



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Stanier Street, Newcastle under Lyme, Staffordshire

Inspection dates 9th - 10th February 2016
Reporting Inspector Joseph Skivington

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Academy primary
Age range of pupils	3 – 11 years
Number on roll	424
Appropriate authority	The Board of Directors
Chair of Governors	Mrs Ellen Wainwright
Telephone number	01782 619685
E-mail address	office@stmarysnul.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	January 2012
DFE School Number	860 3465
Unique Reference Number	140803

Headteacher **Miss B Sims**

Previous inspection: 3

This inspection: 2

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 eleven part RE lessons with the headteacher.
- The inspector completed a work scrutiny and held a discussion with pupils to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time.
- Meetings were held with the chair of governors, staff, and parish priest.
- The inspector observed a whole school assembly, a whole school Mass, 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.
- Other documents such as RAISEonline, the development plan, teachers' planning, learning journals, and the governing body minutes, were read alongside the self evaluation.

Information about the school

- St Mary's is a larger than average Catholic primary school, with 424 pupils currently on roll, serving the parish of Holy Trinity in Newcastle under Lyme and Sacred Heart Silverdale.
- The catchment area for the school is a mixed area of council estates and private housing, with a significant level of social and economic challenges.
- The number of Catholic pupils is currently 243 (57%).
- The proportion of ethnic minority pupils is 21%. There are 91 pupils with EAL.
- The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. The number of pupils registered as having special needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- Attainment on entry is below the national average overall.

Main Findings

- The quality of self evaluation of Catholic life and collective worship is good.
- The quality of self evaluation of RE is good.
- The quality of improvement planning is good.

School self evaluation

Catholic Life and Collective Worship

- Since the last inspection the school has put in place increasingly effective processes to monitor and review the impact of the provision to promote both Catholic life and RE. There are now more robust and searching monitoring procedures which feed into the school's self evaluation judgements, and provide leadership with a clear and reliable picture of where the school is in terms of improvement.
- The school uses a range of increasingly effective measures, particularly reflective enquiry, to judge the impact of its provision. For instance, performance management targets for all staff in 2014-15 ensured that the Catholic life of the school received a high profile within the school and this has continued with demonstrable success.
- Opportunities for pupils and parents to provide written and verbal feedback are now being embedded as a regular feature after assemblies and liturgies, as well as specifically timetabled sessions of reflection and discussion, or the pupil voice interviews, which have enabled senior leaders to assess more accurately the impact of practice and provision.
- Recent improvements are driven by an inspiring school leadership which has successfully communicated a clear vision and high expectations in a relatively short time, thereby transforming every aspect of school life. Fruitful use has been made of staff Inset training, including diocesan support, to raise the awareness and quality of Catholic life. All staff are involved now in the evaluation process, with class teachers monitoring .
- The school is developing a range of measures to assess the impact of its steps to promote Catholic life. Termly staff meetings are used to focus on a specific area for staff development acting directly on feedback from pupils and parents. These include gathering feedback on the "Shine Day" workshops exploring themes such as Forgiveness, Values, Feast, Bread - which enable parents, pupils and staff to discuss and plan prayer life and the sacramental preparation programme. Every year group now has a Catholic Life folder with a colourful record of their journey and participation in the spiritual life the school.
- Findings from formal and informal monitoring are fed into the school improvement plan which is a working document with measurable objectives. This enables it to be reshaped or added to as the targets are realised. Formal, regular questioning of parents and pupils at suitable intervals, such as parent surveys, are becoming more frequent and having greater impact on the school's journey of improvement.
- While it is on display around the school and known in simple terms to the pupils, the school has not had for some time a more formal revisit of the school mission statement, to enable staff, parents and pupils to re interpret and reflect on what it means for them. This is planned for the near future and will specifically involve the pupils' own input and ideas.

- Workshops have been used successfully to review and discuss improvements. This came through strongly in the reviews of the excellent Rosary celebration and the Blessed Sacrament Festival, and improvements are already planned as a result
- The school is developing more robust ways to enable pupils to make a greater contribution to the evaluation and promotion of Catholic life. Already they have had the opportunity through verbal interviews where their response is welcome, but as a direct result of its monitoring, leadership recognises the need now to give pupils more ownership of the liturgical and prayer life of the school, particularly in the early planning stage of celebrations through the liturgical year. The pupils themselves are excited by the idea of going a step beyond whole hearted participation to take real ownership and develop the skills of planning and presenting their own assemblies and liturgies. The school catechist is looking to set up a small liturgy or chaplaincy team to meet this need.
- Pupils' response to the present school prayer opportunities is outstanding, in terms of willingness to participate and a real sense of engagement in the life of the Spirit regardless of faith background or none. In conversation pupils are excited about the challenging idea that they could contribute even more to the prayer and Catholic life of the school and to take more ownership of it. This has also been picked up in pupil voice feedback, to which the school is now responding, for example, by setting up a pupil liturgy group, and input into plans for the prayer garden, which is under way.
- Staff are an integral part of the evaluation process with class teachers held responsible for the quality and evaluation of the impact of class collective worship. This has led to a more meaningful approach, such as class representatives being presented at whole school assembly the day before Ash Wednesday, with the purple table covers for the new season of Lent. This added significance and importance to even such a small symbolic act.
- Pupils of all faiths and none are willing and reverent participants in collective worship. All feel included in this open and welcoming community of Faith. The pupils' enthusiastic singing and reverent demeanour in both the assembly and the Mass during the inspection was exemplary, particularly the careful making of the Sign of the Cross so tellingly modelled by every adult in the room.

