



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST BERNARD'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL BIRMINGHAM

Inspection dates 3rd - 4th July 2012
Reporting Inspector Mr Dominic Collins

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4-11 years
Number on roll	391
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mrs Marie Felli
School address	Wake Green Road Birmingham B13 9QE
Telephone number	0121 4643795
E-mail address	enquiry@st-bernards.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	February 2009
DFE School number	330/3375
Unique Reference Number	103462

Headteacher Mr Patrick O'Leary

DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Evidence

The inspection was carried out by 1 Diocesan Inspector. The focus of the inspection was on the effectiveness and use of the school's self evaluation of religious education (RE) and Catholic life. To validate the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation of teaching and learning, the inspector observed 3 full RE lessons and 2 part RE lessons, 1 with the headteacher and 1 with the deputy headteacher. In addition the inspector completed a work scrutiny and held a discussion with pupils to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time. He held meetings with the chair of governors, parish priest, pupils, staff and parents. He observed a school Mass and undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of learning and teaching in RE, the presentation of the Catholic life of the school, and pupils' behaviour. He looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self evaluation such as RAISEonline, the development plan, teachers' planning, and learning journals. Alongside the validation of school self evaluation, the inspector gathered evidence about assessment, evidence which will be shared with other diocesan schools.

Information about the school

St Bernard's is a larger than average sized Catholic primary school serving the parish of English Martyrs. The school is situated in the district of Moseley, a mixed socio-economic area of council and private housing. There are currently 391 pupils on roll of whom 51% are baptised Catholics. The proportion of pupils deriving from ethnic minority groups is above the national average. The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Ten per cent of pupils are currently identified as having special educational needs. Attainment of pupils on entry is broadly average taking into account varied pre-school provision.

Main Finding

In its self evaluation, St Bernard's judges itself to be a good Catholic school. This view is brought about through the application of a range of effective monitoring processes to evaluate the impact of its Catholic life and RE provision over time. There is clear evidence from the inspection how this ongoing cycle of review has been successfully communicated and the outcomes embraced and effectively actioned by dedicated staff and excellent support from the parish priest and governors. The good and many outstanding features of teaching, pupils' work and progress, RE provision and Catholic life seen during the inspection indicate that the school's judgement is wholly reliable and, perhaps, a little modest.

School self evaluation

The school has established a range of comprehensive and extremely effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of its Catholic life and religious education. These processes, that include RE lesson observations, monitoring the quality of provision, pupil tracking, learning walks, questionnaires and audits; form a continuous cycle throughout the year. This practice ensures that areas in need of refreshment and development are addressed and pupils are appropriately supported and challenged in their learning. The RE subject leader has developed clearly defined systems for gathering evidence that enables the school leadership to gain informed knowledge of the quality of RE provision, the Catholic life of the school and the impact of its mission. Crucially, the outcomes and analysis of school self evaluation which are shared and implemented at all levels, are central to the school improvement plan.

The evaluation of teaching and learning in RE is very well planned and executed. The school leadership and the RE subject leader conduct a monitoring cycle that includes the scrutiny of lesson planning, RE lesson observations and the quality and content of pupils' work. Governors are also involved in the monitoring process in liaison with the headteacher. Detailed records are

kept and written feedback is shared with staff in a professional and constructive manner. Outcomes are carefully analysed by the subject leader and areas of strength and those for review and development are highlighted, good practice is always shared with all staff. For example, the spring RE monitoring summary confirmed evidence of consistent marking and feedback to pupils in accordance with the school policy, good modelling and questioning during lessons, high quality support for extended writing opportunities for pupils. Areas for further development centred around the consistency of ensuring pupils respond to marking feedback and to continue development of the 'pupil voice' initiative.

The accuracy of lesson judgements made by the school is fully supported by the quality of lessons observed during the inspection, which were solidly good and included many outstanding features. Each lesson characterised by succinct, developmental planning, clear learning objectives and interesting, well matched activities to engage all learners. Teachers have high expectations of the children and are confident in their own subject knowledge. An effective and extensive range of assessment systems, closely monitored by the RE subject leader, are firmly established and consistently applied, because they are understood and shared by all staff, following clear guidelines. End of unit assessments are used to track individual progress and analysis of results includes a focus on particular groupings such as gender, cultural background and those with special needs. The excellent practice of regular pupil interviews and progress review, is an extremely effective facet of school self evaluation. The RE subject leader meets each class teacher on a termly basis in order to discuss pupil progress and level pupils work. A portfolio of levelled RE work is shared by the school leadership and all staff.

School self evaluation of the quality and outcomes of the RE curriculum is well addressed. Evidence of pupil interview responses indicate that pupils enjoy their learning in RE and this is confirmed in the lessons observed. Staff communicate their faith through their enthusiasm and sound subject knowledge and are successful in making RE lessons interesting and enjoyable through the innovative and stimulating range of activities used to engage the children in their learning. Informal formative questioning at the beginning of RE lessons gives teachers an indication of pupils' current level of understanding and ways pupils can relate to the gospel values within their daily lives is further explored when opportunities arise during lessons.

