



INSPECTION REPORT

School: St Marie's RC Primary
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Headteacher: Mrs F. Robinson
Chair of Governors: Mrs A. Testa

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Salford
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: 3rd/4th April 2012
Date of previous inspection: December 2008
Reporting Inspector: Mrs A. Lubomski

Information about the school

St Marie's is a Voluntary Aided Roman Catholic Primary school, currently admitting 63% baptised Roman Catholic pupils. 90% of the teachers are Catholic. The School is situated in the centre of Bury. There are currently 211 Full-Time and 41 Part-Time pupils on roll. The age range of the learners is from 3 to 11. The indicative admission number is 30. Children entering school come from diverse home backgrounds; many experience hardship and economic difficulties whilst others are from professional families. Pupils have a predominately white/UK heritage with 43% having English as an Additional Language. The majority of this group are from Asian Heritage and Polish backgrounds. The number of SEN pupils is slightly higher than national average. The school offers many additional experiences in the form of after school activities. There is a strong tradition of participation in sport and musical activities. The school also provides flute tuition, an Eco-Club, a Nurture Group, a choir, drama, art and craft activities. There is a breakfast and after club held on the premises which is regularly attended by a large group of pupils.

Overall Effectiveness :

St Marie's is an outstanding Catholic school. The school's mission statement states that it will 'enable everyone to achieve their potential in an atmosphere of love and security'. The inspector experienced this 'atmosphere' in the classrooms, assemblies, dining room and staffroom of this caring community. Under the leadership of the dedicated head teacher and inspired by the gospel values, the well being of each child is central to the work of the school and the staff demonstrate a clear sense of service. Everyone is explicitly welcomed in God's name. Adults and children expressed with pride their experiences of positive feedback about the children's behaviour when they represent their school out in the wider community. During the inspection, children were respectful, well behaved and very considerate towards each other and the adults around them.

The school is successfully inclusive, it celebrates diversity, embraces those of other faiths and cultures, it builds the children's self esteem and there is a powerful sense of belonging. The children described their school as a 'fun, creative and friendly' place where 'every child is looked after'.

Overall attainment in Religious Education is good. The Religious Education is carefully planned and resourced by the head teacher and deputy who share the leadership of this core subject, with the full support of the governors. Teaching is good overall. There is a variation in its effectiveness from satisfactory to good with outstanding features. The head teacher, deputy head teacher and senior leaders are utilising a range of monitoring strategies, so they are acutely aware of strengths and the areas for development.

The Religious Education curriculum enables children to make meaningful connections between their faith and life and, combined with the outstanding collective worship, they are enabled to give witness to their beliefs. This process is positively influenced and progressed by the support and guidance of the Parish Priest. St Marie's School has an affirming relationship with the parish of St Marie and St Joseph which is influential in the lives of the children and parents. The school has effective links with local and diocesan communities, which strengthens its part in the mission of the Church.

Capacity for sustained improvement- outstanding

The pursuit of excellence in Catholic education has securely maintained and built on previously good performance at St Marie's. Self-evaluation at all levels is grounded in accurate analysis. The senior leadership team and other leaders and managers inspire the school community to sustain an ambitious vision. The governing body clearly understands and is able to articulate its role in developing the Catholic life of the school. Morale is high and belief in the school's success runs through all levels of staff.

Processes for managing performance of staff and for their professional development are used exceptionally well.

What the school needs to do to improve further

1. Continue to provide a challenging Religious Education curriculum in order to increase the percentages of children attaining higher levels.
2. Share across the school the consistent use of questions in the marking of Religious Education activities.

PUPILS

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

During the inspection it was evident that the children at St Marie's are able to articulate and understand the ethos of the school. With appropriate guidance from the staff, different groups of children plan and take a lead role in readings, prayers and actions in liturgies and the mass with the school community and within their classroom environments. Lesson observations and work scrutinised verified the developing religious skills that the children acquire throughout their time at the school. The Year 6 children showed a high level of religious understanding within their discussions about different people's responses to the events of Christ's Resurrection. During lessons observed, the children showed a capacity for praise and celebration, an ability to listen, to give thanks, to forgive and be forgiven. They treat others with high levels of respect and know that their behaviour always has consequences.

