

**Report of the Denominational (Section 48) Inspection**  
**Carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005**

**St Mark's Catholic Primary School**

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DCSF No: 935/3342

For the Catholic Diocese of East Anglia



Headteacher: Mrs T Barker

Chair of Governors: Mr P McGrath

Date of inspection: Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2008

Reporting Inspector: Mrs M Costello

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## **Description of the School**

St Mark's Catholic Primary School is situated on a large housing estate in South West Ipswich. The majority of the pupils are from the parish of St Mark's but the school also serves the Catholic parishes of Felixstowe and Hadleigh. There are 213 pupils on roll aged 5 to 11 years. 65% of pupils are Catholic, 15% are from other Christian faiths and 10% are from other world faiths. Most pupils are of white British descent and nearly a quarter of pupils are from minor ethnic groups. 11 pupils speak English as an additional language. 23 pupils have special educational needs and 1 pupil has a statement. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. Children's attainment on entry to school is usually below that typical for this age and in some year groups it is exceptionally low.

## **Key for Inspection Grades**

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

## **Overall Effectiveness of this Catholic School**

**Grade 1**

St Mark's Primary is an outstanding Catholic School. It has a very strong Catholic identity and the headteacher, staff and governors provide a very clear direction for the Catholic Life of the school. The mission statement is known by all and its aspirations are seen in action daily. Morale is very high and relationships throughout are exceptionally good and reflect the Catholic ethos. The Eucharist and prayer are central to the life of the school and community. Standards achieved in religious education are very high and pupils make very good progress throughout the school. Teaching overall is very good. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and they show great enthusiasm and enjoyment. The curriculum makes a very significant contribution to the pupils' spiritual and moral development which is outstanding. The school is very welcoming and inclusive and has strong links with parents, parishes and community.

## **Improvement since last Inspection**

**Grade 1**

The last inspection report stated that 'St Mark's is a good school with a strong Catholic identity.' The issues for improvement related to planning for the 'Before I begin' session; monitoring the teaching of Religious Education with emphasis on differentiation and standards; enriching worship by providing focus for assembly; ensuring suitable artefacts are displayed and referred to and ensuring that 10% of teaching time is given to Religious Education. The school has made very good progress in all of these areas. The 'Before I begin' session is now used. The subject leader monitors teaching and focuses on differentiation and standards. Assemblies are linked to 'Here I Am', the liturgical year and specific religious events. There are very good artefacts displayed and used. Religious education is given 10% of the teaching timetable.

## **The capacity of the school community to improve and develop**

**Grade 1**

The headteacher, governors and senior staff have a very clear view of the school's strengths and areas for further development. The school improvement plan has a

specific action plan to raise standards and improve outcomes for pupils in religious education. Targets have been set to improve the quality of assessment, to remove any barriers to the learning of religious education and to ensure religious education is raised to the status of a full core subject. The Catholic self-evaluation document is very comprehensive and accurate. All staff are very strongly committed to achieving high standards in educational and spiritual development. There is outstanding capacity for the school to improve and develop further.

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

- Refine the monitoring of attainment in religious education for individual pupils and year groups to match the quality assurance used for other core subjects.

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

### **Leadership and Management**

### **Grade 1**

Leadership and management are strengths. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. The headteacher, staff and governors provide a very clear direction for the Catholic life of the school. The mission statement is well known by all and expresses what the school aspires to. It is evident in its daily life. Effective leadership and management rooted in a culture of self-evaluation has led to high standards academically and outstanding personal development for pupils. Morale is very high and personal relationships throughout are exceptionally good. Pupils hold their teachers in high regard and show respect for adults and each other. They appreciate the care, help and support they are given and the fact that their perceptions of the school are taken into account. The stunning art work in the library and the class gardens resulted from listening to the children's ideas. Very good links exist with parents, parishes and the local community.

