

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

ST MONICA'S VOLUNTARY AIDED CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Currier Drive, Neath Hill, Milton Keynes, MK14 6HB

DfE School No: 826/3378

URN: 110482

Head Teacher: Mr P Kennedy
Chair of Governors: Mr Andrew Beckett

Reporting Inspector: Mrs M Betts
Associate Inspector: Mr J Hamilton

Date of Inspection: 30 June 2010

Date Report Issued: 9 July 2010

Date of previous Inspection: July 2007

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and
in partnership with Milton Keynes Local Authority

Description of the school

St Monica's is a large primary school for pupils aged 3 to 11 years. The number on roll is 444, including 61 part-time pupils attending nursery. 75% of pupils are baptised Catholic. The majority of pupils come from the parish of St Augustine's but pupils also come from other parishes in Milton Keynes and Newport Pagnell. The majority of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and many speak English as an additional language, although very few are in the early stages of learning English. 28 different home languages are spoken. A very small minority of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. A breakfast club and after-school club are provided on site.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding Grade 2: Good Grade 3: Satisfactory Grade 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

St Monica's is a good Catholic school with some outstanding features. The school leadership gives high priority to the positive well-being of the whole community. Relationships and respect between all staff and pupils are good. Pupils are proud of their school. They explained, "It's a caring and fun place to be". The school has a strong Catholic ethos with dedicated leadership from the headteacher, deputy and religious education (RE) co-ordinator who are instrumental in effectively maintaining the school's Catholic identity. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and this is reflected in their behaviour and attitudes. Christian care and concern for others is firmly established and underpins all the school does. Worship is an important aspect of the school's life. The inspiring quality of pupils' religious education displays confirms the high priority this subject receives.

Improvements since last inspection

Grade 3

The school has improved well in some areas since the last inspection. Areas for development were related to monitoring standards, teaching and learning within religious education; developing assessment to link pupils' achievement to the new levels of attainment and using this to inform future planning and set pupil targets; and developing marking procedures to inform pupils as to how they could improve and give them opportunities to make these improvements. Assessment has developed tremendously due to the hard work of the RE co-ordinator. Pupils' achievement is linked to the national levels of attainment and pupil progress has been noted for the last three years. Teachers use these assessments to plan for different levels of abilities. Monitoring has taken place but restraints on the subject coordinator's time detract from its overall effectiveness. Improving marking of RE has been included as a target within the School Improvement Plan.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

Grade 2

The self evaluation of the school is comprehensive. The RE team consisting of the headteacher, RE co-ordinator, parish priest and a deacon from another parish (who are both governors), regularly meet and monitor current practice. These evaluations feed into the whole school improvement plan which has appropriate targets related to developing religious education. The headteacher has a good overall view of the school's strengths and development needs. All staff are committed to the success of the school. The school seeks guidance from the diocese and other specialists. The school has a good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- implement more regular monitoring of RE teaching and learning, including class worship.
- develop marking across the school to challenge pupils to improve their work and direct them towards higher standards and give pupils the opportunities to make those improvements.
- further develop RE assessment to ensure consistency of judgements by moderating work across the school and to record the criteria with which the judgement was achieved.

Leadership and Management

Grade 1

The headteacher, deputy and RE co-ordinator are fully committed to the Catholic life and mission of the school. Governors are supportive, kept informed and are a part of joint planning and vision renewing. The mission statement forms part of the school prayer and is understood by pupils who can describe aspects of school life that it underpins. Relationships within the whole school community are good. Pupils value the caring attitude of the teachers who listen to them and help them with their learning. Pupils' achievements and successes are celebrated. Leadership promotes pupils' spiritual and moral development very well. Very attractive displays around school, often using pupils' prayers and thoughts, serve well to emphasize its Catholic identity. Additionally, the pupils' perceptions of the R.E. programme are regularly sought to ensure they are finding satisfaction through their learning. The RE co-ordinator, working with the Chaplain, plans liturgies that are high quality, memorable celebrations. Parents are very well supported through effective communications and have daily access to senior and other staff who welcome them and their children at the gate and answer any queries. Parents are very positive about the school and appreciate the approachability of the staff to them and their children.

