

INSPECTION REPORT

St Columba's

**Ripley Street
Tonge Moor
Bolton
BL8 3AR**

Inspection date 8th April 2014

Reporting Inspector Mr J Graves, Mr D Golding

Inspection carried out in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School Primary School

URN 105220

Age range of pupils 3 -11

Number on roll 241

Appropriate authority The Governing Body

Chair of Governors R Berry

Headteacher Kath Baker

Religious Education Co-ordinator Kath Baker

Date of previous inspection January 2009

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades 1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3=Requires Improvement 4 = Inadequate
Overall effectiveness of the school	1	
The quality of Catholic Leadership	1	
The quality of the Word of God community	1	
The quality of the Welcome community	1	
The quality of Welfare	1	
The quality of Worship	1	
The quality of Witness	1	
The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements		

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- St Columba's is a Voluntary Aided RC primary school in the diocese of Salford.
- It serves the parish of St Columba's in Bolton, Lancashire.
- Pupils are arranged in single aged classes.
- The admissions number is 30.
- The head teacher was appointed in September 2011.
- The Deputy Head teacher was appointed in Easter 2014.
- The school is situated close to the parish church.
- The socio-economic make up of the pupils is made from a diverse, inner-city community.
- 62% of learners are baptised Catholics.
- Standards on entry to Reception are well below average
- 19.9% of pupils are eligible for Free School Meals.
- 14% of pupils have been identified as having Special Educational Needs.
- 18.25% of children have English as an Additional Language
- Attendance is 95.6% for the period: September 2013 – March 2014.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Columba's is an OUTSTANDING Catholic School. The head teacher works hard to lead the school and to successfully build on its many strengths. She is rightly held in high esteem by colleagues, parents and governors. Self-Evaluation of RE and the Catholic nature of the school is rigorous, honest and accurate. The school is very inclusive. This is demonstrated in the fact that the Mission Statement has been written by the children, staff and governors. They show the Gospel values of love, tolerance and community. Inspectors found the children to be both polite and helpful. Governors are highly visible in the school, for example, they regularly visit for a range of activities from learning walks, work scrutiny and to assist in providing creative activities with the children. The school's Catholic ethos shines out. School is a strong, safe environment for all children who attend. Several children spoken to during a lunch-time all said they felt safe at St Columba's. There is a positive culture where children feel valued and where success is a realistic goal for all. The Mission Statement is alive and working in the school. The children could quote the Mission Statement, explain its meaning and expand upon it. One Year 6 pupil said, "We are following in the footsteps of God and working together. At the end of the year, we will be leaving many happy memories behind." Children engage in the 'Big Questions', eg, in one class after hearing the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead a child asked "Does this make Jesus truly human or truly God?" Children have the opportunity to enter their thoughts, prayers and reflections in a journal which is present in every classroom on the prayer focus table. This is indicative of the opportunities that they are afforded throughout the school. The recent appointments to the governing body and the staff ensure that the key people will be in place to continue to move the school forward on its journey. Parents interviewed during the inspection spoke about the school and its staff with affection saying, "the head teacher leads by example and is well supported by all the staff. Teachers are inspirational. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect. Parents are well informed and we think our children are happy and safe. There is a holistic approach to learning in our school with our new Mission Statement at the centre". Issues from the last inspection have been fully addressed.

KEY STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL INCLUDE

- The leadership of the school is highly effective.
- Teaching and Learning in RE.
- Collective Worship gives children valuable opportunities to reflect,
- Children feel safe and their behaviour, general demeanour and treatment of their peers is excellent.
- Staff take a great pride in displaying and celebrating children's work.

THE QUALITY OF CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP

The quality of Catholic Leadership is OUTSTANDING. The school feels that children take pride in their RE work, and this was seen in the work scrutiny undertaken by inspectors. The RE Co-ordinator has attended training and also led training in school. Leadership has Christ at its centre and it is the aim of all school leaders to build confidence and enable all pupils to fulfil their potential. Monitoring of RE serves to highlight strengths and areas to develop, and ultimately to raise standards in RE. Induction procedures are effective, enabling all staff to support the Catholic ethos of the school. Support staff, at all levels, make a big contribution to learning within the school. Governors have a good knowledge of the school, many of them make regular visits to quality assure the reports they have received. The children have a voice in the school through the School Council and Playground Buddies. The School Improvement Plan highlights Prayer and Worship, and staff and governors have received training for this. Governors are aware of the next steps that the school should take in continuing to raise standards.

