

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Our Lady & St Gerard's Roman Catholic Primary School serves the parish of Our Lady & St Gerard's in Lostock Hall, Preston. A headteacher and deputy headteacher have been appointed since the last inspection. These appointments have established stability and continuity for the school leading to raised standards of attainment. The new leadership of the school is fully supported by the committed staff of the school who have bought into the new direction that the school has taken. The school is situated next to the parish church and serves a mixed socio-economic catchment area. Housing ranges from privately owned homes to terraced cottages with some rented council and tenanted accommodation. The age range of learners is 4 to 11. The indicative admission number is 50 and there are currently 248 pupils on roll. 89% of children are baptised Catholics. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. 4% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. 35 pupils have been identified as having special educational needs and none of these have a statement of special educational need. 8 of the 11 teachers (73%) are Catholic. The children's attainment is generally below the national expectation when they enter the Reception class.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

Our Lady & St Gerard's is a good Catholic school with outstanding features. The headteacher is driven to hold Gospel values at the centre of everything that takes place in the school. The leadership team, supported by the headteacher, are rigorous in evaluating the standards in Religious Education, and proactive in addressing areas to develop. Leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school has led to love and faith being central to the experiences for children. Strengths are celebrated. In the school there is a calm, positive, caring, welcoming atmosphere. The staff share the vision of the headteacher and strive to create a child centred learning environment with a culture based on the teaching of Jesus. No children are withdrawn from collective worship. There is quality provision for Religious Education planned and delivered. This is rigorously monitored. The children are happy, well behaved and show respect for one another. They feel safe and secure, and feel valued by the staff of the school. The children feel safe and are proud of their school. The school is supported by a committed governing body. The school and staff are very supportive of parish events and Masses. Parents are very supportive of the school and say that it is a safe place for their children with people they know and trust, and who value them.

Improvement since the last inspection

The headteacher has a vision that all share, and Catholic life is constantly under the monitoring process. Following the last Section 48 inspection in November 2008, the school has successfully addressed areas for development. Assessment of children's attainment is regular and informs the next steps in learning. Children are also aware of their levels, and know their next step from their target sheets. Moderation of children's work is led by the coordinator and involves all classes. Parents value the changes brought about by the headteacher.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is honest and has led to the headteacher and senior staff knowing the strengths of the school and the areas to improve. This is highlighted by the planned rigour that is being undertaken to monitor and evaluate scheme The Way, The Truth and The Life. The staff and governors are united in their approach that puts children first, with a determination to continue to raise standards. There is outstanding capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- The school wishes to further involve parents in collective worship and other celebrations.
- To sharpen the focus of learning objectives which are shared with children.
- The review of the Mission Statement to lead to its prominence around school and in policies.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. The dedicated Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher and senior management team are passionate in providing strong catholic leadership for the school. Gospel values are clearly displayed throughout the school. The school's leadership and management are

outstanding in putting the Catholic faith at the centre of its life. The headteacher, staff, governing body and parish priest promote the Catholic life of the school very effectively. All members of staff fully support the ethos of the school and promote learners' spiritual and moral development in all they do. Staff work extremely hard and are totally committed to the school's Catholicity, values and high standards. They contribute as a strong, happy team with shared input. The headteacher has a clear vision of the nature of the Catholic school and, together with the deputy headteacher and Religious Education co-ordinator, directs it very well. The headteacher knows the school well, its strengths, and its areas to address. Its self evaluation of the school is accurate. Children are given many opportunities to care for those less fortunate than themselves and give generously to such charities as Headway, Unicef, Sports Relief and CAFOD. Children feel that the school has taught them to behave well, have fun, treat others equally and respect other religions. They are able to talk about many things that they have learnt, including the Ascension, Pentecost, and Jesus rising from the dead. The headteacher works with the Religious Education co-ordinator and headteacher in monitoring progress, providing support and feeding back to the governing body. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and her leadership is a strength. Through her vision and understanding she provides effectively for the needs of all in promoting their spiritual and moral development. Appropriate systems are in place for monitoring and evaluation. Opportunities are provided for staff to exercise responsibilities. Children, too, have responsibilities as 'buddies' helping the younger pupils at lunchtime and as School Council members. The parish based Sacramental Preparation Programme is fully supported by the school. Home, school, parish links are strong as are links with the associated high school. Governors are well informed, strong, challenging and supportive. Parents feel that the staff and headteacher care about the children a great deal, and value their hard work.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship is good with some outstanding features. Pupils are involved in the celebrations through readings, drama, role play and music. Special celebrations, such as Confirmation on Pentecost Sunday, reflect the liturgical year. The whole school assembly observed during the inspection used objects, staff, children, visual effects and music successfully to proclaim the message. The Collective Worship Policy states that the aim is always to "create a prayerful atmosphere" and to "encourage the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the community." These aspects were present in the collective worship observed. The policy is put into practice by the staff. The class based prayers observed used candles and soft music to create a moment of quiet reflection where the children could examine their consciences and develop a mood of reconciliation with each other. The religious display and focus for prayer in each classroom provide further opportunities for prayer and reflection. There is a good range of artefacts available for collective worship. Collective worship makes a good contribution to the spiritual and moral development of learners. Children in Key Stage 2 are able to lead classroom worship and are used to doing this. They also write prayers that go into a book that is used in collective worship in the classroom. There is a "Worry Box" that the children may use as a focus for prayer.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education are good and improving. The school uses the scheme The Way, The Truth and The Life and a great deal of work is done by the co-ordinator to monitor the standards of children's learning in the subject. The co-ordinator is well supported by the headteacher in achieving knowledge of strengths and areas to develop in the subject. As a result, decisions regarding the direction that the subject needs to take to continue to improve are well supported by evidence. Work in books has very constructive marking for the children to improve further. Marking and assessment shows that children are making good progress in Religious Education. The levels of achievement are well known through rigorous assessment methods. Children are aware of their learning for each lesson through WALTs. These clear learning objectives through the WALT system are used throughout the school and differentiation is evident within lessons with staff supported by very able teaching assistants. However, the school wishes to simplify sharing the levels of achievement with the children. The scheme is supplemented by other learning as opportunities are taken to learn through art and highlight other faiths. Teaching Assistants provided good support for the children in all lessons observed. Teachers have high expectations required to show attainment of the pupils that can clearly demonstrate what they know about the topic being taught and how they can put this knowledge into practice within their daily lives.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The overall quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is good. Lessons observed showed that teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. Lessons are based on the scheme The Way, The Truth and The Life and teachers are using the guidance from the medium term and weekly plans from the scheme and/or adapting the

