



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST ANNE'S PRIMARY SCHOOL SOLIHULL

Inspection dates November 9-10th 2009
Reporting Inspector Mr Joseph Skivington

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Primary
Age range of pupils	3-11 years
Number on roll	352
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Rev S Hill
School address	Nineacres Drive Chelmsley Wood Birmingham B37 5DD
Telephone number	0121 7703878
E-mail address	office@st-annes.solihull.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	March 2007
DCSF School Number	334 3511
Unique Reference Number	104104
Headteacher	Mrs Marie Conway

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one Diocesan Inspector. The inspector visited 7 religious education (RE) part lessons to observe teaching and learning, students' behaviour, and held meetings with governors, staff, and groups of students. He observed the school's work, including assemblies, and 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 students' work.

Information about the school

St Anne's is a two form entry school, enlarged by the merger with St Patrick's Primary School, which was in the same parish, in September 2008. There are 352 pupils on roll excluding the school's own nursery. Approximately half of the children in the school are baptised Catholics, but there has been a decline in Catholic numbers from 70% in the present Year 6 to 40% in the Reception class. Pupils come from a mainly White British/Irish background, with 14% from ethnic minority communities. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals stands above average at 26%. In any one year group, at least a quarter of pupils have special educational needs. The Catholicity of the school is supported well by the proximity to, and close links, with the parish, and the high proportion of Catholic teachers.

Overall effectiveness of the school as a Catholic school

St Anne's provides an outstanding Catholic education for all its students. It is a fully inclusive community with openness and affirmation at its heart, where all are welcome and accepted as individuals made in the image of God. Pupils participate enthusiastically in, and respond well to the excellent provision for collective worship. The parish church stands alongside the school and sees much involvement of the children in the parish; this highlights the sense of the mission of the school being part of the wider mission of the Church.

Outcomes from the religious education programme are excellent, thanks to the good, and sometimes outstanding, teaching the pupils receive from the moment they enter the school. This results in excellent achievement. The initial discrepancy between the levels of prior religious knowledge of the children who joined the school from St Patrick's two years ago and children already at St Anne's was comprehensively addressed, so that there is now little difference in attainment. Those pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as the others because of extra support in lessons from teaching assistants and when they have work, usually in pairs or small groups, which is more closely tailored to their learning needs. The religious education programme makes a very significant contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement is excellent. Standards of attainment and the quality and presentation of work have been steadily rising since the last inspection, thanks to effective leadership and management and careful planning with attention to detail. The impact of this improvement is noticeable when one looks at the progress, particularly in written work, over time. Areas for improvement noted in the last inspection are now very much areas of strength, particularly the quality and impact of assessment, including peer assessment, in raising standards, and a culturally richer diet provided by the curriculum. The hand of the governing body is evident in the challenging direction of the school which preserves and nurtures its distinctly Catholic ethos, and results in good quality self evaluation and outcome reviews. The school knows itself well and continually sets itself challenging and measurable targets to sustain its excellent effectiveness.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the effectiveness of pupils' learning by encouraging independent research and thinking skills through consistently challenging teaching strategies

How good outcomes are for individuals and groups of pupils

Standards of attainment in religious education at the end of Key Stage 2 are well in line with expected levels. This represents excellent outcomes in learning and progress, given the generally poor prior knowledge of children entering the school. From the start in Reception they quickly come to a simple grasp of prayer and symbolism and the idea of special times and places, such as circle time and the parish church. By the end of Year 2 pupils can retell many of the stories in the Gospels and give simple explanations of some parables of Jesus. As they progress towards Year 6 they develop a more secure grasp of the main tenets of the Faith and some knowledge of the beliefs and practices of the other main world religions. The level of their knowledge and understanding is in large measure dependent on the amount of challenge they face in lessons, particularly under probing questioning, which encourages real intellectual effort. This is not always a consistent experience in every year group. The rates of progress of the less able pupils and those with special educational needs are similar to the others, particularly when the presence of one or more teaching assistants allows the children to be split into ability groups and given well matched tasks. In lessons pupils work well, especially when they are challenged and engaged by effective teaching strategies, which involve them in activities and peer learning.

Pupils are fully involved in the Catholic life of the school and bring an excellent contribution to it because they feel their voice is heard, and they take responsibility for their own lives and the care of the younger children. They know and understand the mission of the school because it is simply stated, prominently displayed, and daily referred to. By their behaviour around the school they have evidently absorbed the shared values lived out in the Catholic ethos of the school, and have a growing awareness of spiritual and moral matters. They respond generously to the needs of others beyond the school and this makes a valuable contribution to the welcoming openness and inclusivity of the whole community. Many are involved in fund raising, such as the St. Mary's Trust building a school in India, and take part in outreach to the more vulnerable, for example, the shoebox appeal for disadvantaged children. They are excellent ambassadors for the school at a whole variety of outside events linking with other schools, and enjoy many enriching visits and joint ventures. Through assemblies and RE lessons they discuss and come to understand more the issues of justice and peace, and the impact of their donations to CAFOD in helping the poor of other countries. They make a very valuable contribution through their feeding back to staff through questionnaire and discussion their experiences and opinions about their life in school. The Catholic environment of the school is regularly monitored so that there is a reflective corner in every classroom, and the RE displays are striking and reflect the liturgical year and current topics.

