



ARCHDIOCESE OF LIVERPOOL

INSPECTION REPORT

BIRCHLEY ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

BILLINGE

Tuesday 20 January 2009

Inspectors Rev. D. Melly Mrs. M. Buckley

URN 104813

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Catholic Primary
Age range of pupils	4 -11
Number on roll	214
Chair of Governors	Rev. B. Jackson
School address	Birchley Road, Billinge, Wigan, Lancashire WN5 7QJ.
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Date of last inspection	18 May 2004
Headteacher	Mrs. C. Cropper

Introduction

This inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

The report of the inspection is produced for the Archbishop of Liverpool (Code of Canon Law 804 and 806) and for the governors of the school.

The inspectors are members of the Christian Education Department and their associates approved by the Archbishop of Liverpool for this purpose.

Description of the school

Birchley St. Mary's School is a slightly smaller than average primary school. It is situated in Billinge and mainly serves the parish of St. Mary's, Birchley. It is part of the St. Helens Local Authority. The catchment area is a wide socio economic range. There are 214 learners on roll of whom 196 are baptised Catholics, 6 come from other Christian denominations and 1 learner comes from an *Other Faith* tradition. The number of learners eligible for free school meals is lower average. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also lower than the national average. There are 9 members of staff 7 of whom are Catholic. Seven teachers teach Religious Education 4 of who have a Religious Education qualification

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

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Overall effectiveness of the school

Birchley St. Mary's is an outstanding school and is a buzz with productive activity. It is an open, welcoming, community where all live and achieve their potential in the light of the example set by Jesus. Outstanding relationships have obviously been established within the school and with the homes, parish and the local and global community. All are valued, respected, cared for and affirmed. Standards are outstanding overall. Learners achieve well and make outstanding progress. Teaching and learning is outstanding overall. Assessment is in place. This is extremely good and thorough and is affecting the teaching positively. The curriculum planning is outstanding and results in an effective delivery of the *Here I Am* programme. Learners' behaviour is outstanding. The Religious Education programme, Collective Worship and the Catholic life of the school make an outstanding contribution to the learners' spiritual and moral development. The school is outstanding in promoting community cohesion. The headteacher and senior management team have a clear though modest understanding of the school's strengths and a vision of how to meet development needs.

Grade: 1

Improvement since the last inspection

Following the last Section 23 Inspection in May 2004 the school has taken effective steps to address the areas for development identified in the School Development Plan. Assessment procedures have been agreed and have been monitored since December 2007. In-service for Collective Worship was provided in September 2008. Religious Education lessons and Collective Worship are now being monitored. Policies for spiritual and moral development have been reviewed and revised. The Mission Statement still needs to be reviewed and revised.

Grade: 1

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is accurate and comprehensive though modest in its evaluations. The priorities for both the improvement of Religious Education and the Catholic life of the school stem from the self-evaluation and the school development plan. The leadership has a clear understanding of what needs to be developed and is committed to improvement. There is outstanding capacity and eagerness for further improvement.

Grade: 1

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to implement the targets set out in the school self-evaluation document and development plan.

Achievement and standards

Learners' attainment on entry to the school is what one would expect. Learners make outstanding progress in the school and by Year 6 meet or exceed the expectations of the *Here I Am* programme. Standards in Religious Education overall are outstanding. There are no significant differences in performance by learners of different gender or ethnic background. Learners with special needs make excellent progress in Religious Education with the provision of differing tasks and the help provided by the teachers and learning support assistants. The school checks on the progress made by all through assessment. This is very good and thorough and is affecting the teaching in a positive way. Learners' work is always marked with positive comments that affirm, challenge and direct. Learners are very confident and articulate in discussion. They ask good questions which show good knowledge and understanding of Religious Education. Learners are given opportunities to record their knowledge and understanding and express their own thoughts and feelings in a variety of styles.

The school celebrates achievements in lessons and assemblies. Children throughout the school are confident and obviously enjoy work. They have a good understanding of the life and teaching of Jesus and his Church and are able to apply this to their own lives and experiences. Learners' behaviour is outstanding. They have a very good sense of right and wrong, which is supported by the effective house system, which is in place. The Gospel values of love and forgiveness underpin the provision for learners' moral development enabling them to make an outstanding contribution to the school community. The school council has a great effect on the life of the school. Teachers and learners show genuine care, concern and respect for each other.

Grade: 1

Quality of Provision for Religious Education

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching is outstanding overall. Teachers are secure in their knowledge and understanding of the *Here I Am* programme and this is reflected in their thorough planning and confident delivery of the topics. *Here I Am* is extremely well used. All of the teachers are enthusiastic and most make the topics come alive and exciting for the children. This challenges the learners and enables them to respond enthusiastically, helping them to work well both independently and collaboratively. Some good use is made of information communication technology including the interactive white board.

Enthusiastic questioning enables the learners to respond confidently and with great energy as they recall previous learning and are led to even deeper levels of thinking and understanding. Learners are certainly challenged and respond positively. The learners' listening skills, their imagination and their sensitivity are also very well developed. Very good use is made of story, role-play, hot seating and freeze framing. Children's behaviour and relationships are outstanding in all lessons. Learners are obviously valued in class. They are listened to and treated with respect not just by the teachers and support staff but also by their peers. Affirmation is used to great effect. The tasks observed on the day were challenging, exciting, interesting and differentiated, catering well for the wide spectrum of learning abilities in the school. Because of this approach the children are able to learn, make outstanding progress and very obviously enjoy what they are doing. There is very good structure to the lessons, which, together with the diligence of the teachers, helps learners stay focussed. Monitoring of teaching and learning through observation of planning, lessons and learners' workbooks has been put in place and is very thorough and effective. Very effective use is made of teaching assistants throughout lessons. The learning objective, key words and driver words are shared at the beginning of most lessons and revisited at the plenary. This helps maintain the sharp focus of the lesson. Learners' work is regularly assessed and records are effectively kept.

