

Diocese of Arundel & Brighton

SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT

Report on the inspection of denominational education under
Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Glamis Street
Bognor Regis
West Sussex
PO21 1DJ

URN 126037
DCSF 938 3329

Chair of Governors:	Mr A Lucas
Headteacher:	Mrs Katharine Amaladoss
Inspectors:	Mrs Maureen Hughes Mr Brian Sheed
Inspection date:	28 November 2007

Introduction

Description of the school

St Mary's Catholic Primary School is voluntary aided. It is situated in the Cathedral Deanery of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. It is maintained by West Sussex L.A. The principal parish which the school serves is Our Lady of Sorrows, Bognor Regis with Barnham and Slindon. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 78%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to religious education is 10% in Foundation and Key Stage 1 and 10% in Key Stage 2.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 237. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is generally below average. Around 19% of the pupils receive extra support in class. The school serves an area which includes pockets of economic disadvantage. Pupils come from a range of social backgrounds. Most are of White British heritage with an increasing number from ethnic minority groups. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is above average. The school offers additional services of community provision for adult and family education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

St Mary's is outstanding in its effectiveness as a Catholic school. One parent succinctly summed this up by saying "A fantastic, caring, Christian ethos permeates the school so the children are thoughtful, reflective and a real credit to us all". An exemplary staff team led by an intuitive headteacher is responsible for the school's success in making every pupil feel valued and every family feel included. Outstanding systems for care, guidance and support, which recognise individual need, nurture confidence in all pupils, even the most vulnerable, and enable them to make progress. They achieve extremely well in their personal development and become well rounded individuals through outstanding provision for their spiritual, moral and social development. A strong commitment to spirituality underpins the curriculum and pupils are encouraged to appreciate their place in the world. They make good progress in religious education because an innovatively planned curriculum is matched to their different abilities and good teaching challenges them to think for themselves. This is supported by effective systems for assessing and tracking progress, which are continually developing to ensure they impact on attainment. Staff and governors evaluate the school's performance conscientiously and have accurately identified strengths and where development is needed.

Issues from the last inspection have been rigorously addressed. Strong teamwork and shared commitment to its future ensure that the school has a very good capacity for further improvement.

Grade 1

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

- Continue to develop Assessment for Learning and pupil self assessment and link the process to the new levels of attainment.
- Continue to analyse the assessment data, identify underachievement and raise standards of attainment across the school.

The Catholic life of the school

Leadership and management

Strong leadership and management by governors, headteacher and senior staff shape direction for the school and underpin its distinctively Catholic values. By her exceptional commitment to the education of the whole child, the headteacher has created an ethos in which pupils thrive and make outstanding progress in their personal development. She is inspirational in promoting the Catholic life of the school, particularly in the organisation of excellent care systems for all pupils. Her considerable expertise in this area benefits the local community and other schools in the Diocese. Strongly supported by an extremely dedicated deputy headteacher and an enthusiastic assistant headteacher, she leads a well motivated team of colleagues who share a clear vision for the school. Very good leadership of the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and for those with English as an additional language ensures that these pupils are fully integrated into the life of the school. Governors fulfil their role very effectively in relation to the school's Catholic foundation and consider the spiritual implications of all school initiatives. They are extremely supportive of the school, engage in challenging dialogue and are associated with many of its activities. For example, the chair of governors has been instrumental in the development of the Bible Garden and continues to include pupils in its evolution. With the whole staff, governors promote the Gospel values enshrined in the Mission Statement and strive to "build a Christian community which is a sign of God's presence in the world".

Grade 1

Quality of Catholic life of the school

Colourful displays, such as those in the hall and those that make the entrance so welcoming, promote the school's Catholic identity and demonstrate the pride that staff and pupils feel to be part of the community. The whole family is well supported through the excellent relationships which exist, through the Family Support Network and through a comprehensive range of therapeutic services.