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

### **Grade 1**

The provision and quality of worship is outstanding. The Eucharist and prayer are central to the life of the school and the school community. Mass is celebrated frequently and many parents and parishioners attend. Opportunities for Reconciliation are provided during Lent. There are assemblies every day and staff and children share in the preparation. As well as prayers at Mass and assemblies pupils are encouraged to pray in class, in religious education and other times. The school has improved resources to promote prayer. Opportunities for prayer have been greatly enhanced by the development of the Garden of Reflection. Pupils' response to the school's provision is very enthusiastic. They participate confidently, reading very clearly, singing with joy and making music with expertise. Worship makes a very important contribution to the pupils' spiritual and moral development. The school chaplain visits regularly.

## **How Effectively the School promotes Community Cohesion**

**Grade 1**

The school promotes community cohesion in an outstanding way. The School's mission statement very clearly promotes community cohesion by its inclusive nature. The inclusion of all is a shared vision. Many parents spoke enthusiastically about the welcoming and inclusive nature of the school. Many children referred to the school as being 'a big family.' The school undertakes several events which reflect and celebrate its own cultural diversity. These include Black History Week; Mass dedicated to World Peace and Disability Awareness Week featuring a sign-language Mass. The religious education programme features regular week-long studies of other faiths including Judaism, Islam and Hinduism. Elderly people from the parish attend a tea-party each term. The Polish community had free use of the school facilities. The school is twinned with a school in Gambia and linked to a school in Italy and also supports the education of two children in the Congo.

## **Religious Education**

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

**Grade 1**

The standards achieved in religious education are very high taking into account both the pupils' capabilities and their starting points. Almost all pupils including those with learning difficulties make at least good progress and many make very good progress. Pupils are gaining knowledge, skills and understanding at a very good rate across the school. There are no unsatisfactory areas and very few pupils under-perform. The behaviour of pupils is outstanding and they show great enjoyment and enthusiasm. The pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Some KS1 pupils and most KS2 pupils can explain the teachings, values and way of life and worship of the Catholic faith. Almost all pupils can relate the religious knowledge and understanding to their own experiences and everyday life. The quality and quantity of written work is outstanding throughout the school. Pupils are confident and keen to express their ideas and opinions.

### **Quality of Teaching and Learning**

**Grade 1**

Teaching overall is very good. Planning is thorough and lessons have clear learning objectives which are shared with the pupils. Lessons are planned effectively for 3 ability groups based on overall ability and religious education knowledge and understanding. This is very effective in meeting the needs of all pupils. Teachers are secure and confident and subject knowledge is very good. Pupils are challenged to think spiritually, ethically and theologically. Marking is consistent throughout the school and in the main focuses on pupils' religious educational learning and outcomes. The use of this information to plan the next stages of learning is not fully utilised. Pupils' own self-evaluation using the 'traffic lights' system in lessons and an end of unit self-evaluation are useful tools to inform future planning. At the beginning of each term parents and carers receive a religious information leaflet.

## **Quality of the Religious Education Curriculum**

**Grade 1**

The quality of the curriculum is very good. Religious education is viewed as a key subject and is allocated 10% of the curriculum time. It fulfils the requirements of the diocese and the Bishops Conference. It effectively takes account of the pupils' religious experiences, their home circumstances and their prior attainment. All pupils have access to the curriculum which is adapted to their needs through differentiated materials and in-class support. The curriculum focuses on the study of God, the life and teachings of Jesus and the Catholic Faith. This is related to the pupils' everyday life. The church and the chaplain are also used as another resource for learning. Progression is clearly thought out. The curriculum makes a very significant contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. The quality of religious displays and artefacts contribute to its effectiveness.

## **Leadership and Management in Religious Education**

**Grade 1**

The leadership and management of religious education are outstanding. The subject leader focuses on promoting high standards, the quality of religious education and the faith development of the pupils. She has communicated a strong sense of spiritual purpose to the teachers and pupils. She supports very effectively the non-catholic teachers. There is regular monitoring of planning, lessons observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and displays and also of pupils' perceptions. Currently pupils' work is assessed each term and compared to the national levels. The religious education action plan is targeting improving the quality of assessment. Equality of opportunity is promoted very well and the subject leader is focussing on identifying any barriers to pupils' learning. Very good links exist with parents, parishes and the community. The religious education budget is in line with other core subjects and very efficient use is made of resources.