



INSPECTION REPORT

St Mary's Catholic Primary School
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DfE Number: 3425
URN: 109261

Headteacher: Mr A Tarrant
Chair of Governors: Mrs Sarah Sharma

**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: 23rd/24th March 2022
Date of previous inspection: 2nd/3rd December 2015

Reporting Inspector: Ms A Fowler
Additional Inspector: Mr D Leiblich

Description of school

St Mary's is a one form entry primary school serving the parishes of St. Mary's, Bath and The Good Shepherd, Batheaston. Since the last inspection the school has joined a formal collaboration with St Benedict's (Midsomer Norton) with the current head of St Mary's as interim Executive Head over both schools. Approximately 63% of the pupils are baptised Catholics. The vast majority of other children at the school are from other Christian denominations. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support from the pupil premium is below average. The number of pupils with English as an additional language is in line with the national average. Since the last inspection the proportion of Catholic children has decreased and the number of children in reception has fallen. Both the RE Coordinator and the Chair of Governors are new in post. During Covid the school was committed to supporting staff, pupils and families and with the constant support of the parish priest put in effective measures to maintain the Catholic life of the school.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

Grade: Outstanding

This is an outstanding school because:

- Pupils, Parents and Staff are extremely proud of their school; they give their wholehearted support to its Catholic ethos and embrace the opportunities it provides.
- The headteacher is an inspirational leader who provides an excellent role model for all members of the school community.
- The mission statement is known and lived by all.
- Pupils are involved in evaluating the life of the school.
- The governing body is knowledgeable and committed to developing and supporting the Catholic Life of the school.
- Prayer is central to the life of the school.
- All leaders actively seek to develop the Catholic life of the school.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop is Good

The school's self-evaluation is extremely accurate, and all leaders are committed to developing, monitoring and evaluating the Catholic Life of the school. The new partnership with St Benedict's offers opportunities to develop curriculum planning and practice. The connection between school and parish is extremely positive. The new RE coordinator has a clear view of how to develop the subject and build upon existing practice.

In response to the challenges Covid provided the school has put in measures to support both a recovery curriculum and the mental health of both staff and pupils.

Issues raised by the last inspection have been addressed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Within RE, link learning objectives to the driver words of the national outcomes and ensure all tasks match the learning outcomes.
- Use assessment more effectively ensuring that pupils are confident in evaluating their own progress and know how to improve their work
- Ensure that the impact of all monitoring and evaluation is clearly recorded.

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

- Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of belonging to this welcoming, inclusive Catholic community. They welcome the fact that the school celebrates their individual gifts and talents and value the opportunities to share their views. One pupil commented that the only bad thing about school was not being able to come during covid.
- Pupils have the opportunity to participate in taking responsibility for the life of the school in a number of ways. Older children act as reading partners or playground leaders for younger children and the school council and chaplaincy team provide leadership opportunities. Pupils also help evaluate the life of the school through Pupil Voice exercises.
- Pupils benefit from the close connection between school and parish with the parish priest a regular visitor to the school
- Pupils are alert to the needs of others, both within and beyond the school community, demonstrating an informed understanding of how to make connections between faith and life.
- They understand the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and its requirement to help others, even if they are not yet able to fully articulate it. This is evident in their participation in a wide range of local charities such as Rucksacks for Mary's Meals (joint Parish and school project); donations for the local food bank, cake sales for charities, including Bishop Declan's chosen charities, an 'ELF' run for the local hospice as well as supporting refugees in the city. Displays made by pupils in their work supporting refugees are on display at various points around Bath.
- Behaviour across the school is exemplary and pupils' conduct and relationships with each other demonstrates high levels of respect.
- Pupils value the opportunities the school provides for their personal support and development which enables them to be happy and confident individuals. The school uses the 'Thrive' programme to support pupils' mental health and well-being as well as piloting the Reading University 'Project Soothe'
- A new relationship and sex education curriculum was fully introduced this academic year and has already been reviewed to better support the needs of pupils.

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

- The mission statement is at the heart of the school community and is reviewed on an annual basis. It is well known by all pupils who understand its implications. It impacts on all areas of school life including behaviour in the playground and pupils have a strong sense of ownership.

