



# Archdiocese of Birmingham

## INSPECTION REPORT

### ST ALBAN'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL BIRMINGHAM

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Inspection dates 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> October 2011  
Reporting Inspector Dominic Collins

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Type of School	Primary
Age range of pupils	4-11years
Number on roll	208
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Miss Judith Allan
School address	Broad Lane Kings Heath Birmingham B14 5AL
Telephone number	0121 444 6530
E-mail address	enquiry@stalbanrc.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	November 2006
DCSF School Number	330/3381
Unique Reference Number	103466

**Headteacher** Mrs Maureen O'Leary

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DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by 2 Diocesan Inspectors. The inspectors visited 3 full religious education (RE) lessons to observe teaching and learning, pupils' behaviour, and held meetings with governors, staff, and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, including Mass, assembly, classroom collective worship, and looked at a range of evidence, including key documentation such as the school's development plan, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in RE, and pupils' work.

## Information about the school

St Alban's is a smaller than average-sized Catholic primary school and, together with its sister primary school St Dunstan's, serves the parishes of St Dunstan and St Jude. There are 208 children on roll of whom 89% are baptised Catholic's. Foundation baseline RE assessments indicate attainment on entry is low. The proportion of pupils identified with special educational needs and/or learning difficulties is below the national average, as are those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals. Areas of the school building have recently been refurbished to enhance teaching and learning for all pupils.

## Overall effectiveness of the school as a Catholic school

St Alban's is a very good Catholic School with many outstanding features. Pupils understand the mission of the school and are guided by a caring and committed staff who are dedicated to providing a high quality Catholic education. Pupils enjoy coming to school and they are happy, enthusiastic and confident learners. They make good progress in their religious education because the good teaching they receive encourages purposeful learning. By the end of Key Stage 2 many pupils achieve above average levels in RE. There is a very strong Catholic ethos permeating all aspects of school life. The behaviour of pupils in and around school is exemplary. Parents speak well of the school and warmly acknowledge the care and encouragement their children receive.

School self assessment is accurate and demonstrates that the school leadership has a clear understanding of areas in need of review and development. Work on areas identified for improvement during the last inspection has been completed. The RE subject leader, now the newly appointed headteacher, has established effective systems to refine and improve the overall provision for RE and a comprehensive action plan is currently being addressed. The governing body give generously of their time and are committed to supporting and encouraging the work of the school. At St Alban's there exists a powerful combination of dedicated staff and governors with a shared vision to build upon these secure foundations in order to take the school forward. The capacity for sustained improvement in Religious Education is, therefore, very good.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Develop children's ability to learn from religion and engage with the questions of meaning and purpose.
- Increase the opportunities for pupils to prepare and lead worship independently and with confidence.

## How good outcomes are for individuals and groups of pupils

Overall pupils make excellent progress in their religious education. Foundation baseline assessments indicate pupils have limited religious experience and low attainment in RE on entry into school. However, their faith journey is nourished through a growing knowledge of the life of Jesus and a developing understanding of the importance of prayer in our daily lives. Work recorded in RE books shows a momentum of consistent improvement throughout the school and there is clear evidence that the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary for the pupils to further their spiritual growth, are being delivered. The good standard of teaching and the positive attitude of the

children to their learning ensure that very good progress in RE is made across the key stages. Analysis of unit assessments from the diocesan strategy programme indicate that at the end of the Key Stage 1 a large number of pupils achieve or exceed the expected standards. By the end of Key Stage 2 most children are achieving standards significantly above diocesan expectations. Attainment in RE compares well with the school's performance in English. Pupils enjoy their RE lessons and have developed good habits of work, responding enthusiastically to the effective range of teaching strategies used. They are eager to learn and well matched tasks successfully extend their subject knowledge and elicit thoughtful responses from them. The progress of pupils is further enhanced due to the excellent focused support and interventions made by teaching assistants, who make a significant contribution to their learning in the classroom.

The extent to which pupils contribute and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is excellent and pupils take full advantage of the many opportunities the school provides for their personal support and spiritual development as maturing Christians. A very positive ethos permeates the school community. There is a real sense of 'family' where the children are proud to express their Catholic identity by the way they live and understand the values of the school mission 'following in the footsteps of Jesus'. Pupils are happy learners and feel safe, loved and valued. Relationships throughout the school are outstanding and all staff are excellent role models for the children. Behaviour is exemplary in lessons and around the school generally. The children recognise the responsibility they have towards themselves and others; they readily celebrate and praise success of their peers and realise how their actions can influence and affect those around them. Older pupils can confidently discuss the meaning of true friendship and how it is built upon trust, honesty, forgiveness and love.

