



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST VINCENT'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL BIRMINGHAM

Inspection dates	16th-17th January 2012
Reporting Inspector	Mrs Catherine Amos

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Catholic Primary
Age range of pupils	3-11 years
Number on roll	237
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Fr John Carlyle
School address	Vauxhall Grove Vauxhall Birmingham B7 4HP
Telephone number	0121 675 2359
E-mail address	enquiry@stvincnt.bham.sch.uk
Parish	St Vincent
Date of previous inspection	March 2009
DCSF School Number	330/3310
Unique Reference Number	103417

Headteacher

Mrs Janet Tibbits

DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors. The inspectors visited 3 full religious education (RE) lessons to observe teaching and learning, pupils' behaviour, and held meetings with the chair of governors, staff, and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, including a three prayer services. They looked at a range of evidence, including key documentation such as the school's development plan, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in RE, and pupils' work.

Information about the school

St Vincent's is an average sized primary school situated in Nechells, Birmingham, an area of high deprivation. The school is part of an Education Action Zone. It has very strong links with its parish of St Vincent. There are 237 pupils on roll of whom 19.4% are baptised Catholic, 29% Muslim, whilst the remainder are Christian of other denominations. 32.9% of the pupils are on the special educational needs register; four of these pupils have statements of special educational need. This is well above the national average. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is 47%, which is also well above the national average; there are a number of pupils from low income families not qualifying for public funds due to refugee status. The school has a wide ethnic mix with pupils of many Asian, Caribbean, African and Eastern European nationalities, speaking 27 different home languages. These groups constitute a third of pupils who have English as an additional language and is twice the national average. On starting school children's skills and knowledge are well below those expected nationally for their age. Pupils start school with very little knowledge of God or religious practices. The number of Catholic teachers has increased from 60% to 85% since the last inspection. The school has recently undergone complete refurbishment and was blessed by Archbishop Longley on the feast of St Vincent 2011.

Overall effectiveness of the school

St Vincent's is a very special outstanding school. The headteacher knows her school and community well; accurate self evaluation embracing all stakeholders allows school development planning to be ambitious and tailored to meet the pupils' needs. Family *Inspire* workshops to develop spirituality, held each half term in school, are an example of this ambitious vision put into practice. Parents and pupils work together harmoniously, regardless of individual faith, on prayer projects such as Remembering, Advent and Love and Joy. The headteacher tirelessly strives to enhance opportunities for pupils and accepts nothing but the best; the Comenius Project has enabled pupils and staff to visit and engage with communities in Bulgaria, Finland and Spain. The school is currently working on an international programme based on the Olympics. The deputy head, since taking over the role of RE co-ordinator in September, has undertaken a systematic review of the RE provision in order to accurately assess impact of existing strategies; the outcomes of which have informed priorities. This work continues to be a focus. Much work has been successfully undertaken since the last inspection; writing genres are now clearly matched to each RE unit of work, and there is greater opportunity for reflection. Reflection sheets and gap tasks have been introduced. Extended writing is further developed through themes such as social justice issues, the impact of which is beginning to show through. Assessment procedures are developing.

St Vincent's is a vibrant, happy and welcoming school described by the headteacher as a family where everyone truly belongs; this is evident in every aspect of school life and work and echoed by staff and pupils alike. There is outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, within the framework of a strong and caring Catholic ethos, creating a living, tangible faith within the school community. Pupils warmly welcome visitors and proudly celebrate their achievements. Strong relationships secure mutual respect and good teaching ensures that learning and progress are outstanding. Achievement of the large majority of pupils at the end of each key stage is at or above expected levels. This represents excellent progress. Collective worship, a special feature of this school, is also outstanding. Pupils participate very well and with respect and reverence. Parish links are very strong.

Overall the quality of teaching is outstanding. Six of the teaching staff have the CCRS. A re-organisation of teaching responsibilities has allowed the delivery of a range of effective intervention programmes such as nurture groups, mediation programmes and the close targeting of pupils with special educational needs. All staff are well trained in conflict resolution. Planning is based on the diocesan *Strategy for Religious Education*; the RE co-ordinator has rewritten the schemes of work to provide a week by week focus for learning objectives. This enables staff to secure pupil learning and ensures core coverage. The family and life education programme is firmly embedded through a whole school approach.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement in its Catholic life is outstanding. The school is clear about priorities, recognising the need to embed and consolidate existing good practice and refine assessment procedures. All staff have high expectations and work hard to provide the best education possible. The governing body is actively involved in the development of the school and is kept well informed about its RE and Catholic life through reports, governors' meetings, school development planning and working alongside the pupils in school. There is a good balance of challenge and support. The parish priest, who works closely with the school, recognises and values the hard work, dedication and talent of all staff and, in particular, the headteacher. He is extremely supportive of the Catholic life of the school, recognising the challenges that this school and parish face and the outstanding response made by the school to embrace these 'opportunities'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further refine planning and assessment procedures to ensure even coverage of pupils' learning from religion
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to practise extended writing through RE

