



DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION REPORT

incorporating Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the
Archbishop of Southwark

URN 118782

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Greenfield Road

Gillingham ME7 1YH

Inspection date: 16th November 2017

Chair of Governors: Anita Shrubsole

Headteacher: Maureen Grabski

Inspectors: Janette Mann

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EDUCATION COMMISSION

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Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Mary's Catholic Primary School is voluntary aided. It is in the Chatham Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark and is maintained by Medway Local Authority. The principal parish which the school serves is Our Lady of Gillingham. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 61%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in all Key Stages. The school takes pupils from 3 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 420 plus 40 pupils in the Nursery.

On entering the school pupils have attainment well below average, some with very poor social and language skills. Pupil Premium Funding is received by 11% of pupils. Around 20% of pupils receive additional support in class, which is above average. A significant number, 10% have emotional/behaviour/ social needs. 47% of pupils have English as an additional language, with 17% of these at an early stage of language acquisition, well above the national average. 56% of pupils are from ethnic minorities.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS



St Mary's is an outstanding Catholic school because:

- The Headteacher works tirelessly to achieve her vision of high quality child-centred learning, steeped in the spiritual atmosphere of Catholic Life and Church Teachings. She is ably supported by committed governors, staff and parents.
- Spirituality and prayer are firmly embedded throughout the school community, the sense of reverence and reflection that is practised by pupils, staff and governors is wonderful.
- Pupils act with a sense of responsibility, know the importance of making choices based on Catholic values, respect their differences and behave impeccably.
- Parents expressed overwhelming support for the school's work, as one stated: "The value of the education at St Mary's is priceless. Our children are surrounded by caring educators who help them to be drawn to Christ."

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

- To continue developments as per the school's own self-evaluation by:
 - i) Developing assessment without levels in line with other subjects using Diocesan guidance;
 - ii) Creating a School Liturgy Group to prepare and lead liturgies throughout the school.
- To continue to strive to improve pupil achievements from good to outstanding



Overall Effectiveness

How effective the school is in providing Catholic Education.

1

Catholic Life

1

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.

1

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

Religious Education

1

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

2

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education

1

Collective Worship

1

How well pupils respond to and participate in the schools' Collective Worship

1

The quality of provision for Collective Worship

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

1

CATHOLIC LIFE

1

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding

- A warm welcome awaits any visitor who enters St Mary's. The Catholic ethos of the school is strongly evident in the relationships of everyone in its community; they treat each other with love and care and look after their environment. They take great pride in upholding their key values: respect God; respect each other; be responsible; and take pride in our school
- Pupils, staff and governors in St Mary's appreciate and value its Catholic Life, participating with enthusiasm and pride in its many liturgies and celebrations.
- Pupils grow in faith together, contributing to its Catholic Life by leading prayer activities, like the Rosary in October and May and regularly preparing and leading liturgies for their school assemblies, school and Church Masses.
- The school has a harmonious atmosphere. This is because all pupils and staff are aware of the importance of rights and responsibilities. Pupils are given the freedom to make choices in a safe and supportive environment and to recognise that their choices have consequences.
- Pupils benefit from the diverse community which has a wide range of cultures and backgrounds. Members of different faiths and cultures share their beliefs and experiences; events such as 'Interfaith Week' ensure that pupils treat each other with respect, politeness and tolerance and celebrate and take pride in their differences. This is reinforced by the school's theme for this year; "All Different, All Equal."
- The pupils are provided with opportunities to evaluate their school life, for example, the School Learning Council undertake Learning Walks around the school with governors to discuss ideas on helping and improving the school. They have also discussed ideas for improvements with their local MP. Pupils are able to submit concerns via a suggestion box. The School Learning Council have responded to issues which have been highlighted, such as providing a solution to a playground based problem. They then monitor their actions to see if they have had a positive impact.
- Pupils relish the many opportunities they are given to take on responsibilities. The School Learning Council organised a very successful 'St Mary's Got Talent' event and Young Leaders lead playground games and encourage fair play.
- The pupils' empathy for others is evident in their support of charities, such as Children in Need and CAFOD. The Mini-Vinnies meet regularly and help in local homes for the elderly. Pupils understand social issues and were involved with Caring Hands in the Community, a local charity for the homeless.
- The Headteacher and Parish Priest have a collaborative relationship and parish links are developing. Recently, Year 6 pupils visited the church to have robust discussions with Father. Members of the St Vincent de Paul Society have been invited to a school assembly led by the Mini Vinnies to find out about the work these pupils do. Parishioners lead



spiritual guidance sessions for staff. Pupils, staff and governors regularly attend Mass in the Parish and pupils are altar servers.

