



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL LEEK

Inspection dates 23rd-24th November 2011
Reporting Inspector Terence Dillon

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Primary
Age range of pupils	4-11 years
Number on roll	155
Appropriate authority	The federation governing body
Chair of governors	John Pennington
School address	Cruso Street Leek Staffordshire ST13 8BW
Telephone number	01538 483190
E-mail address	office@st-marys-leekstaffs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	January 2009
DCSF School Number	860 3463
Unique Reference Number	124356

Headteacher Anne-Marie Cheadle

DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Introduction

This inspection was carried out by 2 Diocesan Inspectors. The inspectors visited 7 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 and class assembly 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 Mary's Catholic Primary School is a smaller than average primary school, situated in Leek, Staffordshire. It has 155 pupils on roll with a slightly higher number of girls than boys. Most pupils live in the immediate vicinity of the school although a few live in the out-lying villages. The majority of pupils are from white ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of children eligible for free school meals is 22 per cent and 16 per cent come from families whose first language is not English. Forty-eight per cent of pupils are baptised Catholics. Attainment in RE on entry is lower than average. Between 2005 and 2009 the school had an acting head. A substantive head was appointed in 2009 but left on maternity leave after one year. The current head was acting head from 2010 for one year and was appointed to the substantive post from September 2011. Half the staff are Catholics and one, a newly qualified teacher, has the equivalent of the Catholic Teachers' Certificate.

In January 2011, the school became part of a formal federation of seven Catholic schools, six primary schools and one high school. A federated governing body of 28 governors, who include the seven headteachers of the federated schools, oversees the federation. A specific school committee of six members, drawn from the federated governing body, has responsibility for St Mary's.

Overall effectiveness of the school as a Catholic school

St Mary's is a very good Catholic school with an excellent Catholic life and leadership. This signifies a marked improvement since the previous inspection when it was judged satisfactory. Attainment and learning amongst pupils of all abilities is good, an outcome of the good and sometimes outstanding teaching. Learning is very good among the less able pupils as a result of the extra support they receive. Pupils respond outstandingly well to the teaching, although occasionally the work of the most able loses pace. Their behaviour and respect for their teachers and other adults is outstanding. Pupils willingly participate in, and contribute strongly to, the many opportunities for prayer that are provided, as for instance in the Mass and regular prayers observed. Their spiritual life benefits from the support they receive from the parish priest, parish deacon and parish catechists. Curriculum provision in RE is very good and benefits from the excellent planning and assessment procedures.

The school has the capacity for further improvement as a result of the recent appointment of a first rate head and the benefits it is gaining from its involvement in the federation of schools. The systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning as well as the overall Catholic provision of the school are excellent. The school's response to the previous inspection has been thorough, and promises well for the future. The issue of prayer has been resolved, as has the quality of planning. The school has also ensured that staff have benefited from professional development. As a result, they have successfully dealt with the issue of planning and now provide work to suit the different abilities of the pupils. The governors at school and federation level are providing outstanding support for the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the pace of lessons remains brisk throughout for all pupils.

- Seek to develop further multi-cultural displays around the school and wider territorial connections through overseas links so that pupils get a fuller understanding of different cultures and beliefs.
- Ensure that pupils reinforce their excellent spiritual and moral development with more secure knowledge of their faith, for example an understanding of the hierarchy of the Church.
- Ensure that the helpful comments made by teachers when marking pupils' books are fully understood by the pupil concerned.

How good outcomes are for individuals and groups of pupils

Pupils' attainment on entry is below average, but pupils across the ability range make good progress in RE year by year. By the end of Year 2 they have gained a good understanding of Jesus and His followers, recognising the disciples as His friends. They understand the essence of Advent and the importance of waiting for the coming of Christ. In Key Stage 2 their understanding of the Old and New Testaments is well developed and they can talk with some confidence about some of the key stories, for example the ancestry of Jesus and the importance of Abraham. They know a good range of prayers and willingly pray regularly before and after lessons, at the beginning of the school day and before lunch. They have yet to grasp important aspects of the Church, for example, they are unsure of the place of the diocese or the relationship of bishops and archbishops, though they recognise the importance of the parish and parish priest and deacon.

The quality of learning is good and pupils respond well to the wide range of opportunities provided by their teachers. They co-operate extremely well in groups and pairs, helping each other when necessary and sharing their ideas. They also work well individually, as indicated by the extended writing of the older pupils. The presence of teaching assistants has a positive impact on the excellent progress made by the less able pupils.

The Catholic life of the school is excellent and inclusive. Non-Catholic pupils speak of their experiences warmly and there are occasions when they express interest in becoming Catholics. Pupils are positively influenced by the willing commitment of their peers to what is provided and the conviction expressed by their teachers, Catholic and those of other beliefs. Arising from what is taught in lessons, class assemblies and through the liturgies, pupils are developing a good awareness of vocation and through their magnificent charity work how they are each called to contribute to the common good. They see they have a role to play in their communities, which is recognised in the congratulatory letters the school has received from the local parish and beyond.

