

**ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK
COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS & COLLEGES**



SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the
Archbishop of Southwark and inspection of
Denominational Education under Section 48
Of the Education Act 2005
URN 100172

St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Glenure Road
Eltham
London
SE9 1UF

Chair of Governors
Headteacher
Inspectors

Mrs F Gosbee
Miss Maureen Jackson
Mrs Bernadette Dowswell
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Inspection dates 28 February 2012

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Introduction

Description of the school

St Mary's school is voluntary aided and is situated in the Greenwich Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. The school is maintained by Greenwich Local Authority. The principal parish, which the school serves is Christchurch, Eltham, with a few pupils coming from St Thomas More and St John Fisher, Eltham Well Hall. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 98%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to religious education is 10% in Key Stage 1 and 10% in Key Stage 2.

The school takes pupils from 3 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 470, which includes 52 pupils who attend the nursery part time. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the National average. Around 12% of the pupils receive extra support in class. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage with just under a quarter coming from other ethnic heritages, with an increasing number from Eastern European countries. Approximately 12% of pupils speak English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

St Mary's is an outstanding Catholic school, which effectively lives out its mission, 'to provide for our pupils the best possible quality of education, guided by the teachings of Christ and His Church'. Equal value is placed on academic achievement and the pupils' own personal faith development. The school is a warm and welcoming community from the first moment of contact and this is sustained through the strong sense of purpose that pervades the life and work of the school, creating a strong and distinctively Catholic ethos. In the words of one parent, 'An amazing school, with Catholicism at the heart'. Relationships throughout the school are warm, positive and supportive to all pupils and adults. The headteacher, who has been in post since September 2010 gives outstanding direction to staff and pupils as she empowers them to give their best and to strive for excellence. Provision for pupils' spiritual and moral development is outstanding. Pupils feel valued, respected and well supported and their behaviour is exemplary. Due to high expectations and good and at times outstanding teaching pupils make very good progress in their religious education, so that many achieve above average levels of attainment. The vibrant partnership with parents, parish and the wider community further strengthens and nourishes the school and its pupils. Parents are justly proud of their school and are supportive and appreciative of the care taken of their children and the education provided for them. One parent wrote, 'Children have a clear sense of right and wrong, respect for others and a great attitude towards learning'. The parish priest is a welcome visitor who provides both pastoral and educational support to pupils and staff. The governing body is highly effective and very proactive within the school, providing both support and challenge. Issues from the previous inspection have been addressed. St Mary's is far from complacent about its strengths and successes and is clearly committed to continuous improvement. This is evident from self evaluation procedures, which are rigorous and effective. The impact of this is the prominence of the Catholic life of the school and religious education in the School Improvement Plan. The school has an excellent capacity to build on its strengths and to improve even further.

Grade 1

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

There are no major areas for improvement. The school should therefore continue to work on areas defined in the School Improvement Plan and the excellent action plan.

The Catholic life of the school

Leadership and management

Grade 1

Outstanding leadership and management at all levels ensure that St Mary's is a school committed to providing excellent opportunities for the spiritual, moral, social and academic growth of its pupils. All leaders and staff work together to promote and develop an inclusive Christian community, where the dignity of each individual is valued. In her short time at the school, the drive and outstanding leadership of the Headteacher has united staff in the common purpose of providing the very best all round education for all pupils. The Headteacher has a clear vision of the nature of a Catholic school and is developing a cohesive team that shares and is involved in realising that vision. From the moment one enters St Mary's school, it proudly proclaims its Catholic identity through displays such as the Lenten tree in the entrance with the caption, 'How we grow at St Mary's', and the display on the Mass in the corridor. The Mission Statement has a direct impact on the daily life and practice of the school. The school is to be commended on the way pupils are fully aware of the statement and what it means for them. This is evident through discussions with pupils and the many displays in their classrooms. One child said, 'In everything we do, we try to be like Jesus'. The statement is reviewed annually, by governors, staff and pupils. High expectations and a consistently applied code of behaviour based on respect and reconciliation and an emphasis on self discipline result in exemplary behaviour at all times. Pupils are friendly, welcoming and unfailingly courteous and thoughtful to each other and to adults. Part of the context of the Mission Statement says, 'We recognise parents as the chief educators of their children and that we are a Christian community growing in faith'. This is evident in the school's close links with parents and the many ways they are involved in the life of the school. The parish priest is very supportive and active within the school and his commitment and involvement is greatly valued and appreciated by all members of the school community. His recent role as link governor for religious education is now being developed. Links with the parish are strong and growing. In addition to visits from the parish priest, the assistant priest also visits and the school and pupils know him well. Governors know their school extremely well and their role and support is a strength of the school. They attend events, celebrations, Masses and visit classes. The Chair of governors visits and meets with the Headteacher on a weekly basis and the Vice Chair every half term. Governors are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and undertake regular training, the most recent being on 'Developing governors as leaders in Catholic schools'. Their views were sought on the development and completion of the SEF48 document. The direct impact of governors' work is that they are able to engage in constructive dialogue and provide support and challenge to the Headteacher as appropriate.

