



INSPECTION REPORT

St. Mary's Catholic Primary School

Churchdown Road East Churchdown Gloucester GL1 3HU

Telephone: 01452 714053

e-mail address: admin@st-marys-churchdown.gloucs.sch.uk

D/ES Number: 916/3358

Headteacher: Mr Liam Jordan

Chair of Governors: Mrs Mary Puddicombe

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Clifton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: December 5-6th 2007

Date of previous inspection: March 2003

Reporting Inspector: Mr J Skivington

Description of School

St. Mary's is an average size primary school with around 200 pupils on roll, of whom 90% are baptised Catholic. The majority of pupils are White British and come from a mixed socio economic background. It serves two parishes some distance apart. A few pupils have English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils with special education needs is below the national average. Prior attainment on entry is broadly average. The links with the parishes are strong with the local parish church sharing the same site as the school.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Satisfactory; Grade 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

St. Mary's is an outstanding Catholic school where the excellent leadership of the head teacher, closely supported by the governors, is reflected in the wholehearted commitment of staff and parents to provide the highest quality of care and education for the pupils. The mission of the school informs all planning and the whole school community has been involved in redefining the shared vision for the future. The provision for collective worship, as well as the spiritual and moral development of the pupils, is excellent and this contributes enormously to the strong Catholic ethos of the school. The quality of the provision for religious education is likewise outstanding. Excellent teaching promotes excellent learning and achievement. Leadership and management of the subject are both excellent.

Grade 1

Improvement since the last inspection

Effective action has been taken since the last inspection, particularly the careful evaluation of the impact of the school's own mission statement. A marking policy for pupils' written work is now in place and work is in progress to increase its effectiveness in showing pupils how they can get better. Much good work has been done to provide materials and strategies for teaching which are more varied and tied more securely to the learning needs of all the pupils, particularly the less able. The spiritual and moral development policies are clear, linked to PSHE and SEAL schemes as well as the topics covered in religious education.

Grade 1

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

With the recent appointment of the head teacher and a new religious education coordinator there are already clear signs that the levels of excellence achieved in such a short time can be maintained and developed further. The school is determined to provide only the best education for pupils and the medium and long term school improvement plans reflect this. The school knows itself well and has not only correctly identified what areas need to be improved, but has set clear and measurable targets and a timetable to achieve these.

Grade 1

What the school should do to improve further

- To encourage extended writing so that pupils, particularly the more able, have time to express more fully their response to what they are being taught
- To raise the school's profile and widen its tremendous influence for good by a more proactive involvement in the local community

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

The governing body is actively committed to carrying out its responsibilities towards the Catholic foundation of the school. The head teacher has excellent leadership and management skill, and an enthusiastic vision for the school which he has successfully shared with the staff. There is an air of joy and purpose which comes across in conversation with teachers and pupils. Care is taken not to lose sight of the mission of the school and it is rehearsed frequently, particularly at the start of each term, as a key element in the well planned induction process for new staff, particularly those who are not Catholic. The inclusion of all learners is central to the vision of the school, through its belief that all are created in the image of God. Leadership at all levels promotes the spiritual and moral development of the children, not only through teaching but by the example and excellent role modelling of all the significant adults in the pupils' lives.

Grade 1

Collective Worship

The quality of collective worship and the liturgical life of the school is excellent. Masses are celebrated on a regular basis, and all pupils are keen to participate. The Year 4 class Mass celebrated during inspection was well attended by parents. Pupils read clearly, used bidding prayers they has composed themselves, and sang with great joy and enthusiasm. The school chaplain plays a key role in the prayer life of the school and speaks to the children in language they can readily understand, with great kindness and humour. The morning prayer in the reception class was very moving and the pupils recited their prayer with confidence, making the Sign of the Cross remarkably well, with reverence and attentiveness. The sacramental preparation programme is well planned and involves the parents of the candidates closely. Collective worship contributes enormously to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. The effect of the homilies they hear, the excellent quality of the assemblies, the messages and teachings of Jesus through his miracles and parables, as well as the daily encouragement and example of the adults around them, is very evident in their care for others and their excellent behaviour around the school.

