

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

ST MARY CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL **Woodside Way, Northampton, NN5 7HX**

DfES School No: 928/3400
URN 122036

Head Teacher: Mrs C Dodds
Chair of Governors: Mr H Williams

Reporting inspector: Mrs K Edwards
Associate inspector: Mrs M Basham

Date of inspection: 6 March 2018

Date report issued: 26 March 2018
Date of previous inspection: June 2012

The school is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and part of the
St Thomas of Canterbury Academies Trust.

Information about the school

St Mary's Catholic School is a one form entry primary school situated in Kings Heath, Northampton. There are 206 pupils on roll, 77 of whom are Catholic with the remainder coming from a diverse range of Christian and other faith backgrounds. 24% of pupils are from different ethnic minority backgrounds and 25% speak English as an additional language. 15 different languages are spoken in the school. There are eleven members of teaching staff, five of whom are Catholic. The headteacher took on her substantive role in February 2018 having been at the school in an acting capacity since September 2017. Since the last inspection the school became part of the St Thomas of Canterbury Academies Trust.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

St Mary's is a good Catholic school which is in a key stage of development as the new headteacher and governors share, develop and embed their vision for Catholic education further. The distinctive Catholic nature of the school is evident in the quality of relationships between pupils and teachers and the ways in which all are welcomed, nurtured and respected as individuals irrespective of differences in background or faith journey.

St Mary's is a worshipping community where prayer and collective worship is seen as central to the school's mission and ethos. Pupils are proud of their school, responsive to the many opportunities for faith development and feel valued and loved by the staff. Parents express a high degree of satisfaction with the school, praising its Catholic ethos and inclusivity.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

Since the last inspection staff have been working on the Diocesan Pilot RE assessment scheme which will enable the better monitoring of progress in RE through the school's target tracker system. The RE link governor has regular experience of prayer life and collective worship in the school, and is well placed to evaluate this. He has also taken part in book scrutiny and learning walks alongside the RE lead teacher. The staff have benefitted from the training by the primary RE advisor on delivering high quality RE lessons and how to lead worship.

The SEF-RE gives a good overview of where the school is and the Inspectors were able to validate judgements made by the school and governors with the evidence collected during the inspection. Further depth and detail regarding the distinctive nature of St Mary's as a Catholic school would enhance the self-evaluation. The headteacher and governors have a good grasp of the school's strengths and areas for development.

Under the dynamic leadership of the new headteacher, with the support and challenge provided by a dedicated governing body, and informed by wider links with the Academies Trust, the school's capacity for sustained improvement is good. It is evident that the staff and governors share a determination to improve provision further whilst maintaining the very high standards of care for all pupils and families in the community.

What the school should do to improve further:

- improve progress and standards in RE through a strategic and specific development plan to address inconsistencies in provision and expectation
- develop monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning further so that it is more sharply focused on what will make a difference and sets clear, measurable targets for improvement
- improve resources to provide better differentiation across the ability range and more reflect the different cultural backgrounds of the pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 2

Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of the mission statement of the school both in their actions and what they say about why St Mary's is special to them. KS2 pupils spoke articulately about their sense of belonging to 'God's family' where they cared for each other and 'always forgive and give people lots of chances'. There were many examples of pupils taking on responsibility for developing the Catholic nature of the school and of particular note was the enthusiasm showed by the prayer leaders in developing ideas to lead younger pupils in worship and to be good role models for them. In discussion pupils spoke about how important it was 'that we pray together' and 'everyone is included'. Pupils have a clear understanding of how they are called to contribute to the wider community and put this into practice through taking responsibility for charitable work. Some examples are fundraising for CAFOD, the local foodbank, the Manchester concert disaster and regular visits to the local care home at Templemore to participate in joint craft activities. An additional moving example was where the pupils raised money alongside parents to help provide a prosthetic leg for a young girl who was then able to learn to walk again.

Pupils engage in prayer and collective worship readily and with reverence. They sing and join in with enthusiasm. Opportunities to reflect and create their own prayers are much enjoyed as they talk about the importance of the various prayer 'trees' and booklets they have created in the school. Pupils know their traditional prayers and older pupils are able to articulate how prayer is an important part of their lives. They enjoy and take responsibility for welcoming parents and members of other parishes and churches to join them in worship too. The choir represents the school often in the local community and provides a valuable resource in its contribution to the quality of worship.