THE QUALITY OF THE WORD OF GOD

The quality of Word in the school is OUTSTANDING. The school considers RE to be central in all that they do. Displays of scripture are of a high quality throughout the school, and examples seen during the inspection included Zacchaeus, The Parable of the Mustard Seed, and "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." The Good Samaritan display asks children, "How could you be a Good Samaritan around school?" This is a direct invitation to the children to welcome God's Word, and is clearly successful as the behaviour of the children around school was excellent. The school is also rich in scripture in other ways, for example, in the EYFS, Palm Sunday was put at the heart of the learning through writing and creative activities. The standard of teaching across the school was excellent. A lesson in lower Key Stage 2 placed the learning of RE at the heart of writing and art, which enthused and captivated the children. The RE Policy states that the community of the school "are seeking for our children to walk hand in hand with God, and to live out their faith every day." This was evident when, during a lesson observed in lower Key Stage 2, the children were helping the parish priest by producing a set of Stations of the Cross for the church. The curriculum is challenging, creative and fulfilling, for example, a lesson on Zacchaeus encouraged children to ask deep questions, and their responses throughout the lesson were deep and considered. In another lesson children were writing about artefacts used in the church. Children worked cooperatively with the adults and with each other. Vocabulary explanations are often used to extend the children's religious literacy. One pupil on a visit to the church could identify and confidently explain the significance of the tabernacle. Throughout the inspection, a range of successful teaching and learning styles were observed. World faiths are high on the school's agenda, a week of the school year dedicated to this. It is evident that sacred scripture is clearly known, understood and made relevant in the school. The children's religious literacy is of a very high level. In one class, children linked the story of Jesus's trial to a discussion of justice and unfairness in society today. Teachers have high aspirations for their classes; these are well matched to the needs and capabilities of the pupils. Marking and feedback about pupils' work is used to challenge and empower children to be creative, independent and reflective learners. Each class keeps a large file that records the evidence of enquiry in RE. These include photographic evidence of all the shared experiences that have taken place across the year.

THE QUALITY OF WELCOME

The quality of Welcome in the school is OUTSTANDING. The Behaviour Policy has an objective to "ensure that all are treated fairly, shown respect and to promote good friendships." This was observed throughout the school, particularly in lessons where children's responses were treated with value. Children and staff work hard to create a calm, happy, welcoming environment. Inspectors were very impressed by this during their visits. Parents are warmly invited into school to share in assemblies, Masses and productions at Easter and Christmas. Parents are invited into class to work with children regularly, for example, over 40 parents, parishioners and staff attend an optional Mass in the parish church before school each Tuesday in Lent and Advent. The school is seeking to further enhance links with the parish. There is a mix of backgrounds at the school, and all were observed to value each other highly and equally. Staff help all pupils to feel that they belong to one community, there is assistance with language barriers and coffee afternoons at which bilingual staff are available to reassure parents. Even the Sign of the Cross was observed spoken in various tongues to help the inclusivity of the school community. Children who are new to the school work with a Learning Mentor to help them on their initial journey in their new school. The caretaker was observed giving a warm, friendly welcome to children when they arrived in the morning, and this was typical of all staff members who followed the head teacher's calm, welcoming example. As a result, entry to school is safe and fuss free, but with children valued and loved. Register time is also very calm. Children feel valued. One pupil said, "We're all like jigsaw pieces. I've only recently arrived at this school, but I am now part of this big picture."

