



Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

INSPECTION REPORT

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Chapel Green, Crowborough, East Sussex, TN6 2LB

Telephone: 01892 655291

e-mail address: office@stmarysrc.e-sussex.sch.uk

DfES Number: 114566

Headteacher: Ms M Cowler
Chair of Governors: Mr M Dean

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Bishop of Arundel & Brighton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: 13 October 2010
Date of previous inspection: 31 October 2007

Lead Inspector: Mrs A Ireland
Associate Inspector: Mrs B Dowswell

Description of School

St Mary's Catholic Primary School is voluntary aided. It is situated in the Mayfield Deanery of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. It is maintained by East Sussex LA. The principal parishes which the school serves are St Mary's Crowborough and St Thomas of Canterbury, Mayfield. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 55%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to religious education is 10%. The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years and the number of pupils on roll is currently 190. 16% of pupils receive extra support in class. The number of pupils with statements of special educational need is well above average. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is below average. The school serves a population with a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds but predominantly from the professional working class. Most pupils are from a White British background but there has been a steady increase in the number of pupils entering school with minority ethnic backgrounds, especially those of Polish and Filipino origins. The headteacher has been in place since April 2010. The mission statement states that St Mary's is a 'welcoming, Catholic community where we come to pray, learn, love and enjoy'.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Satisfactory; Grade 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

St Mary's is a good and improving school. The clear vision and strong leadership of the headteacher, who is strongly supported by the senior management team and governors, ensures that the Catholic life of the school is celebrated and that standards continue to rise. Relationships are excellent and there is a real sense of teamwork amongst staff and pupils. The care, guidance and support given to pupils are very good. The home, school and parish partnerships are strong. Pupils are making good progress in religious education. Assessment is developing well. The school should continue to develop assessment particularly with regard to the tracking and moderation of pupils' work.

Grade 2

Improvement since the last inspection

Prior to the appointment of the current headteacher, the school had gone through a period of instability, with four headteachers within an eighteen month period. This inevitably affected the pace of improvement. However, the issues highlighted in the previous inspection are now being rigorously addressed. Class observations have focussed on the provision of differentiated activities in lessons. Regular assessment is in place and the tracking of individual pupil's work enables the school to analyse data more efficiently. Joint lesson observation have been carried out in a systematic way in order to identify good practice

Grade 2

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

The headteacher is committed to establishing a strong Catholic community and providing a rich learning environment. Her vision is shared by her senior management and governors. Effective systems of evaluation and review are in place and there is a determination by all to raise standards. This indicates that school has a very good capacity to improve.

Grade 2

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to develop the tracking of individual pupils' progress
- Continue to develop moderation of pupils' work and compile a portfolio of annotated levelled work.

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is a very effective leader whose vision, based on a clear understanding of the nature and mission of a Catholic school, together with a determination to improve the quality of pupils' learning experiences, is helping to shape the direction of the school and raise standards. She works hard to empower staff and governors and is building a strong cohesive team. Within the school community, there is a strong sense of spiritual purpose and a focus on promoting high standards. Relationships within the school community are excellent. The mission statement has been rewritten, and because staff, governors, pupils, parents and parishioners were involved in the process, all are aware of its importance in driving the work of the school. Governors are fully involved in the life of the school. They effectively carry out their responsibilities with regard to the school's Catholic ethos and standards in teaching and learning. Through regular visits, governor training, and detailed reports from the headteacher, they are very well informed about the school's strengths and areas of development. Attractive displays, such as the ones on the Pope's recent visit, and artefacts, such as the lovely statue of Our Lady in school entrance, proclaim the school's Catholic identity. The care given to pupils is very good. Pupils are confident and friendly and very well behaved. The vast majority of parents have very positive attitudes towards the school. They are kept well informed about aspects of school life through attractive and informative newsletters and the school web site. Regular coffee mornings help to provide an informal forum for discussion. Their views are regularly sought, including the recent work on the mission statement and the proposed Year 6 residential trip to France. A few parents thought that the schools links with nearby parishes could be developed and the school intends to investigate these concerns. However, the inspectors judge the school's partnership with the parish of St Mary's to be a strength. Parishioners are invited to school Masses and assemblies. The school mission statement is placed in the Church and news is exchanged in newsletters. Links are made to the Sunday Mass during the regular Monday assembly. Hymns used by the parish are taught in school. Very good support is given by the school to the parish programme for the reception of the sacraments. The link teacher regularly liaises with the parish, teachers attend the First Holy Communion Masses and the school celebrates with a special assembly. The parish priest is a regular and welcome visitor and is regarded by the school as an important member of the school community.

