INSPECTION REPORT
SS JOHN AND MONICA CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL
BIRMINGHAM

Inspection dates 9th – 10th October 2008
Reporting Inspector Teresa Quick

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School Catholic Primary
Age range of pupils 4-11 years
Number on roll 203
Appropriate authority The governing body
Chair of governors Ms Marie O’Halloran
School address Chantry Road
Moseley
Birmingham
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Parish SS John and Martin
Date of previous inspection November 2005
DCSF School Number 330 3410
Unique Reference Number 103478

Headteacher Mrs Eileen Walker
Description of the school

SS John and Monica is an average size primary school in the parish of SS John and Martin in Moseley, Birmingham. It is situated approximately 1 mile from the parish church. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. It is a one-form entry school with 203 pupils on role, of whom 13% are baptised Catholics, 60% Muslim and 17% other Christian faiths. The numbers of baptised Catholics varies between year groups from 34% to 7%. There are 60% of the pupils with English as an additional language. The Catholic pupils are mainly from the parish of St John and St Martin but many pupils travel from across the City to attend the school. The number of pupils who take free school meals is 40%, which is well above average.

Overall effectiveness of the school

SS John and Monica is an outstanding Catholic school. The school successfully combines a strong Catholic ethos within a multi-faith school where the individual is valued and nurtured and diversity is celebrated. There are excellent relations within the school. It is a calm, harmonious community where there is clear respect for each member and a developing understanding of different faiths and cultures. The whole school community accepts the Catholic ethos and values of the school. On entry to the school the majority of the pupils are below the local authority average in most areas of learning and very low in their knowledge of the Catholic faith. There are significant difficulties in language and literacy skills. Pupils make good progress and by Year 2 standards are in line with diocesan expectations. This progress continues during Key Stage 2. In Year 6 pupils have standards that are at least good when judged against diocesan expectations but their understanding of living according to the school’s ideals of justice and peace is outstanding. Pupils are very happy enthusiastic workers who enjoy their work. The leadership is enthusiastic about the teaching of the faith. Throughout the school the teaching is at least good with some outstanding teaching. It is the enthusiasm of the staff working to encourage everyone to follow the mission statement and the good teaching and learning religious education (RE) that enables there to be outstanding achievement in RE. The provision enables pupils to achieve outstanding development spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. The leadership of the school is outstanding. The headteacher, the subject leader and the governing body provide clear direction. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. After thorough reflection and evaluation there is a well thought out school self-evaluation for RE. In their judgements the school underestimates some of its own strengths and capabilities. With their desire for continuous improvement the school has excellent capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop and organise resources to ensure that they are easily accessible,
- Provide more books and artefacts for research and to enable the RE curriculum to be more creative.

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

The leadership of the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. The school faith community is led in an oasis of calm. “They learn through the example of Jesus to love, respect, understand and value each other.” The school has a diverse faith population but all members of the school community feel able to share in the distinct message of the mission statement and also in the general moral message that underlies it. This is an outstanding achievement for the leadership. The mission statement is central to the life of the school. The staff and governors lead the school through reviews from which they further develop the Catholic life of the school. They provide clear direction. The leadership ensures that there is a vital Catholic life. The school lives up to its aim as a place of peace and justice. The ethos proclaims their Christianity. Attitudes reflect the teachings of Christ. In
this Catholic school with many other faiths this is outstanding. Morale is very high. Planning is very good. Governors regularly monitor the Catholic life of the school informally and more formally through the headteacher’s report. The link governor, the parish priest, is regularly in school. The school self-evaluation is detailed and accurate with clear priorities for the improvement of the Catholic life of the school and religious education. The sacramental preparation is organised in conjunction with the other parish school. The teachers of the sacramental classes and the parish priest ensure that the children are spiritually prepared for Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation. The leadership encourages very good links with the parents. When they “welcome a child to the school they welcome the family”. Parents choose this school because of its Catholic ethos. There are very good links with the local Catholic schools, the other local schools, the local Catholic high school and the Birmingham Catholic Partnership. It is the leadership of the Catholic life of the school that ensures that the school is an excellent Catholic school.

