



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST CHRISTOPHER'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL WOLVERHAMPTON

Inspection dates
Reporting Inspector

4th – 5th March 2014
Mary Baines

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 - 11 years
Number on roll	216
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Noel Gallagher
School address	Wolverhampton Rd, Codsall, Wolverhampton WV8 1PF
Telephone number	01902 434310
E-mail address	office@st-christophers.staffs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	September 2008
DFE School number	860/3483
Unique Reference Number	124374
Headteacher	Kathleen Brown

DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Evidence

The inspection was carried out by 1 Diocesan Inspector. The focus of the inspection was on the effectiveness and use of the school's self evaluation of religious education (RE) and Catholic life. To validate the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation of teaching and learning, the inspector observed 3 full RE lessons with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. In addition the inspector completed a work scrutiny and held a discussion with pupils to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time. She held meetings with the chair of governors, staff, and parish priest. She observed an assembly and undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of learning and teaching in RE, the presentation of the Catholic life of the school, and pupils' behaviour. She looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self evaluation such as RAISEonline, the development plan, teachers' planning, and learning journals. Alongside the validation of school self evaluation, the inspector gathered evidence about the school mission and vision, evidence which will be shared with other diocesan schools.

Information about the school

St Christopher's is a slightly smaller than average Catholic primary school serving the parish of St Christopher in Codsall. St Christopher's is in a popular village with the majority of pupils coming from local villages and surrounding areas of Wolverhampton. Housing is predominantly private and most parents are in full time employment, but there are a growing number of pupils from less economically fortunate families. The number of Catholic pupils is currently 80%, the majority of whom attend one of the three local parishes. The majority of pupils are from white UK heritage backgrounds; the proportion of ethnic minority pupils is 14% which is below the national average. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average at 6% as are the numbers with special needs at 11%. Currently there are no children with statements of special needs in school. Attainment on entry is broadly in line with the national average overall but low levels of knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith.

Main Finding

In its self evaluation St Christopher's judges itself to be a solidly good Catholic school in regard to pupils' attainment and learning, with teaching and assessment also judged to be good. These judgments are somewhat cautious as the evidence shows that all of these areas are outstanding or on the cusp of outstanding. The school rightly judges itself to be outstanding in the leadership of the Catholic life, and both the senior leadership and governors have a shared vision for the school. The leadership of religious education by the RE leader and headteacher is outstanding and is given a very high priority. This has been further enhanced by the appointment of a very committed and spiritually motivated deputy since the last inspection. Collective worship is outstanding with pupils leading and engaging in vibrant acts of worship. All teaching is either good or outstanding leading to high attainment. There is an effective system for thorough review and rigorous monitoring of Catholic life and RE provision. Development plans are in place for the continuing improvement of the school in all areas as the governors and leadership are unwavering in their support. The school has excellent links with the parishes that it serves and the wider Catholic community.

School self evaluation

There are thorough and rigorous processes in place to monitor and evaluate the Catholic life and RE including an in depth analysis of pupil attainment. The climate of continuous self evaluation which exists in the school involves all stakeholders, governors are deeply

committed to the school and with school leaders seek to improve the Catholic life by self evaluation and review. This was effected by the governors and staff jointly carrying out a detailed audit of the Catholic life of the school focussing on 'Putting Christ at the Centre'. They challenged themselves to look at current practice and what they needed to maintain, improve or change. All areas of school life were included such as leadership, governance, RE, prayer, chaplaincy and conduct. The planning document that was produced is a medium and long term improvement strategy for the school. Not only is it a celebration of all that happens but it is also an excellent framework for development. There is a collegiate approach to improvement planning with acts of worship, assemblies, work scrutiny and lesson observations monitored and evaluated by other colleagues, and discussed openly at feedback meetings so that all can learn and develop their skills. The senior leadership team monitor curriculum and lesson planning as well as sacramental preparation. There is a clearly planned programme of staff meetings, CDP and Inset based on the school improvement plan.

