

INSPECTION REPORT

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**Inspection carried out Under Canon 806
and in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005**

Name of School: St Columba's RC Primary School, Ripley Street, Tonge Moor, Bolton. BL8 3AR

Inspection date 20th March 2019

Reporting Inspectors Peter Eavers, Sue Molloy, Helen Sullivan

Type of school	Primary
URN	105220
Age range of pupils	3 – 11
Number on roll	240
Appropriate authority	The Governing Board
Chair of Governors	Helen Reddy
Headteacher	Kath Baker
Religious Education Subject Leader	Charlotte Atherton
Date of previous inspection	8 th April 2014

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades
Overall effectiveness of the school	2	1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3=Requires Improvement 4 = Inadequate
The quality of Catholic Leadership	1	
The Catholic Life of the school (incorporating Welcome, Welfare and Witness)	1	
The quality of Religious Education (incorporating Word)	2	
The quality of Worship	1	
The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements		

CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

St Columba's RC Primary School is an average sized primary school on the edge of a housing estate in Tonge Moor in Bolton and serves the parish of Corpus Christi in Bolton. The neighbouring church of St Columba closed in November 2017 and school masses are celebrated regularly in the school hall and twice yearly in St Brendan's Church in Harwood. Socio-economic indicators show that 63% of the children live in areas of significant deprivation. There are 240 pupils on roll including 26 children in the nursery. 73% of the teachers and 61% of the children are baptised Catholics. 24% of the children qualify for pupil premium funding and 52 pupils (22%) have been identified as having a Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND) which is significantly higher than the national average. 5 pupils have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) which is above the national average. 18% of children have English as an additional language. Standards on entry to the school are below or well below the national average. At the time of inspection, the headteacher was the Religious Education subject leader as the appointed postholder was on maternity leave. Since the last inspection, a new chair and vice-chair of governors have taken up office.

THE KEY STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL INCLUDE:

- **Truly authentic Catholic leadership which has created an oasis of safety, nurture and love for all in the school community**
- **Happy, excellently-behaved, enthusiastic children who value their learning and treat each other with love and respect**
- **A strong sense of community, partnership and belonging which makes St Columba's a very special Catholic family**
- **Dedicated, hard-working and talented staff who model genuine Christian relationships across the school and provide a beautiful learning environment for the children**
- **The central value placed on respecting the dignity of the individual which ensures that all children, and especially the most vulnerable, are cared for exceptionally well**

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL IS GOOD

St Columba's RC Primary School is a good Catholic school with very many outstanding features. It was appropriate that inspectors visited the school on International Happiness Day as this is a school which embodies Christian happiness at its best. It is an extremely inclusive school where all are valued and prized as individuals and the needs of the most vulnerable are met with love, care and dignity. All are helped to grow and shine as unique children of God. There is a palpable family atmosphere and a strong culture of welcome which ensures that children, staff and parents feel a strong sense of ownership and belonging. The headteacher is passionate about Catholic education and provides outstanding leadership. She is very well supported by a strong senior leadership team, very talented staff and extremely dedicated and committed governors, who provide high quality support and challenge. Staff and governors are ambitious for the school's continued improvement. Parents overwhelmingly support the work of the school. They feel welcome and valued and that their voices are listened to. They speak very highly of the spiritual life of the school and feel that their children are very well taught and supported. This is a place where the person of Jesus Christ is evident in the love shown to all. Staff model Christ for the children in their relationships across the school. Children's behaviour in classes and around school is exemplary and they treat each other with respect and dignity. Children are happy, enthusiastic and very proud of their school. They feel safe and cared for. Despite the closure of the

neighbouring church, the school has worked hard to retain and strengthen links with the parish and the parish priest and curate are frequent visitors to the school and highly valued by pupils and staff alike. The school should now ensure that they raise even further their expectations for what children can achieve and challenge them to think and reflect even more deeply on their work in Religious Education.

THE QUALITY OF CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

The extremely committed and dedicated headteacher has created an oasis of calm, security and nurture at St Columba's. She cares deeply about the children in her care and is passionate about providing them with the best possible Catholic education. She is very well supported in this vision and ambition by a very skilled and equally committed senior leadership team and a very talented and hard-working staff team. The governing board are extremely dedicated and diligent in their roles and demonstrate a deep commitment to the school and to the Church's mission in education. They share the headteacher's passion and ambition for the school and provide high quality support and challenge in a spirit of love and shared mission. Leadership decisions are clearly driven by Gospel values and resources are well targeted to support those in greatest need. A very good example of this would be the employment of a Pastoral Mentor to support children and families experiencing difficulties, whose work is highly valued across the school. Priority is given to the development of the children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural education to develop the whole child. The parish priest and curate support the school extremely well and are a very valued presence in the school and in the spiritual lives of children, staff and parents. Under the leadership of the headteacher, senior leaders and governors, the school has managed the impact of the closure of the neighbouring church of St Columba very well and the regular Wednesday masses and ongoing links with parishioners have ensured that the school remains a central focal point for worship in the parish. Staff professional development to support the successful introduction of the *Come And See* scheme has been well planned and delivered and those staff new to the school and new to Catholicism are very well supported.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL (incorporating Welcome, Welfare and Witness) IS OUTSTANDING