The children's response to and participation in the Prayer Life of the school is outstanding.

The inspector experienced two whole school assemblies about the Last Supper and the Way of the Cross. Both assemblies were powerful occasions for the spiritual reflection. The events of Holy Week were re-told with reverence and sincerity by children from different faith backgrounds. The whole school left both assemblies in a prayerful manner to continue their own reflections in their classrooms. The parents and governors affirmed that assemblies are always of a high standard.

In the classrooms the teachers have creatively prepared prayer foci for the children, which are appropriate to their faith journey and stages of development. The classroom displays contain many examples of how the children are learning reverence and respect, are growing in confidence in prayer and developing a relationship in 'talking to God'. It is also apparent that the faiths and beliefs of other children from minority groups are very sensitively catered for within the school. An informative display in the hall about Islam has been prepared by some of the Muslim children.

The quality of children's learning and their progress in Religious Education is outstanding.

Progress in both attainment targets is at least good, in relation to their low starting points, in each key stage for different groups. Overtime the percentage of children at the end of Key Stage Two achieving Level 4 or better in Religious Education is equal to those that achieve Level 4 or better in English. During lessons observed the children were able to use religious language in a meaningful way and could understand the implications for everyday life. The inspector observed a group of Nursery children explaining, in simple terms, stories such as 'The Feeding of the Five Thousand' and Jesus' meeting with Zacchaeus that showed how Jesus helped people. They were then able to give examples of how they could be kind like Jesus. There is a commitment and keenness from the children across the school to succeed in extending and improving their learning.

PROVISION

The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum meets children's needs is outstanding.

All Bishops' Conference requirements and local diocesan requirements are fully met. The curriculum helps children to critically reflect on the catholic faith and the responses it gives to questions of meaning and purpose. Because of this they are able to clearly articulate their own personal response to deeper questions of life.

The school is at the cutting edge of effective Religious Education curriculum design. Since September 2011 the school has been successfully implementing 'The Way, the Truth and the Life' scheme. Staff are supplementing the scheme with a range of good quality resources which were evidenced by the inspector through the book scrutinies. The school consistently seeks to improve on the coherence, relevance and excitement of the well planned opportunities provided. As a result, pupils have the opportunity to be enthusiastic and highly motivated learners and benefit from excellent opportunities to improve their spiritual and moral development.

The quality of the Prayer Life provided by the school is outstanding.

Prayer is central to the life of the school and a key part of every school celebration. Prayer opportunities for staff and pupils are planned in a manner that attracts the attendance of adults associated with the children and school.

Children's liturgical formation is well planned, appropriate to their faith backgrounds and shows progression. The themes, chosen by pupils and staff, reflect a deep understanding of the Church's mission and include the spiritual aspirations of all pupils. Children with different religious beliefs are assisted and supported in their prayer rituals. The school carefully and effectively builds the children's awareness of the liturgical year and religious feasts, through focus on liturgical colours, religious artefacts, the teaching of appropriate hymns and prayers for the season.

The quality of teaching and purposeful learning in Religious Education is good. Lessons observed ranged from satisfactory to good with outstanding features. In the Year 2 class all the children successfully retold the story of the Last Supper following an opportunity for 'spontaneous prayer', a discussion about the Year 3/4 assembly, the use of effective questioning techniques by their teacher and access to highly differentiated tasks.

As a result of good assessment procedures, teachers and other adults plan well to meet the needs of all pupils. Good and imaginative use is made of resources, including technology to maximise learning. Children with SEN and/or EAL were effectively supported in their learning by skilled Teaching Assistants. During a lesson in Year 3, the Teaching Assistant reinforced the learning through timely interventions and the rewording of information for a child with SEN.