Grade 1

Community Cohesion

It was well said by one of the governors that St. Mary's is 'a hidden gem'. While the school has tremendous potential for good in its local setting and is in a strong position to identify and help meet the needs of the immediate community, raising the school's impact and presence is an area for future development. At present the school promotes the development of strong links mainly with other Catholic schools and parishes, with particular attention given to activities involving the other feeder parish, which is some distance away. There is potential for extending the present involvement with other schools and groups in the local community, perhaps for example, in hosting extended schools activities. The religious education programme allows pupils to explore other religions and customs in lessons, and assemblies are used to celebrate the diversity of the human family and the special days of other religions, for example Eid.

Muslim pupils are able to write about their after school club where they learn about Allah and study the Koran. The fact that all pupils, including non Catholics, participate fully in the liturgies including the Eucharistic celebrations, helps to secure the unity of the community. In other subjects, cultures outside the UK are studied in the humanities and English. Pupils' opinions are listened to and respected and the school always takes the opportunity to respond to the pupils' initiatives, for example through the school council, and the many fundraising events for charities, such as CAFOD, which benefit the local and global community.

Grade 2

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment in religious knowledge which are broadly in line with what is expected nationally. By the end of Year 6 standards are well above national expectations. This represents excellent achievement. Pupils with learning difficulties achieve as well as the others because of the extra help they receive in lessons and the use of material which is carefully tailored to their learning needs. The quality of the written work in the Reception and Year 1 is striking. Pupils quickly come to recognise and understand religious symbolism and the special nature of places and events, such as Baptism or the time for prayer. Year 2 produce some beautiful prayers and produce work which is above average, for instance, detailed accounts of the Jewish Sabbath. Year 3 pupils wrote thoughtful accounts of their visit to the local synagogue, and in Year 4 they produced good work on All Souls and All Saints. Their understanding of the concept of initiation and the meaning of Confirmation is well expressed, although generally they could be challenged to write more at length and express their own quietly considered response.

Written work in Year 5 and Year 6 is of a very high standard, particularly good examples of empathetic writing. They can relate their own experiences to the life of Jesus, as in reflections on memories and the memorial aspect of the Eucharist. They express ideas of love and death maturely and have an excellent understanding of the symbols of God's world, as in an analysis of the symbolism of Psalm 23.

Pupils contribute much to the school community through the active school council and the care shown to the younger pupils by the older ones, who look out for them and help them

Grade 1

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Achievement is excellent because teaching and learning are excellent. Teaching is characterised by well planned lessons, good pace and very high expectations. Questioning is challenging, encourages pupils to make good intellectual effort, and allows them to take part fully in their own learning. The material used and the variety of activities meets the needs of all abilities. Key words and concepts are reinforced frequently. In a Year 2 lesson on Advent pupils came to a deeper understanding of the symbols on the Advent wreath through excellent differentiated tasks, an enjoyable card game, and the use of power point to emphasise the message. Pupils are encouraged to discuss with each other and this helps them to relate what they are learning to their own lives. They work well together and behaviour and involvement in lessons was excellent. They themselves say they really enjoy the subject.

Grade 1

Quality of the Curriculum

The curriculum is well balanced and meets the needs of all the pupils. The religious education coordinator combines her role with developing the PHSE programme which takes into account the Catholicity of the school's moral teaching. The school nurse is involved in the sex and relationship education and parents are invited along to a preparatory session. The sacramental preparation programme is based in the parish but closely supported by the school. There is further enrichment in the curriculum through the strong links with the parishes and local community through the many fundraising events for charities. All these activities allow the pupils to exercise their spirit of generosity by becoming involved in helping and caring for others.

Grade 1

Leadership and management of Religious Education

The leadership and management of the subject are marked by a very professional and comprehensive approach, with excellent detailed planning and a clear vision for the future. Schemes of work and lesson plans are reviewed regularly and full support given to the teachers. Inset days on the Catholic life of the school are provided, especially to inform and support NQTs and staff new to Catholic education. Quality assurance and self-assessment procedures are being embedded successfully.

Resources are excellent and well managed, with new books purchased and ICT increasingly used to support teaching and independent learning.

Governors discharge their responsibilities very effectively. All statutory requirements are met.

Grade 1