There is an overwhelming culture of welcome at St Columba's and staff work very hard to ensure that all within and beyond the school community feel valued and respected as individuals. The high quality support provided to those children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities ensures that they feel valued and empowered and the emphasis on a strong family ethos across the school enables children, parents, families and staff to feel a very tangible sense of belonging and ownership of the school. The school places great emphasis on parental partnership and holds the Leading Parent Partnership Award. Parents overwhelmingly support the work of the school. Those interviewed spoke very highly of the welcome they receive and felt that the school "caters for everyone's needs". They emphasised that staff were extremely approachable, always willing to listen and any issues that arose were dealt with quickly and effectively. They felt that communication was very good and that the school provided their children with excellent spiritual guidance. Indeed, one family described how their experience at St Columba's had led to their child deciding to become Catholic. The school has very effective procedures to keep children safe. There is a clear emphasis on supporting those children and families experiencing difficulties, most notably through the excellent work of the Pastoral Mentor and her close liaison with the headteacher, Special Educational Needs and Disability Coordinator (SENDCo) and teaching staff. Staff across the school model genuine Christian relationships in their interactions with each other and with children and parents and this modelling provides children with excellent examples of how to 'be Christ for others'. Children's behaviour in classes and around school is exemplary and they treat all members of the school community with respect and dignity. They are very proud of their school, describing it as "perfect – everyone follows in Jesus's footsteps", and stating that "everyone fits in here – you are treated as an individual". They feel that incidents of bullying are rare and if they happen, they are dealt with very effectively. Children feel safe, loved and well looked after, stating that "teachers are always there for you if you're struggling. They make sure we are safe, content, happy and learning to the best of our ability". Children and parents are actively involved in raising money for a wide range of charities and are outstandingly generous in their contributions. The children are very aware of their duties as stewards of God's creation and the school holds the Silver Eco Award, Healthy Schools Award, Geography Award and has developed a wonderful Forest School to enhance children's environmental education.

THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (incorporating Word) IS GOOD

The school's Mission Statement, "We are companions on a journey: living, learning, loving, laughing in the footsteps of Our Lord", which was written by the children, staff and governors, is known, lived and clearly evident throughout the school. Religious Education (RE) is given a high priority in the curriculum and meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory through the use of the *Come and See* and *Caritas in Action* schemes. Children clearly enjoy their learning in RE and inspectors saw some wonderful examples of extremely talented, skilled and enthusiastic teachers being creative in their use of drama and group work to make scripture 'come alive' for the children and help them apply it to their own lives. They examined at an age-appropriate level how to really make Jesus's message to "Love one another as I have loved you" happen on a day to day basis. The school should now focus on raising expectations of what children can achieve in their RE even higher to further develop their standards of religious literacy and to provide them with more opportunities to engage in the 'Big Questions' of purpose and meaning. Children's behaviour for learning in RE is exemplary. The environment across the school is beautiful with very high-quality displays reflecting the value that the school places on learning across the curriculum and particularly in RE. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is helping the children to develop as responsible, caring and loving members of God's family. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is well delivered through the *Journey in Love* scheme. Children learn about other faiths both within the *Come and See* scheme and through the very successful World Religion Trail which is very popular with both children and those parents who took part. The school is an active member of the Bolton Schools Catholic Education Partnership (BOSCEP), working with other Catholic schools to share practice in RE teaching and learning.

THE QUALITY OF WORSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

Prayer is clearly central to the school community at St Columba's. Children respond with reverence and dignity to prayer opportunities. Parents, including those who are not Catholic, speak very highly of the prayer life of the school and how it has had an impact on their children's spiritual development. One mother spoke of how she felt that St Columba's had "ignited a passion" for Christianity in her son to the extent that he has now joined a Youth Mission. The school supports staff very well in developing their confidence in leading prayer and worship, especially those staff previously unfamiliar with Catholicism. Prayerful reflections at the start of each staff briefing session provide wonderful opportunities for staff to pray together regularly and to model different prayer traditions. Whole school and class acts of worship are well-planned to ensure they are age-appropriate and give children real opportunities to meet God in prayer. For example, a whole school act of worship focussing on International Happiness Day encouraged children to think about how they could spread happiness in very simple ways that day and a GIFT chaplain-led outdoor worship in the Forest School focussed on guided meditation and led to children writing their own prayers. There is scope now to develop the role of the GIFT chaplaincy team further to take an even more active role in the spiritual and religious life of the school. The Sacramental Programme is very well delivered in partnership with the parish and is highly valued by parents and children. The parish priest and curate are regular visitors to the school and their support and spiritual guidance are greatly valued by staff and children alike. Since the closure of the neighbouring church, the school has worked very hard to retain and indeed strengthen links with the parish and although parents regret the closure of the church, they speak highly of the work the school has done since to ensure it is very much at the centre of the worshipping life of the local parish community. Parishioners regularly attend the Wednesday masses in the school hall.

GREED AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- **To raise expectations even higher to ensure that all pupils, especially those most able, are challenged more in their RE work, including the development of higher-level religious literacy skills**
- **To provide children with more opportunities to engage in the 'Big Questions' of purpose and meaning as they relate to the world around them**