

INSPECTION REPORT

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ST. BERNARD'S ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL
Wendover Drive Ladybridge Bolton BL3 4RX

Inspection date April 2010
 Reporting Inspector Mr. J. Brierley
 Inspection carried out in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School Catholic Primary/Secondary
 URN 105230
 Age range of pupils 4-11
 Number on roll 122
 Appropriate authority The governing body
 Chair of Governors Cllr. P. Ashcroft
 Headteacher Mrs. C. Doodson
 Religious Education Co-ordinator Mrs. D. Tonge
 Date of previous inspection October 2006

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades 1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3 = Satisfactory 4 = Inadequate
Overall effectiveness of the school	2	
Leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school	2	
The quality of Collective Worship	2	
Achievement and standards in Religious Education	2	
The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education	2	
The quality of the Religious Education curriculum	2	
Leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education	2	
<i>The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements</i>		

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Bernard's is a smaller than average sized voluntary aided Roman Catholic primary school serving the parish of St. Ethelbert in partnership with St. Ethelbert's R.C. Primary School. The school also serves the parish of St. Vincent. The school is located on the Ladybridge housing estate approximately 2 miles from Bolton town centre. The area is relatively affluent with the majority of housing being privately owned. Most pupils are of white British heritage. Indicators suggest that the children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills generally in line with the national expectation for the age group. The age range of pupils is from 4 to 11 years. Since 2009 the indicative admission number has risen to 20 resulting in the school having two new classrooms built. There are currently 122 pupils on roll. 105 of the pupils are baptised Catholics. 12 pupils have been identified as having special educational needs with 3 children having a statutory statement of special educational need. 5% of the children are entitled to free school meals. 5 of the 6 teachers (83%) are of the Catholic faith.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Bernard's is a good Catholic school. Since the last inspection the school has worked hard to bring about improvements and raise standards. New appointments to the senior leadership team have provided the headteacher with the necessary support and expertise to bring about needed change and raise standards. The senior leadership team is encouraged and supported in its work by the governing body and staff of the school. Together they have a unity of purpose based on a clear understanding of the school's strengths while recognising areas for development. Strategies have been put in place which are helping both staff and governors to assess and evaluate planned improvements and whether the improvements in teaching and learning are being sustained. The Catholic life of the school is central to the school's ethos and produces a warm, welcoming and caring environment in which all aspects of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are of a good standard. Pupils are happy, well-behaved, polite and friendly. They display a good attitude to learning and enjoy coming to school where they feel safe, secure and valued by the staff. The very good relationships existing between all members of the school community creates an atmosphere of trust and is an aid to bringing about the improvements being sought. Teaching is good overall. Pupils' achievement in Religious Education has generally reached a good standard by the time they reach Year 6. The school supports a number of local, national and international charities while providing a range of extra-curricular activities for the pupils. The school has achieved Financial Management Standard and been awarded the Activemark.

Improvement since the last inspection

Following the last Section 48 inspection in 2006 the school has put in place both an action plan for Religious Education and a quality assurance programme as a means raising standards in curriculum Religious Education. The resulting regular monitoring of teaching and learning in curriculum Religious Education is helping to raise standards.