lessons appropriately for the topic being taught. Children record their ideas in their work and there seems to be increasing variety of the tasks they take on to do this. There are class prayer books that the children contribute to, as well as photograph books of learning and events that have taken place. Opportunities are taken to further learning in RE through Art. For example, there is a lovely display in the hall by Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 children about how our faith grows. The books and lessons observed show that the children have a good knowledge of Religious Education, as well as knowing what it means to follow Jesus. The school has worked hard to assess their children and level their achievement. This also helps teachers plan the next steps for the children. Evidence shows that all learners are catered for well. Teachers have been trained through regular INSET and there are good resources to support the Religious curriculum. Differentiation is used when it is appropriate, and there are good efforts to include all children in learning. In an outstanding Year 3 lesson, work was differentiated to three levels and a TA worked with the lower ability children whilst the teacher worked with other children when she thought it was appropriate. Teachers are aware that children learn in a number of ways, and teaching and activities reflect this. In a lesson on Saul in Year 6, video, ICT and Bible references were used to show how the Holy Spirit changed the Disciples. Year 2 used objects, story and role play to extend learning. The behaviour of children in all lessons was excellent. Reception children were very mindful of each other and followed their teacher's instructions. All teachers are using learning objectives from the scheme, but these should be simplified to make explicit the drive behind the learning, activity, plenary and assessment.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The quality of the Religious Education curriculum is outstanding. The school has implemented the scheme The Way, The Truth and The Life. Thus, the curriculum uses a scheme, but is also supplemented by a wide range of worthwhile, valuable experiences. The draft of the reviewed RE Policy reflects practice already observed in the school: to “engage children in the study of the mystery of God, of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, and the teachings of the Catholic Church.” All staff share in this goal, and they clearly put the children at the centre of how they go about realising this. Teachers are confident in delivering the curriculum, as they are in assessing it. They have taken on board the direction from the headteacher and the coordinator which has enabled the children to make good progress. The curriculum is supplemented by liturgical events, such as the month of May is Our Lady's month, as well as respecting diversity and other faiths. There are attractive displays around the school which show the quality of the RE Curriculum. The photograph and the prayer books are good evidence of this – but also of how the children are immersed in what they are learning. The children of mixed age classes are challenged in learning from The Way, The Truth and The Life. The Coordinator assesses the impact of her evaluation by further monitoring of the curriculum. She leads regular staff meetings and INSET regarding her findings and the school works together to address the areas to develop that she has found.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education is outstanding. The co-ordinator is committed to advancing the children's learning in her subject and she is well supported by the outstanding catholic leadership of the Headteacher who has placed Religious Education as a core priority in the school. The headteacher's vision of placing Gospel values at the centre of the school is clear to all, and staff are committed to the same goal. The headteacher has fostered a culture that allows staff the freedom to be pro-active in implementing their ideas and solving problems to help the children learn. The Mission Statement is under review, but the Catholic ethos still clearly prevails in the environment of the school. Therefore, the Headteacher is leading the school to fulfil its aim of the foundation of Gospel values. Curriculum development is reviewed continually, and opportunities that arise to improve provision are taken. The marking procedures introduced by the headteacher have made learning explicit for all children. The governors and parish priest also help to lead the school towards its aims by sharing in the ethos. Since the last inspection the governing body, with the support of the headteacher, have overcome several challenges to develop the catholic life of the school. In addition to a weekly newsletter, the school also gives parents information by sending a termly RE Newsletter, which outlines forthcoming learning and School Mass dates. Some of the school's aims are clearly laid out in the School Improvement Plan and the RE Action Plan. The headteacher's vision, hard work and dedication is a strength of the school. The religious education development plan and School Improvement Plan clearly demonstrate the work already in hand in developing the quality of teaching and learning in religious education, improving the rates of pupils' progress and the desire to make the teaching of religious education the very best it can be.