

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

ST MARY MAGDALENE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL **Ardwell Lane, Greenleys, Milton Keynes MK12 6AY**

DfE No: 826/3379.

URN: 110483

Head Teacher: Mrs R Jones
Chair of Governors: Mrs Z Burnett

Reporting Inspector: Mrs K Yuen
Associate Inspector: Mrs M Stacey

Date of Inspection: 03 April 2019
Date Report Issued: 17 April 2019

Date of previous Inspection: 28 November 2013

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

Information about the school

St. Mary Magdalene is a Voluntary Aided Catholic Primary School with 385 children aged 3-11. The school is situated in the parish of St Mary Magdalene but also serves the parishes of St Francis de Sales and St Edward the Confessor. 77% of the pupils are Catholic. St Mary Magdalene draws from a broad, very mixed socio-economic catchment. 68% of the children are from an ethnic minority background and 53% of the children speak English as an additional language. Many children on arrival speak no English at all.

Key grades for inspection

1. Outstanding 2. Good 3. Requires improvement 4. Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of the Catholic school

Grade 1

St Mary Magdalene is an outstanding Catholic primary school. All who enter the school are immediately struck by the wonderfully warm and friendly welcome given to all. Every child is provided with a Catholic education in a caring and supportive environment, where individual needs are exceptionally well catered for. The committed leadership of the headteacher and deputy head, who is also the RE leader, is instrumental in effectively promoting a strong spiritual purpose and high quality care and well-being of the whole school community. The behaviour of the children is exemplary. Pupils and parents are very proud of being part of this Catholic school and highly appreciate the experiences they receive. This work is further enhanced by the support of a very effective, experienced and knowledgeable governing body.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

During the previous inspection no areas for development were identified. However the school has not stood still and constantly strives to build on their excellent practice. New and enriched experiences for the pupils are constantly sought; Pupil Voice being integral to this. The school is currently focussed on developing further its provision for RSE and assessment practice.

The school's self-evaluation is detailed and it is clear that the school has an in-depth understanding of its strengths and areas for focus. The evidence base is securely backed by thorough scrutiny and analysis. The inspectors concurred with the judgements made by the school. The staff and governors are committed to continued improvement.

The school leadership is totally committed to promoting the Catholic dimension of the school and high quality religious education. They have very successfully communicated an inspiring vision for the school, leading to its present effectiveness, and are able to maintain and develop this even further. This is clearly apparent the moment one enters the school, where high expectations become immediately evident through the high quality displays, quality of learning and relationships between staff and pupils. The school has an excellent capacity for sustained improvement and development. The strong leadership team all contribute to the rigorous monitoring and evaluation process, therefore continuing to build on and develop the school and its Catholic life.

What the school should do to improve further

- To implement the new age-related standards for the assessment of RE.

The extent to which pupils benefit from the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. They know and understand the school's mission statement and strive to achieve it in all areas of their school life. Pupils appreciate this Catholic community and have a secure sense of their own worth and the worth of others. Pupils at St Mary Magdalene are proud of their religious identity and make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic Life and mission of the school, which has a very high priority. Pupils are aware of the needs of others, responding willingly to the needs of those beyond the school. Pupils demonstrate an excellent understanding of the liturgical year and its key celebrations. Pupils have a strong voice in the decision making process; they say they are always listened to, highly valued and can therefore confidently express their views and feelings. Pupils are happy, confident, and articulate, secure in their own stage of spiritual growth, demonstrating excellent behaviour towards adults and each other. They talk about the school not tolerating bullying in any form and that there is a 'Worry Box' for children to post their fears and anxieties. There is a powerful sense of belonging and involvement from the pupils and some take responsibility for key roles including: Liturgy Leaders and school councillors. Pupils and parents value the Catholic tradition of their school and are proud of it.

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding. The Chaplaincy provision makes a powerful contribution to the spiritual life and the well-being of the whole community including parents. The members of the team are known well to pupils who value and respond enthusiastically to the extra liturgical experiences and opportunities provided. The headteacher and her deputy lead by example, demonstrating a strong sense of purpose and commitment to the Catholic ethos and mission of the school. They ensure that all staff at St Mary Magdalene are able to share in this. Staff are given opportunities to develop their own faith, for example, by participating in biannual staff retreats. Support to undertake the CCRS has resulted in a significant number of staff participating in this training. St. Mary Magdalene has a vibrant and engaging learning environment apparent both in the classrooms and in and around the school itself, where focal points and displays linked to the Church's seasons provide opportunities to reflect, pray and celebrate its Catholic character. This exceptional presentation within school is a testimony to high expectations which value achievement and promote aspiration.

