



## **INSPECTION REPORT**

### **St. Mary's Catholic Primary School**

Bessemer Road East, Swindon SN2 1PE

Telephone: 01793 523850

e-mail address: [admin@st-marys.swindon.sch.uk](mailto:admin@st-marys.swindon.sch.uk)

DfES Number: 866/5220

Unique Reference Number: 126494

Headteacher: Mrs Clare-Marie Burchall

Chair of Governors: Mrs Anne Griffin

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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

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Date of inspection: 31<sup>st</sup> March-1<sup>st</sup> April 2010

Date of previous inspection: May 2007

Reporting Inspector: Mr Joseph Skivington

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## Description of School

St. Mary's is an averaged size primary school with 260 pupils on roll of whom 94% are baptised Catholic. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and statements is below the national average. The school serves the parish of St. Mary's with which it has close and proactive links. The staff are predominantly Catholic, and all staff have had specific training to CCRS level qualification. The head teacher is also the RE Coordinator.

### Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

### Grade 1

St. Mary's epitomises all that a Catholic school should be. It provides an outstanding Catholic education and a warm openness for all its pupils regardless of faith or economic background. It is a fully inclusive community where all are welcome and accepted as individuals made in the image of God, and its almost tangible ethos is characterised by a strong spirituality and concern for others which include the parents, the parish, and the wider community. Pupils participate enthusiastically in and respond well to the excellent faith enriching provision for prayer life and liturgy. The parish church lies a walkable distance away, is a well used resource, and many pupils take advantage of the opportunities to be involved in parish life, and gain a sense of the mission of the school being part of the wider mission of the Church.

Outcomes from the religious education programme are outstanding. This is the result of predominantly outstanding teaching throughout the school. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as the others because of extra support in lessons and when they have tasks suited to their learning needs. The religious education programme makes an excellent contribution to and impact on the pupils' spiritual and moral development.

## The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

### Grade 1

The school's capacity to sustain the high quality of care and education it provides is excellent, primarily because the present senior leadership has an impressive track record in developing and sustaining the highest standards since the last inspection. The governors, staff, pupils and parents, are involved in ongoing reflection and re-appraisal of the mission statement, and this has the effect of constantly reinvigorating and re-energising the whole school community. There is a proven effectiveness in using resources to tackle areas needing development and a restlessness, which constantly seeks ways to overcome any and all barriers to improvement. Leadership communicates an ambitious vision for the Catholic dimension of the school very effectively and the well qualified staff have the calibre to deliver this vision very successfully.

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## What the school should do to improve further

- To ensure the learning objectives in all lessons deliberately stretch the more able pupils
  - To explore further ways of encouraging and developing the spirituality of the whole staff.
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## How good are outcomes for pupils, taking account of variations between different groups?

### Grade 1

Pupils are fully involved in the Catholic life of the school and make an excellent contribution to it. They are articulate and mature in discussing what they are learning, and proud to explain their significant contribution to the mission of the school. They know their voice is heard through the school council and are willing to take responsibility for their own lives and the care of the younger children. For instance, in the dining room two older boys noticed a younger child's difficulty eating her meal; without prompting they immediately sprang up and helped her cut up her food and clear a spilled drink.

Pupils absorb easily the shared values lived out in the Catholic ethos of the school and have a sound awareness of spiritual and moral matters which they are able to articulate well. They take full ownership in planning and preparing assemblies and Masses in school, and are loyal and enthusiastic servers at the parish Masses. They respond generously to the needs of others beyond the school, and this makes a valuable contribution to the welcoming openness and inclusivity of the school. Many are involved in fundraising for a variety of charities both home and overseas.

Their response to and participation in the prayer life of the school is outstanding. They play an active part in liturgies, sing joyously, and compose very beautiful and heartfelt prayers, which can be shared by others through the prayer folder in the school foyer. During the inspection the pupils presented a wonderful and moving re enactment of the events of Holy Week to a full audience of pupils, parents and parishioners. The pupils' demeanour and reverence at prayer, even the littlest ones, is remarkable, and their confidence shows they have well developed skills of planning and presenting.

Achievement and progress in religious education is excellent throughout the school. Attainment and learning outcomes for the older pupils are excellent, particularly in their ability to learn from religion, and put into practice what they have learned from the life and message of Jesus' teaching. They can discuss the topics they cover easily, and relate them to their own lives. They have a very good grasp of the main tenets of the Faith, for instance the significance of the Last Supper, or the divinity of Jesus, as well as understanding the message of Jesus through His miracles and parables. They also know something of the main beliefs and practices of the faiths of others. They are developing critical thinking skills and this is evident in group and paired discussion in class. There is however always room to challenge the more able pupils with even more demanding tasks. The rate of progress of the less able pupils and those with special educational needs, including those with English as an additional language, is similar to the other pupils. In lessons pupils work hard and really enjoy the subject, particularly when they are challenged and engaged by effective teaching strategies which involve them in their own learning.

