



Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

INSPECTION REPORT

St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Primary

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DfES Number: 845339

Headteacher: Mrs Patricia Longmire

Chair of Governors: Sylvia Cousins

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Bishop of Arundel & Brighton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: March 16th 2011
Date of previous inspection: 18th March 2008

Lead Inspector: Mrs Catherine Walker
Associate Inspector: Ms Teresa Kenefick

Description of School

St Mary Magdalene Catholic Primary school is situated in the St Leonards Deanery of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. The school is maintained by East Sussex Local Authority. It serves the parish of St Mary Magdalene in Bexhill-on-Sea. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 75%. The school takes pupils from the age of 4 to 11 years old. The number of pupils currently on roll is 221. The pupils eligible for free school meals is below average 11 % (24). The number of pupils with a statement of Special educational need is 3% (6), with 23% (50) identified with special educational needs. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage but the school has an increasing number of pupils from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is above average at 17 % (38).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

St Mary Magdalene's is an outstanding school with an exceptionally strong Catholic ethos because almost all aspects of the school's Catholic life and religious education are very good and many are better.

The leadership and management provided by the governing body, led by the knowledgeable chair of governors, together with the experience and commitment of the headteacher and school management team, are outstanding. At all levels staff are strong positive role models for pupils and are dedicated and committed to the school. They work hard to provide a welcoming, caring and stimulating environment in which all aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Learners are very well behaved, friendly and polite. They have good attitudes to their learning and respond well to the quality of teaching they experience.

Thought provoking liturgical celebrations, dynamic displays and excellent relationships at all levels within the school and parish community reflect a clear commitment to Catholic education.

Grade 1

Improvement since the last inspection

Following the last inspection in 2008 the school has successfully addressed the key issues.

There is now a consistent approach to interactive marking. This has had a significant impact by allowing teachers to use assessment to help plan the next steps in learning for all pupils.

Prayer is recognised as being able to be expressed by pupils in a variety of ways. There is now a more in-depth Collective Worship policy that references the use of prayer to aid pupil's spiritual development.

There is very high quality leadership, which provides clear direction for the school. This has had a significant impact on the development of religious education over the last three years.

Grade 1

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

The school's self-evaluation shows excellent capacity for ongoing improvement. The headteacher's energy and drive have moved the school forward significantly and she demonstrates a clear vision for the school's needs and development. She is strongly supported by the deputy head, religious education co-ordinator, parish priest, the chair of governors, the active and knowledgeable governing body and the hardworking, committed staff. The school also makes good use of diocesan support. Rigorous procedures are in place, which enable governors and the senior leadership to monitor and evaluate the Catholic life of the school and religious education across the school.

Grade 1

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to raise the quality of teaching and learning through sharing the outstanding practice already within the school.
- For the subject leader, supported by the school leadership team, to build capacity among all staff to further improve pupil progress in religious education in order to lead the school forward to higher standards of achievement.

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

The headteacher and senior leaders have moved the school rapidly forward over the last three years whilst maintaining and celebrating its strong Catholic ethos and this has enabled pupils' spiritual, moral and social development to flourish. The headteacher leads a united team who share her vision. The care guidance and support given to pupils is outstanding. Staff have high expectations, and this, together with a behaviour management approach based on positive affirmation, results in positive pupil behaviour.

Home, school and parish relationships are excellent and the parish clergy regularly visit the school, leading Masses, liturgies, retreat days and serve on the governing body. The governing body is committed to ensuring that Gospel values underpin all aspects of school life and that there is a clear direction for religious education. They offer appropriate challenge which helps move the school forward. St Mary Magdalene is a school that knows itself and community well as demonstrated by its accurate self-evaluation. The mission statement drives the work of the school and helps create the strong Catholic ethos.

The Prayer Life of the School

Provision for collective worship at St. Mary's is outstanding. It is a key feature of the school and pervades all aspects of school life. The celebration of the Eucharist and prayer are central to the life of St Mary Magdalene School. Provision for collective worship is very good in terms of both frequency and quality. It is underpinned by a clear religious education policy, which includes prayer and worship and by associated detailed guidelines for the development of this aspect of the school. Whole school and key stage Masses are celebrated in school and in church. Assemblies and services reflecting the liturgical calendar are planned annually in conjunction with the 3-year liturgical cycle and celebrated with the parish priest, parents and parishioners.

The Key Stage Two liturgy seen by the inspection team was outstanding. It was a powerful and moving liturgy based around the theme taken from the reading of the day. Pupils were encouraged to give something up for Lent while balancing this with taking something up "give up worrying and trust in God, give up judging others and see Jesus within them."

There is a consistent approach to prayer and worship both in class and during school assemblies. There are many opportunities for prayer, at the beginning and end of sessions, during religious education lessons, during assemblies and at other spontaneous moments. Pupils are taught the traditional prayers of the Church building on prior learning as they move up the school. In addition, they are encouraged to write their own prayers as well as pray informally. Powerful and moving prayers written about loved ones helped pupils relate to the topic of Death and New Life.

Pupils display confidence and pray with respect and reverence, demonstrating a developing awareness of the importance of prayer in their lives. Displays in classes and throughout the school indicate that learners are encouraged to express their spirituality through prayer. Every classroom has an exemplary focal area for prayer.

How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?

