



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MARY OF THE ANGELS CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL ALDRIDGE, WALSALL

Inspection dates 25th - 26th February 2013
Reporting Inspector Mr Joseph Skivington

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3-11 years
Number on roll	227
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Fr Michael Leadbeater
School address	Weston Crescent Aldridge Walsall WS9 0HA
Telephone number	01922 743411
E-mail address	postbox@st-maryangel.walsall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	February 2011
DFE School number	335/3323
Unique Reference Number	104240

Headteacher Mrs Claire O'Hara

DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Evidence

The inspection was carried out by 1 Diocesan Inspector. The focus of the inspection was on the effectiveness and use of the school's self evaluation of religious education (RE) and Catholic life. To validate the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation of teaching and learning, the inspector observed 6 RE lessons. In addition the inspector completed a work scrutiny and held a discussion with pupils to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time. He held meetings with the chair of governors who is also the parish priest. He observed two school assemblies, the presentation of the Catholic life of the school, and pupils' behaviour. He looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self evaluation such as RAISEonline, the development plan and teachers' planning. Alongside the validation of school self evaluation, the inspector gathered evidence about subject leadership, evidence which will be shared with other diocesan schools.

Information about the school

St Mary of the Angels is an average size Catholic primary school situated in the district of Aldridge close to the parish church. There are 227 pupils on roll, of whom 87% are Catholic. Pupils come from generally stable socio-economic backgrounds. There are below average numbers of children with special needs, English as an additional language, or eligible for free school meals. The role of RE co-ordinator has been taken on by the recently appointed deputy head. Pupils' prior religious knowledge and experiences on entry are broadly as expected.

Main Finding

St Mary of the Angels school, in its own searching self evaluation, judges itself to be an outstanding school. The evidence gathered from the inspection amply validates this judgement. It is a fully inclusive school, with an openness to all, and recognising the image of God in every single individual, regardless of background or belief. All pupils benefit enormously from, and contribute with commitment and involvement, to every area of school life, and consequently to its vibrant Catholic ethos. Their response to the excellent provision for collective worship is good. The provision and outcomes from the religious education programme, both teaching and learning, are outstanding. The support and critical challenge from the governors is very effective, partnering the outstanding and inspiring leadership of the headteacher and senior leadership team. They know the school well and have clear, measurable goals and objectives, which have their origin in very robust and effective procedures for monitoring provision and outcomes.

School self evaluation

The school uses effective self evaluation procedures in a quite exemplary manner, through frequent reviews and reflection on its current practice, which are assessed in detail, and lead to achievable aims and measurable objectives which are incorporated into the school development plan. It can demonstrate examples of its effectiveness, for instance, the impact of assessment for learning, or the impact of leadership and management on school improvement, with great attention to detail and emphasis on accountability. The governors and senior leadership recognise the vital importance of encouraging frequent feedback and reflection on the school's mission, a re-vision of which is due in the near future, and will hopefully involve all the pupils as well as staff and parents.

The outstanding teaching and learning of RE is monitored regularly through subject review, lesson observations, and book trawls. These are programmed and carried out

precisely, with discernible impact on improved performance and outcomes throughout the school. The emphasis on learning from religion is a real strength of the RE curriculum and schemes of work, and results in pupils having a secure grasp of what it means in their daily lives, and evident in their excellent behaviour and attitudes towards others. The curriculum is balanced and accessible to all pupils. It effectively provides pupils with a growing insight into the life and message of Jesus as well as the central beliefs that Catholics hold, and the link between belief and action. Pupils are given many opportunities to exercise their generosity and they do organise much charity work in the local community and beyond. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of other major religions is sound.

The subject leadership of RE is an exemplar of outstanding practice. The ground work was well laid by the present headteacher, and the newly appointed RE co-ordinator since September has brought a vision and very professional and knowledgeable approach to the subject. A clear programme of assessment and tracking of pupils' progress, together with lesson observation and close scrutiny of written work has raised the bar in terms of expectation and outcomes, and resulted in rapid progress and high expectation of teacher's approach to RE. There is close collaboration with the RE co-ordinators in the partner schools to moderate teachers' assessments, with the result that both pupils and teachers know exactly what is needed to secure improvement and deepen understanding of the faith. For example, only by a recent close analysis of each cohort's performance did the school come to realise that from Year 3 many pupils, including those with special educational needs, were in fact making accelerated progress. This acceleration was seen to be linked closely to the intensive sacramental programme.

