class assemblies. This will hopefully signal a shift to a more colourful, reflective, and uplifting experience led by the children themselves.
- The prayer life of the school contributes significantly to the spiritual and moral development of the children. As pupils move through the school there is a corresponding progression in prayer, including the traditional Catholic prayers, and an understanding of the structure of the Mass as well as the liturgical year. Pupils also study the lives of the Saints in the countries or background they come from.
- The prayer areas in each class are a reflective focus for daily prayer and have some examples of the pupils' own prayers. They are, however, not always prominent and can be difficult to distinguish from other colourful displays.
- The parish priest is a frequent and inspirational presence to the whole school community, and there are strong, fruitful prayer links between parish and school. The adjoining church is an ideal resource for the pupils and an ideal alternative venue for their special assemblies and liturgies.

## b) The quality of the prayer life provided by the school

- The provision for the prayer life of the school makes an outstanding contribution to the spiritual life of the whole school community and are part and parcel of every school day. This is evident not only in the Masses and assemblies reflecting the Church's liturgical year, but also the school's whole environment, with appropriate statues and colourful displays. An area for an outside prayer garden has been identified, and the chaplaincy team have shown an enthusiastic interest in being involved in the planning process.
- An outstanding feature of prayer life has been the successful introduction of Christian meditation and the very positive response from the children. They feel their faith is important to them and really appreciate times of reflection and retreat.

- The centrality of prayer life reaches out to all pupils, regardless of faith or family background, and includes both staff and parents. Significant moments, such as Harvest, Remembrance Day, Advent and Lent, and traditional Catholic practices, are celebrated as a whole community and are well supported by parents and parish. The Year 6 pupils and the Chaplaincy team have had the opportunity to go on retreat at Prinknash Abbey and Brownshill and shared the retreat experience with the pupils at St. Roses' Special School in Stroud.

**c) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the prayer life of the school.**

- Leaders and governors sustain and nurture the prayer life of the school community well and ensure provision and opportunities for prayer and collective worship are in place. The introduction of meditation sessions has been a great success throughout the school. There is evidence of ongoing planning, appraisal, and review in documentation such as the governors' minutes, and in the school improvement plans. Further work needs to be done to encourage all pupils to take more practical ownership of the existing outstanding prayer life provision. The spirituality of the staff is well supported through training, time for reflection, and a successful staff retreat. They are also supported in planning for worship and so hopefully becoming more knowledgeable about the liturgical rhythm of the Church, and more confident in modelling high quality inspirational presentations.

## Summary of Parental Questionnaires

*Example:*

*There were 110 parental questionnaires received. All were positive about the school and their children's education, with a small percentage feeling the school did not keep them well informed about their child's progress in RE. Some typical responses included:*

***'The behaviour of pupils is exceptional and any concerns are swiftly dealt with. Catholic belief is strongly maintained throughout the school'.***

***'My children are from a Catholic family who have always had strong ties with the church and therefore the school. Their mother and uncles and aunt all went to the school'.***

***'I've spoken to parents who've sent their children here, who all seem to be happy with the school. It is right next to the church so children participate at Mass on regular basis'.***

***'We moved from Spain for three years; our Spanish neighbours had already their children in this school. It matched our search for a Catholic school that could make easier our daughter's integration, and supported our families choice of faith'.***

***'Good visibility of Headteacher, who always loiter at playground so parents can approach him'.***

***'Strong catholic ethos is provided by all staff...a feeling of togetherness and community. You are always welcomed and listened to'.***

***'What is distinct about this school is the way they welcome every family regardless of their background, traditions, culture or faith; the way they make sure each individual is respected, accepted, and included; the way they praise God during the school day'.***

***'Super home/ school/ links mean my children can follow their faith in all three places... All staff display good Christian qualities and help my daughter to flourish as a Christian. The RE lead is hardworking and has excellent subject knowledge'.***