The opportunities for prayer and worship given to pupils are outstanding and at the heart of school life. There is a rich and well planned programme of assemblies, Masses and many other religious celebrations and liturgies. The assembly for Key Stage 2 pupils was led by a Year 6 class and based on the story of the prodigal son. Pupils told and mimed a modern version of the story, which was entertaining and held the attention of all pupils. Connections were made between the very clear message and pupils and our own behaviour, particularly during Lent. The singing was of a very high standard and accompanied by two members of staff on guitars with pupils playing the flute, violin and piano. Pupils' behaviour and attitude throughout the assembly was reverent and attentive and when invited, they were reflective and prayerful. The assistant priest from the local parish often attends and shares in the Key Stage 2 assembly and occasionally takes a lead role. From discussions with pupils and inspectors own observation of a broad range of prayer forms, it is evident that prayer is a natural and integrated part of daily life at St Mary's. Excellent opportunities are provided for pupils to engage in a wide variety of prayer forms, in assemblies, class prayer times, in church and voluntary prayer times. Of particular note is the way pupils are so comfortable and at ease with silence and stillness and reflective prayer. This was evident from the very youngest pupils and all staff are to be commended for developing this in their pupils. Throughout the school, pupils shared their hopes and concerns for themselves and others by writing thoughtful prayers and reflections, which could be seen in their books, portfolios and on display. The direct impact of this outstanding provision is that the pupils at St Mary's are being helped to develop their own personal prayer life and relationship with God. Every class has a focal area for prayer and without exception these are attractive, relevant and well integrated into the prayer life of the class. The lovely prayer garden in the grounds of the school is used by pupils and there are plans to develop its use further. There are opportunities for voluntary prayer in Lent and October and May and through the weekly prayer group. Mass is celebrated throughout the year for the whole school either in the church or school. Class Masses for Key Stage Two pupils are celebrated in the adjacent convent chapel. A variety of other liturgies and celebrations take place during the year, which bring staff, pupils, parents and governors together as a truly worshipping community. These include, Benediction, Reconciliation, Harvest, Crowning of Our Lady and the Nativity concerts. The parish priest has recently introduced Years 2 –6 to the Stations of the Cross in church. In 2011 pupils in Year 5 were offered the opportunity to attend a three day retreat at London Colney Pastoral centre and 39 pupils went. As pupils and parents were so appreciative of this experience this will now be an annual event. The school fully supported by the parish priest is to be commended for the outstanding contribution that prayer and worship make to the spiritual and moral development of its pupils.

St Mary's states, 'We are a Gospel centred community, this is fundamental to our being and permeates everything in the school.' The living reality of this statement can be seen in the way all pupils are welcomed and valued in this harmonious school community. Each child is seen as a unique and special individual made in God's image and from the beginning of their time at the school, pupils are taught to show respect and consideration for others. The pupils are happy and really love their school and teachers. They feel safe and are secure in the knowledge that there is always someone whom they can talk to if they have a worry or a problem. One young pupil said about the teachers, 'They really care for us and notice whether we are feeling well or not'. The school ensures that pupils with additional needs and those more vulnerable are well supported through a full time Special Needs Coordinator and initiatives such as art therapy sessions and the teaching of 'Life Skills' to some pupils. The provision of a small quiet and calmer play area at lunch times for a few pupils who need and prefer more supervision is another example of how the school responds to its pupils' needs. Pupils are given many opportunities to support each other with older pupils actively helping younger ones as buddies, with games at lunch times and with their reading. They undertake these roles with enthusiasm and develop a good understanding of service to each other within the school community. There is an active school council and members communicate very well with their class through the suggestion boxes and reporting back to them. The council has been instrumental in the provision of a buddy bench and games for the playground and are very involved in choosing charities and fund raising activities. They have also had input into lunch time arrangements and the menu. The school is very much part of the community it serves and it contributes positively to parish, Deanery, Diocesan and local life. Links with the parish include many children serving at Mass, choir involvement and support for the Summer Fayre and other events. The school continues to have links with the adjacent convent and one of the Sisters visits regularly. The use of the convent chapel for class Masses is another means of contact with the Sisters. Pupils take part in many sporting and musical events with other schools. The school has established excellent pastoral and curriculum links with the local Catholic secondary school to which the vast majority of pupils transfer. Links are also developing with another Catholic secondary school. Visits to the local alms houses to talk to residents and to sing for them, help pupils to be aware of the value and needs of the elderly in their own community. Every four years the whole school community, including parents and governors, visits Aylesford Priory for a special day of prayer and community activities. This day is completely funded by the Parents' association. The school is part of a cluster of schools within the Deanery. The headteacher and coordinator regularly attend Deanery meetings and all staff attend the annual Deanery mass. Pupils are encouraged to think of those in need in their own community and abroad and contribute to many charities. Through their work on other faiths, pupils learn to understand and respect different religious traditions. This was evident through work in pupils' books and the lovely displays on Judaism and Hinduism in the corridor and