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

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The head has a positive vision, which is shared by the rest of the staff. There is an overwhelming keenness to do well and to live out the school's Catholic mission. The quality of monitoring and evaluating the school's success is outstanding. Careful notes are recorded of lesson observations and of discussions of the school's overall effectiveness. Governors are equally committed to the school's Catholic ethos and take great pride in the progress the federation of schools is making. The governing body includes members who know the community well, have a wide range of expertise and who understand their role in promoting the Catholic identity of the school. The mission and strategy committee meets regularly and the spiritual life of the school is always a focus area. The school's development plan is carefully monitored, and governors are increasingly able to offer the appropriate support and challenge to move the school forward. Governors also work hard to ensure that RE is seen as a core subject, and this is reflected in the resource allocation it receives. The chair of the governors' of the specific school committee visits regularly. She discusses the school's work with staff and sits in on lessons. As a result, she has a very good knowledge of how well the school is doing and is able to share this with the rest of the governors. She is very well supported by the chair of the

federation and through the various link governors. A specific school committee of six members, (two of whom are drawn from the drawn from the federated governing body), has responsibility for St Mary's.

The school's continued improvement is carefully set out in the school and federation development plans. The school plan, in particular, pays significant attention to the development of RE and the Catholic life of the school. The priorities and they ways in which they will be achieved augur well for the school's future.

The head is currently also co-ordinator for RE. She carries the responsibilities outstandingly well, whilst having to cope with a good deal of pressure. She recognises, as do the governors, the importance of RE in the curriculum and ensures that it is given sufficient teaching time, matching the recommendations of the Bishops' Conference. She has overseen the introduction of careful planning and the excellent system of tracking the progress of pupils. As a result, teachers organise their lessons effectively.

The school has a strong commitment to community cohesion. The RE curriculum covers other world faiths briefly but the display around the school does little to draw attention to faith differences. The links with the local parish are excellent and lead to joint ventures with the youth of the parish and with various functions such as the school and parish annual 'fayres'. The school also has links with other bodies in the locality, such as the police and fire brigade, but has yet to develop useful links beyond Britain. Even so, pupils give generously to a range of charities locally and beyond.

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

The overall quality of teaching in RE is good and on occasions outstanding. Teachers have a secure understanding of the work they provide. They have excellent relationships with the pupils, which contributes to the pupils' enthusiasm for the subject. They manage the pupils well and respectfully, with the result that the pupils display excellent behaviour and commitment. Teachers plan effectively and also provide for the needs of pupils across the ability range well, though do not always ensure that the brisk pace required to challenge the most able consistently is maintained. Their long-and short-term planning is excellent. Teachers employ a good range of teaching approaches, which include individual and group work, as well as presentations from the pupils. They demonstrate good questioning technique. Teachers use a good range of resources, which includes the interactive white boards that are in all the classrooms. Their tracking of pupils' progress is extremely thorough. They mark conscientiously and offer comments, though not always in a way that allows the less able pupils to read them. A very positive step is the way older pupils are encouraged to evaluate the work of their peers. Some of their comments are extremely knowledgeable. The teaching assistants and volunteers make an important contribution to pupils' learning. They are well organised, know what is expected of them and cooperate fully with the class teacher.

The staff benefit from links within the federation. They meet with other RE teachers and this is contributing effectively to their continuing personal development. They share ideas. Links with the diocesan cluster group also keep the RE department abreast of developments, as instanced by the effective assessment scheme.

The curriculum is based on the Diocesan scheme "Learning and growing as the people of God". Consequently it provides thorough provision for RE. Religious education is effectively linked to other curriculum areas like ICT, drama, music and history. The curriculum strongly supports the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of pupils. Despite the good practice of introducing pupils to different cultures, as through celebrating the Chinese New Year, the school does not yet ensure that pupils have a deep enough knowledge of other cultures and faiths. The curriculum is taught in line with the liturgical year and pupils' knowledge and understanding of this is enhanced by the "liturgical wheels" displayed in classrooms. This year the curriculum plans have also been developed to include a vocation theme in each class entitled "Inspired by God – who is God calling you to be?"

Provision for collective worship is outstanding. The wide range of provision helps pupils to value and grow in their faith. Prayer and worship are integral to the life of the school. Opportunities for discussion and reflection are incorporated into teachers' planning, and prayer plays a prominent part in school life. RE lessons often begin and end with prayers and a simple liturgy, and the children respond well and with reverence. Pupils also have opportunities to influence and support worship through devising prayers and serving at the weekly Masses, to which families and members of the parish are invited. Advent and Lenten liturgies take place each year, and special provision is made for the Rosary during May and October. The school has a well-established sacramental programme for First Holy Communion and Confirmation, and this is complemented by the bi-annual residential trips to the diocesan youth centre at Alton castle. It has been carefully adapted to the school's needs. Suitable provision is made within the 'Here I Am' series for sex and relationship education.

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