



INSPECTION REPORT

St. Dominic's Catholic Primary School

St. Mary's Hill Inchbrook Stroud GL5 5HP

Telephone: 01453 832682

e-mail address: head@st-dominics.gloucs.sch.uk

D/ES Number: 916/3355

Headteacher: Mrs Margaret Smith

Chair of Governors: Dr John Wright

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: March 4th 2008
Date of previous inspection: March 2003
Reporting Inspector: Mr J Skivington

Description of School

St. Dominic's is a smaller than average size primary school, drawing pupils from Stroud and the surrounding villages. There are 106 pupils on roll, of whom 46% are baptised Catholic. The majority of pupils are White British and come from a wide socio-economic background. The percentage of pupils with special education needs is below the national average. Prior attainment on entry is slightly below average but recent trends suggest this is rising year on year. Baseline attainment in religious knowledge is below average. The links with the parish are strong with the local parish church opposite the school. Parental support of the school is strong, rising numbers an indication of its reputation and popularity.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

St. Dominic'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 it is the yardstick used to measure its success. 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 more consistent and effective assessment and marking of pupils' written work. A marking policy for pupils' written work is in place and work is in progress to increase its effectiveness in showing pupils how they can get better. Tasks and strategies in lessons challenge pupils and meet their learning needs more effectively.

Grade 2

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

There is ample evidence that the levels of excellence achieved by the school will be maintained and developed in the future. The school has identified well the areas for further improvement, for example, assessment for learning, and has put much time and effort into setting clear and measurable targets with a timetable to realise these objectives. There is a determination and

commitment to provide only the best. The staff are keen to deepen their subject knowledge and make full use of Inset and training courses. The school is well supported by governors and parents, while the school chaplain contributes enormously to the very good spiritual development of the children.

Grade 1

What the school should do to improve further

- To refine the procedures for assessment for learning so that areas of weakness uncovered by tracking can be more effectively addressed

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 she 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 quality of the school's self evaluation of its Catholic life is a key element in its success, including as it does the views of governors, staff, parents and children. 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 are excellent. The school chaplain celebrates Mass on a regular basis, and all pupils are keen to participate. Good use is made of the parish church directly opposite the school. There are many opportunities for prayer throughout the day. A prayer book for every child has been provided, and pupils are encouraged to plan their own liturgies and prayers. The Reception/Year 1 assembly was very well presented, with everyone playing their part enthusiastically, while the music was played and sung with joy and enthusiasm. The Morning Prayer in the Year 3/4 class was very moving where the pupils recited their prayer with confidence, making the Sign of the Cross remarkably well, with reverence and attentiveness. Their behaviour and demeanour of pupils in the church is noted and appreciated by the parish. 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

Although the school is comparatively small and relatively isolated, every effort is made to strengthen links with the local community and beyond. There is a welcome and openness at the heart of St. Dominic's, not least because over half its pupils are not Catholic, but also because of the inclusion of every individual in the life of the school. The views of different faiths and none are respected, with no element of coercion but rather an invitation to participate fully in the Catholic life of the school. The pupils themselves say that they would be offended if they were treated differently or not allowed to share in every facet of the life of the school community. Links with the parish have grown much stronger in recent years. The school is well known and respected in the Nailsworth community, and contributes a regular column in the local newspaper. The school is used by a variety of groups, for instance, weddings, dance, Women's Day of Prayer. There is a consistent set of values shared by all. Leadership promotes the development of links with other schools, both in the surrounding community and beyond. 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. 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 charity fundraising events which benefit the local community.

Grade 2

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment in religious knowledge which are below what is expected nationally. By the end of Year 6 standards are above, and in some cases 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 very good. 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 and 3 produce some beautiful prayers and work which is above average, for instance, ideas on celebration, or the rules for Christian living. Prayers composed by pupils themselves are heartfelt and relevant to their own lives. Less able pupils have difficulty expressing themselves at length, but clearly understand the topics they are studying.

In Year 4 and Year 5 pupils can relate belief and the teachings of Jesus to their own lives, and show a sound moral sense. This is evident in their empathetic writing, for example, telling the story of the Prodigal from the viewpoint of the father: or a newspaper style account of the events of Palm Sunday. The study of Islam was particularly well done and appreciated. The symbolism of the sacraments is well understood, as in well-written reflections on the use of chrism in anointing. Bible referencing skills are sound.

By Year 6 standards reached are above average, with some very impressive work from the more able pupils. There are sensitive rewrites of incidents in the scriptures, such as an emotional response to the words of Isaiah, as well as many beautiful prayers of praise and thanksgiving. 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. Pupils work hard at their lessons and behaviour observed was excellent.

Grade 1

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Achievement is excellent because teaching and learning are never less than good, with some outstanding practice observed. Very good 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, power point was used effectively to illustrate the last supper, followed by challenging questions to check their knowledge and understanding. Drama was used to involve pupils in their own learning. The result was a remarkable re-enactment of the last supper with the disciples having a quite spontaneous discussion about what Jesus could have meant by saying 'This is my body...this is my blood.' Writing frames are used to help the less able pupils. Because of high expectation and challenge, pupils learn to back up their statements with some reasons or examples. They enjoy lessons which have varied activities and challenges. They 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 follows diocesan guidelines, is well balanced and meets the needs of all the pupils. The sex and relationship education is in place 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, who readily take the opportunities to update their knowledge and practice by attending the diocesan training days. A second Catholic teacher has joined the staff. Quality assurance and assessment procedures are being embedded successfully, although there is still work to be done on assessment for learning, which is being introduced as a pilot scheme in English initially.

Resources are good and well managed. ICT is used increasingly to support teaching and learning. The many colourful wall displays not only affirm the pupils' work, but also highlight the strong Catholic ethos of St. Dominic's.

Governors discharge their responsibilities very effectively.

Grade 1