Parents and carers are enabled to become involved in their children's Religious Education in a variety of ways and this is outstanding. Newsletters are sent to the homes and parish each week. Religious Education topic newsletters are sent once a term. These give an outline of the religious topics to be covered and suggestions for parental involvement. Religious Education workbooks are sent home for parents to see and comment upon. The school also reports on learners' progress in Religious Education. These reports are sharp and focussed.

Grade: 1

Curriculum

The school is outstanding in meeting the Religious Education curriculum needs and interests of learners. Through using the *Here I Am* programme recommended by the Archdiocese the school is meeting the requirements of the Curriculum Directory for Religious Education. A whole school approach is used and appropriate levels of the programme are being followed in different classes. This ensures complete Religious Education entitlement for each child and meets national and diocesan requirements. Of the total curriculum time 10% is allocated to Religious Education, which is a requirement of the Bishops of England and Wales. The Religious Education curriculum makes an outstanding impact on learners' spiritual and moral development.

Grade: 1

Leadership and Management

Religious Education

Leadership and management in Religious Education are outstanding. There is a clear vision for the subject within the mission of the school, which is shared by all and is reflected in the very positive relationships throughout the school and the enthusiasm of the teachers and learners. The headteacher, who has been coordinating the subject recently, is extremely committed. She, together with the senior management team and the coordinator who has just returned from maternity leave, make an outstanding contribution in leading and supporting staff and have a clear vision for the further development of the school. An excellent handbook guides and directs all staff in their delivery of Religious Education. Monitoring through scrutiny of planning, workbooks, teaching and learning is in place and is outstanding. A process of assessment is also in place and is very effective. Of the 7 staff teaching Religious Education 4 have a suitable qualification. The remaining 3 teachers hope to enrol on the *Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies* course, which will begin in Ormskirk in September. Teaching assistants are very effectively deployed. The subject leader attends coordinators' meetings and information is disseminated to all staff during staff meetings. Priorities for the subject are clearly identified and targets set. Religious Education is well resourced and funding has been well used to add value to children's learning. The headteacher, senior management team and Religious Education coordinator keep governors informed on matters relating to Religious Education. Governors discharge their responsibilities most effectively. The long serving and well-respected parish priest is a very valued member of the community and his contribution to the life of the school is greatly appreciated and valued. All the governors are very involved in an outstanding way in the life of the school.

Grade: 1

Catholic Life of the School

There is outstanding leadership and management in developing the Catholic life of the school through the Mission Statement. Birchley St. Mary's is a happy school in which the Gospel spirit of love and forgiveness permeates every aspect of its life and work. The learners are obviously valued, affirmed and respected. This helps them to be confident and happy. A very good Mission Statement, which expresses the philosophy of education in this Catholic school, is in place: 'To be a happy place, where we live, love, learn and work together in the light of the example set by Jesus'. A date has been set in November to review the Mission Statement. Aims, flowing from the Mission Statement with objectives showing how the aims are to be achieved although not formally set out, are being lived out every day. These will be formalised in the review. All who form the school community will be involved in the process.

Grade: 1

Collective Worship

The quality of Collective Worship overall is outstanding. The school provides Collective Worship in a variety of ways for each child daily, in class or whole school gatherings. This fulfils government and Archdiocesan guidance. A very good policy and guidelines to support the planning and delivery of Collective Worship is in place. Acts of worship were very well planned. Collective Worship observed included music to create a prayerful atmosphere. The focus in each gathering was stimulating. The learners in Key Stage 1 assembled as the Collective Worship progressed. Appropriate songs and hymns were sung enthusiastically, some with signing or actions. Formal and informal prayer was well used. There was some very good use made of stories from the scriptures. These expressed shared values and were linked to the lives of the children. Time was given for personal reflection, which was extremely well used. The learners and adults present responded well to the warm, nurturing encouragement of the confident leaders. Where there are focus tables and displays in classroom and throughout the school these are colourful, attractive and well presented, expressing well the topic of *Journeys*. This enhances the delivery of the curriculum and Collective Worship. Collective Worship makes an outstanding contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the children.

Grade: 1

Community Cohesion

The school's leadership team is outstanding in promoting community cohesion. There is a shared vision and commitment to serve the common good. Leadership at all levels respects difference, values diversity and ensures equal opportunities for all. Parents and carers are very involved in decision-making and in the life of the school. Collective Worship celebrates, reflects and respects the diversity of belief within the school. The use of the Religious Education programme, *Here I Am*, supports community cohesion, which in turn has been supported by the visitors invited into the school from one of the homes and the wider community. Plans are being made to visit a Hindu temple following the recent 'Hindu Week' which was very successful. Links are established with the wider community including the two other local schools, NSPCC, Willowbrook & Wigan and Leigh Hospices, Macmillan Cancer Relief, Sue Ryder Care, Billinge Parish Council and Saints Rugby Club. Learners have explored the beliefs and values of Judaism, Sikhism and Islam. All show a concern for the well being of those less fortunate than themselves in their support of the charities listed above.

Grade: 1