

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

Head Teacher: Mrs P Turner
Chair of Governors: Mr H Williams

Reporting Inspector: Mr J Flanagan
Associate Inspector: Mrs P Brannigan

Date of Inspection: 1 July 2008

Date Report Issued: 14 July 2008

Date of previous Inspection: September 2006

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

Description of the School

St Mary's is a smaller than average Catholic primary school with 151 pupils on roll. Since its last inspection, the school has changed in nature from a lower to a primary school and has, until recently, undergone a period of instability in leadership. 78% of the children live in areas identified as suffering from social deprivation and 41% of the children are baptised Catholics. Attainment on entry is below the national average and most children join the school after the Foundation Stage. 17 children have EAL and there are 29 on the SEN list. The school is not specifically linked to a parish but has links with St Patrick's in Duston and Northampton Cathedral.

Key Grades for Inspection

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

Overall Effectiveness of this Catholic School

Grade 3

St Mary's is a satisfactory school with a clear awareness of its Catholic mission and also of the areas for development. Relationships within the school are good and the care of the children is given a high priority. Staff work hard and are very supportive of the Catholic ethos of the school, which is manifested in the time devoted to children and parents, an attitude and approach that emanates from the head teacher. There is a lively and full spiritual prayer life that is inclusive and engaging but the RE curriculum requires thorough review and monitoring to raise standards and build on existing good practice.

Improvements since Last Inspection

Grade 3

Overall, the school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection of exactly 4 years ago which gave the school three key issues for action. The issues of developing a sex education policy and reviewing reports to parents with the aim of improving the view of children's progress have been fully addressed but the issue of developing formal assessment in RE has not been met and remains a priority for action.

Capacity of the school community to improve and develop

Grade 3

The school has a growing capacity to improve and develop. The head teacher and senior leadership team are well aware of the school's issues for development and have plans in place to implement the changes needed to move the school forward. Already issues of subject leadership and assessment are on the school plan for next year. The leadership team is open to receive support from the diocese, local authority and other appropriate agencies.

What the school needs to do to improve further:

- Establish a rigorous monitoring system of all aspects of the Catholic life of the school that will inform future evaluation and planning.
- Put in place a system of assessing pupils' work that informs all aspects of learning and teaching in RE and leads to an improvement in standards.
- Continue to develop the partnership between home and school in relation to the children's religious education to enhance standards.

Leadership and Management

Grade 3

The leadership team is fully committed to developing the Catholic mission of the school. The school is ordered and governors are very supportive of the school and come into school to work in a variety of ways, but they are not fully involved in the monitoring and evaluation process. The chaplain plays a significant part in developing the mission of the school. Time and energy are devoted to pupil care and support and the school's mission statement of "Let the children come to me" is lived out in the way each is valued. Children make progress in many aspects of their religious life but this is not monitored with any degree of rigour or system. The self-evaluation of all aspects of the Catholic life of the school needs further support from the diocese so that it can become a valuable tool for development.

The Prayer Life of the School

Grade 2

The prayer life of the school is good. Prayer is an integral part of the daily life of the community. There is a wide variety of liturgy ranging from quiet prayer through whole school assembly to exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Evidence of well-planned liturgies is to be found. Children are able to talk freely and with confidence and about the importance of prayer to them. They are also able to describe the roles they take in worship and how they contribute to the prayer life of the school. Local clergy are very supportive and visit the school regularly, reflecting the good links that exist with local parishes. Links with other Catholic schools are growing, providing further opportunities for prayerful activities. Neat prayer tables are to be found in all classrooms. The wide variety of collective worship makes a good contribution to the moral and spiritual development of the pupils and offers support to the staff.

Chaplaincy

Grade 1

The chaplaincy provision makes an outstanding contribution to the life of the school. Staff and pupils speak highly of **the chaplain's work** and children are able to explain how to access support. Support is given flexibly according to perceived need but within a defined structure. Year 5 children go annually to Walsingham on a residential retreat organised by the lay chaplain, a former and much respected member of staff. The chaplain organises a variety of activities ranging from formal liturgies to competitions that readily engage pupil interest and enthusiasm, adding greatly to the life of the school. Chaplaincy is highly valued by the entire school community and the chaplain's work permeates the whole school.

Community Cohesion

Grade 2

Community cohesion is promoted at St Mary's. Diversity is celebrated and valued by the school leadership and real efforts are made to welcome new members into the family of the school. Children are able to talk knowledgeably about the work of the school in supporting others in the local area and internationally and appreciate taking part in such activities. Evidence of appreciation by the local community is to be found. Parents of children from ethnic minorities expressed their great satisfaction with the school. Examples of prayers having been translated into mother tongues are to be found. Children of other faiths feel happy to take part in a range of prayerful activities and forms of worship.

Achievements and Standards in Religious Education

Grade 3

Children make progress though standards of written work are below average and there is some evidence of underperformance, but there is also good work to be found in some pupils' books. However, the children were able to share their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum orally with confidence and clarity and examples of real learning were observed in lessons. Standards of behaviour are good and children were attentive and willing to learn. They display good standards of social, cultural and spiritual development and add to the life of the school.

Teaching and Learning in Religious Education

Grade 3

The majority of lessons are of a satisfactory standard but examples of good and outstanding practice were found. Lessons are planned in detail with clear learning objectives, which are shared with the children. On occasion, too much material is planned so that lessons are rushed and learning opportunities missed. Varied learning activities are presented to the children. Support for the less able pupils is given through intervention and teaching assistants are consistently well deployed in class. However there is no regular and agreed pattern of assessment of children's work so the monitoring of pupil progress is not standardised. Pupils' work is marked but little evidence of comments to aid learning and progress is to be found.

The Quality of the Religious Education Curriculum

Grade 3

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory and meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. 10% of timetable time is devoted to following the "Here I Am" programme and children express their enjoyment of RE lessons. Most children make progress in their knowledge and skills, though for some progress could be greater. RE lessons offer opportunities to develop literacy skills along with art and drama and good use is made of ICT by staff to access visual material upon which the children can reflect. Children are taught to respect other faiths and beliefs and the curriculum in RE makes a contribution to the spiritual and moral growth of the pupils.

Leadership and Management of Religious Education

Grade 3

The current RE co-ordinator has a clear but informal view of the standard of pupils' work and of the quality of teaching – views supported by the inspection finding. At present there are no formal systems of assessment and monitoring in place. However there are clear plans to change this and a new co-ordinator has been identified for September 2008 and strategies are in place to support and develop the role. The issue of assessment is part of the School Plan for next year. The chaplain is able to offer support with resources and ideas for teaching. Staff attend diocesan arranged INSET and adequate resources are devoted to RE with an allocated budget allowance. Governors are aware of the issues in relation to the teaching of RE.