

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Mary's is a Roman Catholic voluntary aided primary school in the Diocese of Salford. It serves the parish of St. Mary in Oswaldtwistle. The school is located in the centre of the small town. Learners come from a variety of backgrounds. They live in accommodation ranging from new private estates to local authority housing and in terraces currently scheduled for demolition. Recently a number of Polish and Indian learners, 6 of whom have English as an additional language, have joined the school. The age range of the learners is from 4 to 11 years. The indicative admission number is 38 and there are currently 238 learners on roll. There is no Nursery provision. 230 of the learners are baptised Catholics. 8% of the learners are eligible for free school meals. 36 have been identified as having special educational needs and 7 have a statutory statement of special educational need. The school has been fully adapted for learners with mobility problems. All 11 teachers (100%) are Catholics.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Mary's is a good Catholic school. It offers its learners a traditional Catholic education in a friendly, caring and supportive environment. It is a happy school in which learners feel valued and enjoy their work. All staff, well led by the headteacher, are dedicated and committed to supporting learners and their families on their faith journeys. This vision is shared with the supportive governing body. Strong home, school and parish links are fostered through the successful Sacramental Programme. Learners are very well behaved, friendly and polite. They thrive on their involvement in being members of the excellent Eco school project and are duly proud of their school's success. Learners are developing a strong sense of self worth and responsibility. The school is very successful in promoting the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its learners.

Improvement since the last inspection

Following the last Section 23 inspection in January 2002 there have been several changes to the fabric of the school. A new entrance and offices have been built. There is full access for wheel chairs both for learners and visitors. A medical room, disabled toilet facilities and stair lifts have been installed. Staff changes through retirement and long term sickness have caused some disruption in recent years. A new deputy head was appointed in September 2006. The issues identified in the last inspection have been addressed but, as yet, not all have been satisfactorily resolved.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is sound but needs to be more structured and rigorous if the issues previously identified are to be satisfactorily resolved. The headteacher and senior management team have a clear vision for the future development of the school and the experience and commitment to realise this vision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Fully implement the diocesan scheme for assessment in curriculum Religious Education as identified in the School Improvement Plan.
- Establish and develop a consistent approach to the rigorous monitoring and evaluation of curriculum Religious Education provision.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are good. The Mission Statement is reviewed each year. Three years ago a new version for learners was developed. Both are on display throughout the school. The Mission Statement is at the beginning of all school policies and permeates all aspects of the school's life. The knowledgeable governing body, led by the parish priest, takes an active role in monitoring the school's provision. The detailed reports from the headteacher and Religious Education co-ordinator inform the governing body. Visits to the school from the designated governor for Religious Education and the weekly visits from the parish priest, to celebrate Mass, ensure governors are kept aware of the provision. A joint in-service training session for governors and staff is held each Spring Term. School, parish and homes work closely together to support the Sacramental Programme which is valued as a successful aspect of parish life. The designated governor for Religious Education has, until recently, been one of the co-ordinators for the parish. The headteacher has a performance management objective related to the Catholicity of the school. The headteacher and governing body have a shared vision for the future development of the school. All permanent teachers hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies or its equivalent