Pupils are keen to take on roles of responsibility and do so with ease. For example, Year 5 and 6 pupils volunteer to be play leaders for Key Stage 1 and Foundation children and do so with pride and genuine care. Children needing first aid are always supported by their peers. Older children are monitors in different ways, as house captains, to greet parents and visitors to assemblies and Masses and as prayer leaders for the many pupils who attend the Rosary during their lunchtime in May and October. Pupils serve at school and parish Masses and organise appropriate rotas independently. All classes are represented on the school pupil council and through their role have successfully effected improvements to lunchtimes, the purchase of a climbing wall, girls wearing trousers to school and the renovation of the school prayer garden. All these activities impact on the pupils' sense of responsibility and broadens their strength of relationships. As part of their preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation, Year 6 children experience a retreat to Alton Castle and visit St Chad's Cathedral. The children are sensitive to the needs of others who are less fortunate and understand that through prayer and alms giving they can make a difference.

Pupils respond extremely well to collective worship. They understand the importance of prayer in the daily life of the school and respond with enthusiasm and reverence to the variety of good opportunities they are offered. Pupils demonstrate a sound knowledge of traditional prayers and are equally confident in preparing and sharing their own prayer intentions, thoughtfully and reverently in public. During an assembly that focused on the October devotions to the Rosary, pupils listened attentively and made thoughtful contributions to the discussion that evolved. They were very enthusiastic when invited to make their own Rosary at home, a number of children eagerly responded with their efforts the following day. Prayer and worship is central to the life of the school and is fostered by the example and commitment of all members of staff. The celebration of Mass in school during the inspection was joyful and inspirational. The children were fully involved, taking responsibility with confidence and ease. Readings were delivered with clarity, bidding prayers composed by the children were thoughtful and reflective and the singing, supported by a talented group of musicians and led by the children evoked a vibrant, enthusiastic response from all the pupils, parents, parishioners and governors who were present. Collective worship has a very positive impact on the spiritual and moral development of pupils and reflects the strong Catholic character of the school.

## How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the school

The newly appointed headteacher, who is also the current RE subject leader, is passionate about maintaining and developing the Catholic life of the school. She is supported by a dedicated and caring staff, who are excellent role models in their knowledge and practise of the faith, and all are committed to the Church's mission in education. The spiritual and moral development of all pupils is placed as the highest priority and the school's leadership successfully communicates a clear vision to promote and enrich it. The school RE action plan embraces a systematic audit and evaluation of provision and outcomes for pupils and how all personnel can contribute to developing the Catholic life of the school. In her role as the former deputy headteacher, the RE subject leader established excellent procedures for monitoring the teaching and learning of RE through out the school and continues to provide support for all members of staff. A comprehensive RE co-ordinator file is testimony to the clear organisation and systems for the analysis of assessment data, scrutiny of children's work and lesson observations to monitor learning and pupil progress within classes, phases and groups.

Through pupil questionnaires, school council termly meetings and pupil interviews, the views of learners, the Catholic life of the school is monitored, evaluated and actioned. Staff and parents are also consulted, towards a constant drive to improve and extend learning opportunities for the children. This has a positive impact on the quality of RE provision and enhances learning outcomes for the pupils. School self evaluation is thorough, accurate and informs priorities for future planning. Priority is given to the spiritual development of all staff and in addition to that provided through the support of the parish priest, an annual staff retreat is organised to St Paul's convent. Ongoing staff professional development in RE is also evidenced by a record of attendance at a variety of courses and meetings.

The school governing body has a full complement of Catholic membership. They are fully involved in the Catholic life of the school and discharge their statutory and canonical responsibilities effectively. The parish priest and governors are very supportive of the headteacher and her staff and they are dedicated to providing the best Catholic education for all the pupils. Staff and governors work effectively together with a shared mission to take the school forward. The chair of governors is experienced and knowledgeable in school matters and is kept well informed through regular meetings with the headteacher and frequent visits to school. Collectively governors have a broad base of expertise and are able to offer a significant level of challenge to the school for improving the Catholic life and RE. Governors are kept fully aware of the school's strengths and areas for development in RE through detailed reports presented by the RE subject leader. However, governors' increased input into RE monitoring, evaluation and development planning would help to broaden the ways in which they are able to offer support and challenge. Governors take every opportunity to engage with staff, pupils and parents. They share celebrations and collective worship with the children and staff and are an integral part of the parish and school community.

