

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



Inspection Report of Denominational Character and Religious Education`

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

St Monica's Catholic Primary School

DfE School No: 826/3378

URN: 110482

Headteacher: Mr Robert O'Malley
Chair of Governors: Mr Dominic Kingsman

Reporting Inspector: Mrs Marion Betts
Associate Inspector: Mrs Pauline Cotton

Date of Inspection: 14th July 2016

Date and grade of previous inspection: 30th June 2010. Grade 2

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and is directed by
Milton Keynes Local Education Authority.

Information about the school

St Monica's is a large primary school for pupils aged 3 to 11 years. The number on roll is 456 including 41 part-time pupils attending nursery. 60% of pupils are baptised Catholic. The school serves the parish of St Augustine's. Pupils come from a broad socio-economic range of backgrounds. The majority of pupils are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium (extra government funding for disadvantaged pupils) is lower than the national average. The senior leadership team has changed recently with the headteacher appointed from January and the deputy and religious education leader starting their roles last September.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school.

Grade 2

St Monica's school is a good school which is moving forward at a fast rate to develop even further its Catholic life and religious education. It has a strong Catholic ethos with dedicated leadership from the headteacher, deputy and governors. Relationships and respect between all staff and pupils are very good and demonstrate the school's Catholic ethos. One pupil explained "we are all friends here". The Mass, worship and prayer are central in the school's life. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and this is reflected in their behaviour and positive attitudes. Pupils are proud of their school and feel valued, respected and listened to. Religious education (RE) has a high profile and is led by an enthusiastic and dedicated leader who is supporting and guiding teachers thoroughly through the initial stages of the school's new RE strategies. Pupils make steady progress in this subject throughout their school life.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

The school has an excellent capacity for sustained improvement. The new senior leadership team, from the basis of rigorous monitoring and evaluations, has already set in motion new strategies to develop the school in its Catholic life and RE. Staff are being trained to understand these improvements and their roles in undertaking them. They are visiting other schools to see and understand these strategies in practice. The school has already begun benefitting from the initial actions that are taking place and, within time, these improvements will becoming embedded within school practices. More improvement developments are being planned. Governors are very supportive and regularly review the benefits of any changes being undertaken.

The school has made good progress with the improvements recommended in the last report. RE is monitored regularly through lesson observations and book scrutiny with detailed feedback to teachers outlining strengths and development points. Books are now well marked with improvement points. Through following these suggestions pupils are now given opportunities to extend their learning. Assessments are now made regularly and a thorough analysis of the results are being made to aid future predictions of individual pupil's target attainment. The school has also developed its provision for the Catholic life, and extended the range of the richness of pupils' experiences. A mission day has been held involving staff, parents and governors encouraging pupils to learn a wide variety of extra skills. Pupils have also attended the Christian based "Help not Harm" trip to Oxford.

The school's self-evaluation is derived from rigorous monitoring by the headteacher, deputy and RE subject leader who thereby gain a very good overall view of the school's strengths and development needs. The inspectors concurred with the judgements made by the school. All staff are willing to improve their skills through training opportunities. The school remains dedicated to continuing their effective Catholic partnership with other Catholic schools which benefits all.

What the school should do to improve further

- include ongoing teacher and pupil targets into each round of monitoring so that successful improvements in RE teaching can be assessed and teachers' expectations for pupils' achievement raised
- further develop pupil spirituality by the promotion of enriched prayer and worship opportunities through effective links with the parish and wider community.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 2

Pupils benefit well from the school's Catholic ethos. Their growing awareness of their Catholic faith is effectively fostered as is their understanding of how to live this out in their lives by following the example of Jesus. This is reflected in pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. Pupils particularly praised the inclusivity of the school who welcomes all, no matter what their faith or cultural backgrounds. Pupils understand the importance of key celebrations throughout the liturgical year and are reflective and interested in the beliefs of others. Relationships reflect Christian respect and concern for others. Pupils willingly undertake responsibilities especially as members of the School Council. They support many local and global charities and often plan and organise games to raise money. Pupils praise their teachers who listen to them and help solve their problems. Pupils show an understanding of the need to forgive and be forgiven and mentioned this in relation to the behaviour expectations of the school and as part of being "restorative friends". Their achievements are recognised and celebrated.