St Mary Magdalene is a truly inclusive school. There is a very strong sense of belonging to the school community. One parent reinforced this saying "There is a sense of St Mary Magdalene's being one big family." The headteacher and all staff maintain and develop very good relationships with other local schools through established partnerships and links with other Deanery schools. The school's membership of the Bexhill Consortium of schools ensures very close links with the local community. Strong links have been nurtured with a local special school. Pupils engage in community links with overseas projects such as "Pestalozzi" and are developing their links with a school in the North East of England. The local parish receives strong support from the school particularly in the form of joint celebrations. Policies reflect the school's commitment to community cohesion. They are aware of the needs of others and give generously to a number of worldwide and local charities.

Pupils are quick to show concern for the well being of each other. The "Guardian Angels" in Year 6 take their role very seriously. Pupils are proud of their school because as one child stated "we are always kind to one another and friendship builds as you go up the school."

Governors are fully committed to serving the common good and work hard to improve the quality of education for the pupils in this locality with governors serving from a number of neighboring parishes. There is strong evidence in displays and through pupil's work of the study of world faiths. Year 5 have recently visited a synagogue and were confidently able to speak about Judaism. St Mary Magdalene's school fully embraces the key principles of community cohesion.

Grade 1

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Achievement and standards in religious education are good. Standards in religious education match standards in English. Very clear and effective strategies and systems introduced since the 2008 inspection have ensured that high standards have been achieved and maintained. Scrutiny of work, assessment books and the portfolio of children's work indicate that learners make at least good progress and some make very good progress. This good progress is well supported by a clear scheme of work, a wide range of resources and very thorough planning. This identifies focused objectives and outcomes, highlighting appropriate differentiation. In observations during the inspection, learners were provided with opportunities to debate, question and express themselves both orally and in their written work. Pupils respond very positively to religious education. They enjoy the subject, are well motivated and take pride in their work. Across the whole school community there is a feeling of self-worth and self-esteem. Learners are aware of God's presence in their lives and of His forgiveness and love. Behaviour observed in all lessons was good and as a result of this pupils achieve well.

Grade 2

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

The quality of teaching and learning ranged from satisfactory to outstanding with the majority of lessons demonstrating outstanding practice. The relationships between teachers and their pupils are strong and foster a very good learning environment.

One pupil stated "the teachers help people who need help, they are the best teachers in the world."

The high level of teaching enables the pupils to make good progress. Lessons are interesting, exciting and varied. A variety of teaching styles are used to deliver the learning objectives, which are shared with the pupils. Planning is of a high quality and meets the needs of all pupils. Pupils remained on task throughout lessons and were engaged and enthusiastic. Where lessons were outstanding, the teachers had excellent knowledge of the subject matter which, when allied to their strong personal faith, commitment and expertise, produces a very good climate for learning. Teaching assistants provide high quality, focused support. The use of ICT proves to be an excellent stimulus for learning in the classroom. The pupils are at ease with it and the teachers use it with confidence. Informative displays around school about Pupil Voice,

Fair Trade and the parish community further enhance learning and are one of the many strengths of the school. Interactive marking provides positive and constructive comments in order to help the pupils assess their own work. Thought provoking "Big Question" books develop pupil's critical thinking skills. Where outstanding questioning was observed teachers challenged pupils to think spiritually and theologically. Year 2 children examined the meaning behind the question "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Skilled practitioners ensure a good balance between learning and teaching.

Grade 2

Quality of the Curriculum

A well-planned curriculum, based on the 'Here I Am' programme, fulfils the requirements of the Diocese and the Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools and is very effective in meeting the religious education curriculum needs and interests of all learners.

The vision of the school to "inspire through the love of Christ" pervades all areas of school life.

Where lessons were outstanding, pupils were given good opportunities to develop speaking, listening, reading and writing skills as well as ICT and music. The RE curriculum makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Regular information is sent to parents outlining termly topics and activities and ways in which they can support their children at home.

Pupils, including gifted and talented, and those children with special educational needs, achieve well as a result of an excellent differentiated religious education curriculum, which meets the needs of all children.

Grade 1

Leadership and management of Religious Education

The high quality support afforded by the subject leader ensures that a shared sense of mission has been established among all staff. Development needs are accurately identified and tackled energetically. The subject is managed very efficiently and, through its quality assurance procedures, has a well-grounded understanding of the quality of its provision.

The dedicated and enthusiastic subject leader focuses on promoting the highest standard and quality of religious education and greatly values the total support of the headteacher in her work. Religious education has a high priority throughout all the work of the school and is a key feature of and fully integrated into the School's Improvement Plan.

The overall leadership and management of religious education is exemplary and the school is fortunate in having a subject leader whose direction and support leading to improvement are outstanding. Records of planning, monitoring, evaluation and assessment are thorough and detailed. The leadership of the subject is strongly focused on the school's Catholic mission, on raising standards and promoting the faith development of pupils.

The inclusion of all learners is a central goal based on a firm belief that "we help one another so we can become the best we can be, in both our learning and behaviour" as stated in the school's mission statement. The provision for Special Education Needs is good. Parents really value this and one mother in speaking of her special needs child said that the whole school

community "totally embraced my child".

Excellent links exist with governors, parents, priests and parish. Learners flourish as a result. Morale among all staff is very high and the subject leader is well supported by committed colleagues. Leadership and Management are outstanding in raising achievement and supporting all learners in religious education.

Grade 1