

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St John's is a large two form entry Roman Catholic voluntary aided Primary School with a sixty place nursery in the Diocese of Salford. It serves the parish of St John in an urban district approximately three miles from the centre of Manchester. The majority of pupils are of white British heritage with a small number of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. The age range of pupils is from 3 - 11. The indicative admission number is 60 and there are presently 508 pupils on roll including nursery. All children are baptised Catholics. 20% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals and 63 have been identified as having special educational needs with 3 having a statutory statement of special educational need. 23 out of 23 teachers (100%) are Catholics.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St John's is an outstanding Catholic school. It is a very welcoming, caring and happy school committed to ensuring high quality education for all pupils within a Catholic context. It is inspirationally led by the headteacher and the leadership team. All staff are dedicated, committed and work hard to ensure that the school continues to look forward and further improve its already very high standards. The school consistently strives to provide the best possible outcomes for pupils. Although teachers already plan their Religious Education teaching on a half-termly and weekly basis using Salford Diocese *REvision 2000* the weekly planning lesson template is to be reviewed. Teaching and learning witnessed during the inspection were always good, and frequently outstanding, as were the opportunities for collective worship. Pupils are well behaved, polite and friendly towards each other with a very good attitude to their learning. The Catholic ethos of the school is very strong with excellent provision for pupils' spiritual and moral development. This is further strengthened by the committed work of the parish priest and the governing body in helping the school establish strong links between home, school and parish. The headteacher leads the school extremely well and has an accurate view of the school's strengths while planning for further development.

Improvement since the last inspection

Since the last Section 23 inspection in June 2002 the school has put procedures in place for recording assessment in curriculum Religious Education and revised the school's prayer and worship policy. The school has also gone on to further develop Religious Education and prayer and worship while nourishing a Catholic community in which staff, pupils, parents and parish celebrate their faith through attendance at the Family Mass each Sunday and Sacramental Programme celebrations.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is accurate and in line with the judgements of the inspection. Even though the overall effectiveness of the school is outstanding the school's capacity to improve further is excellent because the school's leadership team and governing body are not complacent. They work together in identifying areas for improvement and prioritise the sought after improvements in the School Improvement Plan. The staff of the school share the vision of the leadership team by effectively implementing, monitoring and evaluating planned improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to monitor, evaluate and enhance provision for prayer and worship throughout the school.
- Monitor and evaluate the outcomes of the Salford Diocesan assessment and standardisation guidelines for curriculum Religious Education implemented in September 2006.
- Establish the planned programme for assessing, monitoring and evaluating curriculum Religious Education planning and teaching as a means of raising standards.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. The chair of governors, headteacher and leadership team share the same commitment to the consistent and effective promotion of the Catholic life of the school. They inspire the commitment of the staff to join them in this. Together they have prepared and implemented the School Improvement Plan in which the development of Religious Education takes a prominent place. The governors clearly support, encourage and challenge all staff to lead, develop and promote both Religious Education and the Catholicity of the school. The improvement of an identified aspect of the Catholic life of the school regularly forms one of the headteacher's performance management objectives. Establishing strong links between school, home and church and making the school an integral part of the parish are fostered on a daily basis. The parish priest is a frequent visitor to the school and attendance of staff and children at the Sunday Family Mass is actively encouraged. The children are given the opportunity to lead and take responsibility for their school through their elected school council. A discussion with the school council during the inspection helped illustrate the effectiveness of the school's leadership team in leading and managing the Catholic life of the school. The children were able to discuss and explain what they had been taught in Religious Education lessons and describe how well the staff care and provide for them - "We have lots of after school clubs". They listed the charities they support and reported that "the Family Mass is always packed on Sundays".