Self evaluation of the Catholic life of the school is also very well structured, seeking the views of all members of the school community, including parents and external sources. A comprehensive annual audit is conducted, the outcomes of which are analysed, shared and actioned by governors and the school leadership.

In view of this high quality of the school self evaluation and the areas identified for review and development that feature in future planning, the capacity for sustained improvement in both Catholic life and religious education is outstanding.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

Outcomes for pupils in RE are excellent and there is evidence to support a consistent level of development in their work and faith journey across each key stage. Relationships throughout the school are outstanding; staff know the children well and are very aware of their individual needs. Consequently, pupil tracking and end of RE curriculum module assessments show that all groups of learners achieve well and make rapid progress relative to their starting point, because of the good teaching support and encouragement they receive in their religious education. Attainment at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 is good overall. The RE school development plan is a very useful document of work in progress. This practice of regular review, coupled with the effective

¹ As the quality of the school self evaluation has been affirmed, the judgements in this section of the report conform to those of the school.

assessment and tracking of pupil progress, results in accurate planning and high quality outcomes for pupils.

Pupils' learning extends beyond the classroom and RE permeates the excellent Catholic ethos of the school, providing pupils with many opportunities to develop a deeper insight into their Catholic faith. The children are fine ambassadors for the school. They are cheerful, courteous and smart in appearance, reflecting their pride in the school and the work they do. Behaviour is excellent, even in the more unstructured situations on the playground and during meal times. They conduct themselves around the school showing genuine care and respect for one another. Relationships at all levels are a strength of the school and the excellent example and commitment to their faith shown by the staff has a very positive influence on the pupils who demonstrate a mutual respect. The impact of St. Bernard's as a Catholic school is very powerful. Catholic signs and symbols around the school grounds are a constant reminder of the school commitment to the spiritual growth of the pupils. Vibrant and informative religious displays, including pupils' art work and prayers, adorn many areas around the school. Bright, attractive classrooms, each with a prominent prayer focus create a purposeful atmosphere for the school community.

There are many opportunities for pupils to contribute to the Catholic life of the school. The pupils respond eagerly to these challenges and perform their duties with pride. For example, the school pupil council is a very effective group who, apart from projecting the views of their peers within school, represent St Bernard's school when a group of Catholic school pupil councils meet. This gathering, entitled the 'Brotherhood of Holiness', provides an opportunity to discuss and compare 'Catholic life' in their schools and share good practice.

Prayer and worship underpin the Catholic life of the school and are an integral part of each day. Pupils are attentive and reverent in prayer and are able to express their feelings thoughtfully and confidently when sharing their prayer intentions publicly. The weekly lunchtime prayer club is well attended and the school Oratory is regularly used by pupils and staff for prayer and reflection. Mass celebrated during the inspection inspired heartfelt response and engaged all who were present. A well organised pupil choir led lively, joyous and original songs of praise that the children sang with actions and a fervent passion. Everyone enjoyed a moving, spiritual experience, summed up by a comment 'Mass has set me up for the day, put me in another place.'

Provision overall is excellent and there are effective well established systems in place for monitoring and evaluating the impact it has on the pupils. The high quality teaching of a rich, well matched curriculum ensures consistently positive outcomes. Catholic life has a powerful impact on the school community and parents speak highly about the education their children receive. The school has a comprehensive and attractive website through which prospective and existing parents can access information about every aspect of school life. Sacramental preparation and provision for RE feature as the main priority.

Recommendations

- Establish greater links with the community parish of English Martyrs
- In partnership with the pupil school council, aim to establish a prayer garden within the school grounds
- Develop further partnership and multi-cultural links with Catholic primary schools across the world.



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July 2012

Dear Parents and Carers

Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St. Bernard's Catholic Primary School, July 2012

I am writing this letter to share with you the findings of the diocesan inspection of your children's school. Diocesan inspection now explores in detail the school's own view of itself as expressed in its self-evaluation. For this reason, much of the report is more technical than used to be the case. You are still entitled to have a copy of the full report should you want one and it will be available on the school website or by request from the school office.

St Bernard's School has an outstanding Catholic ethos where children of all abilities achieve well and make excellent progress because of the quality of teaching, support and encouragement they receive from all staff. It reviews its work very well and this leads to effective improvement planning.

I was very impressed with the mature way pupils behave in lessons and around the school and the way they show care and respect for one another. The children are proud of their school and of its Catholic identity. They enjoy learning about the way Jesus lived and try very hard to relate His teachings to their daily lives.

The children realise how important it is to say their prayers, which they are able to do in a variety of ways. Their reverence and joyful singing at Mass was inspirational, which I enjoyed very much.

In order to broaden learning in RE, the school has devised a very clear plan to build upon this firm foundation and in conjunction with this I have recommended that the school should:-

- establish greater links with the parish community of English Martyrs
- in partnership with the pupil school council, establish a prayer garden within the school grounds
- develop further partnership and multi-cultural links with Catholic primary schools across the world

It was a pleasure to inspect St Bernard's School. I enjoyed my visit very much and was made most welcome by all. Your children are a credit to the school, their families and all who care for them.

Yours sincerely,

Dominic Collins
Diocesan Inspector