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## **How effective are leaders and managers in developing the Catholic Life of the school?**

**Grade 1**

The Catholic ethos of the school colours all of its activities. Outstanding leadership and management promote the Catholic life of the school very effectively, with frequent monitoring reports, great attention to detail, and focussed planning for future improvement. Care is taken to put and keep the mission of the school in the forefront of everyone's mind, particularly with substantial Inset for staff and governors on spirituality and Catholic education. A retreat for all staff is planned for later this term titled Nurturing Human Wholeness. Training is taken seriously with the result that all teaching staff, Catholic or otherwise, have completed courses equivalent to the CCRS. Prayer life and liturgies are monitored and reviewed very effectively, with close liaison between parish priest, other governors and senior leadership. The head teacher reports to the governing body on the quality of Catholic life at every governors' meeting. The school development plan objectives are linked closely to performance management and leadership has a clear picture of progress in meeting these objectives. The high calibre of leadership and management is seen in the high morale of the staff, the pupil's excellent behaviour, and the very good relationships between staff and pupils.

The robustness of governance was an area for development at the last inspection. Good improvement can now be noted. There are a number of new foundation governors settling into their role, and all governors have received training: for example, Visiting the School guidelines and advice such as how to conduct a learning walk. A community coordinator's role has been created. All statutory and canonical responsibilities are met. The parish priest is the link governor for religious education.

The school collaborates well with other schools and participates in community undertakings, including local charities. There is a clear policy promoted by governors and senior staff to promote community cohesion with the result that the school has an openness to all, all are included in its life, and its generous outreach to the local and the global community is a real strength. Two of the leading teachers are involved in sharing expertise and best practice with other local schools. The curriculum provides an exploration of the other faiths. The annual Community Cohesion day and International Days have provided further opportunity to study World Faiths and the cultures of others. The school supports orphans in India as well as other local and global charities. Those of other faiths feel that they are able to express their own beliefs comfortably, and all feel included and welcomed into every aspect of school life.

## **How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?**

**Grade 1**

Provision for prayer life is outstanding, a real strength of the school, because it meets very effectively the spiritual needs of the pupils, be it through assemblies and liturgies, or the opportunities for retreat, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and support for the parish- run preparation programme for First Holy Communion. The parish priest is a frequent visitor and provides excellent support both for the liturgical life of the school and for religious education. There are many occasions during the day for spiritual nourishment through prayer and moments of reflection. The liturgical year is well marked and celebrated, particularly Advent, Lent and Holy Week. All pupils participate with enthusiasm and willingness, and as they move

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up the school, take responsibility for running their own assemblies, with growing confidence and conviction. The parish church is an excellent resource used frequently by different groups of pupils.

The excellent curriculum successfully meets the needs of all groups of pupils, as well as meeting the Curriculum Directory for Religious Education requirements, such as the allocation of time. Relationship education is dealt with sensitively and clearly from a Catholic standpoint. The beliefs of other faiths are explored through topics in the schemes of work. Resources are well managed, and ICT, art and music particularly are used imaginatively to colour and enrich the learning experience, evident in the striking and beautiful displays linked to topics and the liturgical year. All subjects are shot through with references to the Faith and spirituality. For example, a dance group beautifully expressed and choreographed by themselves the temptations of Jesus in the desert with tremendous empathy and imagination, quite naturally as part of their dance lesson.

The quality of teaching and purposeful learning is outstanding. Outstanding teaching enables the pupils to learn really well because it engages their interest and provides challenge and high expectation, so that the pupils themselves do the work and make the real intellectual effort. Group and paired work were especially effective strategies because they provided peer learning and assessment. On occasion the more able pupils would benefit from lesson planning which gives them even more demanding and challenging tasks. Proactive teaching assistants provide invaluable support especially in allowing the teacher to split children into smaller groups with differentiated tasks tailored to their learning needs. The written work of the pupils is exceptionally well presented and of very good quality. Marking is helpful and makes a real difference to presentation, length and quality of work. Pupils' work and behaviour in lessons is excellent and they are enthusiastic about the subject. Their enjoyment is clearly evident.

Excellent assessment procedures are well embedded and effective use is made of level indicators to monitor progress and achievement. Tracking of individual progress is well developed, and provides teachers with a clearer picture of each pupil's strengths and where support and guidance are needed. As a result pupils know and understand where they are at and how to move on successfully to the next stage.