



Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **St Mary's Catholic Primary School**

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DfE Number: 846/3344

Headteacher: Mrs J Jones

Chair of Governors: Mr I Keating

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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

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Date of inspection: 6 June 2013

Date of previous inspection: 15 October 2010

Lead Inspector: Mr P Ward

Associate Inspector: Mrs M Clerkin

## **Description of School**

St Mary's Catholic School is a voluntary aided school situated in the Brighton deanery of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. It is maintained by the unitary authority of Brighton and Hove. The principal parish which the school serves is the parish of Southwick with Portslade. Some pupils in attendance are from the neighbouring parishes of St Peter's Hove, and St George's Hove. The proportion of Catholic pupils currently stands at 71%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in both key stages.

The school is a one form entry primary school that takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 212. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is well below national expectations. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs at School Action level is in line with the national average, as is the proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding. The proportion at School Action Plus is above the national average. The school serves a very diverse and wide catchment area and has a high proportion, 37%, of minority ethnic groups, cultures and faiths. 26% of pupils, above the national average, have English as an additional language and many of these enter the school with limited English language skills. In most years, a few pupils arrive directly from abroad speaking little or no English.

### **Key for inspection grades**

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

## **Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school**

St Mary's is experiencing a period of transition following the departure of a significant number of teachers and the imminent retirement of the longstanding headteacher. The Governing Body, including the parish priest who is an associate governor, have a clear vision for St Mary's and have appointed a headteacher designate and deputy headteacher to implement it. The school has a distinct Catholic identity and strives with success to include each individual and to make each pupil feel valued in accordance with its mission statement "where all individuals feel that they are all valued and belong [so that] as we journey together with Christ, we seek to engender the joy and wonder of learning through celebrating God's love in our lives". This can be seen throughout the school. The strong impetus to raise standards comes from the Governing Body and senior leadership team in order that pupils have every opportunity for future success. There are very close links with the local parish and the school strives to work well with parents and carers. Overall, from low starting points, pupils make good progress and their achievement is broadly good. Attainment overall is average in Religious Education but there is evidence of more able pupils' attainment being good in Years 5 and 6. Pupils achieve well when they enjoy their work in Religious Education classes where teaching is good overall. The Religious Education curriculum is closely linked to the diocesan supported 'Here I Am' programme which provides the themes for many of the school's acts of collective worship. Prayer and worship are significant in the Catholic life of the school so that pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good. Behaviour is good and pupils enjoy being part of the school community. Pupils have a developing understanding of the Church's mission at home and abroad through their support for a number of good causes such as CAFOD.

**Grade 2**

## **Improvement since the last inspection**

The key action points in the previous inspection have been only partly addressed due to significant staff changes. The appointment of a new headteacher and deputy headteacher indicate that the school is well placed to secure further improvement.

**Grade 3**

## **What the school should do to improve further:**

- take advantage of the opportunity presented by the introduction of the new 'Come and See' Religious Education programme to ensure a uniformly high standard approach to the teaching of Catholic Religious Education;
- when introducing 'Come and See', ensure a uniform pattern of assessment that is valid and reliable;
- ensure planning for prayer and worship is rooted in the Church's liturgy and liturgical year and develop greater engagement and ownership by pupils.

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## **The Catholic Life of the School**

### **Leadership and Management**

The Governing Body has the capacity and energy to provide continuity of vision required by the retirement of the long-standing headteacher and transition to the already appointed incoming headteacher. Since the last Inspection the school has experienced a turbulent period as a result of a significant change of staff which has had some impact upon teaching and learning. This is already being addressed. The Governing Body has a good understanding of the school, contributing at an early stage to the writing of the Catholic self-evaluation document, and is confident that it will continue to improve under the new school leadership who are committed to maintaining and enhancing its Catholic character. The parish priest, who is an associate governor, is also committed to furthering this and developing further school and parish links.

**Grade 2**

### **The Prayer Life of the School**

Provision for prayer and worship is a key feature of the school. Daily collective worship, appropriate to the age of pupils present, is teacher led, often together with pupils, and takes place in class, group and whole school gatherings. It is planned on a termly basis, reflecting both the principal seasons of the Church and the theme of the Religious Education programme, such as 'Choices'. Monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure significant pupil participation and engagement is still developing. Pupils are progressively introduced to prayer in various ways. It is a feature of Religious Education lessons, with Year 5 pupils' adaptations of the Lord's Prayer being displayed, and each school day ends with a reflective prayer. Mass is celebrated twice a term and on special occasions, such as marking first Holy Communion. Younger pupils are gradually included at a pace judged appropriate to them. In Advent and Lent, Reconciliation is the focus of a school assembly for worship and the Sacrament is celebrated for those eligible.

In the months of May and October the parish priest leads guided meditations in the Mary Garden. Religious artefacts are displayed appropriately throughout the school. Each classroom has a distinctive crucifix and a prayer focus, some of which are very carefully arranged by pupils. The spiritual and moral development of pupils is developed and promoted through prayer and worship.