The pupils' response to collective worship is positive and joyful, where every individual plays their part. This was very evident in a beautifully prepared Mass in the parish church during the inspection which was joyful, prayerful, and reverent. Readings and prayers were rehearsed beforehand and confidently and clearly read, and the singing was exuberant. All approached the altar for Holy Communion or a blessing. The youngest pupils learn quickly from the start to pray and make the Sign of the Cross well, and come to understand the special and reverent nature of prayer time. Proper emphasis is placed on the wider mission of the Church integrating the school particularly in the thorough preparation of the pupils for the sacraments of Holy Communion and Confirmation. The parish priest is an available and supportive figure in the celebration of the Mass and the Sacraments, together with the ministry of the parish Deacon, who is also the Chair of Governors and the link governor for RE.

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

Leaders and managers promote the Catholic life of the school very effectively because they have clear policies and procedures to maintain and evaluate the special ethos of the school. The governing body is made up of knowledgeable and challenging members who are totally committed to its future. They meet and visit the school regularly to specifically scrutinise and evaluate the

Catholic life of the school as well as the progress of the RE schemes of work. The excellent leadership of the headteacher communicates a common vision for the whole school community which maintains a sense of purpose and challenge. Collective worship is likewise monitored, with close liaison between governors, senior leadership and the parish priest to ensure a good provision for assemblies and liturgies. Much effort has been expended by the governors to find and employ the best teachers possible, and they have successfully appointed good, young teachers who are fully committed to the Catholic ethos of the school and the quality of the religious education programme. Teachers are well supported with useful and relevant materials, as well as role modelling by other staff in providing a meaningful quality of daily prayer for their charges. This is much appreciated particularly by those teachers who are not Catholic. Regular in-service education provides a scriptural and Catholic grounding for the mission of the school as well as very effectively communicating the leadership's vision. The success of leadership and management is seen in the high morale of the staff, the pupils' excellent behaviour and care for others, and the very good relationships between pupils and staff.

The leadership and management of RE are excellent. There is great attention to detail and ways in which the subject can be better delivered. This is the result of very good self evaluation and reviews of progress. For example, the quality of marking is improving dramatically even from last term, as a result of effective action and the sharing of best practice. Teachers are well supported and good practice shared through lesson observations and book trawls. Priorities are clearly laid out in the improvement plan with appropriate action taken and its effects monitored and assessed.

There is a clear policy amongst governors and senior staff to promote community cohesion with the result that the school has an openness to all. All are included in its life and generous outreach to the local and global community is a strength of the school. The school collaborates well with other Catholic schools and participates in community undertakings. Links with parents and parish are strong. Those of other denominations or faiths feel that they are able to express their beliefs comfortably. Students explore other faiths in appropriate depth through the RE curriculum. They experience a variety of cultures through special topics and Culture Week, as well as visitors to the school, educating the children on topics such as Judaism, African drumming, Divali, India and many more mind opening experiences. All groups of students feel included and welcomed into every aspect of the school's life.

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

The quality of teaching is good with some excellent practice observed during the inspection, which is being shared and is spreading. Good lessons engage pupils because they are challenging and much is expected from them in contributing to their own learning. Paired and group work is used to good effect. In the best lessons the quality of teachers' questioning encouraged pupils to think for themselves and, especially the older children, to back up their opinion with some thoughtful argument. These skills will be invaluable in later life when they come to explain or defend the Faith. Not every teacher encourages real intellectual effort, particularly of the more able pupils, being often satisfied with any answer the child gives without probing further. It was very noticeable in the challenging lessons observed that the pupils' level of enjoyment of their learning was correspondingly high. The scrutiny of written work shows that helpful marking is making a real difference to presentation, length and quality of work. Assessment procedures and the tracking of individual progress is beginning to inform teaching strategies and individual learning programmes and leading to better learning outcomes for all pupils.

The curriculum successfully meets the needs of all groups of students, as well as meeting the *Curriculum Directory for Religious Education* requirements, such as the allocation of time. Relationship education is dealt with sensitively and clearly. The beliefs of other faiths are touched on in RE and enriching experiences, such as visits to other places of worship, or the Year 6 residential at Alton Castle, are well planned and popular. Resources are satisfactory and well managed and ICT is effectively and interactively used to colour teaching and reinforce learning, particularly the effective use of short video clips. Artistic and colourful display work around the school affirms pupils' work and demonstrates the strong Catholic ethos of St Anne's.

Provision for collective worship is excellent. The close proximity of the parish church is a great blessing and resource, not least because of the contact with parishioners who are present at the Masses planned by and involving the pupils. There are many opportunities for spiritual nourishment through prayer and reflection. The liturgical season is well marked and celebrated, particularly Advent, Lent and Holy Week. Harvest Festival, Carol Service, and Christmas nativities all have their place in the year. All pupils are welcome to participate and all according to their age and ability do so with enthusiasm and willingness, particularly as they move up the school.