The prayer life of the school

Grade 2

Prayer is an integral part of each school day. Pupils often compose their own prayers. These are greatly valued by the school. Prayer cards are regularly sent home. Worship is appropriate to the age of the pupils and uses visual presentation, gospel messages, poetry and music to promote the interest of pupils. The pupils' high quality singing enhances the worship. Pupils listen attentively, are interested and behave very well. They would appreciate more opportunities to plan and participate in worship. Pupils' spiritual lives have been powerfully enhanced by the use of meditation sessions. They really appreciate these, one pupil describing it as "a time to be still, thankful and reflect." The prayer room is used well by pupils for quiet prayer and contemplation. Attractive prayer tables are in each classroom and often used as a focus for prayer. Class prayer is not as yet formally monitored. Mass and prayer services are celebrated regularly and parents and parishioners are invited. Pupils are actively involved in readings and the presentation of gifts procession. Links with the local parish are strong. During art activities, the pupils made some Stations of the Cross, displayed in the church during Lent.

Chaplaincy

Grade 2

Chaplaincy provision makes a significant contribution to the spiritual life and the well-being of the whole community. The parish priest as Chaplain is an integral part of the community, known well by pupils and takes a pro-active role in planning the liturgical experiences. He is an excellent reference source for staff. Pupils feel safe and secure in school and are aware of the procedures to resolve their problems. High priority is placed on the pastoral care of pupils. The individual needs of each child are well-catered for by the staff, who together with parents can access the support of the school nurse and a counsellor. The school plans to increase this support by adding regular nurture groups and the implementation of the Rainbows bereavement programme for which staff have already been trained. Parents appreciate the care of the staff for their children.

Community Cohesion

Grade 2

The school is a welcoming, inclusive community where all members are valued. Some teachers greet pupils in their own language. Pupils show compassion for others by giving to local, national and global charities. Pupils participate well in local community activities and have built good relationships with a local home for the elderly. The school has very good links with other Catholic schools in the area and has built links with other local schools. They offer joint training, such as: delivering parental workshops together. Reflection time given during prayer or meditation sessions allows all pupils to apply the learning to their own lives and experiences. Pupils are taught to respect people of other faiths and the school uses their local resources well by inviting visitors to share their knowledge and expertise. A local African community uses the premises on a Sunday for their own worship.

Achievements and standards in religious education

Grade 2

Assessment has shown that pupils make good progress in religious education throughout their time at the school. The majority of pupils achieve age appropriate national levels of attainment. Some achieve a higher grade. Pupils are beginning to understand the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church and are able to apply this to their own experiences. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils display respect towards each other and to adults. Year 6 pupils make a very good contribution to the school community through their responsibilities as monitors. Older pupils take seriously their roles as good examples to the younger children. Pupils are attentive, behave very well and work together well in pairs and groups. Their RE books are well presented, and evidence a good coverage of the curriculum. There is a good variety of written activities and some Bible research. Pupils' views are sought through the School Council.

Teaching and learning in religious education

Grade 2

Teaching is overall good. Teachers plan thoroughly with clear learning intentions. Where teaching was best, the lessons encouraged active pupil participation in a motivating and creative way. Teachers use visual presentation, open questioning and talk partners well to motivate pupils with their work and develop confidence in their ideas. Pupils of all abilities are able to make progress through the extra support given and a good range of well differentiated activities. Assessments are made and compared with national levels of attainment. The information gained is used to record pupil progress. All teachers use marking positively to praise pupils' work but it does not always develop or challenge pupils' thinking. RE homework is given regularly. The school encourages the whole family to be involved in the activity.

Quality of the Religious Education curriculum

Grade 2

The quality of the curriculum is good, and suitable for the age and abilities of the pupils. It fulfils the requirement of the Bishops' Conference. 10% of curriculum time is used for religious education following the "Here I Am" programme, with additional work linked to current news topics. For example, "God's Wonderful World", developed from pupils' interest in the football World Cup. Attractive religious education displays around the building give added value to this core subject. Other faiths are taught. The parish priest is used as an extra resource for RE learning. Religious education is creatively enriched by links to other curriculum areas such as literacy, dance, music, song, poetry, drama, art and ICT (Information and Communication Technology). The outside environment acts as an additional resource as well as space for joint class activities. The curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Most pupils enjoy their religious education lessons, especially those linked to practical activities and collaborative working.

Leadership and management in religious education

Grade 2

The headteacher, governors and religious education co-ordinator give a high profile to this subject and set clear direction for the faith development of pupils. The RE co-ordinator has achieved much since the last inspection. She manages the subject with enthusiasm and has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development. She has worked very hard to implement new initiatives and leads staff meetings to disseminate information and discuss practice. She guides teachers very well and ensures strong support for non-Catholic colleagues. Staff find her very approachable. Teachers plan together. Sufficient time has not been given for her to adequately monitor all aspects of the subject. Religious education is well resourced.