- Staff and governors attend the Deanery Mass and pupils joined in the Deanery Games. There are close links with St John Fisher Secondary School which hosted 'World Vision Day.' Pupils engaged with the local community when they were invited to exhibit their artwork in a local supermarket.
- Parents are welcomed in the school and regularly attend liturgies and celebrations, such as the Nativity. They appreciate the part St Mary's plays in the Catholic Life of their children, as one commented: "They provide a safe and loving environment where faith is lived and communicated." The Parent Teacher Association is an important part of the school community and raises extra funds for the school.

The quality of provision of the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding

- The provision for the Catholic Life of the school is a high priority. The values expressed in the school's Mission Statement clearly lie at the heart of St Mary's; the school has identified and made plans for its revision, with input from the whole community, to make it an even more effective driving force.
- Staff wholeheartedly promote and enthusiastically participate in the Catholic Life of the school, enhancing their understanding through training, by sharing liturgies, prayers and meditations. They pray together every morning. The Parish Priest is a regular and invaluable visitor to the school.
- The Catholic identity of the school takes prime position on the attractive and inspiring school website. Newsletters prominently feature themes emphasising Catholic values and stories with significant moral messages. In school, the ethos is enhanced by eye-catching and meaningful displays of, for example, Our Lady, seasons of the Church Year, Religious Education topics and charitable works. There is a spiritual area in the library (enhanced by candlelight, a waterfall and a Remembrance display) and an attractive prayer garden; both are well used for reflection and prayer.
- Staff lead by example and ensure that relationships between staff and pupils are based on mutual respect and reconciliation. This enables the school to be a prayerful community committed to the social teachings of the Church. One parent said, "Our children embrace the diversity at the school following the good role models they have in the teachers and adults working in their school community."
- Staff at St Mary's work hard to provide strong chaplaincy by promoting and supporting the Mini-Vinnies and class liturgy groups.
- The well-being of staff and pupils of high importance. Staff welcome their regular meditation sessions.
- Pupils' welfare is outstanding and is supported by caring staff, counselling sessions, a clear personal, social and health education, a rich prayer life and a broad, enriched curriculum.
- Parents are supported with Place2Be counselling sessions and coffee mornings which have discussed e-safety and healthy eating. At the coffee morning on the day of the inspection,

parents and carers said how much they appreciated the friendly, accessible support. Parents are also helped with Maths and English workshops

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding

- High quality leadership underpins the success of St Mary's; it ensures that the Catholic ethos is reflected in all aspects of school life. In spite of a challenging year with many staff changes, the highly effective and progressive Headteacher is building on existing talents, encouraging new teachers and creating a committed and cohesive staff team, within which she is developing strong leadership capacity. She works closely with the inspirational and highly-motivated Religious Education Leader.
- They, together with the Governing Body, have a passion, clear vision and love of Catholic education and are totally committed to the success and well-being of the school community.
- The knowledgeable and effective Governing Body has an excellent understanding of St Mary's considerable strengths and few weaknesses. They are updated about the religious life of the school at governor meetings, attend training and receive a summary of the year's outcomes at the end of the academic year from the Religious Education Leader. Learning Walks help them to review provision. On one walk, they were accompanied by the School Learning Council. Consequently, they have drawn up a detailed Religious Education development programme and provide a good balance of strategic challenge and support. Governors attend many school, Parish and Deanery events.
- School self-evaluation shows that the school systematically and insightfully reviews its provision for Catholic Life and plans for its improvement, for example, it is working to form a new Medway Religious Education hub with other local Catholic schools.
- Termly training for staff on is well-thought out and effective. Staff said that it enhances their understanding and commitment to the Church's educational mission. New teachers said they feel very welcome and fully supported.
- St Mary's successfully engages parents and helps them to integrate into school life by supporting them and keeping them well-informed about events that are happening in school and the community with a personal morning greeting, newsletters and the web-site. Parents said that their views were listened to and any problems were sorted out immediately.
- Leaders and Governors are dedicated to the Catholic Life of the school and fully committed to promoting and monitoring a range of inspiring opportunities for everybody's spiritual and moral development.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is outstanding