There is a closely written review and summary of the impact of assessment presented to the governors every year, and through the close involvement of the link governor and the ethos committee, there is a clarity and awareness of every area that requires any or further improvement. Action points are drawn up after every analysis, patterns are very quickly identified and effective focus is put where it is needed. This has led to increasing staff awareness and objectives, such as the very successful emphasis on the importance of teaching for meaning and learning from religion. Analysis and review of the effectiveness of the moderation meetings have also proved fruitful in setting up progress tracking for every single pupil which is developing strongly in terms of progress over time seen in the pupils' written work as well as their confidence in talking about religion.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

Outcomes for pupils in RE are outstanding, closely linked to the excellent quality of the teaching they receive, and the fresh, enthusiastic, challenging approach of the RE coordinator. Pupils' base assessment scores in RE indicate prior knowledge and religious experience to be low. Pupils make rapid progress in the Foundation classes so that by the end of Key Stage 1 they are meeting expected attainment levels. There is good, solid progress in Year 3 and Year 4, accelerating in Year 5 and Year 6, so that by the end of Key Stage 2 attainment is high and a significant majority are making more than expected progress. Pupils are able to speak with confidence about their learning in RE and have a good grasp of the main tenets of the Faith and the significance and efficacy of prayer. The feedback from pupils in the autumn term indicated that they enjoyed their learning and the engagement in RE lessons, but more importantly that they could articulate 'what RE lessons are all about'. Pupils with particular learning needs are well catered for and make the same excellent progress as the others. The teaching is making good headway in encouraging independent, peer and group learning so that the pupils are becoming

¹ As the quality of the school self evaluation has been affirmed, the judgements in this section of the report conform to those of the school.

more enthusiastic and motivated learners. They are unanimous in saying they enjoy RE lessons and appreciate that they have the opportunity to feedback to their teachers on how best they learn in lessons. Their positive behaviour in lessons and around the school contributes much to their learning.

The pupils through their time at St Mary's absorb and internalise the attitudes and values inspired by the message of Jesus. They well understand the connection between these and how they should act towards others and behave in their own lives. They are quick to praise, to thank and to forgive. Every pupil regardless of faith, or none, feels a valued member of the school community, and participates reverently in prayer and liturgy. All pupils are familiar with the mission statement and would benefit from the opportunity to explore further their role in it. They make an excellent contribution to the Catholic life of the school through pupil voice. The school council is proactive and invited into the school's decision-making process.

Pupils' response to prayer invitations and the rich provision is good, with an enthusiastic participation in liturgies and assemblies and opportunities for prayer. They are beginning to take the lead in planning and presenting their own class assemblies, as well as being willing servers, readers and singers at the Family Mass in the parish church. There is room to develop further their skills of planning and presenting their own liturgies and becoming leaders in the school as they get older. Prayer is undoubtedly an important part of their daily lives and not only in school but increasingly, with the use of prayer cards, in their own home family setting. They pray well, even the youngest, and their own prayers reflect their growing maturity and understanding. They sing with enthusiasm and feeling, as witnessed in the assembly during the inspection. Their response chimes well with the school's own self evaluation and demonstrates their growing ownership of Catholic life and the school's vibrant life of prayer and worship.

Provision for RE is outstanding, with consistently good teaching and much that is outstanding. On entry, pupils who have little prior knowledge become very quickly acquainted with key ideas about the Catholic Faith and a baseline assessment is established from which the progress of every individual child can be tracked. The best teaching involved the pupils fully in their own learning and encouraged independent and peer work. They do the work, while the teacher skilfully steers and shapes their learning through questioning that probes for understanding. Teachers are aware that their subject knowledge needs to be constantly deepened through supportive training and Inset in order to allow pupils, especially the more able, to achieve their full potential. Teaching assistants working with individual pupils provide feedback to the teacher so that individual learning needs can be better met. Lesson planning is effective because it takes account of prior learning particularly in the case of setting lesson objectives, which target the learning needs and abilities of individual pupils. The marking of written work is proving an effective tool to show pupils how they can improve and creates a formative dialogue between teacher and pupil

