



Archdiocese of Birmingham

Section 48 Inspection Report

ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Queen's Avenue, Bicester, OX26 2NX

Inspection dates: 20th–21st March 2019

Lead Inspector: Mary Daniels

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS: **Good**

Catholic Life: Outstanding

Religious Education: Good

Collective Worship: Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection: Outstanding

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

This is a Good Catholic school because:

- There is an excellent partnership between the school and parish. This fosters a real sense of community, which permeates every aspect of the Catholic Life of the school.
- Pupils' attainment and progress in Religious Education is good because it is well planned, organised and resourced.
- Monitoring and evaluation of Collective Worship involves the whole school community.
- The headteacher and governors know their school well and identify areas for development accurately.

It is not yet Outstanding because:

- The standard of teaching of Religious Education is inconsistent across the school.
- Pupils' planning and leading of Collective Worship is not yet embedded.
- Formal monitoring and evaluation by leaders and governors does not always feed into action plans.

FULL REPORT**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that teaching in Religious Education is consistently high across the school.
- Provide pupils with more opportunities to plan and lead Collective Worship.
- Conduct formal monitoring and evaluation that leads into well-developed action plans.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the Catholic Life of the school.	Outstanding
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.	Outstanding
The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.	Outstanding
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school.	Outstanding

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.**The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.**

- Pupils are very familiar with the mission of the school. The whole school has participated in reviewing the mission statement, 'St Mary's is a doorway to a life of love and learning in the light of Christ'. A team of Year 6 pupils were responsible for highlighting the school's mission for all pupils. Teachers have taught a focused lesson on the mission statement and numerous activities were completed by pupils. A display in the hall captures some of this work, where one pupil has written, 'The doorway is not a normal doorway but one that leads you into the St Mary's family, where we all love every person, no matter who they are.'
- Pupils actively participate in the Catholic Life of the school. During break and lunchtimes, older pupils regularly support the younger pupils. In discussions, pupils enthusiastically outlined their responsibilities in the school, which include helping younger pupils at Mass and becoming Smile Ambassadors.
- Pupils enthusiastically take part in visits and retreats. Sacramental retreats are organised annually for those pupils preparing for the sacraments.
- The behaviour of the pupils is outstanding. They are considerate and caring. This is particularly evident in their responses to charitable activities.
- Pupils regularly suggest charities and charitable events that they would like to support. Some of the many charities supported by the school include, The Batthula Trust (a charity based in Indian), Fr Hudson's and Operation Christmas Child. Involvement in these activities regularly promotes the Catholic Life and mission of the school, both within school and the wider community.
- Pupils are very aware of environmental issues and posters around school remind pupils of the importance of conservation and recycling.
- Chaplaincy provision is a strength of the school. The parish priest is highly visible in the school and is also a very experienced chair of governors. The school is very fortunate to have support from an assistant priest and a religious sister, who work in the parish.

- Pupils are well supported in their personal development and, as a result, they are happy, confident and secure. Every staff meeting opens with a discussion about safeguarding issues. The school provides support for pupils using trained play therapists and additional help is given through working with outside agencies.
- Most recently, the school organised a mental health day around the theme of Make me Smile. This project promoted peer to peer mentoring and Year 6 pupils became Smile Ambassadors. There is also a dedicated nurture room for any pupils experiencing difficulties.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of loving relationships. The school uses the diocesan programme, 'All That I Am', to teach pupils about relationship and sex education.
- The Catholic Schools Pupil Profile (CSPP) is evident throughout the school. The current virtues promoted by the CSPP are displayed on classroom prayer spaces, shared with parents through the website, the newsletter and at achievement assemblies.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of what it is to have a vocation. They understand that vocation is using one's gifts in the service of others. The local clergy and parish sisters are frequent visitors to the school thus strengthening the pupils' understanding of vocation, as well as contributing to their faith and spiritual development.
- St Mary's has experienced a significant increase in pupils with English as an additional Language (EAL). The school celebrates this diversity and there is an annual international Mass and lunch, where pupils read prayers in their home language.
- Pupils' awareness of other faiths is developed through a focused week when each class studies a different faith. The work from this week is shared with others through their spiritual reflection books.
- Pupils are immersed in the parish through the strong links there are between the school and parish. Monthly Sunday Masses, led by the pupils, are another strength of the school. These Masses encourage the parish and school to come together and they foster a real sense of community. Parishioners are also invited to attend early morning weekly Masses at the school during Advent and Lent.
- Other joint activities include Harvest Tea for the elderly of the parish, a carol service, a family day and a Corpus Christi procession and benediction. A member of the parish leads the weekly rosary group in school, which is very well attended.
- This sense of community is appreciated by parents. One parent commented, 'The school is at the centre of the faith life of our children, family and parish.'
- The headteacher is instrumental in developing these strong links with the parish. Her commitment is recognised by the parish priest, who commented that she is always supportive and attends all school and parish events.
- Despite several changes in staffing recently, it is obvious that all staff are fully committed to the mission of the school and enthusiastically take part in school activities. This is due to the outstanding induction provided by the headteacher and deputy headteacher, who are excellent role models for the whole school community.
- Extra-curricular activities offered by the school are organised and led by staff. They are keen to support the school and willing to give of their time freely. There is a real sense of commitment from all members of staff and they work as a team. They clearly support and respect the headteacher and deputy headteacher.