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship is outstanding. Each week the headteacher leads six assemblies across the key stages and the deputy head leads one Key Stage 1 assembly. The assistant head leads one celebration assembly in Key Stage 1 and the Key Stage 2 staff lead one Key Stage assembly. During the year the children in each Key Stage 1 class lead one assembly and the children in each Key Stage 2 class lead two assemblies to which parents are invited. Teachers keep a record of their assemblies as an aid to future planning. The school is seeking ways of refining its system for the planning and recording of assemblies and is encouraged to continue to monitor, evaluate and enhance provision for prayer and worship. Assemblies provide opportunities for reflection and prayer and for the celebration of the good work of the learners. The seasons and events of the liturgical year are also celebrated. The parish priest celebrates Mass in school on Holy Days and other special occasions while working in close collaboration with the school for the well attended Family Mass on Sundays. The quality of collective worship observed during the inspection was of a very high standard. The children were respectful and reverent. They listened with rapt attention and participated well. The drama and singing presented as part of the Year 6 assembly on the real meaning of Advent involved confident children displaying their understanding of Advent and enjoying teaching the gathered parents and children about biblical characters associated with the Advent season. The Key Stage 1 assembly was of the same very high standard. Prayer has a high profile in the school as reflected in displays around the school and the children's own prayers in their work books. A focus for prayer is present in each classroom.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school has evaluated achievement and standards in Religious Education as good but the inspector saw sufficient evidence during the inspection to indicate that achievement and standards are outstanding. The Religious Education co-ordinator together with the leadership team are actively seeking quality assurance through rigorous Religious Education assessment and monitoring strategies which are being put in place as part of the School Improvement Plan. Lessons observed during the inspection from nursery to Year 6 provided appropriate and often inspirational challenge to match the age and ability of the children. During a Year 6 lesson the children were challenged to reflect and think deeply about the human qualities of Our Lady in order to appreciate that Our Lady knew how to listen to God and respond. The children rose to the challenge and successfully produced well thought out and well reasoned answers to the teacher's probing and thought provoking questions. Tasks set for children in their exercise books are generally appropriate to the age and ability of the children. Writing the learning objective at the beginning of each exercise is helping children to focus on the task and assisting the teachers to mark the work effectively. Differentiation is mainly by outcome and the strategic use of able teaching assistants. Religious Education displays are prominent through the school. The school is bringing more structure to the assessment of Religious Education by implementing the diocesan assessment and standardisation guidelines for curriculum Religious Education. The school is encouraged to continue to adopt the guidelines and to monitor and evaluate their outcomes.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The inspector agrees with the school's own evaluation that the quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is outstanding. The teaching observed during the inspection was never less than good and frequently outstanding. The teachers display a sound subject knowledge and understanding of Religious Education coupled with a belief in what they are teaching. Their faith is important to them. The Foundation Stage children were taught through carefully planned and appropriately targeted group work and related independent tasks. Children in Key Stage 1 were able to understand that the best gifts that they could give to Jesus in preparation for his birthday stemmed from their own behaviour and relationships. The lessons observed in Key Stage 2 built on the quality teaching and learning witnessed in the earlier stages. The children displayed an excellent attitude to learning motivated by inspirational, hard working and committed teachers. The children's behaviour during lessons was exemplary. They listened carefully to their teacher and cooperated effectively and enthusiastically when using 'talking' and 'writing partners'. They set about their independent tasks promptly and industriously. The teachers displayed excellent questioning techniques that probed and developed understanding. Teachers mark the children's work meticulously and in some instances the marking is exceptionally detailed and exemplary causing the inspector to marvel at the length of time the teachers must have committed to it. The Sacramental Programme is led by the parish and fully supported by both school and home.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The school has evaluated the quality of the Religious Education curriculum as outstanding and inspection judgements support this evaluation. The high profile of Religious Education in the school is clearly visible through displays and the presence of religious artefacts in every room. At least 10% of teaching time is allocated to Religious Education in all Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 classes. The school uses the Salford Diocesan Religious Education scheme *REvision 2000*. This is supplemented by an annual cycle of religious activities that further stimulate children's knowledge and understanding of their religion and its traditions. The school has significantly put Religious Education on the front page of its School Improvement Plan and identified assessment of pupil's work, a review of teacher planning and religious lesson observations in the School Development plan as rigorous strategies to raise standards even further. The quality of the Religious Education curriculum is further reinforced beyond Religious Education lessons. Evidence of children's work from Religious Education lessons is present in all classrooms and shared areas and every opportunity is taken to link Religious Education into other areas of the curriculum and school life. An example of this was Spanish being taught through the singing of a hymn. The school choir is an area of excellence within the school and frequently brings added quality to both the Religious Education curriculum and collective worship. The inclusion of the study of world religions during the summer term gives children the opportunity to understand and respect other religions and cultures.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education is outstanding. The parish priest is a regular, almost daily, visitor to the school and helps, supports and encourages the leadership team in promoting their shared vision of what a Catholic school, at the heart of the Catholic community, should be. The inspirational leadership of the headteacher and the leadership team has been augmented by the appointment of a committed, enthusiastic and dedicated Religious Education co-ordinator. With the full support and backing of the headteacher and deputy she is making a difference by leading the staff through the implementation of change to the way Religious Education and collective worship are monitored, evaluated and assessed. The Religious Education co-ordinator has been encouraged in her work by the '*positive spirit*' the staff have shown in implementing and supporting the planned changes. There is an expectation of high standards emanating from the school governors and the leadership team. The staff and pupils are rising to meet that challenge because they want to be part of the school's success story. The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school reaches beyond the school gates into the homes of parents and parishioners and helps the parish priest have a '*packed*' Family Mass each Sunday. The leadership team and other staff also act as role models and show their commitment to the Catholic community by their attendance at the popular Sunday Family Mass. The headteacher has accurately evaluated Religious Education in the school and identified how it can be made even better.