- The pupils, some with lower than expected communication and language skills and others with emotional and economical needs, make good progress which is a testament to the care and support they are given by the school.
- The number of pupils reaching the expected standard in Religious Education by the end of Year 6 is in line with those achieved in English and Maths which are just above the expected standards achieved locally and nationally.
- Pupils who have additional needs have targeted and effective support and make expected progress. Parents are delighted with their children's progress, saying that staff go "above and beyond" expectation.
- The school places great emphasis on the pupils growing as competent learners. Pupils were observed responding to the 'Choice and Challenge'; they were able to explain which task they had chosen and how it would help them grow, one pupil said, "If it's too easy for you, then you can choose a harder challenge and if that's too easy, you can choose an even harder challenge". Staff allow pupils to 'learn without limits' which frees pupils from working within a fixed ability group.
- In class, pupils made it clear that they enjoyed their Religious Education. One pupil said, "I like RE because praying makes me feel like I'm part of God's family, like God is the tree trunk and we are the leaves." They listen attentively and make good use of religious vocabulary. Their knowledge and understanding of scripture is excellent. They talked to each other and readily shared their ideas and their faith, working with a partner or in a group. They can also work independently.
- Pupils show great pride and respect for their written work which is evident from their beautiful Religious Education books which show coverage, breadth and a variety of recorded activities.
- Pupils work with enthusiasm and great interest, tackle and relish challenging tasks and discussions and take full advantage of their opportunities. They are developing the skills to reflect spiritually and morally. One pupil explained, "RE lessons help us to think about doing the right things ...like giving money to charity ... and not getting into trouble." Consequently, behaviour is excellent because the pupils apply themselves in lessons, strive to produce their best work and work collaboratively with others.

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is outstanding

- The school can show evidence that it systematically assesses pupils' written and verbal understanding with termly assessments, dialogue, which is valued highly as a diagnostic tool, and book scrutiny. This has happened over a period of time. St Mary's moderates their evidence, to check its accuracy, in school and with other schools.



- Teachers meet with pupils to identify their best work and discuss their strengths and areas for development; this enables the pupils to write their own reports and think about their next steps.
- Staff regularly give feedback to inform, encourage and praise pupils both verbally and in written comments and expect pupils to react appropriately. The school highly values the dialogue that takes place to help pupils make judgements about their progress and how to improve.
- Teaching is effective and purposeful and many outstanding features were observed:
 - the sense of spirituality and awe and wonder created
 - the well-judged pace of delivery which maintained pupils' interest and enthusiasm
 - the excellent teacher subject knowledge and deep passion for Religious Education
 - the way topics were made relevant to the pupils to enhance their understanding
 - the use of scripture to deepen pupils' reflections on the word of God
 - the use of high-level questioning to assess and extend pupil's understanding
 - the way prior learning was reinforced throughout the lessons
 - the use of inspirational artwork, images and artefacts to illuminate ideas and themes
 - the relationships within the class built on care and mutual respect
 - high expectations, challenging tasks and thought-provoking discussions
- Teachers' inspiration and motivation enables pupils at St Mary's to work independently and collaboratively with high levels of engagement, interest and enthusiasm.
- A generous budget provides high quality resources which are intelligently used by the school.
- Teaching Assistants are well-briefed and work instinctively and patiently to help pupils of all abilities to optimise their learning.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is outstanding

- St Mary's meets the requirements of the Bishop's Conference in terms of content coverage and the time allocated to Religious Education.
- The chosen scheme: 'The Way, the Truth and the Life' is implemented effectively and is augmented through the use of computers, art and drama, as appropriate.
- The new Religious Education link governor is working closely and effectively with the subject leader. Governors are provided with training by the Religious Education leader, on a variety of topics including the change in assessment procedures. They have undertaken learning walks and book scrutinies to evaluate and celebrate the curriculum and to evaluate the pupils' response. They are extremely supportive but also confident and questioning in their approach.
- Leaders employ a range of systematic and productive monitoring activities to identify the school's strengths and weaknesses. This strong self-evaluation leads to staff undertaking well-targeted and strategic action to improve outcomes in the curriculum



for pupils, for example, exploring the introduction of a new Relationship and Sex Education programme.