**Grade 2**

### **How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?**

Pupils display considerable care and concern for one another which allows all, including the most vulnerable, to thrive. This was made explicit to inspectors when one pupil said, "I know the name of every pupil in the school!" There is a distinct Catholic pattern of prayer and liturgy in the school, which also allows opportunities for the sharing and celebration of other faiths and cultures. For example a display on Gypsy and Traveller life anticipated a forthcoming curriculum focus. Pupils' diverse backgrounds are recognised and valued in Religious Education which includes the study of Judaism and another world religion in addition to Catholic Christianity. Pupils respond well to opportunities to take responsibility such as in the School Council. The Breakfast Club is popular and provides a valuable opportunity for pupils to mix across year groups. An active Parent Teacher Association reflects the school's commitment to working with parents and carers, some of whom are able to attend liturgical events held during the school day. There are good links with the diocese and local deanery and a close partnership with the local parish and its priest who regularly visits the school to support pupils and staff in many ways. The parish and the local community make use of the school premises while the school celebrates the annual 'carols by candlelight' service in the parish church. The school supports a number of diocesan, national and international agencies, including Cabrini Children's Society and CAFOD, as well a project supporting schools in Tanzania. There is also an established link with a school in Belgium which provides opportunities for pupils to correspond.

**Grade 2**

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## **Religious Education**

### **Achievement and Standards in Religious Education**

School data shows attainment to be good, in line with and often exceeding English in all Years, with no variation between groups of students. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 display a good understanding of religious concepts and engage well with a variety of thoughtful activities that develop religious knowledge and understanding. For example the most able pupils in a Year 5 lesson on reconciliation took the part of St Paul and wrote to Philemon asking him to forgive Onesimus. Pupils become progressively more religiously literate and display age-appropriate understanding of the Trinity. A scrutiny of pupils' Religious Education books revealed that written work did not always display the standard demonstrated orally in the classes visited. Pupils enjoy Religious Education and when given the opportunity discharge the responsibility of setting out the prayer table with care and attention. During the inspection, the behaviour of pupils observed was always at least good.

**Grade 2**

## Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Teaching and learning of Religious Education is generally good and sometimes outstanding. Good relationships among pupils and with their teachers are used positively by teachers to create an atmosphere that promotes learning. Lessons judged by inspectors to be good or better engaged all pupils because the good subject knowledge of teachers enabled thoughtful planning of a variety of approaches to the topic and range of activities well matched to the needs and interests of the pupils' abilities. There was good pace and balance between teacher input and pupil activity which took many forms including role-play, talk partners and individual and group work, well focused to advance learning. Interactive whiteboards were used imaginatively and teachers' questioning was well judged. Writing scaffolds supported written answers but there were opportunities for free response. Teachers encourage the development of the skills and confidence needed for independent learning, such as researching the meaning of the name of a biblical character before the next lesson. Consequently pupils were motivated and challenged and made good progress. Where assessment for learning takes place, it contributes to pupils' progress. Assessment of written work across the school is variable and fails to support pupils' learning consistently. Teachers challenge pupils to reflect spiritually and think ethically and theologically and to become aware of the demands of religious commitment in daily life. A regular topic letter is distributed to parents and carers to inform them of the programme so that they may support their children's learning.

Grade 2

## Quality of the Curriculum

The curriculum in Religious Education fulfils the requirements of the diocese and the *Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools* by devoting 10% of curriculum time to the 'Here I Am' programme. Variations to the programme to meet local circumstances are carefully managed to ensure the content of the *Directory* is still covered. It is organised around the life and teaching of Jesus and the Church, and the beliefs, celebrations and way of life of Catholics who follow that teaching. Thoughtful planned provision also introduces pupils to other religions and beliefs and engenders respect for their adherents. All pupils irrespective of ability are able to make progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding and to learn to reflect spiritually, to think ethically and theologically, and to become aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life. The planned curriculum and individual lesson planning and delivery contribute to the pupils becoming progressively religiously literate. English literacy skills are also specifically but naturally developed during the course of lessons. The Religious Education curriculum makes a good contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils.

Grade 2

## Leadership and management of Religious Education

Good leadership structures are in place with the headteacher supporting the acting Religious Education coordinator who is in regular contact with the link governor. Thus it contributes positively to the Catholic mission of the school and to its broader educational objectives. The 'Here I Am' programme is delivered efficiently throughout the school and is an integral feature of prayer and worship. The extensive remit of the Religious Education Action Plan embraces much of the Catholic life of the school, ensuring the Religious Education is at the core of the school but potentially broadening the focus to the detriment of the subject. All teachers have been observed teaching Religious Education and there has been diocesan training on the teaching programme. Plans are in hand to review the reliability of assessment along with the introduction of the new 'Come and See' programme. Religious Education is funded in line with all core

subjects in the school and resources are used well. There are good links with parents and carers, some responding to invitations to attend 'Rejoice' assemblies as well as school liturgies and other events. Links with the local parish are a particular strength. Overall pupils make steady progress.

**Grade 2**