Collective Worship

Provision for collective worship is very good in respect of frequency and quality. There are daily acts of worship in each class. Collective worship and prayer are seen to be an integral part of school life and contribute to the spiritual and moral development of pupils and adults. Pupils are taught the traditional prayers of the Church and they also write and say their own. The Rosary is said in class during October. The very good support of the parish priest ensures that a Mass is said regularly in school. The school prayer book has been updated. It is in use throughout the school and available to parents. Collective worship is well organised with an altar server rota and a rota for the leading of the liturgy. The Mass during the inspection was well planned with most of the class leading the liturgy having an individual role. The Gospel reading was enhanced by drama. Responses and the singing were very good. Parents attended the Mass supporting their children, showing respect and support for the faith of the school. A Eucharistic Minister came to receive the Blessed Sacrament to take to the sick of the parish, which provided pupils with the further knowledge that they are part of the whole parish community. Pupils were reverent and their behaviour was exemplary. When making the Sign of Peace in Mass they sing “shalom my friend” and have adapted the words to the repeat verse so that the say “Salaam my friend” as a means of integrating all pupils more fully into the Mass. The importance for the setting for the Mass in school has been greatly enhanced by the recent purchases of a new altar and altar cloths. Parish and school work together in the sacramental preparation programme with special Masses on Sundays throughout the preparation time. Pupils attend Mass on the holy days in Church but pupils during sacramental preparation spend time in Church. Prayer tables in the classrooms are the focus of classroom prayer. Each class is dedicated to a particular saint. During the last year new statues have been purchased for most classrooms. Another recent addition to the prayer life of the school is the attractive quiet area. Not only do pupils use this after receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but pupils who wish for a period of prayerful peace and quiet also use it. Collective worship supports the school’s very good contribution to the spiritual life of the pupils.

Community Cohesion

Community cohesion is an area of outstanding achievement. The school serves a socio-economically mixed background and has pupils speaking nine different languages and coming from a number of different faiths. The school is a welcoming and inclusive community. Parents choose to send their children to SS John and Monica’s. They do so because it is a Catholic setting and value the quality of education provided. Staff and governors promote a positive attitude to diversity of faith, race, disability and ethnicity through every aspect of school experience and are committed to strengthening their community cohesion. They encourage pupils to respect their own faith and that of other people. This is a harmonious community where pupil’s friendships cross social, cultural and faith boundaries. Staff live, share, teach and celebrate the Gospel. They are excellent role models. The vast majority of the pupils of all faiths share the faith journey with the Catholic pupils within the school. The headteacher is involved with other schools and faith leaders in a local initiative to encourage multi-faith working together. She also teaches the faith to Catholic pupils at the local special school each week. The parish priest supports the school in its respect for the diversity in the
community and welcomes all faiths to attend events and gatherings. The Christmas and Summer Fairs have multi-cultural representations from the school, usually in the form of dancing. The school and parish work closely together. The staff are knowledgeable and sensitive about the needs of pupils of the differing faiths. Pupils of different faiths are supported in their celebrations and religious observances. The staff are conscious of the drop in attendance that accompanies Eid each year and plan to prevent loss of curriculum time for those pupils who are absent. A large proportion of the pupils are Muslim and as such there are occasions when the celebrations of this faith need to be acknowledged and shared by the whole school community. A great number of the older pupils participate to some degree in the fasting associated with Ramadan and the school is mindful of the learning and emotional impact such actions have on the pupils. Three of the teaching assistants are Muslim and their addition to the staff continues to enhance the diversity of the school. All pupils achieve equally well. They work together in mixes of ability, gender, culture and religion. Major world religions are explored annually. Through charity events, inclusion the school council and multi-faith teaching, the school encourages initiatives to enable pupils to leave the school with moral values, which can be use positively to contribute to society. The pupils’ religious education, PSHE and work with the SEAL (Social, Emotional, Aspects of Learning) project support the social cohesion agenda. The school is an active member in the parish community and is a member of the Partnership of Catholic schools. As they are a Forest School they reach out to other schools in the community, in particular the other parish school to enable them to share the facilities. They also reach out into the communities of Moseley and Balsall Heath in differing ways. The pupils take part each year in the activities surrounding the Balsall Heath carnival and participate in Moseley in Bloom. They sing carols at Christmas in an Old Peoples’ Home. The home-school association produced a cookbook involving all parents and pupils and sponsored by local businesses.

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Achievement in RE is outstanding. Baseline assessment shows that very few pupils start school with any knowledge of the faith. By Year 6 pupils have good standards. Throughout the school the majority of pupils are keen learners, interested, thinking pupils who work well and enjoy their RE lessons. There is consistently good teaching and, with the active participation in the Catholic life of the school, pupils learn well and achieve high standards. Almost all learners, including those with learning difficulties and English as an additional language achieve well and make outstanding progress. The learning and skills in literacy are successfully transferred to RE. Pupils throughout the school have a good and developing knowledge of the traditional prayers of the Church.

