

# Catholic Diocese of Northampton



## INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

### ST MARY'S VOLUNTARY AIDED CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Dunstable Road, Caddington, LU1 4BB

DfE School No: 823/3346

URN: 145324

Head Teacher: Mr S Chiswell  
Chair of Governors: Mrs P Cotton

Reporting Inspector: Mrs R Jones  
Associate Inspector: Mrs M Everington

**Date of Inspection: 20 March 2018**  
Date Report Issued: 2 May 2018

Date of previous Inspection: February 2012

St Mary's is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and is a school in  
St Alban Catholic Academy Trust

### **Information about the school**

St Mary's Catholic Primary school and nursery is a one form entry school that serves the parish of St Mary's, Dunstable. There are currently 243 pupils on roll, 39% are baptised Catholics, the remainder come from a range of Christian and other faith backgrounds. Just over half of the teaching staff and half of the support staff are Catholic. The majority of pupils are white British. Since the last inspection the school has become part of the St Albans Academies Trust.

### **Key grades for inspection**

1: Outstanding      2: Good      3: Satisfactory      4: unsatisfactory

### **Overall effectiveness of this School**

**Grade 2**

St Mary's is a good Catholic school. The distinctive Catholic nature of the school is evident. It is a welcoming school where the quality of relationships between staff and pupils is easily seen. Since the last inspection a new deputy headteacher and a new RE coordinator have been appointed. The senior leadership team are highly motivated and are focussed on raising the Catholic identity of the school and raising standards in RE. To this end they have developed an appropriate plan of action. Teaching is at least good. Teachers are supported by highly effective, skilled and dedicated teaching assistants. Most children make sound progress in religious education. The relationships between staff and governors is good. The children are proud of the school and appreciate the opportunities and experiences it offers them. They have a true sense of belonging and feel valued and respected. Parental response to the questionnaire demonstrated parents' high regard for the school. They are very appreciative of the strong Catholic ethos and the warmth of relationships between staff, pupils and parents. Many feel the school has a true family atmosphere.

### **The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**Grade 2**

All areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been addressed. The school's self-evaluation gives an accurate picture of both the schools strengths and areas for development. The RE coordinator has great enthusiasm and a passion for improving outcomes for pupils. Since her appointment the subject knowledge of the staff has improved because of shared good practice and support. The school has implemented a monitoring cycle to scrutinise planning, teaching and pupils' books. The staff has also benefitted from working with the other schools in the Trust and from training by the diocesan RE advisor. The chair of governors, who is also the RE link governor, is a regular visitor to the school. She is an active member of the monitoring team participating, for instance, in learning walks and is therefore well placed to provide informed support and challenge. She also leads pupil prayer groups. Pupil progress is tracked and termly assessments help to identify gaps in learning and inform future planning. There is every indication that staff and governors are dedicated to school improvement. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

### **What the school should do to improve further:**

- improve the quality and presentation of pupils RE work by ensuring all staff have high expectations that are shared and understood by pupils
- further raise standards of attainment through providing opportunities for more independent and challenging tasks for all pupils
- raise the overall standard of teaching by increasing the pace of lessons thus ensuring learning is optimised.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

**Grade 2**

Pupils make a good contribution to the Catholic life of the school. They demonstrate a clear understanding of the school's mission statement in how they behave and in what they say about belonging to St Mary's. They are proud to be part of the school community. They respond well to opportunities to support the needs of others in the school and wider

community, through a range of fundraising activities for charities including CAFOD, Poppy Appeal and Noah (enterprise for the homeless). Pupils take on responsibilities within the school demonstrating leadership as part of the School Council, play buddies, Eco-Council and gardening club. Faith Ambassadors meet weekly and lead prayer in classes. There are good links with the parish including a school notice board in the church. Pupils regularly contribute to Sunday mass, reading bidding prayers and participating as altar servers. They show respect for adults and each other. The atmosphere at St Mary's is one of belonging, providing the pupils with a sense of security, happiness and friendship.