- Leaders seek to improve outcomes when they discuss the Class Learning Journey individually with teachers at Pupil Progress Meetings. Windows of opportunities are also timetabled so that teachers can 'drop-in' to observe their peers to share best practice.
- The Religious Education Leader is the Deputy Headteacher. She has excellent knowledge and a capacity for strong leadership, is passionate and has committed spiritual purpose. She has developed positive relationships with staff who respect her advice and appreciate her support. She is pro-active in the induction of newly qualified teachers and non-Catholic staff. She delivers training to staff at meetings and Inset, for example, on assessing without levels. She attends Diocesan training, meetings and conferences and liaises with other Catholic schools to share best practice and to moderate assessments. She gives feedback, reporting her findings to staff and governors.
- The school enriches the curriculum with a programme of visits, visitors and creative activities which engages and motivates pupils' learning and facilitates a high level of enjoyment. Cross-curricular links are regularly made so that pupils understand that their spirituality can be expressed in many ways. The Forest School enhances younger pupils' experiences of being in and celebrating God's world.
- Parents are kept up-to-date with the progress of their children. They are given information about the Religious Education topics to be covered and are given knowledge and practical advice in the 'RE Newsletter' about how they can help their children on their spiritual journey. A parent shared, "dedicated teachers and TAs aim for a high academic education, care about children's spiritual development, promote healthy self-esteem, confidence, respect and compassion for others."

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COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

1

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding

- Collective Worship is a truly spiritual experience in St Mary's. The pupils are reverential in prayerful situations and view communal, personal prayer and worship as an integral aspect of their time in school, irrespective of their ability, cultural background or faith. They appreciate and understand the religious differences of others and are respectful of their needs.
- Class Liturgy groups prepare and lead their own Masses and class liturgies; pupils choose hymns that they wish to sing. Year 6 Mini-Vinnies prepare and lead whole school celebration assemblies and the School Learning Council take responsibility for whole school assemblies based on the Gospel. On the day of the inspection, Year 3 pupils prepared and successfully led their first Mass in Church, admirably assisted and supported by experienced pupils from Year 6.
- In school, Year 1's class liturgy was led by the Parish Priest who answered deep questions like, "Why did Jesus die?" The pupils listened patiently while the class shared their own prayers. A Key Stage 2 meditation was observed in which the pupils, sitting peacefully in candlelight, were asked to reflect on how they felt when they met Jesus at the well.
- Pupils readily join in with formal prayers of the Church and are able to offer spontaneous prayers for their own intentions and those of the wider community. Pupils choose to pray voluntarily as demonstrated when they say the Rosary in the prayer garden.
- The Catholic liturgical year, seasons and feasts are confidently understood and celebrated, for example, pupils enthusiastically supported their Harvest liturgy.
- Each classroom has a very attractive and meaningful prayer area which is used as a spiritual focal point. Candles in the area are lit at the beginning of and throughout the Religious Education lesson to signify the lesson's specialness.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding

- Acts of worship provided by St Mary's reflect the Catholic character of the school in their depth and variety, from individual reflection to whole school and Parish celebrations. They take into account the different faith and cultural backgrounds of the school community.
- An act of Collective Worship takes place daily. It is either whole school, key stage or class based and is supported by dance, drama and singing; it makes a significant contribution to the pupils' spiritual and moral development. Mass is celebrated regularly in school, for example, the Leavers' Mass, and in the Parish Church.
- The Parish Priest regularly attends class liturgies and Masses; he provides much valued advice, support and encouragement to the pupils and staff.
- Collective Worship is planned, led and evaluated by knowledgeable, skilled and passionate staff with a clear message and purpose to reflect the liturgical year and the Church's mission.



Staff are given a timetable of the Church's liturgical year to use in the planning and provision of lessons and worship.

- The staff teach and encourage their pupils to plan and deliver quality worship in class or whole school settings.
- St Mary's provides attractive areas in school and in the grounds for prayer and reflection.
- When space allows, parents are welcomed to acts of Collective Worship in the school and are delighted to attend. They feel included and are always "made to feel at home."

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding

- The provision for Collective Worship is a high priority for leaders and governors. Their keen understanding of the Church's liturgical year, seasons and feasts enables them to promote, prepare and lead high quality liturgy and worship in St Mary's. Throughout the school there is a strong sense of the traditions of the Church and its Catholic heritage.
- Their expertise enables them to accurately self-evaluate its delivery and effect and to plan for its improvement. Their work on improving prayer-life and embedding meditation and reflection for the older children is remarkable and plans are in place to extend this throughout the school.
- The professional development of staff and governors incorporates liturgical formation and training in planning and delivery of Collective Worship.
- Leaders, by their behaviour, attitude and practice are very effective and inspiring role models for pupils and staff.
- They are committed to encouraging and enabling pupils in the school to lead and facilitate the faith journey of their peers. They have plans to form a School Liturgy Group to prepare, organise and lead Collective Worship which will augment the provision already in place for this chaplaincy.