

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Brigid's is an average-sized one form entry Roman Catholic voluntary aided primary school with a 45 place nursery in the Diocese of Salford. It serves the recently amalgamated parish of St Anne and St Brigid in east Manchester. This is an area of below average social and economic circumstances two miles from the city centre where major regeneration is taking place. About three quarters of the pupils are of white British heritage with the remainder coming from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, the principle groups being Black African and Irish Travellers. The age range of pupils is from 3-11. The indicative admission number is 30 and there are presently 195 pupils on roll including nursery. All children (100%) are baptised Catholics. 49% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals and 30 pupils have been identified as having special educational needs with 1 child having a statutory statement of special educational need. 9 out of 10 teachers (90%) are Catholics.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

Overall St Brigid's is an outstanding Catholic school. The headteacher and chair of governors provide strong leadership and are working hard with the leadership team to develop further the very good practice already evident in the school. The school has a warm, welcoming and caring environment in which all aspects of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are of a high standard. Pupils are happy, well-behaved, polite and friendly and their attitude to learning is a credit to both themselves and the staff of the school. Children enjoy coming to school and feel safe, secure and valued by the staff. Teaching is good overall with some outstanding teaching observed during the inspection. Members of staff are positive role models for pupils and are dedicated, committed and hard working. Religious Education is planned using the Salford Diocese *REvision 2000* syllabus and supplemented by other Religious Education schemes and resources. The children enjoy their education in a very happy and secure atmosphere engendered by the exemplary relationships that exist between all members of the school community. The links between the school and the parish are strengthened by the committed work of the dedicated parish priest who actively ensures that the school and parish are as one. The parish priest celebrates Mass in church for the whole school every week as well as on special occasions and feast days. The school governors support and encourage the school's leadership team in its drive to lead the school forward. The school is well maintained providing a bright and exciting learning environment with excellent flood-lit outdoor play areas and playing pitches. The headteacher and the leadership team have accurately evaluated their school.

Improvement since the last inspection

There were no key issues arising from the last Section 23 inspection in June 2001. Since that inspection, however, the school has reviewed its Religious Education and Prayer and Worship policies and recently introduced the Salford diocesan assessment and standardisation guidelines for curriculum Religious Education

Capacity to improve

The school's capacity to improve is very good because the headteacher, leadership team and governors have a shared vision for their school and are working closely together to realise that vision. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and in line with the judgements of the inspection. Areas for further development in both Religious Education and collective worship have been identified and strategies to bring about improvements put in place