THE QUALITY OF WELFARE

The quality of Welfare in the school is OUTSTANDING. The SRE Policy aims “to encourage children to be aware of their attitudes and values and have a sense of responsibility for themselves.” This part of the policy was observed when children were selling snacks at breaktime: both sellers and customers showed each other lots of respect and fun. The Behaviour Policy states that, “All will be taught to treat others well and their behaviour will reflect this.” This was seen in practice in a lesson on Zacchaeus where teamwork among the children was excellent. Relationships between staff and children were observed to be very supportive and very positive. For example, in an EYFS lesson adults worked to ensure that all children were safe with the activities that they had chosen. Retreats are being planned for the older children, to help them grow in their love of God and respect for their peers. The school prides itself on its links with children and families across the world, praying for and raising funds for them. This was evident from examples like the displays on Fair Trade and CAFOD and a recent fundraising event, selling cakes to support a partner school in Zambia. The staff show great care towards the children in the school. Some are very vulnerable, and all children are afforded a secure, safe, trusting school environment with quiet places for pupils to go should they need space. Lunchtimes were observed, welfare staff treated the children with dignity and respect both in the dining hall and on the yard.

THE QUALITY OF WORSHIP

The quality of Worship in the school is OUTSTANDING. The Worship Policy says that the belief of the school is “that Christian worship in a Catholic school is concerned with giving glory, honour, praise and thanks to God.” This was observed when the very youngest children in the nursery prayed together in a circle at the start of the day. The teacher set the tone of the session with quiet music, the children handled objects from the worship box and one pupil commented “I really like this time together.” During a session in lower Key Stage 2 children were given a wonderful, serene opportunity to reflect upon their own feelings and situations and all made a contribution to the prayer basket. The policy also states that worship is the community’s response, in word and action, to God’s invitation to enter a relationship with him.” This was evident when children wrote private prayers to God to help them in showing compassion to others. There are many opportunities for the children to develop their sense of Worship, ranging from services during Advent, Lent, Ash Wednesday, Feast Days, Stations of the Cross, Reconciliation and Awe and Wonder Days that run across the year, these are all days of reflection and spirituality. Inspectors listened to staff and pupils talking about their Lenten Trail Day. A day of activities and experiences that involved meditation, seed planting and reflection. In addition to this, there are Class Masses each fortnight and moments for personal prayer during the day. There are focal points for worship in each classroom that change with the liturgical seasons and class topics. The school has pupil chaplains who have been commissioned by the diocese. This is at an early stage of development, and the chaplains are potentially good ambassadors for the school, helping and mentoring others.

THE QUALITY OF WITNESS

The quality of Witness in the school is OUTSTANDING. One of the aims of the school’s SRE Policy is “to promote the belief that each human person has a unique and special dignity and worth at each stage in life.” This was shown when in upper Key Stage 2 where all responses were valued and respected by both staff and children. The RE Policy states that the staff of the school “are dedicated to setting good examples and expressing our own faith, in our teaching and in all of our care for our pupils.” This was clearly evident with buddy system for children on the yard. Self-Evaluation of the school states that the school community lives the Gospel values of reconciliation, compassion, justice, liberation, service, freedom, sincerity, truth, joy and stewardship. This was observed many times during the inspection. Children know their responsibilities and the rights of others. This was shown during a hot seating activity on doing the ‘right thing.’ Staff are good role models for children in this school.

AGREED AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- For all lesson activities to be consistently driven by a tight learning objective fully understood by the children.
- To develop the pupil chaplains to take a part in planning, delivering and leading prayer and worship.

8th April 2014

Dear Pupils,

Thank you for making our visit to St Columba's School so enjoyable when we came to inspect your school for the Bishop. Thank you for making us both feel so welcome. We really enjoyed our time with you. Your school is an outstanding Catholic school.

We really enjoyed seeing your lessons and joining you for your collective worship. We noticed how polite and well behaved you were throughout our visits, and we would like to congratulate you on this. You all work hard and care for each other, making the school a lovely place to learn. Thank you.

Your school staff, teachers, head teacher and governors work very hard and have brought the school a long way since the last time inspectors visited your school, in 2009. The work that we saw in your books and in each class's Inquiry File was outstanding. You are well thought of by the mums and dads that we spoke to. The whole school community is very proud of you, and rightly so.

We have both thoroughly enjoyed our day visit to your school. Well done!

God bless all in your school,

Mr J Graves and Mr D Golding

(Section 48 Inspectors)

Summary Report to Parents

On 8th April 2014 the school was inspected in accordance with section 48 of the education Act 2005. The full report has been made available to the school and can also be accessed via both the school website and the Education section on the website of the Diocese of Salford.

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