How good outcomes are for individuals and groups of pupils

Learning and progress is outstanding. Pupils enter nursery well below national expectations, often with language deprivation. Good teaching and experience in the nursery allows the pupils to make a good start in overcoming social and emotional problems whilst acquiring language. Further work to develop empathy and enable pupils to deal with their social and emotional problems is addressed through nurture groups in reception, Year 1 and Year 2 classes. The Learning Mentor leads on many social skills and friendship groups. The school has developed its own baseline assessment for RE which gives a clear picture of whether pupils have any experience of God as Father, know any prayers and have any knowledge of Church or faith. Assessments show this experience to be minimal. Assessments show that pupils in Year 1 make outstanding progress. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils' attainment and knowledge and understanding of religion are good and are able to explain what a miracle and parable are and talk about their favourite bible story. Year 5 pupils access bible references with ease and pupils are able to talk about the many miracles of the sick. Year 6 assessments show a high proportion of pupils working at average level or above with nearly half of those achieving above expectations.

Behaviour in all aspects of school life is excellent. There is a very positive ethos with assertive discipline strategies used to good effect. Christ is at the heart of St Vincent's. Year 5 pupils, trained as peer mediators, avidly support the lunchtime supervisors in ensuring a happy playtime where conflict is quickly resolved. There is an ethos of care and consideration for each other; Year 6 pupils provide guidance to younger Key Stage 2 pupils in the dining hall at lunchtime. Lunchtime supervisory assistants actively play with the pupils and clearly enjoy their time with them.

Pupils talk enthusiastically about their many responsibilities within the school: school council, eco-warriors, Altar servers, HSBC roles and peer mediators. These promote a shared ownership of and responsibility for the school community and develop key social skills in a meaningful context.

St Vincent's is an inclusive community embracing pupils of many faiths and cultures. A well planned multi-faith week, allowing pupils to celebrate their faiths and backgrounds, includes visits to the Synagogue, the Hindu temple, the Mosque, the Sikh Temple and the Buddhist Vihayrah. There is also a programme of visitors to school. This strong celebration of diversity is exemplified in staff response; a Muslim Learning Assistant in Year 3 shared her delight at being in this school and how the strong spirituality encourages her to reflect on her own faith practice. Relationships between adults and pupils, pupils and pupils are strong. The breakfast and after school club provides good quality care – children are happy, safe and secure.

Pupils make a good contribution to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school. Pupils in Key Stage 2 regularly prepare and share prayer services; this is a new initiative supported by teacher mentors. Pupils clearly enjoy and participate well in collective worship and are keen for visitors to join in. As pupils move through the key stages they enjoy an increasing responsibility for planning and preparing acts of worship. The parish priest is an active member of the community and, whilst very busy, still finds time for frequent visits to the school, sacramental preparation support and the celebration of school Masses both in St Vincent's Parish Church and in school. Pupils represent the school at monthly Parish Masses; some staff lead children's liturgy. This living witness of faith has a profound impact on the distinctive nature of this unique Catholic school. Pupils know the importance of prayer in their everyday lives and join in respectfully and reverently. School prayer books for each class ensure coverage of the more traditional prayers, with prayer bags for home being used in each year group. Pupils speak confidently in prayer.

How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the school

The headteacher is a source of great inspiration to the whole community and, together with her deputy, strives for the continuous improvement of the Catholic life of the school. There is a real sense of mission throughout the school led by the headteacher and deputy; all are committed to living and sharing the values of the Gospel. The deputy, who is also RE co-ordinator, has refined the RE curriculum to build on existing good practice. Staff plan together in phases with feedback from book scrutinies and monitoring providing clear direction for improvement. Pupil self-evaluation is developing in a more focused way through reflection sheets. The prayer life of the school is strong. Displays throughout the school are outstanding and reflect the ethnic mix within school whilst retaining the distinctive Catholic identity.