Strong external partnerships with other professionals ensure that a school counsellor, family link worker and art therapist are available in the specially designated Family Community Room. Outstanding systems for pastoral care, based on the school's Catholic ethos, contribute significantly to pupils' enjoyment and to their emotional well being. Pupils feel secure and trust the adults in school. The needs of those with learning difficulties and those with English as a second language are exceptionally well met by a highly skilled team of dedicated staff, who know their pupils well. Social and community cohesion is encouraged by a whole school celebration of diversity so that all pupils feel equally valued. Evidence of this is apparent in the positive move to welcome Polish families to this very inclusive school. Outstanding behaviour management systems, based on positive affirmation, a clear code of conduct and a strong commitment to conflict resolution, nurtures pupils' self esteem. Consequently they are considerate towards each other and their behaviour is exemplary. The "Working With Others" initiative has helped some pupils to develop the social skills necessary to work in such harmony. Pupils are happy to take on responsibility through the lunch time partners scheme and some in Year 6 are training as peer mediators. Pupils feel that the staff are strongly committed to listening to them and consider that their voice is heard through discussions, interviews and the school council. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. One commented "We are so pleased that our son is part of an exciting and lively Catholic community, in which he is valued and respected for what he is and is given space to explore himself and his beliefs." This strong partnership with parents is matched by equally strong links with the parish. Parishioners are welcome in the school and the school, in turn, supports many parish events. The clergy visit the school regularly and work closely with staff and pupils. They make a positive impact on the spiritual life of the whole school community. Pupils recognise their responsibilities to those less fortunate than themselves and donate regularly to a range of local and international charities. They make a very strong contribution to the wider community and work in collaboration with the Town Project to reach out to those from Eastern Europe. The school is continually looking to extend its provision and is to be congratulated on its outstanding and dynamic interaction with home, parish and wider community.

Grade 1

Quality of provision for personal and collective worship

Collective Worship is well planned to reflect the liturgical year and the "Here I Am" programme. Care is given to ensuring that the different ages, interests and abilities of the pupils are addressed through a wide variety of activities, such as drama, song and dance. Pupils are invited to participate in prayer and reflection at their own level of spiritual maturity and so develop their personal relationship with God. At the whole school assembly, excellent links were made between the Gospel message, the pupils' own lives and the lives of the local community, as the plight of the homeless was considered. Some pupils delivered their own PowerPoint presentation, while others encouraged reflection through an enthralling liturgical dance.

All staff and pupils were thoroughly engaged and responded with respect, particularly during the joyful singing and signing. Many other opportunities for prayer are provided throughout the school day, from staff prayer at the beginning of the day to moments of reflection in every religious education lesson. Pupils are comfortable with sharing their own thoughts and experiences and readily engage in quiet and spontaneous prayer. Good examples of personal prayer were seen in Year 2, while a group of Year 6 pupils prepared and led their own class liturgy with great maturity. Attractive prayer focal areas support the prayer life of each class and reinforce the current religious education topic. There is good provision for the celebration of Masses and liturgies and for retreats and reconciliation. These provide excellent occasions for pupils to engage in the traditional prayers of the Church and for staff to give positive witness of their own commitment to the Catholic ethos of the school. The whole curriculum contributes to the pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral and social development. It offers many opportunities that inspire a sense of wonder at God's creation, particularly through the use of the Sensory and Bible Gardens. Subject leaders are encouraged to reflect on how their programmes of study allow for exploration of spiritual themes and the whole school is regularly involved in such events as Spirituality Week.

Grade 1

Religious education

Achievement and standards

Attainment on entry to school is generally below average, especially in speaking and listening skills. However, many families have an understanding of Church and the excellent provision in the Foundation Stage builds on this early experience. Consequently progress is good and, by the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment in religious education matches expectations. Throughout Key Stage 2, pupils continue to make good progress, especially in Year 6, where their attainment often exceeds national expectations. Pupils succeed because the school has taken appropriate steps to ensure that all their needs are met and provides well targeted support. Interviews show that pupils are confident in using the language and concepts of religious education to express their thoughts and ideas. They reach good levels of religious literacy, due to the purposeful use of key words for each topic. Most pupils are able to apply their learning to their own lives. They readily empathise with others, as witnessed when asked to consider their reactions to visitors. With great sensitivity, they discussed the possible challenges, worries and pleasures experienced by themselves and the visitors. Pupils are justly proud of their religious education and education for personal relationship books. These are well presented and show a good range of knowledge and skills.

