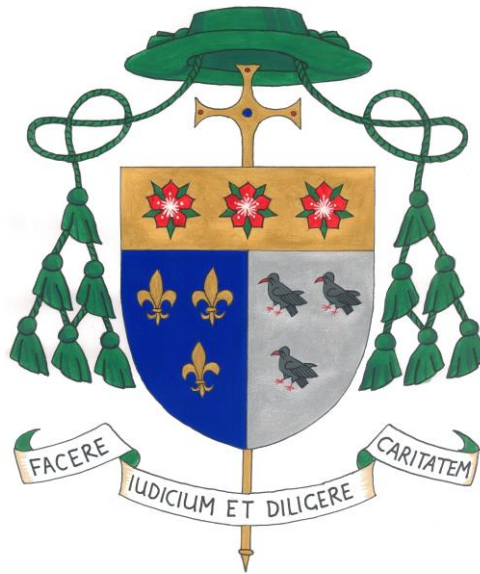


Catholic Diocese of Northampton



INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

ST MARY'S VOLUNTARY AIDED CATHOLIC LOWER SCHOOL

Dunstable Road, Caddington, LU1 4BB

DfE School No: 820/3346

URN: 109630

Head Teacher: Mr S Chiswell
Chair of Governors: Mr R Neal

Reporting Inspector: Mrs Marion Betts
Associate Inspector: Mrs K Williams

Date of Inspection: 28 February 2012
Date Report Issued: 15 March 2012

Date of previous Inspection: November 2009

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and in partnership with
Central Bedfordshire Local Authority

DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL

St Mary's is a one form entry school with part-time nursery provision for pupils aged from 3 to 9. It serves the parish of St Mary's Dunstable. There are 165 pupils on roll of whom 39% are baptised Catholics. Half of the teachers and almost half of the support staff are Catholic. The majority of pupils are White British. A larger than average number of pupils is known to be eligible for free school meals. The school runs a Breakfast and After School club. Following a prolonged period of interrupted leadership, the acting headteacher has recently been appointed as the school's permanent head.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

St Mary's Lower School is a good Catholic school and its strong Catholic identity permeates the school's daily life. The headteacher is fully committed to promoting the school's Catholic ethos which impacts significantly on the children's spiritual and moral development. This reflects in their good behaviour and positive attitudes to faith awareness and learning. Relationships within the school are very good and reflect Christian love and concern for others. Pupils are proud of their school describing it as a place where "we learn a lot and help each other". Prayer and worship are important in the school's life. The RE subject leader ensures that Religious Education (RE) has a high profile in the school. Pupils make good progress throughout their school life in knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

The school has improved well in most areas since the last inspection. The issues for development were related to appointing a substantive headteacher, developing RE assessment and chaplaincy provision. A permanent headteacher has now been appointed. Pupils' work has been assessed but not consistently. The school has now devised a whole school assessment system for RE linked to National Levels of Attainment and staff have undertaken training. Pupils' progress in RE will be recorded, monitored and used in future planning. Chaplaincy provision is also at an early stage but its initial effectiveness is already being felt.

The school's self-evaluation form is comprehensive and accurate. The headteacher, RE subject leader and chaplain have a good overall view of the school's strengths and future development needs. Appropriate improvement actions are fed into the whole school development plan.

The headteacher and staff are totally committed to promoting the Catholic dimension of the school and high quality Religious Education. All staff have undertaken training related to working in a Catholic school. Each teacher now has one of their performance management targets relating to the school's Catholicity. This is having a positive impact on the school's ethos and RE. The enthusiasms and skills of staff have been recognised and are being used very effectively to promote various aspects of Catholic life. The governors are aware of their role to further foster the Catholic life and RE.

The school with its current leadership and governance is focused on maintaining and developing its effectiveness as a Catholic school. The restructured leadership roles and their current action plans are beginning to have a good impact on Religious Education and Chaplaincy. The school has a good capacity to continue to improve.

What the school needs to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in RE by:
 - planning challenging activities for the more able children

- developing RE marking so children know how their work can be improved and are given opportunities to make these improvements
- embedding the assessment procedures and developing recording and analysing progress and moderating judgements.
- Further raising the profile of the Catholicity of the school both within the activities of the school and within the local parish.

OUTCOMES FOR PUPILS

Grade 2

Children benefit well from the school's Catholic life. They display respect towards each other and to adults. They understand the "St Mary's values" and the school's expectations and respond well, pleased when they are rewarded for displaying one of the values. The children can articulate how the school is helping them to understand how God and Jesus would want them to live. Sometimes Catholic children share with others their special responsibilities in the parish such **(as)** altar server duties. The children willingly undertake responsibilities and show care and support to the younger children through, for example, "playground friends" and "reading buddies". The children demonstrate a developing awareness of those in need and occasionally pupils plan and organise fund-raising such as for Breast Cancer last year. Pupils praise the friendly, caring attitude of the teachers who listen to them, help to solve any problems and encourage their learning. Pupils' achievements are recognised, praised and valued. Their views and ideas are sought through the School and Eco Councils.