In RE there is a clear description of the attainment and progress of all pupils at every stage of their education. By the end of their first year in school pupils' progress is very good. This is continued in the following years so that by the end of Key Stage 2 achievement is above national expectations. This is in line with literacy achievement. Work scrutinies, end of unit assessments and lesson observations are carried out by the subject leader and the headteacher, and the findings are fed back to teachers at individual pupil progress meetings. Staff meetings are used to share good practice and discuss key issues. The school intends to continue to improve on existing very effective practice and the recently appointed deputy has given a fresh perspective to this process. The school judges teaching to be good to outstanding. This was evidenced during the inspection when all teaching observed was outstanding with many charismatic and inspirational elements.

The governing body is deeply committed to the life of the school; they are mindful of their responsibilities in upholding and promoting the Church. This is evidenced through appointments, committees and in particular their involvement in monitoring the Catholic life of the school. They are regular visitors to the school, carry out learning walks and engage with parents to find out their opinions. The governors are effective in holding school leaders to account for continued improvement in RE and Catholic life. The parish priest is exemplary in his support for the school, governors, staff, parents and pupils. He understands what an outstanding Catholic school should be and through his friendship and guidance is determined to ensure its success and ongoing development.

The school's self evaluation rightly considers that the effectiveness of the curriculum is outstanding and that it is well balanced, offering a range of high quality experiences for the children. Staff consider the prior learning, attainment and individual faith journey of each child in a holistic approach. The pupils' spiritual, moral and vocational development is judged to be outstanding because of the strong leadership qualities demonstrated by the governors, senior leaders and RE leader ensuring that RE is central to everything in the school including excellent behaviour and relationships which pervade the ethos of the school.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

Outcomes for pupils are above diocesan expectations. Pupils enter school with below average knowledge and understanding about the Church and the Catholic religion. By Year 2 many pupils are working above diocesan expectations and by Year 6 all pupils are doing so; achievement is very good in RE because teacher expectation is high and pupils are

¹ As the quality of the school self evaluation has been affirmed, the judgements in this section of the report conform to those of the school.

encouraged to use higher order thinking skills thus enabling them to become independent learners. All pupils have excellent attitudes to learning as was recognised. Progress is consistently good and better, it is accelerated in Year 3 and Year 6 during Sacramental preparation. Many pupils learn effectively from the Faith as well as about the Faith.

The Catholic life of the school offers great benefits to the pupils; the children have a strong sense of their personal worth and they understand that their faith can help them to respond to the challenges of daily life. They express their views and beliefs with confidence, they appreciate that the teachings of Jesus and the Church provide a strong moral path. They have a developing sense of vocation and know that God calls us to serve. They respond very well to the many opportunities the school offers them for their spiritual, moral and vocational development.

Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels. There is a clear vision of Catholic education which is shared by the parish priest, governors, headteacher, RE leader, senior leadership team and all staff. Clear direction is set and the school strives continually to improve and develop on its faith journey. Monitoring and evaluation is excellent and is being further enhanced by the appointment of the deputy, adding strength and a fresh approach to this area.

Teaching in RE is outstanding overall. Planning is good and assessment data is used effectively. Whole staff training on raising attainment in RE have proved to be very valuable as staff are committed to continuous improvement and there is no room for complacency. Higher order thinking, skilful question and answer sessions as well as deep knowledge, understanding and love of the faith is displayed by teachers and other adults. Teaching clearly follows the diocesan scheme and is enlivened by engaging strategies such as PowerPoint presentations, exploration of art and music and by teachers' personal witness to the Gospel values. There is clear progression across the key stages, tasks are well differentiated, and marking is very effective thus ensuring that any misconceptions are rectified and next steps are identified. All pupils are highly motivated, engage fully, enjoy their learning and behave exceptionally well. ICT, including iPads and laptops, are used imaginatively to enhance the teaching and learning. These are in addition to high quality Bibles and other artefacts. Pupils in Y5 are all adept at finding and using scriptural passages independently. Reflection, meditation and prayer are part of all religious lessons, a wide variety of prayer spaces are in both classrooms and around the building. Children's good work is celebrated and shared in class and in good work assemblies.