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship at St. Mary's is good. There is a policy statement for collective worship. Throughout the school year learners, parents and parishioners are offered a range of opportunities to deepen their relationship with God. The celebration of the Eucharist is central to the life of the school. Whole school Masses are celebrated in church on Holy Days and feast days. Class led Masses are celebrated weekly in school for learners, parents and parishioners and the learners are fully involved in the readings, bidding prayers, music, and offertory procession. The recently introduced "Welcome Mass" for the Reception class and their parents has proved popular. Whole school and key stage assemblies, led by the headteacher and teaching staff, are held each week. Learners are regularly involved. Parents enjoy the weekly "Praise" assemblies and many attend these celebrations. Liturgies are well prepared and are appropriate to the age of the learners. Detailed records of these celebrations and Masses have been kept for many years. Prayer is an important aspect of school life. Each October and May the headteacher leads a "Rosary Club" at lunch time. This is always well attended. Displays throughout the school and in the workbooks indicate that learners are happy to write their own spontaneous prayers, reflecting their spirituality. Opportunities are given for personal and communal prayer and learners have a good knowledge of the traditional prayers of the church. In all class or group prayers observed during inspection learners responded respectfully and reverently. They sing their hymns with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Every class has an area for prayer with attractive focal points in some classes. Class collective worship is integrated into Religious Education lessons.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education are good overall. Learners enter the Foundation Stage with standards broadly in line with national expectations. Throughout this stage and in Key Stage 1 learners make good consistent progress and by the end of Key Stage 1 they have a good knowledge of their faith. They produce good quality written accounts of stories they have heard and use good religious vocabulary when explaining their ideas. An example seen during inspection involved the Year 2 learners explaining the Annunciation when "hot seating" as Mary or Gabriel. In Key Stage 2 progress is inconsistent. In a minority of classes too much copying of teachers' work inhibits challenging targets being set for the learners. However by the end of the key stage some very good independent written work is seen. Learners discuss their opinions with confidence and are developing a strong sense of their responsibility to care for all God's creation through their Eco project which is recognised as an exemplar of excellence in the community. The focus is "Our world - Our responsibility". In the majority of classes work is very well marked. Good work and effort is acknowledged and direction given as to how work could be improved or developed. Learners are very well behaved, friendly and polite. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. They give generous support to local, national and international charities including a school and parish in Tanzania. The

headteacher takes disabled learners on the annual pilgrimage to Lourdes with the Handicapped Childrens' Pilgrimage Trust.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The inspector agrees with the school that the quality of teaching and learning is good overall. All lessons are planned using the REvision 2000 guidelines. Lessons have a clear focus and resources are carefully prepared and used effectively to enhance the learning process. A range of teaching styles is evident and designed to meet the requirements of the lesson content and the age of the learners. Learners are encouraged to be involved in class discussions and are very happy to do so. In the best lessons there is a good balance between direct teacher input and group or class discussion with sufficient time being allowed for learners produce good quality independent written work. Plenary sessions are used effectively to bring the lesson to a satisfactory conclusion. Learners are encouraged to use technology for further research as seen in a lesson with the oldest learners on Bishop Oscar Romero. The school has just begun the process of introducing the diocesan assessment scheme. This should be fully implemented throughout the school. Work is moderated each year but a more rigorous and evaluative approach should help eliminate the current inconsistencies particularly in Key Stage 2. Learners have a good attitude to their learning and enjoy their work. When given a task to complete most settle down quickly and remain focused until the task is finished. Those who need extra help are well supported by the teacher or teaching assistant with adapted tasks. Learners work co-operatively in small groups. Behaviour at all times is very good.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The Religious Education curriculum is good. In mixed-age classes teachers plan together to ensure that the lesson content reflects the appropriate Religious Education curriculum for the age and ability of the learners. All lessons are based on the diocesan Revision 2000 guidelines supplemented with additional schemes when necessary. The time allocated to curriculum Religious Education meets both national and diocesan requirements in all key stages. The school has a policy statement for Religious Education. Visitors to school from CAFOD and the Holy Childhood and from the school link in Tanzania all impact positively on the Religious Education curriculum. The school recently welcomed an Archbishop and a priest from this area. The many opportunities given for learners to “live” their faith through celebrations such as the Advent “Toy” Mass and the Holy Week Last Supper Service together with prayer and worship and the impressive impact of the Eco project all serve to enhance the overall provision for curriculum Religious Education. Parents are kept informed about their children’s progress in Religious Education and the quality of the curriculum contributes positively to the successful development of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness of the learners.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education is satisfactory with some good aspects. The previous Religious Education co-ordinator retired at the end of the last academic year. The headteacher, who also has a considerable teaching commitment, took on this additional responsibility in September 2006. The monitoring of the Religious Education curriculum had begun but there is little evidence that the provision had been rigorously evaluated. Inconsistencies in the provision in Key Stage 2 had been identified in February 2006 but had not been acted upon. Documentation is in need of updating. The school is encouraged to address these issues. Continuing professional development in curriculum Religious Education could be facilitated by enlisting the support of the diocesan advisers. The headteacher has the support of the staff and the necessary commitment and experience to provide a clear direction for the continuing development of curriculum Religious Education in the school. All staff have a good knowledge of the Religious Education curriculum and the personal faith and dedication to extend and develop the overall provision. Resources are adequate and are supplemented when necessary. Displays clearly reflect the faith life of the school.