



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MARTIN'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL CAVERSHAM

Inspection dates 24th – 25th May 2012
Reporting Inspector Terry Dillon

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	145
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mrs Yvonne Mubanga
School address	Pendennis Avenue Caversham Park Village Reading Berkshire RG4 6SS
Telephone number	0118 937 5544
E-mail address	head@stmartins.reading.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	January 2007
DFE School number	870/3360
Unique Reference Number	110038

Headteacher Mrs Madeleine Cosgrove

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 seven RE lessons (two of which were with the 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, staff, and parish priest. He observed a prayer service 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 the school's collective prayer life, evidence which will be shared with other Diocesan schools.

Information about the school

St Martin's is a smaller than average size Catholic primary school serving the parish of St Michael's in Sonning Common, to the north of Reading. Pupils are drawn from a mixed area of council and private housing. The number of Catholic pupils is currently 84%. The proportion of ethnic minority pupils is 29%. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average whilst the numbers with special needs and/or disabilities is about average. Overall attainment on entry is broadly in line with the national average.

Main Finding

In its self evaluation St Martin's judges itself to be a good Catholic school which strives to ensure that what it teaches its pupils goes beyond simply learning to an acceptance in their daily lives of the school's mission to 'lead, through love and service, the life of purpose and excellence that God wants for us'. The inspection revealed that the school is having success in meeting that goal and has made significant improvements in several areas since the previous inspection. The values espoused by the staff, the parish priest and the governors and their commitment to achieving them are ensuring that the school is living out its mission as a Catholic school outstandingly well. The school works hard in its efforts to be an integral part of its Catholic and its wider community and is doing exceptionally well in the contribution it makes to both.

School self evaluation

The school's evaluation of its Catholic life is done on several fronts. The staff, parish priest and governors are aware of the school's strengths and the areas which require further development. This is based on the close attention they give to monitoring what happens in the various facets of school life and then in the way the findings are articulated and discussed. Regular visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' written work and teachers' planning provide the staff with a good base for their discussions on where improvements are required and help to explain the school's marked progress since the previous inspection. The parish priest observes and guides and has made a significant impact on the way pupils participate in school Masses. He is aware that such activity is both well supported by, and supports, his Sunday Children's Liturgies. The governors also learn of the school's work through regular

visits, the link governors and their involvement in governors' meetings. As a result of this broad span of evaluations, the school has been able to devise a mission plan that is understood by pupils, is meaningful in terms of the demands it makes on the attitudes and behaviour of all those involved and leads to a community of faith.

The school's self-evaluation of its Catholic life is set out very honestly. It recognises the importance of monitoring and evaluation and is continually seeking to improve as a result of what it learns from them. The outcomes are carefully recorded and discussed by the staff. The headteacher, who is also the religious education (RE) co-ordinator follows an effective programme of gathering information about planning, about the quality of teaching and learning, and about pupils' progress. As a result, she is fully aware of the progress being made by the children and the quality of educational provision they are enjoying. Consequently, she is able, through her use of that evidence, to identify and share with staff and governors the steps that need to be taken to continue the school's development. The RE development plan is well constructed and clear and, although the whole-school development plan has a different structure, it is well understood by the governing body.

The headteacher monitors and evaluates lessons and those she observed with the inspector indicate that she does this with objectivity and accuracy. She also scrutinises pupils' written work at regular intervals and oversees teachers' planning. The headteacher is fully aware of what she is looking for in her staff and pupils and her positive Catholic vision for the school rightly influences her approach. As a result, the school's effectiveness in providing for the Catholic life of its stakeholders has moved from the judgement of good at the time of the previous inspection to outstanding, as it has the capacity to make any further necessary improvements. This is a more positive judgement than that of the school in its self-evaluation document. The school was right to judge that teaching and learning are good and stronger than at the time of the previous inspection, an outcome of the monitoring and evaluation system that has led to the sharing of good practice. The school has correctly identified the need for teachers to think more carefully about lesson objectives, to develop more skilful questioning techniques and to recognise that there are various ways of helping those who have limited literacy skills to demonstrate their understanding of some of the key learning in RE. Evidence of this last shortcoming was revealed in the book scrutiny, where some pupils struggled to express what they knew and yet orally were able to show good understanding. The school's evaluation has also revealed some inconsistencies in teachers' marking and assessment and as a result correctly judges improvement in these areas as factors in improving the overall quality of teaching and learning.

The evaluation of the RE curriculum has led to a careful appraisal of the whole-school curriculum, as the school seeks to fulfil its mission to make learning meaningful to its pupils. In the previous report the school was recommended to help staff develop the diocesan curriculum strategy. This has been achieved but has gone a stage further in influencing what is taught across the curriculum. The school is able to recognise how the positive attitudes of the pupils to their faith have been influenced by its cross-curricular approach. Pupils' written work, responses to teachers' questions and their obvious commitment to the school's Catholic ethos reflect the school's positive evaluation of its curricular improvements. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those with English as an additional language (EAL) also benefit from these developments.