All children respond well to worship and the prayer life of the school. They understand the importance of prayer and participate respectfully and with ease. Pupils have opportunities to pray spontaneously and create their own seasonal promises and prayers. They use these within class worship. The children enjoy worship especially singing and when they have opportunities to participate. Pupils contribute to celebrating the Mass. They appreciate the quiet times given them during meditation and Lenten prayer and explain: "it gives us peaceful time". They also value the reflection time given during worship to apply the theme to their own lives and future possible actions. Worship contributes very well to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

Chaplaincy provision, although only recently established, is having an effective impact on the spiritual and pastoral support of staff, parents and children. The children are aware of the chaplain and know how to access her support if they have a problem. They appreciate this provision and speak of its effectiveness to them personally. They know the school leaders support and promote chaplaincy. Parents have also been made aware of the chaplaincy team. In order to support the well-being of families the chaplain has made available to parents a comprehensive list of outside helpful agencies. Detailed action plans for developing chaplaincy will effectively impact the school community in the future.

Children are developing a sound knowledge of the Catholic faith during their time in the school. They achieve age appropriate RE levels of attainment. Most pupils enjoy their Religious Education lessons especially stories about Jesus and using the Bible. One child quoted from the scripture passage that was the theme of an RE display. Pupils behave very well and have a positive attitude to learning. They regard their RE books as special. On the whole presentation is adequate with a good variety of written work. The books showed a good coverage of the curriculum but challenging outcomes for the more able children were not evident.

LEADERS AND MANAGERS

Grade 2

The headteacher very effectively communicates a clear and shared vision for the Catholic ethos which promotes caring and positive concern for the well-being of all in the school community. The school mission statement "in God's love we learn and grow" underpins the

work of the school and the new St Mary's values contribute very well to the children's spiritual and moral development. A teacher is currently completing a chaplaincy course. The school is effectively managed in a way that ensures regular evaluation of its religious life. Attractive displays around school confirm the Catholic identity. The school has good links with parents who responded extremely positively to the Catholic questionnaire. Parents feel welcomed into school and there is a good variety of opportunities for building partnerships. Links with the parish are improving and the school now displays children's work in the church. Plans have been made to develop these links even further.

The Religious Education subject leader works closely with the headteacher to ensure this subject has a high profile across the school. She is enthusiastic and conscientious. Book scrutiny has been undertaken and the analysis of the results has fed into the RE action plans. Joint monitoring with the diocese RE advisor ensures teaching and learning are evaluated. The RE subject leader has a clear knowledge of the strengths of the subject and an appropriate vision for improvement. She undertakes regular training and guides teachers well. Two members of staff are currently undertaking the Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies. The budget for Religious Education and Worship is in line with that allocated to other core subjects. Religious Education is well resourced.

Governors fulfil their statutory and canonical responsibilities. They are all practising Catholics. They are supportive of the school and kept well informed by the headteacher. The governors have formed a "Catholicity working party" to improve parish links and oversee the formation of chaplaincy in the school. There is a new RE link governor. Governors regularly visit the school.

The school is a welcoming inclusive community where all members are respected and valued. Non-Catholic pupils and parents are fully involved in the school's life. For example every family receives "The Wednesday Word" to share together in the home. Parents and parishioners are invited to join celebrations and events. Pupils show compassion for others by their fund-raising for local, national and international charities and at present during Lent they are supporting Cafod's clean water appeal. The school participates in village life such as taking part in the local remembrance service with non-Catholic churches. Visitors from the local Baptist church have led a puppet assembly acting out a Bible story. The school has links with a special school and together they share food technology lessons. Provision for spiritual development effectively provides opportunities for pupils to link the learning with their own experiences. The RE curriculum includes some study of other faiths. Plans are being made to celebrate more fully the diversity of beliefs and cultures.

PROVISION

Grade 2

Worship and prayer are integral to the school's life. Worship is planned well and reflects both the liturgical year and the Christian values promoted. Visual presentation, role play, stories and song are all used well to engage the pupils and develop their thinking. The worship observed led the children to reflect more deeply on their service to others during Lent. The children learn a variety of traditional prayers. Prayer tables in each classroom provide attractive foci for prayer. The children lead their class worship and RE end of topic celebrations. The one observed was a culmination of the class topic on special meals and reflected well the learning which had taken place. Pupils occasionally contribute to Sunday Mass in the parish. Masses are held in school on a regular basis. Bishop Peter led Mass recently to celebrate the school's 40th anniversary. He also opened the new, attractive and spiritually stimulating prayer garden.

The quality of Religious Education lessons is good overall. Lessons are planned well with clear learning intentions. Where teaching is best secure subject knowledge, visual presentations, open questioning, talking partners and clear explanation of the tasks are all

effectively used to motivate and interest pupils in the learning. In some lessons the pace was slow and the RE learning objectives not fulfilled by the tasks. Teaching assistants are well informed and are committed to the RE programme.

The quality of the Religious Education curriculum is good, and suitable for the age and abilities of the learners. It fulfils the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. At least 10% of curriculum time is used for Religious Education following the "Here I Am" programme in the older classes and the "Come and See" scheme in the younger classes. Scripture is used well during teaching. Pupils are encouraged to become aware of the demands of religious commitment. Religious education is linked to other curriculum areas particularly to Literacy, craft, song and occasionally information and communication technology (ICT). The curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Very attractive and colourful Religious Education displays around school give added value to this core subject.

Teachers have undertaken assessment training and assessment procedures have recently been implemented. Judgements of pupils' work are made and linked to the National RE Levels of Attainment. These are recorded and will be tracked and analysed. Work is not yet generally moderated by teachers but the RE subject leader compares judgements to ensure consistency of standards. Marking gives appropriate praise and affirms achievement of the learning intention but does not at present suggest improvements to extend the children's learning.

The inspectors wish to thank the headteacher, staff and children for their very warm welcome and for contributing to their very enjoyable and interesting visit.