Prayer and worship are an integral part of school life. Pupils know the traditional Catholic prayers and willingly attend voluntary prayer groups, such as Prayer Pals and the Rosary Ring which operate at lunchtimes. They are also given opportunities to write their own prayers and share them during collective worship as was seen during the inspection. Parents are invited to class assemblies and special celebrations. Families share prayer time at home through the use of school prayer bags which are sent home weekly. Mass is celebrated termly. Each classroom has a prayer table which reflects the church's year. Prayer books with prayers written by the children are available on the prayer tables.

Chaplaincy provision has a positive impact on the spiritual and pastoral development of pupils and staff. Pupils know how to access chaplaincy support if they need it. They appreciate the caring attitude of staff who listen to them and encourage their learning. Chaplaincy and pastoral care help to foster and maintain the strong Catholic ethos of the school.

The excellent response of the pupils in class and their good behaviour helps them to develop a sound knowledge of the Catholic faith. Pupil achievement and progress in religious education are good. Pupils told inspectors they enjoyed their religious education lessons. In good lessons there was a range of activities to promote learning including drama, hot seating, group and partner work. Whilst pupils work well together and listen attentively, there needs to be greater challenge in the tasks provided. Too much time was spent recapping previous learning, therefore the pace of the teaching was sometimes slow. With increased pace, learning would be improved. The presentation of pupils' work is not consistent across the school. Pupils' workbooks did however demonstrate progress and good coverage of the curriculum. By the end of key stage 2 attainment meets diocesan expectations.

### **Leaders and managers**

### **Grade 2**

The headteacher and RE subject leader show good leadership. They promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school. They have accurately identified the school's strengths and areas for development. Learning walks and book and planning scrutinies have been undertaken with feedback given to staff. Formal assessment systems are in place, pupils attainment is tracked and analysed in order to raise standards. The school's Catholic identity is evident in the many displays which reflect the liturgical year and current RE topic. Leadership ensure that the school is a welcoming community where everyone is respected and valued. Diversity is celebrated; a non-Catholic pupil reported he enjoyed being at St Mary's because he was learning all about Jesus. Parental support for the school is high. Parents are invited and welcomed to class assemblies and celebrations during the school year. Communication with parents is also good and includes curriculum information, newsletters and the Wednesday Word. Families are well supported. The school offers a breakfast club, a range of extra-curricular activities and lunchtime and after school clubs.

Governors are supportive of the school and of late are more involved in monitoring and evaluating the provision. The headteacher keeps governors informed about religious education and the Catholic life of the school. Many governors have good links with the

parish and the local community which enable them to promote good relationships within and beyond the school. Religious Education is regarded as a core subject and given high status. The school's marking policy is applied to religious education and enables pupils to improve their work. There is some evidence of developmental marking indicating the next steps in learning.

### **Provision**

### **Grade 2**

Collective worship, prayer and chaplaincy play an important part in meeting the spiritual needs of both staff and pupils. Many opportunities are provided to enable a full and active participation in the school's spiritual life and to allow for a personal response to God. Provision for worship prayer and chaplaincy is good. Assemblies and liturgies are well-planned. Daily prayer forms an integral part of school life. Displays in class and around the school celebrate the Catholic life of the school.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are planned with clear learning intentions and differentiated tasks. Pupils are keen to learn, concentrate well and enjoy their work. At least 10% of curriculum time is dedicated to religious education. Religious education is well resourced. The curriculum enables pupils to develop a sense of service to each other and the wider community. St Mary's is a very inclusive community. Teaching assistants are used effectively and fully involved in all aspects of the pupils learning. Behaviour in lessons and around school is excellent. There is evidence that outcomes for pupils are likely to be improved as the school continues to build on current good practice.

Inspectors would like to express their thanks and appreciation to the school community for their warm welcome during their visit.