The refurbishment of the school has enhanced the learning environment and provided great space to work in. Class altars provide a focal point for prayer. All staff voluntarily attend staff prayer. Staff meetings and briefings begin and finish with a prayer. Many staff are actively involved in the parish and set a good example to pupils. This year all staff, including the headteacher, have a performance management target linked to RE, the focus of which is the 'Family Inspire' workshops.

The effectiveness of the governing body in respect of the Catholic life and RE in the school is outstanding. Statutory and canonical duties in respect of the school's Catholic foundation are efficiently undertaken. Governors make themselves available during parent evenings to meet parents and discuss issues with them. They attend school development planning days which enables them to have a clear knowledge of the strengths and areas for school development. Governors are kept well informed through the termly headteacher's reports, RE reports, annual questionnaires to parents and pupils, attendance at celebrations and observing lessons.

Community cohesion, particularly in respect of the school's Catholic foundation, is outstanding. The Breakfast Club and After School Club extends provision beyond the classroom. The 'Inspire Workshops' initiative has successfully drawn the community into school. This exemplifies the senior leadership team's relentless quest to include 'hard to reach' parents in the spiritual life of the school. Extra-curricular activities are well planned and provide a good variety of experiences. There are strong links with seven other local Catholic schools which includes shared liturgies and project planning. The school works with the local parish religious sister to prepare Catholic children to receive the sacraments; she supports in the foundation stage each week providing a new

dimension for many of the pupils. Residential visits to Stansfeld in Oxfordshire are a regular feature, with children experiencing the wonder and awe of God's world. Outstanding work develops the pupils' understanding and respect of other faiths and cultures from within their community. Pupils are enthusiastic and respond generously to fund raising activities in aid of local and worldwide charities. The school promotes pupils for future citizenship by encouraging independence, creative thinking and a confidence and self worth both within the curriculum and beyond. The weekly newsletter to parents includes curriculum reports by pupils and reflections based on the liturgical year. Parents are reminded about Masses in school by text messages. Parent relationships with school are secure. Pupils strongly support school led and Global UK charitable works: *Million Minutes*, CAFOD, Harvest Appeal, St Basil's, Rwanda, Pakistan flood victims and the Father Hudson's Society.

The quality of the school's work in providing Catholic education

The quality of teaching is outstanding overall. Two outstanding lessons and one good lesson with outstanding features were observed on inspection. Staff plan thoroughly using the revised scheme at an appropriate level and are mindful of the needs of the individual pupil through careful match of lessons to pupils' abilities. There is evidence of well matched and independent learning for less able pupils. However, occasionally tasks are not explained sufficiently well and as a result pupils are slow to start work. Where lessons are outstanding a good range of teaching and learning strategies help to generate a good pace, maintain interest and engage pupils. Skilful questioning affirms pupils' understanding and is based on careful assessment of previous learning. Teaching assistants are a strength and work well with their colleagues to ensure effective targeted support and good or outstanding pupil progress. Scrutiny of books identifies that work is regularly set and marked; probing questions for gap tasks challenge the pupils to reflect on their learning. This needs to be further embedded. Whilst staff structure lessons skilfully to ensure that the learning objectives are met, more time to complete the independent activity and practise writing skills should be planned for.

The RE curriculum is greatly enriched through creative cross-curricular links and the themed curriculum approach. Staff lead extra-curricular clubs which are well attended. The lunchtime art club designed and made an impressive 'The Last Supper' mural. This enrichment is continued through visitors to school and opportunities for pupils to identify and support charitable needs. The curriculum is greatly enriched by the quality of collective worship. Visits support the learning about our Catholic cultural heritage such as Year 6 visit to St Chad's Cathedral. SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) resources impact positively on behaviour and understanding of others' feelings. The school works closely with the parish in preparing pupils for the sacraments. There are meetings for parents and special celebratory Masses. There is a generous budget allocation with priorities carefully matched against the school development plan; this ensures high quality resources.

The provision of collective worship is outstanding. It is central to the life of the school and makes an outstanding contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. In the prayer services observed it was very moving to see the pupils of different faiths and cultures all praying together, a shared bond which brings strength to the whole community. During these formal experiences pupils are encouraged to be still and reflect; they do this freely as they clearly enjoy their prayer time together. Prayer services incorporate innovative ways to engage the pupils, with staff and pupils participating in mime and role play. Music, both live and recorded, enhances the quality of collective worship; pupils are introduced to a variety of hymns, both traditional and modern. Signing by pupils and staff is very good and provides an extra dimension for kinaesthetic learners. Prayer services, Masses and assemblies ensure pupils experience the traditional liturgies of the Church and are carefully planned. The parish priest actively supports all pupils and staff in their journey of faith.