



INSPECTION REPORT

ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL
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DfE Number: 866 5220
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Acting Headteacher: Mrs R Weaver
Chair of Governors: Mrs A Long

**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: 8th and 9th June 2022
Date of previous inspection: 24th and 25th June 2015

Reporting Inspector: Mrs B McLaughlin
Additional Inspector: Mrs A Barrett

Description of school

St Mary's is a larger than average sized primary school with 352 children. Since the last inspection the school has increased the number of pupils admitted each year and has also opened a nursery provision. The proportion of children who are baptised Catholic is high (85%). The proportion of children with Special Educational Needs is below the national average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those speaking English as an additional language is well above the national average, with 25 different languages being spoken. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and known to be eligible for support from the pupil premium is below the national average.

The school has had an acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher since March 2021 and a new RE lead since September 2021. The staff of the school includes a number of long-serving staff as well as new members who have joined in the last two years. There has been stability in the Governing Body since the last inspection.

The school is part of Samuel Partnership of Catholic schools in Swindon.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

Outstanding

This is an outstanding school because:

- It is a strong, vibrant, Christ-centred school where all members of the community are actively engaged in living out the school's mission.
- The acting headteacher provides outstanding leadership, which is rooted in her commitment to Catholic education and achieving the best for every child.
- The Governing Body is highly ambitious for the Catholic life of the school, is actively involved in its evaluation and is ready to challenge and support where necessary.
- Staff and governors work effectively together, united in their focus on sustaining the school's outstanding Catholic tradition.
- Pupils love their school and demonstrate a deep sense of belonging. They participate enthusiastically in all aspects of school life.
- The school is fully attentive to the needs of pupils and staff and provides the highest levels of pastoral care.
- Since the last inspection, chaplaincy has gone from strength to strength and is a model of excellent practice.
- Leadership in religious education (RE) is well established, providing a clear framework for teaching and learning.
- Teaching in RE is consistently good and often outstanding in all key stages, enabling pupils to make good progress.

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- This is an outward looking school. Charitable and partnership work is frequent and strong.
 - The school is highly regarded by parents and the local community. There are excellent links with the parish.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

The capacity of the school to improve is good. Leadership and governance are very strong and rooted in the school's Catholic identity. There is a commitment and passion for ensuring the very best for every member of the school community and the future of the school. This is shared by staff, parents and the wider community. Leaders have implemented comprehensive and rigorous systems and structures, which promote consistency and support school improvement. The areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection have been fully addressed.

What the school should do to improve further

Building on the excellent developments since the last inspection:

- increase the range of opportunities for all pupils to be involved in devising and leading a wider variety of prayer and worship activities.
- embed Catholic Social Teaching across the whole curriculum.

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

- Pupils demonstrate an enthusiastic sense of belonging to this welcoming, inclusive Catholic community, with its rich cultural diversity and clear focus on the school's mission, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."
- Pupils have a profound awareness of the importance of living out their faith and responding to the needs of others, both within and beyond the school community. This is evident in a wide range of charitable work, which includes the Alternative Angels who cook and deliver meals to the homeless each month; as well as charitable work in support of Cafod, Ukrainian refugees, the Harbour Project and a women's' refuge.
- The behaviour and attitudes of pupils are excellent. They demonstrate high levels of respect and care for each other, as seen in their interactions around the school. Pupils state that the caring nature of the whole school is one of the things they like best about St Mary's.
- Pupils embrace the many opportunities that exist to take on responsibilities associated with the Catholic life of the school. There are 53 school chaplains from across both key stages, a Chaplaincy Council, a School Council, and an eco-group.
- The Chaplaincy Council meets regularly and has its own development plan, structured on strengthening mission, deepening prayer, and enabling communion. Council members identify activities they wish to undertake, develop success criteria, link their undertakings to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and evaluate their work.
- Pupils benefit from the very close links with the parish and spoke enthusiastically about the Platinum Jubilee party they organised for parishioners.
- Pupils value and respect links with the diocese and the wider church as demonstrated in the school's response to the Synod, where the children contributed their thoughts and hopes for the future of the Church. These are displayed in the school hall.
- Pupils speak positively about the care and support they receive from a range of staff. They feel safe and happy and enjoy coming to school.
- Pupils value the opportunities the school provides for their physical, social, emotional and spiritual development. They speak positively about their learning in relation to Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE).