St Albans is a welcoming and inclusive Catholic school. There is a common sense of belonging and the strong Catholic ethos permeates all aspects of school life. Gospel values are reflected in the school's happy, caring environment with the aim to help all children to enjoy their learning and achieve their full potential. The RE curriculum enriches children's knowledge of community, equality and diversity. For example, celebrations of world religions are explored throughout the school and each year the children enjoy celebrating a dedicated multicultural week. Visits to a local mosque, synagogue and temple are arranged and the events of 'Black History' week' helps the children to recognise individual influences throughout the world. The SEAL programme is an ongoing feature for promoting children's self-awareness and sensitivity to others. One theme is followed by the school each term. Relationships within the school are excellent. Pupils and their families respond enthusiastically and generously to support for charitable appeals and understand that their efforts through prayer and fund raising initiatives really do make a difference to those in need. Good links are established with other Catholic schools locally and through the service level

agreement with the diocese, the school benefits from cluster meetings and ongoing support and guidance to maintain and develop the Catholic life of the school.

## The quality of the school's work in providing Catholic education

The quality of teaching in RE is good with some that is outstanding. The excellent relationships that exist between staff and pupils, together with the positive work ethic of the children and their desire to achieve, creates a purposeful setting for effective teaching and learning to take place. It is evident that staff know their children very well and have high expectations of their capabilities. In the lessons observed planning was clearly linked to the assessment of pupils' prior learning and suitably matched to engage all ability groups in order to consolidate and extend their learning. Clear learning objectives shared with the children at the beginning, are referred to intermittently throughout a lesson and developed in the lesson plenary, when children are also invited to self assess their own progress towards achieving them. Pupils are happy, confident learners and clearly enjoy their RE lessons. Teachers employ an effective range of teaching styles that fully engage the children making their lessons interesting and exciting. Excellent examples of these were observed in a lesson about the story of Joseph and his brothers, where drama, ICT and composing a diary extract, prompted mature responses relating to feelings of jealousy and making choices. In another, music was used effectively to reflect upon and compose a class psalm. Evidence of the positive effect of good teaching and learning in RE throughout the school, was emphatically demonstrated in a vibrant lesson that focused on discipleship. Pupils were eager to use their spiritual knowledge, understanding and skills in order to explore why we follow Jesus and the courage, sacrifices and choices we are asked to make. The children were able to use bible references accurately, make informal, thoughtful contribution to discussions that showed their spiritual maturity and confidently shared their prayers and petitions publicly in a prayerful reflective plenary. Each RE lesson observed was characterised by the good subject knowledge and enthusiasm of the teachers, the eager response from the children and the effective additional guidance given to them by the excellent support staff. The lesson learning objective was always linked to our daily lives by frequent references being made to the school mission statement "Following in the footsteps of Jesus"

Effective assessment systems are in place that allow staff to evaluate pupil progress and inform future planning. A comprehensive RE assessment file is kept and this, combined with the moderation and levelling of pupils' work, provides an accurate picture of achievement for all pupils. Marking is used consistently to give pupils good quality feedback and guidance of how to improve further. Planning activities also assist pupil self assessment and assessment for learning. A detailed assessment and monitoring programme to focus on the liturgical year features as a priority in the current RE action plan.

The RE curriculum complies with the requirement laid down in the *Curriculum Directory for Religious Education* and has been successfully adapted to meet the needs of all learners. Sex and relationship education is taught through the *All that I Am* programme in accordance with the governors' policy and diocesan guidelines. A varied programme of enrichment activities include: Year 6 retreat to Alton Castle, support for the work of CAFOD, Samaritans purse collections and pupil led Lenten charity fund raising. These initiatives extend pupils' learning and enable them to become active and engaged in their faith, by having a relevance and understanding within their daily lives. The school is an active and integral part of the vibrant parish community of St Dunstan's and works closely with the parish priest who makes regular visits to support the sacramental programme. A number of children serve at parish Masses and sacramental meetings. Workshops and prayer sessions are organised to ensure that parents and carers are fully involved in the children's preparations. The introduction of prayer bags and the invitation extended to parents to attend assemblies and Mass celebrated each week in school, also helps to develop and foster an effective partnership with parents and carers.

Provision for collective worship is excellent and is central to the daily life of the school. There are many opportunities for staff and pupils to experience spiritual nourishment together through prayer and reflection. The children respond with enthusiasm and reverence and are confident to share

their own prayers and intercessions with others. Pupils have a good understanding of a variety of prayer styles in addition to traditional prayers and they are confident and equipped in skills to lead prayer. Each classroom has a prominent, high quality prayer focus to highlight the liturgical seasons and stimulate thoughtful reflection. An attractive prayer garden, dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes, is a central school focus used by pupils for, reflective personal prayer. Staff regularly review and plan improvements to the prayer life of the school and the most recent audit resulted in the compilation of a new school prayer book.