Grade 2

Quality of provision for religious education

Teaching is good, sometimes outstanding and always in harmony with the Mission Statement. Lessons are purposeful and very well planned to reinforce previous learning and to build knowledge. They are lively and move at a good pace. Teachers employ a variety of strategies to engage pupils. For example the Foundation teacher held pupils' interest through visual clues, as she pulled articles that might be needed on a visit to Jesus, out of a suitcase. All teachers set the pupils tasks that are carefully matched to their different abilities and to their different styles of learning. Good examples were seen in every class visited, especially in Year 6, where activities were very carefully adapted to meet a wide range of educational needs. Pupils enjoy paired discussions and role play, as seen in Year 4 and respond particularly well to the use of interactive whiteboards. They rise to the challenges set by the teachers, who have high expectations of them. Excellent questioning fosters high level thinking skills and pupils are offered time to reflect on their answers without pressure. They are encouraged to be independent thinkers and were seen, especially in Year 2, making choices and taking risks with their learning. Skilled teaching assistants play an important role in leading small group activities and make a significant impact on provision for pupils with learning difficulties of all kinds. Assessment is now embedded in practice and is beginning to have a positive effect on attainment. Pupil progress is being tracked and the data used to identify underachievement. Further analysis would make this process more rigorous. Through Assessment for Learning strategies, pupils are beginning to evaluate their own achievements, but are not yet clear about what they must do to improve. Teachers are beginning to use interactive marking to help pupils identify the way forward and this should be further developed and linked to learning objectives.

Grade 2

The religious education curriculum

At least 10% of curriculum time is allocated to religious education but it is not taught in isolation and permeates every subject on the timetable. Very effective cross curricular links, especially with ICT, art, drama, music and literacy, serve to emphasise the importance of religious education in all the school does throughout the day. A rich and innovatively planned curriculum based on the "Here I Am" programme and linked to the "Every Child Matters" agenda builds on the experience of home and ensures relevance to the pupils. It relates very well to the local community and takes account of cultural and social diversity. The assembly based on the local charity for the homeless gave clear evidence of the connections made to life outside school. Through a good programme of education in other world faiths, pupils expand these connections and learn to respect and respond to the beliefs of others. A very wide range of activities, both in school and after school, broadens the pupils' experience, while their natural musical and sporting talents are particularly well nurtured. Visitors to the school and visits to places of interest further enhance the curriculum and make it exciting. As a result, pupils say they enjoy religious education and show a positive attitude to their learning.

The programme for personal, health and social education has been devised to have direct relevance to the pupils. It is outstanding in the way it sensitively promotes the rights and responsibilities of the individual and others in the community. The programme contributes significantly to the spiritual, moral and social development of the pupils.

Grade 1

Leadership and management

There is clear direction for religious education through a range of excellent policies and through a School Improvement Plan which reflects the school's priorities for its development as a Catholic community. The RE co-ordinator is an outstanding manager and an inspirational leader of the subject. She keeps religious education under constant review and is committed to raising standards. She ensures practice matches policy by actively monitoring the quality of teaching and learning through a systematic programme of lesson observation, work scrutinies and pupil interviews. She recognises the importance of ensuring that this process makes a positive impact on pupil attainment so she delivers constructive feedback to teachers, which influences their future practice. She provides structured support through termly topic packs and well focussed training. To ensure her advice is current, she regularly takes advantage of diocesan advice and shares information with staff. She supports many of the deanery and diocesan initiatives and contributes regularly to workshops and training, sharing her expertise and showing her dedication to Catholic education. All staff are encouraged in their work and readily identify and share good practice in this very reflective school. They are offered many opportunities to develop their own personal spirituality and all contribute positively to the welcoming ethos of the school, making it a very happy place for everyone to work.

Grade 1