Leadership and Governance

- Since the last inspection the school has formalised monitoring and evaluation procedures to the extent that governors are now better informed so that their challenges and decision making are the result of a closer, more detailed knowledge of the school.
- The governing body is committed to the school and its Catholic ethos. They are frequent visitors to the school and know staff and pupils well. The minutes of their meetings contain many examples of challenging and probing questions particularly in response to the head teacher's reports. Diocesan training has not yet been fully taken advantage of, but will help in the development of an overall picture of where they are at the moment and the next steps to greater effectiveness.
- The link governor for RE is a significant support to the RE leader and teachers, with valuable, expert advice. He also enables the governing body to achieve a clear and detailed picture of the subject, which feeds into the RE performance management

targets and the subject improvement plan. The impact is seen in rising standards of attainment because governors are better informed and are therefore in a position to assess the quality of the RE outcomes, and know how to compare themselves to the other diocesan schools. The link governor is also the parish priest and very strong, fruitful links are being forged with the parish, and the wider mission of the Church.

- The school leaders, backed wholeheartedly by the governors, are successfully involving more parents in its day to day life, winning hearts and minds, as evident in their growing presence at collective worship, engaging in discussion sessions, and offering valued and acted-on feedback.
- Improvement planning is closely tied in to the evaluation processes, marked by clear priorities, manageable steps, success criteria, and review and reshape intervals. In service provision and support material are provided for staff. The subject leader will feed back issues to the RE link governor each term and the whole governing body are provided with a detailed overview of progress against the school improvement plan.
- Targets are appropriate to the stage at which the school finds itself. This is a school that knows itself well and what it needs to do to reach outstanding.

Religious Education

- Evaluation is rooted in close the monitoring of performance, an improving picture which is proof that the processes for review are effective.
- The school benefits significantly from collaboration and valuable peer assessment with the other schools in the academy cluster, particularly in the exchange of best practice and the joint moderation of academic standards over the past year.
- The overall good teaching is increasingly effective because its impact is monitored and evaluated closely through learning walks and the assessment of progress in learning over time through book scrutiny. The findings are shared with the teachers and fed into the CPD programme and performance targets with real success as demonstrated by the rising standards.
- The marking policy is well embedded and is consistently applied. The quality of the teachers' comments and the pupils' response is work in progress, if it is to become a major driver in raising learning and progress over time to an outstanding level. This process also enables the teachers to judge more accurately the progress each individual has made. The pupils' response to the formative advice, and its impact on progress would be further enhanced with time set aside for them to reflect on and respond at some length.
- The teachers' assessment of standards is becoming surer as they gain experience through training, moderation, and building a bank of assessed, moderated pieces of written work for comparison. The school is getting together with the other academy cluster RE teachers to group moderate the work of pupils of different ability, and this is proving very helpful especially linking in to the level indicators as a guide.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

- The judgement of good conforms to the school's own evaluation of itself as a good Catholic school.
- Progress and attainment in RE across both key stages is good, the result of good teaching and the outstanding behaviour of the children, and specifically behaviour for learning. There is however room to improve pupils' progress in learning further, especially to meet the specific learning needs of individual pupils.
- The levels of attainment of pupils at the end of both key stages are broadly in line with diocesan expectations. Baseline assessments indicate low prior knowledge and religious experience but pupils make good progress through Key Stage 1, despite a slower pace initially for EAL because of weaker language and literacy skills. The gap closes significantly as they move through the school, due to the extra support from learning assistants, and tailored, differentiated tasks. There is significant pupil mobility in the school, with children joining late in all years, and these too benefit from the extra support in language and catch up tasks.
- The best learning is achieved through the teachers' high expectation of the quality of pupils' work, higher order questioning which encourages real intellectual effort, but also questioning which searches for individual understanding or to correct misunderstanding. Excellent practice was observed during the inspection and this could be beneficially shared across all years.
- Although behaviour for learning is very positive, the school does recognise the ongoing need to develop independent and peer learning skills, and to provide further challenge especially for the more able in order to achieve outstanding outcomes. Also the need to provide further opportunities to encourage more extended reflective writing especially at Key Stage 2. Pupils' learning from religion and relating it to their own lives is a real strength, and many, though not all, would be able to express themselves also in writing or in discussion at some length and depth.
- The school has ensured that the curriculum is structured around the Curriculum Directory for RE. The translation of the syllabus and schemes of work into lesson plans with challenging learning objectives more tailored to individual learning needs, as well as building on prior knowledge rather than rehearsing what they know already, is work in progress. There is ongoing regular Inset for staff in working out the schemes of work and feedback on impact and how to improve. Staff also have time to pray together especially during Lent with an early Friday Mass together before school.
- Basic knowledge of other faiths is covered through topics assigned to different years. Pupils have been on residential or day retreats in the past. They have a wider link with a school in Dubrovnik, Croatia. They wholeheartedly become involved in the many opportunities to exercise their generosity in helping others through charities both local and global, such as CAFOD. A further impulse has been the study and practice of the values enshrined in the Catholic pupil profile, particularly generosity and gratefulness.

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.

Recommendations

- Move learning outcomes to outstanding by employing more higher order questioning in lessons and marking, and by providing further opportunities for reflective, extended writing.
- Involve pupils further in planning and presenting their own liturgies and assemblies, and in taking more ownership of, and responsibility for animating the Catholic life of the school.