

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



Inspection Report of Denominational Character and Religious Education

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

Our Lady's Catholic Primary School

Amersham Road, Amersham, HP6 5PL

URN: 110479

DfES School No: 825/3375

Headteacher: Mr M Holdsworth

Chair of Governors: Mr B Shelley

Reporting Inspector: Mrs P Brannigan

Associate Inspector: Mrs M Everington

Date of inspection: 5th July 2012

Date of previous inspection: 5th December 2006

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and in partnership with
Buckinghamshire Local Authority

Information about the school

Our Lady's is a one-form entry primary school in Chesham Bois, Buckinghamshire. It serves the parishes of Our Lady's, Chesham Bois, St Columba's Chesham, St Aidan's Little Chalfont and Immaculate Heart of Mary Great Missenden. There are currently 202 pupils aged 4-11 on roll and the school is over subscribed. Over 70% of pupils are of White British Heritage with the remainder coming from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Around 97% of pupils are Catholics as are most of the teachers and support staff. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below the national average and currently no pupils receive free school meals.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Satisfactory 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

Our Lady's is a good school with a strong Catholic ethos. Prayer and worship are central to the life of the school and pupils' spiritual and moral development is good. The new headteacher has put in place a number of new initiatives linked to the Catholic life of the school as well as teaching, learning, assessment and monitoring. These initiatives are well supported by staff and governors. Pastoral care is good and shared by the chaplain and all members of the school community. Relationships within the school are good and pupils feel well cared for and supported in their learning. Parents welcome the new initiatives, appreciate the good communication with staff and the way the school keeps them informed. Pupils' standards of attainment are good.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

The school has a good capacity for sustained improvement. The last inspection in 2006 identified two areas for development. These have both been addressed although further developments are currently taking place. An assessment system has been implemented which links pupils' achievement to the current levels of attainment and a marking policy has been put in place. Teachers now use a wider range of learning styles including paired and group work which has enhanced pupils' enjoyment of religious education lessons.

The quality of self-evaluation is good. The school SEF-RE document is accurate and gives a detailed, comprehensive analysis of the Catholic life of the school and religious education. Some staff and governors as well as the headteacher have been involved in its completion and it is a working document. The school leadership gives a high profile to religious education and is putting in place strategies to share good practice and support new teachers.

The senior leadership team and governors have a clear vision for the Catholicity of the school and the central place of prayer, worship and religious education. The new headteacher has put in place a rapid improvement plan to establish rigorous monitoring and build on good practice. Senior staff are good role models and all staff are encouraged to improve their skills.

The current leadership has a good capacity to maintain effectiveness. The headteacher shows good leadership of a Catholic community and is well supported by staff. Governors have a wide range of expertise and many are involved in the life of the school. Systems are in place to develop and strengthen recent initiatives which are leading to better outcomes for all pupils. The religious education co-ordinator is well placed to support colleagues and has attended training linked to a new religious education scheme which is to be implemented in September.

What the school should do to improve further

- Fully implement the new system for rigorous monitoring and evaluation of religious education including the moderation and levelling of pupils' work across the school
- Establish a marking system which will enable pupils to identify the next steps in their learning.
- Develop the current assessment system to enable staff to plan lessons which will challenge all groups of pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 2

Pupils make a good contribution to the Catholic life of the school. They respond well to opportunities to understand the needs of others in school and the wider community. Members of the School Council play an active part in school life and older pupils help and support younger ones. Several local, national and international charities are supported throughout the year and there are good links with the local parishes. Pupils show respect for adults and each other. Behaviour is very good and pupils value the sense of community created within the school.

Prayer and worship are at the heart of school life. Pupils respond positively to opportunities to develop in their faith journey. They are actively involved in preparation for assemblies, liturgies and masses and participate with reverence. Pupils learn the traditional prayers of the Church and are given time for reflection. They are able to apply aspects of Jesus' life and teaching to their own lives. They understand the importance of prayer and participate readily in class and assemblies. Pupils are given opportunities to create their own prayers and examples were seen during the inspection.

Chaplaincy provision is good. The chaplain visits classes on a regular basis and leads discussions with pupils. Staff and governors work closely together to promote the spiritual development of pupils and the Catholic life of the community. High priority is given to the pastoral care of pupils. They feel safe, cared for and know where to go when they need support. They value being in a friendly environment where they are listened to and encouraged to help each other. Parents value the care given to their children and the approachability of staff.