- Staff promote high standards of behaviour and are excellent role models, treating pupils with genuine care and respect. There is a strong sense of community at all levels. As a consequence, the school is a supportive and joyful community.
- The school environment reflects the Catholic nature of the school. Much work has been completed to enhance the overall environment and it is obvious that resources have been used with expertise to ensure that its Catholic identity is clearly evident.
- The school provides extensive opportunities for moral and spiritual development, both through its PSHE programme (Personal Social Health Education) and opportunities to pray throughout the school day.
- The school is very aware of the pastoral needs of the staff and ensure that their needs are catered for.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school.

- Leaders and governors are deeply committed to the development of the Catholic Life of the school and see it as a core leadership responsibility. All decisions taken are considered in the light of their effect on the Catholic Life of the school. This is demonstrated in the rigorous recruitment process, the excellent induction processes and the resources allotted to Catholic Life.
- Catholic Life is a priority for leaders and this is reflected in the school's self-evaluation and accurate analysis of areas for development. This has informed decisions and led to actions that have maintained and enhanced the Catholic Life of the school during a period of disruption.
- There are a variety of monitoring activities completed by leaders and governors, such as pupil interviews, learning walks and audits. The headteacher reports about Catholic Life as part of her report to governors.
- Continual professional development for staff focusing on the Catholic Life of the school occurs frequently. This training has successfully developed an understanding of the mission of the school. Staff attend training led by both the diocese and the school's leaders.
- Strategies to involve parents in Catholic Life are very successful. There are regular Masses and Parent Teacher Association meetings. Parents are contacted through email, text and a monthly newsletter is also available. Parents are very happy with the school and its leaders. They have shared numerous positive comments about the school and its Catholic Life, such as, 'Amazing school. My children are really happy', 'Good community and excellent Mass involvement', 'Very good support' and 'It is a joy to be part of the school. The Catholic ethos is the fabric of the school.'
- Governors are very ambitious for the Catholic Life of the school and they make an excellent contribution towards it. The current chair of governors is highly experienced, having previously served on several governing bodies.
- Governors attend a commitment Mass alongside staff on an annual basis and attend Collective Worship in school whenever possible.
- Several new governors have been appointed, who wholly endorse the work of the governing body. New governors have been trained and mentored by experienced members. Currently, the governing body is preparing for a governor award, which is an example of their commitment to the school.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The quality of Religious Education.	Good
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.	Good
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.	Good
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.	Good