Governors play an important part in the monitoring and evaluation of the school's work. Careful appraisal of the school development plan and regular visits by the

outstandingly lucid chair of governors ensure that the governing body is closely in touch with the school's work and in a position to effectively act as the 'critical friend'. Their awareness of the school's vocational and community activity is also a positive feature of their evaluation of the school's development since the previous inspection. The parish priest is also a regular visitor to the school and rightly judges that religious practice in school and that the links between the school and the parish have improved considerably. The school's self-evaluation rightly values his contribution to pupils' understanding of Sacramental life.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

Overall, pupils achieve high and on occasions very high standards in RE, which is better than at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils can recite a good range of prayers, some traditional and some of their own; they have a good awareness of the multi-cultural nature of the world; and above all grow to recognise how Christ's teaching demands a response in the way they conduct their own lives. The last is evident in their regard for one another and their teachers and their response to the opportunities for prayer. Even younger pupils have the confidence to explore their thinking in extended writing and this is certainly a strength by the time pupils reach Year 6. As a result, pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress from Reception to the end of Key Stage 2. Pupils with SEND and EAL share in this progress, generally a result of the good support they receive from classroom assistants and their willingness to learn, though there are too few examples of their being given types of work more matched to their limited ability in literacy. The response of pupils in lessons is positive and they talk enthusiastically about RE because of the range of activities they experience and the significance that the subject has for their lives.

In the lessons, various approaches are used to help pupils understand the significance of Pentecost. In one lesson, the introduction of 'secret envelopes' captivated the pupils and led to their considering purposefully the importance of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles as well as their own lives. The writing of one Year 6 child on the Holy Spirit was of outstanding quality. Occasionally, the impact of a lesson is diminished by attempts by the teacher to cover too much, by the slow pace or by a lack of specificity in the lesson objectives.

Relationships throughout the school between teachers and pupils and amongst the pupils themselves are excellent. There are clear indications that the school's intention to help pupils understand the essential messages of Christ is working. The approach of pupils to prayer life within the school is outstanding. A regular feature during May has been lunchtime Rosary, which has attracted 20 to 30 pupils. At the Year 2 Mass observed pupils were closely involved in the liturgy and along with their teacher influenced the way the readings were transmitted to help other pupils and those adults present to understand their message. Pupils' response in the presentation assembly was, at appropriate times, prayerful, enthusiastic and supportive. The positive emphasis on the contribution that different pupils had made to the lives of other pupils was reinforced by the element of peer judgements in the awards. Pupils pray devoutly at appropriate times and are clearly influenced by the very good example set by their teachers. Their willing participation in the school's involvement with neighbouring schools, the parish, a wide range of charities and other vocational activities, locally and overseas, supports their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively.

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.

Provision overall is at least good and has some outstanding features. The overall quality of teaching is good and pupils' achievement and progress are good and sometimes outstanding. The regular use of 'partner talk' ensures that pupils have opportunities to deepen their understanding of issues whilst the opportunities provided for reflection also work well, though the outcomes are not always guided by properly articulated lesson objectives. The excellent leadership of the headteacher has encouraged in staff and pupils the belief that the school's mission and Christ's teaching are to be lived out rather than simply taught or learned. In this she has the full backing of the governors. The well-planned RE course, therefore, influences planning across the school curriculum. The use of assessment to evaluate the pupils' progress is a good feature of RE, but marking, though regular and often containing useful comment, is not always followed up to ensure that a pupil has taken it into consideration in future work.

Recommendations

The school will continue to improve if it:

- ensures that the intended outcomes of lessons are more to do with outcome than process, are shared with the pupils and guide the focus of lessons in line with the school's stated aims;
- ensures that different types of work are set to enable pupils of different abilities to clearly show what they know, understand and can do;
- ensures that comments made when teachers mark pupils' books are followed up so that they result in progress in learning and achievement.



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Dear Parents and Carers

Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St Martin's Catholic Primary School, 24th and 25th of May 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.

The school has made good progress since the time of the previous inspection in 2007 and is now a good Catholic school with several excellent features. The vision and values espoused by the headmistress, the staff, the governors and your parish priest reflect not only the desire but the determination to ensure that the school lives out its Catholic mission. The school works effectively with the parish, with several other nearby schools and with the community locally and further afield. The pupils, most of whom are baptised Catholics, enjoy being at the school and their religious education lessons. They contribute well to the liturgical life of the school, contributing to the various Masses and assemblies. The number of pupils who attended the praying of the Rosary at lunchtime was impressive. The pupils of other faiths who attend the school have no problem in participating fully in the school's Catholic life. Overall pupils achieve good and sometimes excellent standards by the time they leave the school. They know a range of prayers, the basic tenets of other Faiths and have a good knowledge of Christ's teaching.

In order for the school to continue its good progress we have recommended that the school ensures that the purposes of lessons are more to do with outcome than process, that they are shared with the pupils and guide the focus of lessons in line with the school's aims; it also ensures that different types of work are set to enable pupils of different abilities to clearly show what they know, understand and can do; and it ensures that comments made when teachers mark pupils' books are followed up so that they result in progress in learning and achievement.

It was a pleasure and privilege to inspect the school and to see how well it is doing. I was welcomed by the staff and the pupils, and found everyone committed and keen to do their best.

Yours sincerely

Terence Dillon
Diocesan Inspector