He is well known by pupils, parents and staff who all greatly appreciate his support and involvement. He regularly works with classes, individual members of staff and the headteacher, as well as celebrating Mass and other liturgies. His participation in the life and work of the school helps to considerably strengthen the home, school and parish partnership. The school has good links with local Catholic schools in the Lewes and Mayfield deaneries. Stronger links have been established with the nearest Catholic secondary school. This helps pupils as they prepare to transfer to secondary school.

Grade 2

The Prayer Life of the School

A comprehensive programme of Masses, assemblies, class worship and other Liturgies, such as services of Reconciliation and the May procession, provide pupils with good opportunities to participate in acts of prayer and worship. At such times, pupils are encouraged to deepen their prayer life and develop a sense of ritual, as evidenced in the class spiritual journals. Each class leads an assembly or participates in a Mass three times during the school year. Pupils from Year 2 upwards are responsible for preparing whole school Masses. The assembly on the theme of 'Friendship' was clearly linked to pupils' own experiences. Pupils engaged in role play to illustrate a Muslim story and the pupils watching were attentive, reflective and prayerful throughout. Very good use was made of a PowerPoint presentation to make the message of assembly clear. Pupils sang well with joy and enthusiasm. Makaton signing was used to reinforce the meaning of the words. Prayer is a key principle of the school's mission statement and is central to the life of the school. Pupils know the traditional prayers of the Church. Even the youngest pupils are given opportunities to experience a variety of prayer forms, such as spontaneous and reflective prayer. All pupils are encouraged to write their own prayers which are often reflective and moving. Every class has a prayer corner, and these are, without exception of high quality. They are attractive, relevant and form an excellent focus for the prayer life of the class. Year 6 pupils have the opportunity to take part in a retreat before they move on to their new schools. The school is now seeking ways of extending the opportunities for voluntary prayer.

Grade 2

How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?

This is a warm, safe, welcoming and reconciling community, where all are valued as unique and special. The care guidance and support given to all pupils is very good. Pupils develop in confidence and feel happy and safe. Those pupils who have special educational needs or who are vulnerable in any way are well supported. Good use is made of external agencies, the inclusion manager and nurture groups to support pupils and their families. The school celebrates the diversity of God's people in a variety of ways, such as the display of prayer books in different languages. Parents are invited to school to share their different cultures and beliefs. Pupils are given very good opportunities to exercise responsibility in a variety of ways, including the buddy and play leader initiatives and through the work of the eco group. The school council plays an active part in the life of the school and their voice is listened to and respected. For example they were involved in the recent appointment of the headteacher. Pupils are encouraged to look beyond their needs to those of others. They engage in a range of fund raising and other activities both local and national, such as the recent Cafod Family Fast day held at St Gregory's secondary school. Links with the local community are good. For example, the school hosted a 'Cookathon', which was attended by the mayor and local businesses, and joined with other local primary schools for the 'Big Sing'. The school has appointed a community cohesion coordinator in order to raise the profile of this aspect of school life. An audit of current practice has been carried out and a comprehensive action plan has been formulated.

Grade 2

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Achievements and standards in religious education are good and improving. Attainment on entry to the school is generally about average. Good progress is made as pupils move up the school so that by the end of Key stage 2, pupils are reaching levels above national expectations. This is line with attainment in the core curriculum. Pupils are developing a very good religious vocabulary and a sound knowledge of sacraments, including Baptism. For example, pupils in the Year 3 class were able to identify and name the sacred oils used in baptism. Pupils have a good knowledge of stories from scripture and the teachings of the Church, appropriate for their age. They have very well developed oral and listening skills which they use effectively in paired or group discussions. They employ a range of cross curricular skills in order to make progress and enhance their learning. For example, as part of their work on Baptism, a group of pupils in the Year 2 class were happily organising themselves in a role play activity and in a Year 6 class, pupils were using well developed letter writing skills to compose a letter to themselves about their gifts which were then placed in clay pots that they had made earlier. ICT skills are used well to enhance learning. For example, pupils in Year 5 had designed posters and PowerPoint presentations as part of their work on the prophet Moses. Many pupils are able think quite deeply on how what they have learnt applies to their own lives. For example one pupil, talking about some work she had done on the Footprints poem said, 'If we are lonely we will never be alone because God is with us for our whole life'. Pupils with special educational needs or who have English as a second language make good progress because they have good adult support and are given appropriate activities. Pupils have very positive attitudes towards religious education. They enjoy their work especially when it is challenging and thought provoking. Work in books indicates that pupils are able to record their work in variety of interesting ways and that older more able pupils are beginning to use higher order thinking skills in order to produce high quality work. It is clear that pupils regard these books as special and take pride in ensuring they are neat and well presented.