**How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.**

- Most pupils make good progress across all key stages. Pupils enter school knowing very little about the Catholic faith and when they leave most are working in line with or above expected levels. This achievement is similar to that of other core subjects.
- The very good progress and attainment that is achieved in early years and key stage one is maintained across key stage two.
- Pupils with EAL achieve well and make good progress in line with their peers.
- Current work is good. There is a good range of work in books, including diary entries, recounts and feelings grid.
- Pupils are religiously literate and can reflect spiritually. Year 6 pupils can confidently recall Gospel accounts of lives that were changed by Jesus and are able to make reflective comments such as, 'You may have all sorts of qualities but you can't be a true follower of Jesus without love.'
- In a lesson observed during the inspection, pupils planted 'seeds of change' and were asked to write a prayer about how they were going to change and grow during Lent.
- Most lessons refer to the Catholic School Pupil Profile (CSPP). Pupils know the virtues it promotes well and they can relate them to their own lives and link them to their learning in Religious Education.
- Pupils clearly enjoy their lessons, which are imaginative and active. They are actively engaged through well thought out questions and activities that quickly challenge them. In one lesson pupils were asked, 'Is there anything that surprises you about the paralysed man?' This challenged the pupils' thinking and their responses showed a good level of spiritual reflection.
- Pupils know how to improve their work. All work is both teacher and self-assessed and pupils are given high quality feedback. Well thought out comments at the end of pieces of work challenge and extend the pupils' learning and any additional tasks set to improve work are always completed.
- Pupils are interested and enthusiastic during Religious Education lessons. As a result, they concentrate well and are willing to respond to questions.
- The behaviour of pupils is excellent and relationships between adults and pupils are friendly and respectful.
- Lessons are consistently well planned and teaching is good. Teachers plan together in phases and teachers are supported by the phase leader and subject lead. Teachers who are less confident in their subject knowledge are well supported through this system.

- Teachers use a range of teaching strategies to engage pupils. Freeze frames, talk partners, hot setting and drama are all used to good effect. Additional adults are used well and teachers have high expectations of all pupils.
- Lessons have pace and teachers have the confidence to adapt lessons to enhance the learning.
- Several lessons, observed during the inspection, focused on feelings and emotions. This encouraged pupils to empathise with different people in a Gospel story, explaining the emotions they may have been feeling and explaining why they were feeling them.
- The classroom environment is good. There are bright and interesting displays in all classrooms, depicting the season of Lent. The prayers space is the focal point of the room and every class has a display of the CSPP virtues.
- Pupils are involved in evaluating their work in Religious Education. They regularly record on a grid whether they have achieved the success criteria set. This practice is well established across the school and is used in other core subjects.
- Teachers use extended questioning to challenge pupils in their learning. Open ended questioning allow pupils to develop their skills of reflection and meaning. Teachers use questioning to challenge pupils' thinking and explore ideas in greater depth.
- Pupils' achievement and effort are often celebrated in class and at achievement assemblies.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

- Leaders and governors ensure the Religious Education curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishop's conference. It is taught for the correct amount of time and it is comparable to other core subjects.
- Religious Education forms part of the appraisal cycle of the school.
- Religious Education follows a cycle of monitoring and evaluation, this includes lesson observations, book trawls and pupil interviews. Books are monitored monthly either in phases, at staff or senior leadership meetings. Self-evaluation of the subject reflects its strengths and areas for development.
- Analysis of teacher assessments and data is rigorous. Teachers analyse their own data, which is then shared with the subject leader. She moderates a sample of judgements from each teacher and scrutinises the assessment data. Any improvement points are recorded and shared with staff.
- The subject leader has a clear vision for Religious Education. Although new to the position, she is an experienced leader and her impact can already be clearly measured.
- Leaders and governors ensure that Religious Education meets the needs of different groups of pupils. For example, Year 6 have been taught in two groups to ensure all pupils have a positive experience of learning and make good progress. This strategy has been very successful. Pupils enjoy their lessons, which are imaginative and active.
- Standards in Religious Education are reported to governors regularly. The link governor for Religious Education is very proactive in supporting the teaching and learning in the school.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

The quality of Collective Worship.	Good
How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.	Good
The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school.	Good
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.	Good

**How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.
The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school.**