The provision of collective worship is outstanding because of the range and quality of expertise within the school and also because of the excellent support provided by the whole school community. There are very strong links between school and parish. Pupils engage in vibrant acts of worship and are learning to deepen their relationship with God through prayer, reflection and participation in Masses. The pupils are respectful and act with reverence in all prayer situations; they have a real sense of God working in their lives. The newly formed liturgy team is working hard to share ideas as they plan liturgies and celebrations for the whole school community. The 'Ruby garden' which commemorates the 40th anniversary of the school is very well used as a beautiful prayer space which reflects the liturgical year, at the time of the inspection it contained desert grasses and pebbles to symbolise the season of Lent. The prayer partners system is most innovative with the children meeting up with their partner at a signal from the headteacher during assembly and then finding a quiet place to pray together in a truly reflective way. Monday Message and Wednesday Word assemblies give the children a clear understanding and love of the Gospel as well as helping them to apply it to their lives. There are regular opportunities for the children to respond to those less fortunate than themselves and they do this through a variety of fundraising events.

The Catholic life of the school enriches the spiritual journey of each child and their family through the Sacramental programme allied to the strong influence of the parish priest during his homilies at Mass and other liturgical celebrations. Pupils' learning is promoted and enhanced by the many and varied high quality assemblies, acts of collective worship and individual reflection time. The curriculum is further enriched by the creative features of the curriculum which encompasses other faiths and cultures. This takes place during a specific focussed week. This enables the children to appreciate diversity, understand the global Catholic community and learn to value and respect others who are different to themselves. The RE curriculum benefits from the broader use of resources such as visits to Alton Castle, St Chad's Cathedral and Oscott Seminary. The choir sings at a variety of carol concerts, music festivals and has recorded a Mass setting with One Life Music.

There is a strong emphasis on the idea of vocation; they understand that God has a plan for them and they will hear His call if they listen attentively like Samuel. Sex and relationship education is given using the diocesan recommended scheme and it takes place in the context which is in keeping with the teachings of the Church. Pupils who experience bereavement or loss are well supported by a thriving Rainbows programme. The governors ensure that their responsibilities are fulfilled in all areas.

Recommendations

To provide for succession planning the school should develop a team to manage, lead, develop, monitor and evaluate all aspects of RE, Catholic life and collective worship across the school.

Develop a wider range of visits to include places of worship of other faiths.



March 2014

Diocesan Education Service,
Don Bosco House,
Coventry Road,
Coleshill,
B46 3EA

Dear Parents and Carers

Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St Christopher's Catholic Primary School, 4th-5th March 2014

I am writing this letter to share with you the findings of the diocesan inspection of your children's school. Diocesan inspection now explores in detail the school's own view of itself as expressed in its self-evaluation. For this reason, much of the report is more technical than used to be the case. You are still entitled to have a copy of the full report should you want one and it will be available on the school website or by request from the school office.

St Christopher's is an outstanding Catholic school. The leadership of religious education by the RE leader and headteacher is outstanding and is given a very high priority in school life, this has been enhanced by the appointment of a very committed and spiritually motivated deputy since the last inspection. Collective worship is outstanding with pupils leading and engaging in vibrant acts of worship. All teaching is very good and outstanding with much that is inspirational and developing higher order thinking skills in the pupils. There are rigorous systems in place for monitoring RE and the Catholic life of the school including detailed analysis of pupil attainment.

Pupils' behaviour and care for each other is outstanding. They are respectful and act with reverence in all prayer services, Masses and assemblies. They demonstrate a real sense of God working in their lives. The parish priest, governing body, and entire staff team are exemplary in their support for the children and for the whole school community. There is a very well balanced RE curriculum which enables the children to enjoy a range of high quality, spiritual experiences.

To further improve we have advised that the school should develop a team to manage, lead, develop, monitor and evaluate all aspects of RE, Catholic life and collective worship across the school thereby building on existing outstanding practice. The school should also develop a wider range of visits to include places of worship of other faiths so as to extend the pupils' knowledge and understanding of others.

Throughout the inspection your children were extremely courteous, welcoming and impeccably behaved. The school is a haven for all who go there and a spiritual oasis. The pupils exhibit a true love of their faith and are eager to learn more about it. Many thanks to you as their parents for the support that you give to them and to the whole school without which this level of success would not be possible.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Baines
Diocesan Inspector