Prayer has a very high profile within school life and all pupils respond well, participating respectfully and with ease. Worship contributes well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Pupils enjoy worship especially when visual material and drama is used to enhance the message. Their high quality of singing enriches the experience. Pupils assist with worship but are not yet given opportunities to prepare and plan their own liturgies and so take more ownership of this important activity. A children's chaplaincy team has been formed to participate more fully in future planning and delivery of liturgies. Pupils know many set prayers and have written prayers for class prayer books and as part of their RE displays.

Chaplaincy provision has an effective impact on the spiritual and pastoral support of staff, pupils and parents. Pupils are aware how to access any help if they have a problem and are certain of a positive response. The individual needs of children are well-catered for by experienced staff, exemplified in the "Treasure Box" group observed when pupils related examples of how their confidence had increased through these activities.

Pupils make steady progress in RE and the majority achieve the expected levels and some achieve higher. They are developing a sound knowledge of the Catholic faith. RE outcomes compare favourably with other core subjects. Most pupils enjoy their religious education lessons especially when given practical and creative tasks to motivate and consolidate their learning. They also appreciate the opportunities to discuss their own ideas and opinions with others. They identify RE as extremely important and mentioned that exploring understanding of the parables "helps us to think about our actions more deeply". RE books are extremely well presented and evidence a good variety of written work.

Leaders and managers

Grade 2

The strong Catholic identity permeates the school's daily life. A clear powerful vision is effectively demonstrated by the school's drive for continuous improvement to increase the richness of pupils' Catholic life experiences and also for the pupils to achieve their full educational potential. The mission statement "Let Trust, Respect and Love live here" is known and understood by the whole school community who strive to live this out in their respect and daily dealings with each other. The leadership know the school's major strengths and inspire staff to take on board challenging developments. Governors are kept

informed as to the progress of the new initiatives in the school and many visit regularly. Links with the parish are extremely strong with many staff worshipping in the parish. Parents responded very positively to the inspection questionnaire. The commitment of the leadership team effectively promotes the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and faith awareness.

The religious education leader works closely with the headteacher to ensure this subject has a high profile across the school. She has undertaken training and provides firm support and guidance to the staff. RE is well resourced and the budget is in line with that given to other core subjects. Pupils are assessed regularly and RE progress tracked. Judgements have begun to be moderated within the school as well as with other schools. Governors receive reports concerning the RE curriculum, monitoring and pupils' RE attainment data. Staff are committed to the high profile given to RE.

Provision

Grade 2

Worship and prayer are integral to the school's life for both pupils and staff. The chaplaincy team provide a broad richness of prayer, sacraments and worship linking to Catholic traditions. There are plans to provide prayer activities that promote individual reflective experiences. The prayer room provides a sacred space for quiet prayer and reflection. The chaplain and parish priests make a significant contribution to pupils' sacramental worship. The new chaplaincy team plan to broaden even further the range of experiences for pupils' and staff's spiritual development. Worship themes reflect Sunday's gospel and the liturgical year. Attractive prayer tables effectively provide the focus for class prayer.

The quality of religious education lessons overall is good. Where RE lessons were best, there were clear learning objectives; pupils were motivated to learn by visual demonstrations and practical activities; talking partners ensured thoughtful reflection; Scripture was used well to inspire learning; and the more able pupils were sufficiently challenged to achieve well. Experienced teaching assistants provide good support to groups of pupils.

The quality of the curriculum is good, and suitable for the age and abilities of the learners. It fulfils the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. 10% of curriculum time is used for religious education following "Come and See" the diocesan directed programme. Scripture is used well during much of the teaching, and work using Bible research was observed. The curriculum has also included learning about an age-appropriate topic for the Year of Mercy with related displays prominent around the school. Pupils are encouraged to become aware of the demands of religious commitment as in lessons that focused on taking care of God's world where young pupils took part in litter collection around the school and when older pupils explores ideas of how to persuade others to value God's treasure of water. Pupils in mixed-age groups discuss topical events and "statements to live by" sharing ideas of how these can apply to their lives. The curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Religious education is often linked to other curriculum areas particularly to literacy, drama, song and art. Pupils' books evidence a very good coverage of the curriculum. The curriculum raises pupils' awareness of other faiths. Pupils have visited the church connected to another Christian denomination. The parish priests are regular visitors to the school and support RE learning.

The inspectors wish to thanks the senior leaders, staff and children for their very warm welcome and for contributing to their informative and interesting visit.