All the teachers observed shared clear learning objectives with the children and encouraged them to recall their previous learning. Children are given effective feedback verbally and through the marking of their work. Learning could be further advanced by the consistent use of questions in the marking which encourage the children develop their independent thinking skills about the topics being studied.

The effectiveness of assessment and academic guidance in Religious Education is outstanding.

Self-evaluation at all levels within the school is coherent and rigorous. There is searching analysis and self challenge. The school has rigorously focuses assessment strategies which include both summative and formative assessment and staff provide an up to date picture of the achievement of all children. This information is used consistently and systemically by the subject leaders to promote rapid improvement or sustain high levels of achievement.

Children are involved in evaluating how well they achieve. This contributes to their improved achievement and provides them with confidence about making further improvement. Accurate, regular, systematic assessment ensures children know what the school expects of them and how well they are doing in all aspects of their work in Religious Education. The school sets challenging targets for all children, these are regularly monitored by the Subject Leaders and, when needed, well targeted actions are taken by the school. As a result, outcomes in Religious Education for most children are good.

LEADERS AND MANAGERS

The extent to which leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan improvement to outcomes for children is outstanding.

The school's leadership is deeply committed to the Church's mission in education. The head teacher and deputy head teacher, as RE subject leaders, give high precedence to Religious Education, they plan regular INSET for staff and provide relevant resources to support teaching and learning. Supported by the governing body, they encourage the staff, pupils and parents to reflect on the diocesan guidelines and seek to put these into practice. St Marie's is a school where the senior leaders and staff are sustained and guided by the Parish Priest, supported by the chair of governors and they appreciate this partnership. The school recognises the important role of parents and carers in providing a truly Christian partnership, which in turn positively impacts on the attitudes of the children. Parents speak gratefully about the welcome that they and their children have received within the school whether they joined in the infants or the Juniors. Parents and governors agreed that the children enjoyed their Religious Education lessons and shared their learning at home without being prompted.

At St Marie's, staff work tirelessly to provide assistance to vulnerable families in the school community. This work shows that the Catholic mission of the school is a priority along with the spiritual and moral development of children. This mission is extended through the fund raising opportunities that the children participate in during the school year for global and local charities. This is reflected in the school improvement plan, self evaluation form and other documents. Self-evaluation at all levels is a coherent reflection of rigorous monitoring, searching analysis and self-challenge. This leads to well targeted planning and actions taken by the leadership team in partnership with the Governing Body. As a result the children and staff have a good understanding of the school's mission, share its purpose and are keenly and actively involved in shaping and supporting it.

The extent to which the governing body provides effective challenge and support for the Catholic dimension of the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory and canonical responsibilities are met is outstanding.

Governors fully understand and are able to articulate the mission of the school and they make a highly significant contribution to the work and the Catholic dimension of the school. They fully understand, and have reflected on, the requirement of the diocesan guidelines and the implications for their school. Foundation Governors make good use of the training provided by the diocese. They have high levels of expertise, are extremely well organised and thorough in their approach.

In discharging their statutory and canonical responsibilities, they have highly robust systems in evaluating the effectiveness of their implementation, keeping the work of the school under review and acting upon their findings. Governors are flexible and adapt to new ideas quickly, supporting the work of the staff in improving outcomes for all children. They are confident in providing a high level of challenge for Religious Education.

Governors engage very effectively with parents, children and the staff as a whole and are well informed about users' views of the school. They use these views to inform strategic priorities for development.

The extent to which leaders and managers promote Community Cohesion is outstanding.

The inclusion of all is a central goal and a shared vision. Leaders and managers work with others beyond the school to ensure that children are given opportunities to collaborate with people from different backgrounds. Within the school, there is concern, respect and hospitality towards others. Children are offered opportunities across cultural/faith/social/economic backgrounds. Parents from all backgrounds are involved in decision making through annual questionnaires and discussions with staff.

Provision for Religious Education, within the spirit and direction of Vatican II, results in an attitude of respect for all faiths, mutual understanding and integrity, enabling children to challenge each other's beliefs, bring them close to people on the margins of society and those who suffer.