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

- The school's mission statement underpins life at St Mary's and is owned and understood by all. It is visible across the school not only in displays but also in the conversations and actions of pupils and staff, who are committed to living out the school's mission.
- There is a palpable sense of community, evident in the high quality of relationships and strong culture of welcome within this inclusive community. Staff promote high standards of behaviour, which are rooted in Gospel values. This is further supported by a weekly whole school focus on a different aspect of the *Nurturing Human Wholeness* programme.
- There is a passionate commitment to the school, driven, in particular by the acting headteacher and chair of governors. There is a strong sense of the tradition of St Mary's as a Catholic school, which celebrates the past while looking to the future with hope and positivity.
- Staff receive high quality induction under the guidance of the acting headteacher, RE and chaplaincy leads. They participate in ongoing professional development relating to the Catholic life of the school. Many staff additionally engage with support and training provided by the diocese.
- The school environment clearly celebrates its Catholic identity and ethos. There are many engaging displays around the school and the RE table in each classroom provides a clear focal point in support of the Catholic and prayer life of each class.
- The chaplaincy provision in the school is coordinated by the inspiring chaplaincy lead and offers an excellent range of faith-based activities for pupils. These activities, centred around the prayer room and outdoor prayer pods, promote participation among large numbers of pupils.
- The pastoral care provided by staff is of a very high standard and extends to families. The welfare of staff is also carefully considered and as a result they feel valued and well supported.
- The spiritual development of pupils is very well supported by the chaplaincy lead and all staff. The involvement of the parish priest further strengthens pupils' understanding that spirituality is part of daily life.
- A school wide focus on Catholic Social Teaching is increasingly permeating the curriculum and beginning to positively impact on the mission of the school.
- Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), and Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) are carefully planned to reflect Catholic teachings and principles. Details of the schemes have been fully shared with governors and parents.
- The school celebrates and shares its Catholic mission and identity through the school's website, newsletters, and class floor books, which contain a multitude of photographs that document pupil participation in the Catholic life of the school.

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 proactive in promoting the Catholic life of the school. They see it as a core leadership responsibility and ensure that all aspects of school life contribute to the spiritual and moral development of pupils.
- The acting headteacher, supported by the RE and chaplaincy leaders and governors, is passionate in her positivity, care and ambition for the school and its pupils. She has developed an effective model of distributed leadership, which encourages and empowers all staff.
- Leaders and governors are highly active in promoting and evaluating the Catholic life of the school. Rigorous systems are in place, with scheduled termly activities which include pupils, governors, staff and parents.
- Reporting by leaders and governors is very strong. The acting headteacher and RE link governor, in particular, produce detailed, evaluative reports, which include the findings of monitoring activities and the impact of actions taken.
- The school development plan is an effective working document and includes a section on priorities for the Catholic life of the school. Progress towards these priorities is tracked and recorded.
- Leaders and governors have allocated significant resources to support the Catholic life of the school. This includes the provision of a chaplaincy leader, whose hours are being increased, the appointment of a school counsellor and the allocation of a chaplaincy budget.
- The school has a range of very successful strategies in place for engaging parents. These include weekly email contact, a newsletter, the website, contact in the playground and inviting parents into school. Consequently, parents have an excellent understanding of the school's mission and are very supportive of it.

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

- Overall, most children, from their varied starting points, make good progress in each key stage, with no significant variation between groups of learners. The progress of pupils in religious education was maintained during the period of home learning due to the Covid pandemic.
- The religious literacy of pupils is strong. They make full use of the key words' Wordle which staff share for each topic of study. This was particularly evident in a Year 5 piece of work on Catechumens and in a reception class lesson where children spoke of all the things that God has created.
- Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons and participate enthusiastically; as a result, behaviour in lessons is excellent. Pupils are confident in talking about their learning and in making links between it and daily life. Their positive attitude and the pride they take in their work contribute to the progress they make in religious education.
- Pupils are ambitious learners and demonstrate a desire to do well. They welcome the high expectations, academic challenge and range of activities provided by staff. They particularly enjoy it when their religious education lessons include art, drama and making links with their other subjects, and would like to do more of these.
- The work produced by pupils is consistently of a high standard. In all years, it demonstrates that good progress is made over time. Pupils are clear of the learning objectives for each lesson, use support resources independently and are able to demonstrate their understanding in a variety of ways.
- Pupils, especially older ones, have frequent opportunities to write in depth, particularly in relation to engaging, responding and learning from religion. Pupils in Year 6 were seen to have opportunities to develop their skills of analysis and evaluation, however more opportunities to do this would benefit all of Key Stage 2.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and they also receive verbal feedback. Marking affirms the progress made by pupils but is not frequently focused on what they need to do to further improve their work.