Grade 2

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Teaching is generally good. Teachers plan work carefully and prepare their lessons well. Learning objectives are clearly articulated to pupils. Teachers use a range of strategies to engage pupils' interest. Good use is made of resources, including interactive whiteboards and a range of well chosen photographs to help pupils learn. In some classes, teaching assistants were fully involved in the progress of the lesson and made a significant contribution to the learning taking place. Assessment is developing well. Pupils are encouraged to self assess and older pupils are becoming aware of their own levels of attainment. The tracking of individual pupils' work has been introduced and is already beginning to impact on attainment. It now needs to develop further to ensure that it informs planning and is used to identify pupils who need additional help or challenge. Teachers have undertaken some moderation of pupils' work.

The inspectors agree with the school that this is an area for further development. A portfolio of levelled and annotated work should now be produced in order to ensure consistency of judgments across the school and as an aid to new teachers. All teachers mark pupils' work carefully and there are examples of interactive marking in some classes.

This good practice needs to develop across the school and time given to pupils to respond. Parents are kept well informed about the curriculum and their children's progress through the religious education newsletters and the newly established meet the teacher sessions. Home learning is set for each 'Here I Am' topic. This enables parents to become involved in their children's work and strengthens the learning experience in the class. For example, pupils in the Reception class had brought in the names of their Godparents. These were then placed in a special treasure box and a prayer for Godparents was said.

Grade 2

Quality of the Curriculum

The time allocated for religious education is in line with the Bishops' requirement of 10% of curriculum time and is well used. All themes and topics of the 'Here I Am' programme are fully covered. Teachers plan carefully and choose a range of activities in order to engage pupils' interest. As one pupil said, 'The teachers try to make learning more fun'. These activities are matched to pupils' abilities and the school is beginning to address the needs of the more able when planning work. The teaching of other faiths is supported by a range of resources and the school is currently investigating a range of suitable visits and visitors in order to help pupils deepen their understanding of other faiths. Very good use is made of visits to the local Catholic and Anglican Churches. For example, as part of their work on 'Initiation', pupils recently visited the Anglican Church to see the pool used for total immersion. Education for personal relationships is linked to the 'Here I Am' programme and supported by the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning material. The 'Loving for Life' policy has been reviewed and reflects Catholic teaching. The headteacher has produced a programme of study which links sex education to the sacraments and is hoping to introduce it in the near future. Very good opportunities are provided within the religious education curriculum for spiritual and moral development. The class 'Big question' books encourage pupils to reflect on the spiritual dimensions of their lives. Initiatives such as the 'Brian Awareness' project and the introduction of the creative curriculum have made a positive contribution to religious education lessons. The school has a good selection of resources including posters, books and sets of age appropriate Bibles to support the curriculum.

Grade 2

Leadership and management of Religious Education

Leadership and management are good. The coordinator, strongly supported by the headteacher, ensures that religious education has a high profile throughout the school. She has a well developed monitoring role which includes classroom observations, scrutiny of pupils' work, planning and assessment. She provides useful feedback to staff and highlights areas for improvement which are then incorporated into a detailed action plan which is clearly link to raising attainment. The link governor has a sound knowledge of policy and practice as well as standards and achievement in religious education throughout the school. She liaises closely with the coordinator and the headteacher. Together, they agree on the focus for the governor's regular monitoring visits. Details of these visits are reported back to the governing body. All staff, including those new to the 'Here I Am' programme are very well supported through appropriate in service training and regular staff meetings. Good use is made of diocesan support and deanery initiatives.

The coordinator keeps up to date through attendance at diocesan meetings and in-service and disseminates new ideas and good practice to staff. Resources are of good quality, stored centrally and are easily accessible. All staff are committed to delivering a religious education in accordance with the mission of the school.

They work hard to create an environment which encourages and celebrates learning. Very good use is made of displays of pupils work, photos and PowerPoint presentations to celebrate the life and work of the school.

Grade 2