- All staff are fully committed to the Catholic life of the school, they take an active part in the prayer life of the school, join in retreat days, begin staff meetings with prayer and are provided with inset opportunities to help them develop their understanding of Catholic life and mission. There is a strong commitment to Catholic Social Teaching which permeates the whole school.
- Opportunities for inset to develop the Catholic Life are provided on a regular basis and governors undertake training with the diocese.
- The school chaplaincy team has taken the lead on prayer and liturgy. Their work was interrupted during Covid but is now slowly being reinstated.
- The school premises are vibrant and through displays, prayer areas, pupil work and artifacts demonstrate the clear Catholic identity of the school.
- There is a strong clear focus on supporting the mental and physical health of both pupils and staff. From the encouragement to run a daily mile to the use of 'Thrive' to screen and provide specific support plans and provision to pupils who require these. The parish priest offers pastoral support and the pastoral care of all is promoted by the governing body.
- The school uses an approved scheme for relationship and sex education which is in keeping with Catholic values and has consulted with parents on its adoption. Staff have received training in order to implement this.

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

- Leaders and governors are deeply committed to, and effective in, promoting the Catholic life of the school, placing the development of the Catholic life of the school at the centre of all that they do. They have demonstrated their willingness to support the Bishop's vision for the diocese through their support for other schools and their participation in diocesan events.
- Leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the Catholic life of the school on a regular basis. Governors receive reports from the Head on the Catholic life, and they make regular monitoring visits to school. Governor minutes reflect challenge as well as support. In order to develop this further, it should be clearer what the impact of such monitoring is.
- Pupils take part in pupil voice activities where they reflect on the Catholic life of the school and results from this are reviewed on a regular basis.
- Staff are provided with varied inset opportunities to strengthen their understanding of the Catholic life of the school. In order to develop this further the school needs to review the impact of these events.
- The school is fully committed to the spiritual and moral development of pupils and has begun exploring ways of formally developing Catholic Social Teaching across all areas of the curriculum
- The school has various strategies in place to engage with parents and carers. Before Covid a parental forum was in existence, and this will now be restarted.

Whilst covid regulations were in force parents were able to contact the school through direct e mails to staff, phone calls or social media. The school issues a regular newsletter which keeps parents informed of activities which relate to the Catholic life of the school.

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

- Pupils are able to use their knowledge and understanding of their learning in RE to reflect spiritually and ethically and on the importance of faith in action.
- Pupils are religiously literate and confidently use subject specific words. For example, in the lessons observed pupils talked knowledgeably about Covenant and the Torah.
- Pupils took part in the Diocesan Synod and their responses reveal a thoughtful insight into religious life.
- Behaviour in lessons was exemplary with a strong positive and mutually respectful relationship between pupils and staff and pupils actively seek to do well.
- Pupils spoke with confidence about the importance of learning about other cultures and faiths and valued the opportunity RE gave them to do this
- Most pupils with special educational needs make comparable progress to other groups.

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

- Teachers are enthusiastic about RE and want to ensure pupils succeed. Their questioning skills are excellent, designed to ensure pupils recall past learning and are able to think more reflectively about the topic
- Pupils are encouraged to work in pairs or groups and work together in a collaborative way. They are able to independently research topics
- Teachers are quick to praise pupils and develop a supportive atmosphere within the classroom.
- Although lessons are planned to develop learning in some cases the pace of the lesson is slow, and this affects the engagement of some pupils.
- There needs to be more consistency over the use of both learning outcomes and the way feedback is given. Learning outcomes need to reflect the driver words for pupil outcomes in RE and raise the level of challenge and the type of activities pupils are engaging in, especially for older pupils. Pupils are mostly reliant on teachers to know if their work needs improving and judge their own progress
- Pupils' scripture knowledge is excellent but there are some gaps in their learning that need to be addressed.
- Assessment of learning needs to be used more effectively in planning lessons and improvement to the curriculum.