Assessment procedures are successfully embedded and provide for the close tracking of individual progress, with teachers becoming increasingly confident in assessing using the level indicators, supported enormously by the RE coordinator employing frequent joint assessment and moderation meetings. For instance, an annual summary of the curriculum strand selected for end of year assessments is collated by the RE co-ordinator, and shared and discussed with all teaching staff (including the attainment and progress of SEN, EAL, FSM and vulnerable children). This is leading to the smarter use of pupil data to inform lesson objectives and teaching strategies, and its impact over time is already becoming evident.

The curriculum is broad, balanced, closely linked to the Diocesan Strategy, and accessible to all. The new relationships programme is in line with Catholic guidelines. Recent work to promote the need to evidence and assess aspects of attainment target 2 has encouraged better questioning and engaging activities. As a result staff are increasingly aware of the importance and place of learning from religion, and the need to incorporate it as a focus in their lesson planning. The school continues to build on its links with other faiths, including a more extended project each year to further insight in contrasts and similarities with other people and cultures around the world. Work on Diwali at Key Stage 1 was successful and enjoyable, and entailed an exploration of the symbolism of light and dark. Key Stage 2 have planned a visit to a Hindu Temple in March, to coincide with work on the Festival of Holi. As a result, pupils can speak with good understanding of similarities and differences between religions. School and parish work closely together to run the well planned and fruitful sacramental preparation programmes which provide such an evident impetus within the RE curriculum.

The quality of the provision for collective worship is outstanding. The well planned liturgies follow the Church's liturgical year, and are echoed by some excellent displays in classrooms and around the school, and traditional Catholic practices such as the Rosary in October and Stations of the Cross. Prayer groups and the use of prayer cards are successfully encouraged and spaces set aside for quiet reflection. The use of "makaton" signing in prayers and singing involves the whole person and the younger pupils are proud of their new skill. Mass is celebrated regularly with pupils taking an active role with great enthusiasm. IT is used effectively both in lessons and assemblies to colour and flesh out the topics and themes. Links with the parish and involvement in parish life are a growing strength.

Recommendations

Provide increased opportunities for all pupils to develop the skills of planning and presenting their own liturgies and assemblies.

Raise the profile of spiritual and moral expectation, especially amongst children whose home background does not reflect or support Catholic teaching.



March 2013

Diocesan Education Service,
Don Bosco House,
Coventry Road,
Coleshill,
B46 3EA]

Dear Parents and Carers

Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St Mary of the Angels, Aldridge, February 25th - 26th 2013

I am writing this letter to share with you the findings of the diocesan inspection of your children's school. Diocesan inspection now explores in detail the school's own view of itself as expressed in its self-evaluation. For this reason, much of the report is more technical than used to be the case. You are still entitled to have a copy of the full report should you want one and it will be available on the school website or by request from the school office.

The school has an excellent distinctive Catholic ethos which informs all that it does. The leadership has made an outstanding impact on developing its Catholicity, based solidly on clear vision and self evaluation, which will sustain and continue to improve even further the high quality education it provides. Pupils speak very highly of the school and are using the opportunities to become involved and take ownership of their own education remarkably well. Their attainment meets expectations well; progress and achievement are outstanding. The pupils enjoy their work in RE immensely and are eager and valued members of the school community. Their response to the excellent provision for collective worship is good. Teaching and purposeful learning in RE is excellent.

I have recommended that the school should support especially those children whose home background does not mirror the strong ethos of the school. Also it should provide more opportunities for pupils to develop the skills of planning and presenting their own liturgies and assemblies.

I met and talked with many of the pupils, whom I found were invariably welcoming and courteous, and I was very impressed by the high level contribution they make to the school community and their own education. They are a credit to the school and to their families and those who care for them.

It was a pleasure and privilege to inspect St Mary's and I wish it every success in sustaining its outstanding effectiveness.

Yours sincerely

Joseph Skivington
Diocesan Inspector