Quality of Provision for Religious Education

Teaching and Learning

The quality of teaching and learning throughout the school is at least good with some outstanding teaching. The work in pupils’ books and talking to pupils gives evidence that teaching and learning are outstanding. RE is taught as a discrete subject each week. Much of the work is well matched to ability, but teaching assistants contribute substantially to the learning whether it is the understanding or language that is in need of support. The school uses a variety of different teaching styles and techniques to pupils to be interested, question and to learn well and enjoy RE lessons. This is manifest in particular with the support for the pupils when English is not their first language. Very good support is given to them with the new vocabulary before the start of a new topic. ICT proves to be an excellent stimulus for learning especially in Year 6 where pupils are excited and proud of their work. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. Planning is of a high quality which, together with the teachers’ very good knowledge of the subject, supports excellent learning throughout the school. Teaching assistants provide high quality focused support. There is some evidence of creativity in RE lessons across the school. This is an area for planned development. Targets for RE are in the front of the pupils’ books. Written work progresses well with standards linked to those found in English. Marking supports pupils’ learning giving developmental points supporting pupils’ knowledge of how to improve their work. An area of improvement since the last
inspection is assessment, which is now very good. Teachers have a clear knowledge of the level at which each pupil is functioning. Pupils are involved in the assessment process. The school is working successfully towards its aim of providing excellence in teaching and learning.

Curriculum

The curriculum provision is good and improving. The time allocation for RE meets the requirements of the Bishops’ Conference and the curriculum fulfils the Curriculum Directory for Religious Education. Teachers planning for RE follows the Diocesan Strategy for Religious Education as the base. There is an overall view of the RE curriculum. Pupils have excellent support in their spiritual and moral development through the well-established SEAL programme. Family life and sex education is supported through the All that I am programme of study. There are very good cross-curricular links with RE. English and ICT have clearly defined links. Circle time encourages the pupils to become reflective which is an area the school is working to develop. PSHE work includes moral issues such as social justice and has dedicated topic areas on other world faiths. Learning in the forest school is being linked into the RE curriculum. Staff adapt the curriculum to meet the interests of the pupils in this multi-faith school, for example Year 6 when studying the story of Cain and Abel in the Old Testament, access the Qu’ran version of the story and allow pupils to compare and contrast. In addition to traditional music tuition the school offers Tabla tuition (Asian drums) to Year 6 pupils as many of them have access to these instruments at Gurdwara and Temple. School visits to enhance the pupils’ knowledge of Catholic heritage are limited. Visits to St. Chad’s Cathedral, Alton Castle and a day of recollection at the Convent of La Retraite form part of the parish based preparation for the sacraments and provided for the children in the parish schools. Charity events enhance the curriculum strategy and offer a real life focus. Pupils have contributed to both Catholic, local and worldwide charities these include Father Hudson’s Society, Rwanda appeal and CAFOD.

Leadership and Management of Religious Education

The leadership and management by the subject leader are outstanding. The leadership team and the governors give RE high priority within the school. The subject leader has undertaken a thorough review of teaching in RE by lesson observations, book trawls and “RE walks”. She is well qualified and understands the needs of the curriculum. In the two years since she came to the school many changes have been instigated as a result of her reviews and by acting upon the findings in the parent and child questionnaires. She ensures that very good planning is in place for all areas of the RE curriculum. Much has been achieved but there are still areas of the curriculum that are planned for further review and development. Formal cross-curricular links are being developed. Links to other faiths are included during RE teaching. The subject leader has formed links with the leaders of other faiths in the area thus enabling her to meet the needs of the pupils. The school self-evaluation for RE is detailed and future developments have been identified. Rigorous assessment is now in place and monitored. Expenditure in RE of necessity has been high. The school is well resourced for Bibles. More books are needed for reference and artefacts to support the learning of the Catholic and other faiths. Good staff training is organised and the subject leader gives individual support. The priest, who is the link governor for RE, is a regular visitor to the school. He is supportive of the staff in the unique position in which they work. Governors have a good knowledge of the work in RE from the headteacher’s report and from the subject leader. The management ensure there is no doubt that this is a Catholic school. There is a large dramatic painted mural surrounding a stairwell. Appropriate crucifixes, statues and displays around the school enhance the school’s Catholicity. Displays of a religious nature are in all classrooms. The headteacher and subject leader have led change from good foundations making this an outstanding Catholic school.