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

- Teachers are highly effective in consistently planning high-quality lessons which consolidate and extend pupils' learning. A collaborative approach which includes weekly joint planning and peer observations further supports this.

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- The acting headteacher and RE lead provide strong and focused leadership in religious education. They provide staff with ongoing support on the content and teaching of religious education and as a result staff display high levels of confidence in their delivery of lessons.
 - Teachers are enthusiastic in their teaching and as a result the pupils are enthusiastic too. Teachers are aware of the different needs of pupils in their class, and together with a team of committed teaching assistants, support individual learners. Teachers and support staff provide lots of praise and affirmation to learners; these impact positively on pupil attitudes and behaviour.
 - Teachers structure lessons effectively and are particularly skilled in revisiting prior learning at the start of lessons, enabling them to accurately assess pupils and provide appropriate challenge for all learners. They provide a range of differentiated activities and materials to extend the learning of all pupils.
 - Teachers are skilful in their use of questioning and have created a climate where pupils automatically justify and expand their answers, pushing themselves and responding to the challenge to think more deeply and make links in their learning.
 - Teachers regularly offer feedback to pupils and assess their understanding of the topics being covered. Their progress is mapped on the learning ladders found in each child's exercise book.
 - The learning environment is purposeful and focused. A range of resources are appropriately deployed, and class displays are used to support learning and celebrate pupils' achievements.
 - During the period of school closure and remote learning, due to the Covid pandemic, teachers maintained their high expectations with a range of structured and engaging activities, and thoughtful support for both pupils and parents.

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 and that the required amount of curriculum time is given to religious education.
- Leaders maintain religious education at the heart of the curriculum. They provide high quality resources and ensure that staff receive regular, pertinent training and updates. As a result of this, the quality of work produced by pupils has parity with other core subjects.
- Leaders and governors ensure that the teaching of religious education is carefully planned to meet the needs of pupils in each key stage and within the nursery provision, so that prior learning is enhanced and built upon. Staff benefit from

opportunities to work with teachers of other year groups, thus gaining a deep understanding of where their pupils have come from and where they need to be by the end of the year.

- Leaders' and governors' self-evaluation of religious education is exemplary and is a coherent reflection of rigorous monitoring, searching analysis and self-challenge. This results in well targeted planning and strategic action which secure further improvements.
- The RE lead has a clear vision of outstanding teaching and learning in religious education. She has strong, well-embedded systems for tracking and monitoring the delivery of religious education. These include lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work, seeking the views of pupils and staff and analysing pupil progress data. The challenge and support that she and the acting headteacher provide to staff results in teaching that is at least consistently good and often outstanding.
- The RE link governor has an excellent understanding of the school's approach to the teaching of religious education. His insightful monitoring and detailed reports ensure that the School Improvement Committee and Governing Body can assess the impact of the provision of religious education at the school.
- Partnership work with other schools and the diocese successfully supports the delivery of religious education and provides opportunities to moderate pupils' work.

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

- Prayer is central in the life of the school and punctuates life at St Mary's. Every class writes their own class prayer at the start of the school year and each week pupils participate in a Gospel assembly, celebration through hymns, a key stage assembly and class worship and celebration. Classes also take turns in attending the parish Mass each Friday.
- Pupils are reverent and respectful during prayer and worship. At the international Mass, which was celebrated during the inspection, they participated attentively, joining in all the Mass responses, and singing with great gusto. Singing is an integral part of worship at the school.
- Pupils know a wide range of traditional prayers. As well as the daily collective worship, they pray together at the start and end of each day and before meals. The afternoon starts off with pupils engaging in meditative prayer. This well-established routine is greatly valued by pupils, who understand the benefits of contemplative prayer.
- Pupils have many opportunities to lead prayer and worship and do so willingly and confidently. They are ably guided and supported by staff and understand the planning frameworks provided. Many pupils feel they could be given more autonomy and could explore a wider range of formats for prayer and worship.
- Pupils are skilled in leading prayer and worship and have regular opportunities to do so in their classes. Chaplaincy leaders work collaboratively to prepare key stage assemblies and are involved in the headteacher's Gospel assemblies. Pupils also lead voluntary prayer activities in the prayer room. During the inspection an energetic action hymns session was led by a Year 5 pupil.
- Pupils have a strong understanding of the liturgical calendar, which is prominent in school life. Pupils enjoy participating in seasonal celebrations and have many opportunities to do so. During May there was a focus on praying the rosary and a whole school May procession took place. Pupils welcome opportunities to pray with partner schools and during Lent they hosted the Stations of the Cross for other local Catholic schools.
- Pupils value the school prayer room and outdoor spaces such as the prayer pods and Andrew's Orchard. Chaplaincy leaders are particularly proud of the recently installed, three outdoor prayer pods, which they designed and now maintain.