Progress in religious education is good. Pupils work with interest and enjoyment. They enjoy their religious education lessons and work well together. They are eager to participate in activities and keen to do well. They have a good knowledge of the Catholic faith appropriate to their age and abilities. Workbooks show coverage of the curriculum and indicate a varied range of tasks. Standards of attainment meet or exceed diocesan expectations.

Leaders and managers

Grade 2

The new headteacher demonstrates very good leadership of the school through the way he promotes, monitors and evaluates the provision for the Catholic life of the school. He communicates a clear Catholic vision to the whole community and is supported in this by staff and governors who are all committed to providing the best possible environment for the pupils. He has recently strengthened the process of self-evaluation which is detailed and identifies areas for improvement. The new subject leader has a good knowledge of areas for development and is well placed to support colleagues.

Religious education is now monitored consistently by means of lesson observations, work scrutiny and joint planning by the subject leader and the headteacher. The school has identified the need to put in place strategies to ensure all pupils make good progress and this is now happening. The implementation of a rapid improvement plan has led to a stronger focus on planning and assessment. Much emphasis is placed on staff development and teachers are encouraged to undertake further training.

Governors work closely with the headteacher and have a good understanding of strengths and areas for development. They are well informed about the life of the school through the headteacher's report and meetings with subject leaders. The link governor for religious education attends school liturgies and weekly staff prayers. He has also visited classrooms and held discussions with pupils about their work. In addition several governors visit frequently and are involved in school activities. They recognise the need to ensure that there is an effective monitoring system in place to evaluate all aspects of the religious life of the school and to enable the governing body to challenge and support effectively.

Community cohesion is good. The school is a welcoming community where everyone is respected and valued. Diversity is celebrated and pupils from other faiths are given opportunities to share their traditions. The school participates in local sporting and cultural events and there are good links with other schools including those to which pupils transfer at the end of Key Stage 2. Parish links are good. Other faiths are taught well and speakers are invited to talk to pupils at special assemblies. A good range of charities including MOPSA are supported throughout the year and pupils are given opportunities to develop a sense of service and show compassion for others. Provision for spiritual

development ensures that pupils are able to reflect on their own lives and experiences. Parents are invited to many school events and are kept well informed about their children's welfare and progress. They appreciate the curriculum information sheets which enable them to support their children's learning.

Provision

Grade 2

Provision for prayer and worship at Our Lady's is good. Assemblies and liturgies are well planned and contribute to pupils' spiritual development. They include visual presentations, bible readings drama, singing and music. Pupils are involved in collective worship in their classrooms and are given opportunities for personal reflection. Each classroom has a prayer focus with religious artefacts which sometimes includes children's work. Masses are celebrated in school throughout the year as well as Stations of the Cross, Ash Wednesday and a May procession. Parents and families are invited to these celebrations. Priests and the deacon from the local parish support the school through masses, liturgies and chaplaincy.

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is good. During the inspection, lessons observed were good and one had outstanding features. Lessons are planned with clear learning intentions and an interesting range of activities. Pupils work well and generally make good progress. Teachers respond well to pupils' comments although occasionally opportunities to extend knowledge and develop understanding are missed. Good support by teaching assistants is a feature of many lessons. Marking is positive but rarely includes suggestions of ways to improve. The assessment strategies currently being strengthened indicate that standards are likely to be maintained or improve.

The quality of the religious education curriculum is good. At least 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education. At present Foundation stage and Year 1 are trialling materials from the new programme, 'Come and See' with a view to implementing it throughout the school in September. The co-ordinator and headteacher give religious education a central place in the life of the school and this is demonstrated by the good level of resources and time devoted to it. Religious education displays around the school emphasise the centrality of faith to the work of the community. The curriculum enables pupils to become aware of their responsibility for each other and their environment. It contributes very well to their spiritual and moral development.

Assessment is in place and the school is in the process of developing current practice to improve outcomes for pupils. There is evidence that a strengthened system has begun to support the learning and progress of all pupils. The school has recognised the need to consolidate and build on current good practice in this area.

The inspectors would like to express their thanks and appreciation to all members of the school community for their welcome and openness during the inspection.