Pupils benefit greatly from the chaplaincy provision offered by the school. A particular example is that of the 'Godly play' sessions where pupils explore their faith creatively through the less formal, kinaesthetic approach offered. Another is the pro-active and enthusiastic way pupils help organise services and participate in school masses.

Pupils across the school demonstrate a high level of engagement and curiosity in RE lessons. Generally there was good biblical knowledge and understanding of how what was being learned applied to how they should try to live their lives on a personal, individual level. Pupils were able to articulate good understanding, often at a conceptual level, through class discussion and posing and answering their own, curious questions. There were some good examples seen of collaborative learning with pupils particularly enjoying an opportunity for role-play in a 'conscience alley'. Despite these many positive outcomes the school recognises that standards of attainment and progress in RE are not yet high enough, consistently, across every year group and this is clearly evidenced in some books. Pupils are reflective and generally confident learners and enjoy sharing opinions with others.

Leaders and managers

Grade 2

There is a strong commitment to developing the Catholic life of the school which is shared by the headteacher, staff and governors. Governors regularly visit the school, seeing their role in terms of both support and challenge. They have a clear picture of where the school needs to develop and the importance of equipping staff with the training and opportunities to do so. Regular participation in collective worship and the prayer life of the school by members of the governing body enables them to promote and evaluate the quality of collective worship. The headteacher has a strong and ambitious vision for Catholic education and, despite only being appointed since September, is demonstrating inspirational leadership in drawing staff and parents together in improving outcomes for pupils.

The RE lead teacher has worked alongside the RE link governor to conduct joint learning walks and book scrutinies. She has benefitted from regular liaison with colleagues from other

local Catholic schools and is currently introducing the new Diocesan assessment pilot. When this is embedded in the school it will give a sharper, more rigorous focus on the monitoring and evaluation of pupil progress over time. The RE lead teacher provides valuable training on the Catholic life of the school for all staff, works alongside colleagues in joint planning activities and has a clear understanding shared with the headteacher of 'next steps' to improve standards through future training and further development of current monitoring and evaluation tools.

Provision

Grade 2

The school provides many and varied opportunities for prayer and pupils, staff and visitors are encouraged to pray regularly and sometimes spontaneously for others in crisis. Careful planning ensures that prayer and worship follow the liturgical year. Prayer tables provide a useful focus in each classroom, and staff are provided with extra resources to enable them to lead deeper reflection with pupils, particularly during Advent and Lent. The school community benefit from the support offered by several members of local clergy. Chaplaincy provision is a strength of the school and is enhanced by the contribution of the RE link governor, the Trust chaplain and those who form the chaplaincy team. Pastoral provision for all pupils, and particularly the most vulnerable, is outstanding and the school's family worker is instrumental in providing support for families in need.

The quality of teaching is good overall. In good and outstanding practice pupils were actively involved and taking ownership of their learning using investigative approaches where pupils were encouraged to answer their own curious questions. Where teacher expectations of quality outcomes were high, pupils demonstrated progress in lessons and over time. Well devised, challenging key questions enabled some lessons to have a clarity of focus and purpose but this strategy needs to be more consistent across the school. The vibrancy of the environment and the creativity of the lesson delivery in the reception class was a particular strength as was the use of well organised role-play and opportunity for personal reflection and connection further up the school. Good examples of differentiation were seen in planning and delivery but in some lessons this was underdeveloped in particular resources and activities to challenge the more able and support EAL pupils. Best practice in marking moved pupils' thinking on by posing challenging questions, developing subject literacy and communicating high expectations in terms of quality outcomes, however this was not consistent across this school.

The schemes of work in RE are planned to address the learning objectives of 'Come and See'. 10% of teaching time is devoted to religious education meeting Diocesan guidelines. The school is aware that resources in the school library are lacking and there are plans to address this. Evidence showed some teaching about Judaism throughout the school but this was underdeveloped as were displays and resources celebrating different cultural identities. Evidence from books and lessons demonstrated the many opportunities for spiritual and moral development within the curriculum as pupils are nurtured to develop their personal faith and understanding of what it means to be a child of God.

The inspectors would like to thank all members of the school community for the warm welcome and hospitality extended during their visit.