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

- Leaders see prayer as an integral part of life at the school and ensure that quality prayer is part of the daily experience of all pupils and staff. This is greatly valued by all.
- The chaplaincy lead is an inspirational role model in the prayer life of the school. She organises, leads and models a range of worship opportunities at whole school level and in the prayer room. Staff value the training and individual support she and other leaders provide, and as a result they have a comprehensive understanding of the purpose of collective worship.
- The liturgical calendar informs the themes chosen for prayer as do the themes identified through the *Nurturing Human Wholeness* programme and events happening in the world.
- The chaplaincy lead has developed a prayer progression framework which covers all year groups. It maps and provides guidance on formal prayers, liturgical prayers, worship gestures and actions, silence and meditation, as well as independent prayer skills. As a result, there is consistency in staff expectations and pupils' knowledge and participation.
- The physical environment reflects the centrality of prayer in the school. The reception area, prayer room, prayer pods, outdoor prayer spaces, class RE tables, statues and displays around the school are all vibrant and engaging.
- The RE table in every classroom also serves as a prayer station, where pupils are encouraged to take a quiet moment of personal prayer and often invite visitors to do so. The class collective worship books catalogue pupils' involvement in planning and leading prayers with their peers.
- Prayer and worship in the school is inclusive and representative of the whole school community, as seen at the International Mass, where readers were invited to wear national costumes and read in their home language.
- The prayer life of the school is shared with parents and parishioners, who are regularly invited to attend worship. The school newsletter and website support and celebrate the prayer life of the school and parents are extremely positive about the encouragement and support they and their children receive to deepen their own prayer lives.

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

- Leaders and in particular the chaplaincy lead, are highly effective in planning and leading quality prayer and collective worship. They have an extensive understanding of the Church's liturgical year, seasons and feasts and are skilled at making these accessible to both pupils and staff.
- Leaders and governors have continued to build on the school's strong tradition

as a prayerful community, seeing this as an ongoing whole school priority for all. A clear focus is placed on supporting important prayer opportunities both in school, such as the Year 6 Leavers' Mass, and within the parish, as with First Holy Communion.

- Leaders and governors have adopted the same rigorous and proactive approach to promoting, monitoring and evaluating the prayer life of the school, as is evident in all key areas of school life. They undertake learning walks, scrutinise documentation and seek the views of pupils, staff and parents. Identified priorities are included and monitored through the school development plan. This culture of always striving to improve is conveyed with great positivity and as a result welcomed by all.
- New staff are very effectively inducted into the prayer life of the school. All staff have the opportunity to participate in professional development opportunities to support prayer and collective worship. They value the support provided by leaders, especially the chaplaincy lead and not only understand but also embrace their involvement in the prayer life of the school.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 238 parental questionnaires received. They were all positive in their praise of the school and their children's education. Some typical responses included:

"The school ethos promotes kindness and friendship. The school pulls everyone together to celebrate and pray."

"Love shines through from the staff and the children. My son tells me every day that Jesus loves us."

"St Mary's offers such a loving, warm, friendly community feel. All staff members are approachable and always willing to assist. I also find the communication between the school and parents to be fantastic. Recognition of talents is also celebrated in this school, which is uplifting for the child."

"We feel this school has got an excellent community spirit, helping the children to grow up with spiritual beliefs."

"I strongly believe that my child will learn all about God and the Catholic faith, which will make him grow up better in spiritual life and help people in need."

"The values promoted are seen in my child's behaviour."

"St Mary's is such a friendly, caring and supportive community and is rooted in Gospel values that I want my children to inherit and live out in their own lives."

"The school has high expectations and strong values."

"I sense just from reading the newsletter how important the Catholic faith is to the leadership team and I love how welcoming and loving all staff members are. This is a special school."

"I love how inclusive the school is and the values and morals it teaches my children through their religious path. Parents are informed and supported regularly."

"There is togetherness."

"A very welcoming environment with a spiritual ethos; equality and diversity are the main values."

"I value the way they are involved with the parents as well as the children. The teachers are very caring and helpful."

"This is a happy school. It feels like a big family. Everyone is approachable if I have any concerns. My kids are not shy to pray at home in front of others."

"Being part of a great community; an extremely welcoming school that gives every child an opportunity to shine and show their talent and ability to learn and develop."