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

- Leaders and governors ensure that the religious education curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. The school follows the approved diocesan programme and ensures that the teaching of other faiths is an integral part of this.
- Training for staff on aspects of the RE curriculum is provided and staff are knowledgeable about the subject
- The Coordinator is new in post but has a clear insight into how to develop the subject. Monitoring and evaluating work is carried out on a regular basis through lesson observations, book scrutinises and informal meetings. This monitoring provides an accurate assessment but, to further develop this, evidence of the impact of this needs to be provided.
- The Link Governor for RE is fully aware of the demands of the subject and carries out learning walks and reviews
- Although assessment is in place this is not yet sufficiently robust

The Prayer Life of the School

Grade: Outstanding

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

- Pupils value the opportunity to participate in the prayer life of the school. From reception pupils learn traditional Catholic prayers and respond with reverence and respect to the opportunities provided. School and class worship follows the pattern of the Church's liturgical year which enables pupils to reinforce their knowledge.
- Pupils have the opportunity to organise, lead and plan prayer and worship. Pupil led reflections were observed in year 2 and year 6. Pupils use the framework, 'Gather, Hear, Respond and Mission' to help them plan and afterwards reflect on their planning. Year 6 have led whole school worship and during Covid restrictions made use of the internet to help them. Pupils are also actively involved in maintaining the prayer areas of the classroom and by using prompts like the prayer trees make frequent use of the opportunities created to respond.
- Mass is celebrated in year groups, (or a para liturgy for younger pupils). They plan the liturgy with the help of the parish priest the week before and afterwards have the opportunity to reflect on what has taken place.
- Pupils are aware of the different types of prayers within the Catholic tradition, although some of the younger pupils have not yet been able to experience these. They have taken an active part in planning the design of their new prayer garden and are excited about the opportunity of making this their own.
- There is a chaplaincy group within the school which is being renewed after a break during covid. Pupils have written a development plan for chaplaincy which follows the pattern of the diocesan initiative 'People of Hope' and lists the activities and events they hope to plan lead during the year. Some of these, like the 'Elf' run for the local hospice, have already taken place.

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

- Prayer is central to the life of the school and teachers strive to ensure that prayer is relevant to life thus creating opportunities for spiritual and moral development. During the inspection, the focus was on the theme of peace enabling pupils to reflect meaningfully and appropriately on events within the world. Prayer is inclusive and uses music, story, and sign effectively. Displays in and around the school are vibrant and supportive of the school's Catholic life. Prayers are displayed in the classroom, with a prayer table acting as a focal point for prayer and reflection. Each class records the prayer activities in a floor book which also enables pupils to comment on activities
- Links between the school and parish are exemplary. The parish priest is a frequent visitor to the school and his contribution to school life valued by the

pupils. The school in turn supports the sacramental programme within the parish.

- Pupils have the opportunity to attend diocesan and local events, for example the chaplaincy commissioning service in Clifton Cathedral and contributed to a prayer book compiled by the Catholic schools' partnership in this area.
- All staff are confident in their knowledge of the liturgical year with the Year 6 teacher writing hymns to support pupils' understanding, including one which highlights the mission of the school.
- In normal circumstances parents are invited to attend and support liturgical events in school including reconciliation services which take place during Advent and Lent.

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

- Leaders and governors place a high priority on good quality provision for collective worship. Liturgical formation opportunities exist during staff meetings and INSET where the parish priest has worked alongside the school team to support their understanding of theological aspects, and key stage meetings are used to help plan opportunities and events.
- The school has invested in a range of artefacts and resources to help staff and pupils in their planning and delivery of prayer and worship
- The link governor for RE reviews prayer displays and focal points when taking part in learning walks around the school.
- Pupils have both formal and informal opportunities to review the prayer life of the school. They reflect individually on specific events that they have either led or taken part in and take part in Pupil Voice. Within the Pupil Voice questionnaires, they are asked specific questions like, "What helps you to pray" and "how do you think collective worship and prayer in school could be improved". Moving forward the school now needs to record the impact of such activities.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were relatively few responses from parents all of which were extremely positive. Parents commented on the inclusiveness of the school, the sense of family and belonging and its strong ethos. One parent wrote: "Children's individuality is celebrated; it feels like a family. Our son loves going to school." Another parent commented "the Head, teaching and supporting staff all really care about the children. There is a strong underpinning of kindness and children do well academically as well."