Governors discharge their statutory and canonical duties extremely well. They work effectively with the headteacher and RE Leader and are committed to upholding the strong caring ethos that exists. The leadership of the school in promoting the Catholic Life is outstanding. The headteacher and deputy headteacher, have a positive presence around the school, as well as a very clear understanding of Catholic education and the role of the Catholic school. They are embedding this very effectively throughout the school so that pupils, staff and parents recognise and support its realisation. The RE leader guides and supports the Catholic Life by continually seeking out new and exciting ways to challenge, and guide pupils along their faith journey. The development of the Easter prayer bags and 23 acts of kindness as a daily guide during Lent are an example of this. The school's self-evaluation is given high priority and the leaders and managers have established a range of monitoring activities to provide clear and accurate evidence which is used to successfully move the school forward. The school priorities are correctly identified in the school development plan which provides detailed actions and timescales to drive improvement. This plan is regularly reviewed by the governors and the senior leadership team to ensure continued development and constant improvement in provision. Parents speak extremely highly of the school: they have a clear understanding of the school's purpose and are very supportive of this. They are extremely proud of the school, applauding the Leadership and the warm welcome and approachability from all staff. Communication with parents is strong; Governors know the school well and are fundamental in shaping both policies and practice. They are highly visible and regular visitors to the school with the religious education link governor undertaking a key role in monitoring provision.

Religious Education

Grade 1

Religious education is at the heart of the school curriculum and children's learning. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their religious education lessons, always have a positive attitude and are most enthusiastic in their response to questions. Behaviour during religious education lessons is excellent. Pupils are proud of their work in religious education and speak confidently about what they have learnt. They work independently within a range of different activities according to age and ability. Pupils generally are making strong progress in religious education within lessons and over time. Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities are well supported and are achieving very well. The targeted support from highly skilled teaching assistants ensures all groups of pupils make at least good progress. Pupils enter school with knowledge and skills which are below age expectations. The school's data and evidence in books show that most pupils make outstanding progress over time.

Teaching and learning in religious education is outstanding. Assessment of this is thorough. The school is currently in transition from assessing in levels to end of year expectations. Training for staff has taken place and full implementation is due to start in September. Lesson planning is a strength. Teachers provide challenging tasks that extend pupils' knowledge and understanding in religious education and build on what they already know and can do. Opportunities for cross-curricular links between religious education and other curriculum areas were observed. Children in Year 2 were fully involved in dramatizing the events of Palm Sunday as a prelude to their writing. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge which is used well to support pupils' learning. They plan interesting and imaginative lessons, which build upon prior learning, using a good range of high quality resources. In Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 practical activities and well scaffolded tasks keep children highly motivated and engaged. The outside area is a valuable and rich resource for learning. Targeted questioning is used well to assess understanding, monitor progress and reinforce the learning objective. As a result pupils are motivated and engaged and demonstrate very positive attitudes to their learning. Assessments are regular and systematic. The assessment activities are recorded in pupils' assessment portfolios which form a record of achievement in religious education and remain a proud testimony of progress during school life. Tasks are differentiated when needed, with the majority of pupils working at a similar high standard. Teachers regularly check understanding and progress throughout the lesson, ensuring that pupils' learning needs are met.

The curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference and contributes very effectively to the pupils' spiritual and moral development. Leaders and managers provide strong leadership and conduct a wide range of monitoring activities that are carefully planned to determine the impact of provision. Rigorous work scrutiny and tracking of pupil progress ensure that no pupil is left behind and that timely action can be taken to prevent underachievement. School self-evaluation is thorough and robust and is integral to the school improvement plan. The Governors are highly visible in the school and appropriately challenge and support leadership. Governors are well informed of standards through committee and full governor reports and speak confidently about pupils' attainment and progress. The personal and professional integrity of the leadership inspires wholehearted commitment from staff, pupils and parents. Consequently, religious education not only has a high profile, it is at the heart of the curriculum and daily school life.

Collective Worship

Grade 1

St Mary Magdalene is a prayerful community where worship is a regular and meaningful part of the day. Pupils respond extremely well to worship and the prayer life of the school. They participate respectfully and with ease and appreciate these experiences as a time of uniting the whole school community. All pupils are enthusiastic in their response to Collective Worship. This is evident in their keen participation in liturgies, particularly their gathering and prayerful reflection. Children consistently demonstrate reverence and respect during acts of Collective Worship: for example, Year 6 children were preparing for child-led reflection of The Stations of the Cross. This was of a high quality; the stillness, contemplative use of silence, and mime contributed to its powerful impact. Prayer is a regular feature of school life and all pupils know their daily prayers which are celebrated in the morning, at lunchtime and the end of the school day.

Collective Worship is at the heart of every school celebration and is inclusive and reflective. Praying together is a natural part of the school day for all staff and pupils. Opportunities for worship, Masses and other liturgical celebrations are well planned and resourced and include opportunities for pupils' own spontaneous prayers. There is a rich variety of different forms of worship, which are enthusiastically embraced by the whole school community. The parish priest is a regular visitor to the school and is known to staff, pupils and parents. He offers valuable guidance and support to staff, celebrates Mass and is totally praiseworthy of the work and tradition of school.

The headteacher and RE leader set a very high standard for Collective Worship in school. They lead by example, ensuring that pupils and staff develop a deepening appreciation of the Church's traditions, seasons, rites and symbols and those prayerful, reflective opportunities contribute to the spiritual formation of pupils and staff. Leaders and governors have a very visible presence in school and a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development in Collective Worship through both formal and informal monitoring. Leaders regularly seek the views of parents through questionnaires and discussion, and their responses are highly appreciated and valued and lead to further developments. The school's life of prayer and worship is given the highest priority by the headteacher, staff and governors and is seen as the very heart and soul of the school.

The inspectors wish to thank the headteacher, staff and children for their warm welcome and for contributing to their very enjoyable and interesting visit.