- Collective Worship is central to the life of the school and praying together is part of the daily experience for pupils and staff. Staff have the opportunity to contribute to prayer at each staff meeting.
- Pupils act with reverence and are keen to join in Collective Worship. They sing and respond to prayers with confidence. Soloists are encouraged to sing during Mass, contributing to the overall prayerful experience of the celebration.
- Pupils read at Mass and write bidding prayers. Older pupils lead and prepare worship for early years and key stage one. They also lead Stations of the Cross for younger pupils during Lent. Pupils are thoughtful in their planning of this liturgy, asking younger pupils challenging questions such as, 'Which station did Jesus find the hardest?' and 'Which station is most important to you?'
- Pupils use a variety of approaches to prayer; formal and informal, private and communal and they are encouraged to be still and to listen to God. Prayer is enhanced by the use of drama, sacred music and art.
- Each class has a prayer bag that is sent home with every pupil. This encourages families to join in the prayer life of the school.
- Pupils response to voluntary prayer is clearly evident in the number of pupils attending the early morning Lenten Mass, their attendance at the rosary group and the Year 6 spiritual group led by the assistant priest. Staff also attend these voluntary acts of worship.
- Chaplaincy provision is very strong. The parish priest is very supportive and the parish sisters and the assistant priest attend school twice a week to support teaching and learning, as well as the sacramental programmes.
- The assistant priest also runs a Year 6 spiritual group at lunchtimes, with a focus on further catechesis and developing spiritual thinking.
- Collective Worship is given a high priority in terms of planning, evaluating and resourcing. Collective Worship is timetabled daily. There are regular Masses held in school and the parish church and there is a Gospel assembly every Monday. During Advent and Lent, Mass is held every Thursday morning before school. A large number of staff, families and parishioners attend these Masses.
- Relevant staff have a good understanding of the Church's liturgical year and ensure pupils are familiar with its themes and have good experiences of the Church's liturgical life.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

- Leaders know how to plan and deliver quality Collective Worship. They are excellent models of good practice for staff and pupils.
- Collective Worship is well organised and planned by the headteacher and subject lead. There is a wide variety of Collective Worship planned throughout the year.
- Collective worship has a clear message and purpose. Themes for Masses and assemblies reflect the liturgical calendar and ensure pupils have a good understanding of the liturgical year, seasons and feasts.
- Monitoring and evaluation of Collective Worship follows the school's annual monitoring schedule.
- Leaders offer staff the opportunity to develop their understanding of liturgy by involving them in the planning and evaluation of Collective Worship. There is a lead staff member who monitors a different aspect of Collective Worship. This includes the Gospel assemblies, class extended worship sessions, class prayer areas and prayer. This is a very successful strategy as it involves all staff and deepens their understanding of the expectations of Collective Worship.
- Pupils responses to prayer are monitored regularly and the writing of prayers is monitored termly.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Unique reference number	123207
Local authority	Oxfordshire
<i>This inspection was carried out under canon 806 of Canon Law and under Section 48 of the 2005 Education Act.</i>	
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range	4-11 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	239
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Canon John Y Batthula
Headteacher	Patricia Pickering
Telephone number	01869 252035
Website address	www.st-marys-bicester.oxon.sch.uk
Email address	Head.3824@st-marys-bicester.oxon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 th -12 th March 2014

INFORMATION ABOUT THIS SCHOOL

- St Mary's Catholic Primary School is a one and a half form entry Catholic primary school. It serves the parish of the Immaculate Conception in Bicester.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils is currently 71.5%.
- The percentage of disadvantaged pupils is well below the national average.
- The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic origins is above the national average.
- The percentage of pupils with EAL is well above the national average.
- Attainment on entry is in line with national expectations.
- Since the last inspection there have been a number of significant changes. There has been a rise in pupils with EAL, a high staff turnover and a change in chaplaincy provision.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION

- The inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors – Mary Daniels and Denis Cody.
- The focus of the inspection was on the impact, quality and leadership of the school's provision of Catholic Life, Religious Education and Collective Worship.
- The inspectors observed teaching across seven Religious Education lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. All of these lesson observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- The inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils to evaluate their understanding of Catholic Life, the impact of Religious Education teaching on their learning over time and their experience of Collective Worship.
- Meetings were held with the governors which included the chair of governors who is also the parish priest, Religious Education link governor, headteacher and the Religious Education subject leader.
- The inspectors attended a whole school Mass and undertook a learning walk to look at Collective Worship across the school, aspects of learning and teaching in Religious Education, the presentation of the Catholic Life of the school and pupils' behaviour.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation, data about pupils' attainment and progress, Analyse School Performance (ASP) data, the school development plan, the Religious Education action plan and teachers' planning and Spiritual Reflection books.