Capacity to improve

The school's capacity to improve is good because the senior leadership team, staff and governors have a shared vision for sustained improvement through the use of an effective School Improvement Plan, Religious Education action plan and a quality assurance programme for assessing and evaluating teaching and learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the role played by children in leading collective prayer and worship at whole school assemblies.
- Continue to establish the diocesan scheme for assessment by moderating levelled work and setting up a pupil tracking system to record pupils' levelled assessments in Religious Education so that progress can be effectively monitored.
- Continue to establish the quality assurance programme for the monitoring and evaluation of Religious Education so that the impact it is making is effectively evaluated.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are good. Since the last inspection new appointments to the senior leadership team have helped the dedicated headteacher put in place necessary strategies to bring about change and raise standards. The governing body is actively involved in helping the headteacher and senior leadership of the school to lead the Catholic life of the school. The chair and vice-chair of governors, who is also the designated governor for Religious Education, meet with the headteacher every fortnight and a governors' log is in place which records all briefings and visits by governors. The governing body governs the school effectively through its committee structure. Following an audit of their skills the governors are drawing up an action plan which will further develop their role in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the school. In 2009 the governors and staff consulted all stakeholders in a review of the school's Mission Statement with a synopsis describing St. Bernard's as 'a unique family in faith, love and learning'. The headteacher includes a spiritual focus on every half-termly newsletter linked to the Catholic life of the school. Since his appointment in March 2010 the newly appointed parish priest has made himself well known to the school community and established a rota of class masses with plans for further developments. Community cohesion is an important feature of the work of both parish and school and over the academic year children are given many opportunities to think and care for others. The school has an elected pupil school council which has met with the chair and vice-chair of governors giving the children a voice in the school.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship is good. There is a clear collective worship policy in place. A programme of class Masses, Masses at the beginning and end of term and on special occasions is planned in collaboration with the parish priest. These Masses which are celebrated in school are attended by the children, parents and parishioners. The headteacher leads a whole school assembly every Monday and Friday. On the remaining weekdays each class has its own collective prayer service with the class teacher planning a particular focus each week. The excellent headteacher led assembly, presented during the inspection, was based on the theme 'Together we are stronger' and reflected on individual uniqueness, relationships and working with Jesus. The meaningful class based prayer and worship opportunity for Year 3 and Year 4 was successfully linked to curriculum Religious Education. The children were reverent and engrossed throughout both the assembly and prayer and worship. Children are encouraged to attend voluntary prayer opportunities led by the headteacher or Religious Education co-ordinator during lunch-times or break times for Advent prayers, the Stations of the Cross during Lent and The Rosary during May and October. Assembly themes take into account other faiths and cultures especially during the summer term Multi-faith Week'. The Sacramental Programme is prepared and taught in both school and church with the support of the parish priest and parish catechists. The school is aiming to develop the role played by children in leading collective prayer and worship at whole school assemblies.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education are good. Indicators suggest that on starting school the majority of the children's attainment is generally in line with the national expectation for the age group. By the time the children reach Year 6 they have achieved a good understanding of their faith. The standards achieved in Religious Education are greatly aided by the strong Catholic life of the school which is present through prayer and worship opportunities, displays and relationships. The school monitors pupils through the completion of Salford diocese Religious Education assessments each half term but the tracking of individual pupil progress and the measuring of achievement and standards in Religious Education are at an early stage. The school should continue to establish the diocesan scheme for assessment by moderating levelled work and setting up a pupil tracking system to record pupils' levelled assessments in Religious Education so that progress can be effectively monitored. The scrutiny of exercise books during the inspection showed that differentiation in children's work is being encouraged by the school leadership and teachers are endeavouring to develop this in their lessons but very often differentiation is either by outcome or the provision of additional teaching support. In some classes completed exercise tasks need to provide a more consistent challenge to pupils, especially those of a higher ability, as a key to raising levels of achievement. The use of assessment for learning in Religious education is being developed in the school.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The overall quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is good. All lessons observed during the inspection were at least good and teachers consistently demonstrated good subject knowledge. Lessons are based on the diocesan programme of study for Religious Education and teachers use both medium term plans and short term planning. Learning objectives are clearly identified on short term lesson plans. Marking of pupils' work is completed regularly by teachers and often recognises and praises good work but it does not always match the school's marking policy's recommendation that, 'marking should state clearly what a pupil has achieved and what they can do to further improve'. Marking is at its best when teachers ask probing questions and suggest how a child could better meet the learning objective. The learning objective is sometimes written at the top of the exercise as an aid to both understanding and teacher marking but this practice is not consistent across the school. In order to bring about consistency of approach the school is encouraged to continue to establish the quality assurance programme for the monitoring and evaluation of Religious Education so that the impact it is making is effectively evaluated. During all lessons the children were well-behaved and generally attentive while displaying very good relationships between all members of the school community. Children enjoyed their lessons as illustrated by children in Class 1 eagerly role playing the story of 'children being turned away from Jesus' and children in Class 2 enthusiastically displaying the emotions of the apostles by practising facial expressions recorded in art and ICT. Teaching assistants effectively enhance learning.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The quality of the Religious Education curriculum is good. The significance of curriculum Religious Education in the school is clearly visible through displays and the presence of religious artefacts and a focal point for prayer in every classroom. The school's Mission Statement is displayed through the school. The school uses the Salford diocesan Religious Education scheme which is supplemented by reference to the annual cycle of religious activities that further stimulate children's knowledge and understanding of their religion and its traditions. The school has developed a two year rolling programme as an aid to delivering curriculum Religious Education to vertically streamed classes. The school has enhanced its Religious Education curriculum through its approach to teaching about other faiths and cultures. During the summer term the school has a Multi-Faith Week which provides an array of opportunities for children to experience and learn about the other cultures and faiths within the community. Regular inclusion of Religious Education on staff and governors' meetings agendas ensures that its profile within the school remains high and that the Religious Education curriculum is regularly reviewed and developed. Evidence of children's work from Religious Education lessons is on display in classrooms and shared areas. The school's Religious Education curriculum is further enhanced by its support of a number of national and international charities which include the Samaritan Child, CAFOD, St. Joseph's Penny, Marie Curie and Derian House and its links with a school and orphanage in Africa.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education are good. Following the last inspection the governors set up a governor monitoring group which met every two weeks resulting in the governors being better placed to monitor and evaluate their school. This quest for improvement has been sustained by both the governors and the leadership team. Since the appointment of new members to the senior leadership team the school has acquired the capacity to review the roles of its subject co-ordinators. This has allowed the Religious Education co-ordinator to prioritise Religious Education and link it to other curriculum areas related to this all important role. The Religious Education co-ordinator is well established, respected and confident in her role giving good leadership to all staff. The headteacher and Religious Education co-ordinator work closely together in both developing curriculum Religious Education and monitoring and evaluating the teaching and learning in the subject. The Religious Education action plan for 2009-2010 identifies four targets aimed at raising standards in teaching and learning, assessment and the development of collective worship. The senior leadership team, governors and staff share a clear vision as to the high priority to be given to Religious Education in the school. The designated Religious Education governor regularly meets with the headteacher and subject co-ordinator and has a real knowledge of the school. The Religious Education co-ordinator presents an annual written report on her subject to the governors to keep them informed of progress.