What the school should do to improve further

- Complete the review of the marking policy in Religious Education in order to bring about greater consistency.
- Monitor and evaluate the outcomes of the Salford diocesan assessment and standardisation guidelines for curriculum Religious Education implemented by the school from the autumn term 2006.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. The chair of governors, headteacher and leadership team share the same commitment to the consistent and effective promotion of the Catholic life of the school. They inspire the commitment of the staff to join them in this. Together they have prepared and implemented the School Improvement Plan in which developments in Religious Education are identified. The governing body governs the school effectively through its committee structure and has introduced a governors' visit policy which identifies how the governors give further help, support, encouragement and challenge to the leadership and management of the school. Strong links between the school, home and church are fostered by the parish priest who is also the chair of governors and the leadership team. The parish priest is a frequent visitor to the school and celebrates Mass in church every Wednesday as a means of ensuring that children know they are part of the parish. Attendance by parents and children at the Sunday Mass is actively encouraged particularly through the Sacramental Programme. The children know their priest and he knows them. The Mission Statement is visible through the school and every aspect of the School Improvement Plan is directly linked to part of the School Mission Statement. The children are given the opportunity to lead and take responsibility for their school through their elected school council. During inspection the children were able to discuss their religion and illustrate how as Catholics they should try to lead their lives for the benefit of the whole community.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship is outstanding. A programme of weekly masses as well as Masses for special occasions is carefully planned in collaboration with the parish priest. Every Wednesday the parish priest celebrates Mass in church for the whole school with the exception of Foundation Stage children who normally celebrate their own appropriate liturgy in school. On special occasions they join the rest of the school at Mass. The Mass witnessed during the inspection, at which parishioners were present, was child centred with the parish priest using the Stations of the Cross as a readily available visual aid. A child introduced the theme of the Mass '*Placing our trust in God*' and brought it to an end with a purposeful reflection with the theme '*You are always there*'. Children acted as readers, altar servers, choir members and made up the offertory procession. The Foundation Stage children enjoyed their own liturgy based on the '*Lost Sheep*'. Each class takes it in turn to lead a Friday assembly for the whole school to which parents are invited. The class led assembly during inspection and attended by a large number of parents was a high quality assembly on the theme of '*Mother's Day*'. The Friday assembly also celebrates the children's successes in all areas of school life. The children were attentive and reverent during the collective worship observed during the inspection. Key Stage I and Key Stage 2 children also attend an assembly every Monday led by the deputy head and Key Stage 1 children attend a further assembly on Tuesdays led by a member of the leadership team. Teachers keep a record of their assemblies as an aid to future planning. During Holy Week each Key Stage 2 class in turn presents part of the Holy Week story to which parents are invited. A focus for prayer is present in each classroom.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education have been evaluated as good by the school and the inspector agrees with this evaluation. Evidence shows however that the staff of the school, led by headteacher and Religious Education co-ordinator, are not complacent and are working hard to raise achievement and standards in Religious Education. At the end of Key Stage 1 pupils have a basic understanding of the Catholic and Christian traditions. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils have a growing knowledge and understanding of Catholic, Christian and world faith traditions. Scrutiny of the children's work, teachers' planning and completed assessment tasks show that in relation to the level descriptors and attainment targets identified within the Religious Education programmes of study many learners achieve well relative to their below average starting point. The staff have high expectations of pupil achievement and standards as exemplified during a Year 4 lesson about Holy Week. The children showed a very good understanding and factual knowledge of the events of Holy Week but were then challenged further. In their independent task the children were asked to write a diary of the events of Holy week from the point of view of Peter or Judas and how the events might impact physically and emotionally on the two different characters.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is good overall with some outstanding features. During the inspection all teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge both in their planning and their lessons. Lessons observed were at least good with some lessons containing outstanding features. A Year 3 lesson on prayer provided the children with a carefully thought out and balanced spiritual experience involving formal prayer, reflective prayer, a bible reading relating to the events in the garden of Gethsemane, a story to aid reflection and the singing of a simple refrain. The children were engrossed throughout. A Year 2 lesson based on *'identifying and knowing how Jesus responded to other people'* used the story of the curing of Bartemaus as an example. The set independent tasks gave the children the opportunity to express themselves through art, writing their own reactions to the story and *'thought tracking'* the characters in the story through role play. This carefully planned and well taught lesson ensured that the children were both challenged and engrossed in their Religious Education. Teachers in Key Stage 2 made good use of the interactive whiteboards to help inspire the children. The children in both key stages displayed a good attitude to learning, listened attentively to their teachers and showed respect for each other. Marking of pupils' work is carried out regularly and praises good work but requires more consistency when using marking to move children forward or meet targets. The school is reviewing its marking policy as means of developing this aspect of teaching and the inspector encourages the school in this development. Where the marking is at its best is where teachers write probing and thought provoking questions at the end of a child's written task. The school has recently implemented the Salford diocesan assessment and standardisation guidelines for curriculum Religious Education. The inspector encourages the school to monitor this programme and to evaluate its outcomes.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The quality of the Religious Education Curriculum is outstanding. Although the school uses the Salford Diocese scheme *REvision 2000* as its main syllabus the senior leadership team, Religious Education co-ordinator and chair of governors have actively sought out other schemes and resources to supplement the *REvision 2000* syllabus in order to aid teaching and learning and bring further depth and richness to the Religious Education curriculum. The Religious Education co-ordinator and the leadership team are actively seeking quality assurance through Religious Education assessment and monitoring strategies. Lessons observed during the inspection provided appropriate challenge to match the age and ability of the children. The Year 6 lesson observed challenged the children to *'show how facing the truth allows God working through the Holy Spirit, to use past failures to build his vision of the future'*. The story of Nelson Mandela was used to illustrate the point. The large percentage of African pupils gives the school a rich source for learning about other cultures and world faiths as well as the quality teaching resources provided by the school. The scrutiny of children's work indicated that differentiation is mainly by outcome and the strategic use of able teaching assistants. Religious Education displays are prominent through the school and reflect the great importance attached to Religious Education in the school.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education are outstanding. The chair of governors, who is also the Religious Education governor, is a well informed daily visitor to the school. He takes his role and responsibilities as chair of governors and the roles and responsibilities of the governing body very seriously in helping, supporting and encouraging the leadership team in promoting their shared vision of what a Catholic school, at the heart of the Catholic community, should be. The leadership and management provided by the inspirational headteacher are augmented by the recent staff restructuring and the work of the committed Religious Education co-ordinator. The Religious Education co-ordinator has her action plan for the school year and appropriate Religious Education in-service training is planned so that all staff will have full knowledge and understanding of Religious Education curriculum developments and initiatives. There is an expectation of high standards in Religious Education and prayer and worship emanating from the governing body and the leadership team. The effectiveness of the leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education reaches beyond the school gates into the homes of parents and parishioners through the work of the parish priest, the leadership team and school governors who also serve as church ministers and put the school at the heart of the parish. The headteacher has accurately evaluated Religious Education in his school and identified how it can be made even better.