some classrooms. Pupils recognise and respect that they are all different from one another but share a common humanity. This was illustrated in a Year 6 class where a world map was displayed with all the countries the pupils' families originated from marked and a caption, 'We all live together but our families come from far and wide. We feel this enriches our community.' The school is looking for further ways to develop pupils' awareness and understanding of a wider range of cultures and is hoping to establish links with other schools both in the United Kingdom and abroad.

Religious education

Achievement and standards in religious education

Grade 1

On entry to the school, children's understanding and achievements are broadly in line with those expected of their age. Excellent care and support in the nursery and reception classes enable pupils to settle quickly so that very good personal and social development is secured. Pupils in the nursery had made their own Lenten promises and learnt about the Wedding feast at Cana. Linked to this work one pupil had shared their experience of a wedding in Uganda and the parish priest had taken part in a wedding role play. Pupils in a reception class were able to sit and pray silently and empathise with those who had been hurt by unkind words and actions. A firm foundation for future learning in religious education is being established and these young pupils flourish in the warm, positive and lively environments created for them. Throughout Key Stage 1 good and often very good progress is maintained and at the end of Year 2, many pupils are reaching above average standards in their work. One parent of a Year 2 pupil wrote, 'My daughter is able to discuss her religious learning with knowledge and confidence and really enjoys such teachings. She has a good understanding of what is right/wrong, how her actions effect others emotionally and what God would expect from her'. Many pupils in a Year 2 class had a very good understanding of the Mass and key vocabulary of the Church, for example, tabernacle, genuflect, vestments and sanctuary lamp. Throughout the school pupils are articulate and their oral skills indicate high levels of attainment. Expectations in religious education are as equally challenging as those in other subjects. Key Stage 2 pupils consistently continue to make good or very good progress and at the end of Year 6 a high number of them achieve above average standards. Those pupils with additional needs are very well supported through work, which matches their needs and through the work of skilled teaching assistants. Pupils are highly motivated, engaged and enthusiastic learners. Their behaviour is always exemplary. They listen very well and stay on task. All pupils work well individually, in pairs and in groups. They are exceptionally supportive to each other, which was evident when pupils in a Year 6 class showed great understanding when a pupil with additional needs was trying to explain his thoughts. Across the school, teachers strive to help pupils make connections between what they learn and their own lives. The evidence of this could be seen during lessons, in pupils' books and in the way pupils worked and behaved. The impact is that pupils' are experiencing their faith as something real and active in their lives. The work in pupils' books is of a high

standard and shows clear evidence of considerable and consistent progress across the year groups. They are given the opportunity to record their work in a variety of interesting ways and tasks are often differentiated and matched to pupils' varying abilities. Opportunities for prayer and reflection were an integral part of each lesson observed and linked to what the children were learning. Teachers are to be commended for the ways in which they create a sacred space for their pupils to be still and reflect.

Teaching and learning in religious education

Grade 1

The planning and delivery of religious education are of a high quality because teachers have very good subject knowledge, and teach with commitment and enthusiasm. Teaching is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. Lessons are marked by a brisk pace, skilful questioning, and classroom management skills and very positive relationships. These all impact to create a rich learning environment where pupils thrive. All lessons have clear learning intentions and success criteria, both of which are shared with pupils and referred to during the lesson or at the end. Teachers use a variety of approaches and activities in order to make lessons interesting and stimulating for their pupils. For example, "talk partners", "role play", "freeze framing" and "hot seating". In a Year 5 lesson, "freeze framing" was used to very good effect when pupils were asked to show in groups how they were close to God and then show what happens when they turn away from Him. This activity was carried out in a very mature and thoughtful way. One pupil explained why he liked working with his talk partner by saying, 'It helps us to sort our thoughts out'. Lessons are clearly differentiated providing suitable work for those pupils with additional needs and those who are more able. Assessment of pupils' work has developed very well since the last inspection. It is recorded very well in the Foundation Stage. Teachers are confident in using the levels of attainment to assess pupils' work and to track their progress and attainment in order to identify any under achievement and also any pupil who is doing exceptionally well. The use of the assessment tracker used for religious education works well and the school has decided to put the data on 'target tracker' in line with other core subjects. There is an excellent portfolio of levelled work to support staff in their judgments. They have undertaken moderation exercises, in year groups and key stages and this is an ongoing process. The clear and consistent approach to the marking of pupils' work in religious education, matches that in other subjects. Interactive marking is evident in the majority of classes and pupils respond well to their teachers' comments, which have a positive impact on their progress. One pupil commented, 'We are often asked about the next steps in our religious education work'. Parents are kept very well informed on the religious education curriculum through an excellent newsletter sent out each half term by the coordinator. Appreciation of this information was expressed by one parent who said, 'We have the curriculum for each term and links and ideas on how to share and enjoy with our children their journey in faith'.

The religious education curriculum

Grade 1

In line with national guidance the religious education curriculum more than meets the 10% timetabled requirement and is well supported through strong cross curricular links and a staff experienced in the teaching of religious education. It is organised around the life and teaching of the Church, builds on the foundation of home and relates directly to the pupils' own experiences. The considerable support and input given by the parish priest further extends the curriculum opportunities for pupils and is appreciated by all. The growing confidence of staff to use a range of approaches and resources to generate enthusiasm and participation to a high level greatly strengthens the religious education curriculum. Excellent cross curricular links, especially with art, drama, music and ICT help to make learning more meaningful and fun and greatly enhance the quality of provision, as do the many lunch time and after school clubs and activities. Visits and visitors enrich the curriculum with the visit to a Gurdwara and a visiting speaker on Judaism, further supporting community cohesion. The policy for sex education and education for personal relationships is firmly rooted in Catholic values and governors review this in line with other school policies. Parents are kept well informed on the policy. The religious education curriculum is extremely well supported by work in PSHE (personal, social and health education) and this was evident in displays and pupils' books. The school is to be commended for actively encouraging pupils to engage in thoughtful and lively but sensitive discussion in order to develop their confidence to express their values and beliefs. The whole curriculum nurtures pupils' spiritual, moral and academic development by encouraging them in their personal faith journey and preparing them well to face the challenges of modern life. The religious education is well resourced with good budgetary provision that provides for a wide and up to date range of books and artefacts.

Leadership and management of religious education

Grade 1

The leadership and management of religious education is very strong and has a positive impact on the life of the school. The coordinator, headteacher and parish priest (who is the link governor), work closely together to ensure religious education has a very high profile throughout the school and makes a significant contribution to the educational mission of the Church. There is a strong focus on developing the personal faith development of each pupil and in helping them achieve their true potential. Religious Education has prominence in the School Improvement Plan, which feeds into a detailed and excellent action plan. The experienced and knowledgeable coordinator is part of the Senior Management Team and she is deeply committed to her role. Because this is a reflective school and evaluation is rigorous, the coordinator has an accurate knowledge and understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Her monitoring role has been developed very well since the last inspection. Fully supported by the headteacher, her role includes learning walks, scrutiny of pupils' books and observation of lessons and moderation of work. Developmental feedback is given to staff, which has a direct impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The coordinator gives excellent support to her colleagues both informally and

through regular staff meetings. Staff who are not Catholic are well supported and they feel confident in asking for support and guidance when necessary. An excellent policy, which is regularly updated and reviewed, supports staff in the delivery of the subject. The coordinator works closely with the parish priest who has recently become link governor and is always willing to discuss issues and share ideas and give support to staff and pupils. He gives valuable inservice training to staff, for example on the new translation of the Mass, using the parish church as a resource and understanding the Mass. The governors are well informed on the religious education curriculum and standards through regular reports from the headteacher and coordinator who has also made presentations to the governing body. Their knowledge is enhanced by their visits to the school and to classrooms in particular. The coordinator regularly attends Diocesan meetings ensuring that she keeps up to date with new ideas and initiatives, which she shares with her colleagues. The resources for religious education are very well managed and deployed, ensuring staff and pupils have access to a wide variety of resources that support teaching and learning. The school is bright and attractive with consistently high quality displays of pupils' work, which show the value placed on pupils' efforts and achievements. These together with some powerful art work create an extremely pleasant and attractive learning environment.