

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St.Alban's is a voluntary aided Roman Catholic primary school serving the parish of St. Alban and parts of the Good Shepherd parish. The school is situated in the Larkhill district of Blackburn and draws learners from several districts of the town including travellers' children. Some housing is owner occupied but most is local authority or housing association rented property. Learners range from 3 to 11 years in age. The admission number is 30 and there are 206 children on roll plus two daily sessions of 24 each in the Nursery. 134 learners are baptised Catholics. There is a significantly changing pupil profile with an increasing number of children from other faiths. 39% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. 49 pupils (24%) are identified as having special educational needs with 2 having a statutory statement of special educational need. 10 of the 11 teachers (91%) are Catholics.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Alban's is a good Catholic school with some outstanding features. Leadership and management ensure that the school provides a welcoming, happy, caring environment where the learners know they are respected, cared for and loved. Through the fulfilment of its mission and ethos the school aims to provide a Catholic education whilst embracing pupils and staff of diverse cultures and faiths with no barriers existing. Staff are dedicated and committed. They work hard to help the school to grow and develop and to promote the spiritual, moral, social, academic and cultural development of the children. The school emphasises the value of all individuals and nurtures them on their faith journey in loving God and following Jesus' example. The recently appointed headteacher has quickly established a very accurate understanding of the school's strengths and development needs. Through working with senior staff and governors areas for further improvements have been identified and an appropriate action plan drawn up. All staff are supported in their professional development.

Improvement since the last inspection

The school was committed to develop two areas following the last inspection in November 2001. Since then there have been two changes of headteacher and four changes of the Religious Education co-ordinator. Each classroom now has a focal area for prayer and worship regularly changed to reflect the curriculum topic and used to enhance various types of prayer. However, the development of an assessment system for Religious Education did not become a priority until the construction of the current action plan. It is an immediate priority for the new co-ordinator. All teachers now use a recently introduced consistent pro-forma for planning and more formal monitoring of teachers' planning and pupils' work has begun.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is very good. The recently appointed headteacher has a clear vision of the school's future needs and developments. He is strongly supported by the newly appointed deputy head, Religious Education co-ordinator, senior staff and all governors. Following consultation and evaluation an action plan agreed by the staff and governors is in place identifying priorities which will be implemented and which will help the school to move on. The parish priest who is the chair of governors visits school regularly, shares in its life and discusses school issues with the headteacher. Help from the diocese and in-service training are utilised and all opportunities for staff development are encouraged. Capacity to improve is therefore good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop planning of differentiated tasks to address mixed ability needs in class groups.
- Ensure the quality and quantity of learners' written work enables secure judgements to be made in monitoring, assessment and evaluation.
- Complete the review of assessment procedures in curriculum Religious Education in order to inform future judgments on standards of attainment and on the quality of teaching and learning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. The Catholic faith is at the centre of the school's life and reflects its mission to "create a happy environment in which the love of God envelops the whole school community and where the living of God's word touches each person in a unique and individual way". Governors are well informed, challenging and supportive. They work well in their committees helping to shape the life and direction at the school. Appointing Catholic teachers is a priority. The parish priest gives a strong lead both as the chair of governors and as the link Religious Education governor. He visits the school often, discusses issues with the headteacher and staff, celebrates Holy Mass regularly in school and shares other celebrations. He helps to facilitate the governors' monitoring of Religious Education. The recently appointed and hard working headteacher has a clear vision for the school's future development. The high quality of his leadership, supported by the new deputy head and senior management team, ensures that the distinctive nature of the Catholic life of the school is maintained as well as providing for the continuing spiritual and moral development needs of all. Staff work hard and are committed to the school's Catholicity. Appropriate systems have been introduced for monitoring and evaluation and staff development. Opportunities are provided for staff to exercise responsibilities. Learners too have responsibilities as 'buddies', school council members and fulfilling general tasks. Because of the wide geographical range of the pupil intake the school plays a large role in supporting the Sacramental Programme in the parish. Home, school, parish links are strong as are links with the associated Catholic high school and the other associated primary schools.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

The quality of collective worship is outstanding. A rich variety of relevant opportunities and experiences was observed during the inspection. Each Monday morning and Friday afternoon the headteacher leads well planned, whole school assemblies usually related to the Church's liturgy or a topical event. Friday's assembly also includes a celebration of achievements. Class led assemblies take place in rota. They relate to the *REvision 2000* scheme and include pupil planning, participation, curriculum links, reverent reflection and prayers, drama and hymns. Classes pray at set times during the day when private, individual, meditative and traditional prayers are included. The school plans to timetable weekly class prayer services. The parish priest plays an active role in the school's prayer and worship and in regular Eucharistic celebrations in classes or church. These are inspirational and devotional. The example set by teachers encourages respect and reverence in the pupils and helps to create meaningful, spiritual experiences for them. There is a strong realisation of the importance of prayer and pupils respond with sincerity and devotion. It is an integral part of school life influencing learners' spiritual and moral development, attitudes and values. There is a meaningful prayer focal point in each classroom usually related to the curriculum or liturgy. Governors, parents and parishioners attend assemblies, liturgical celebrations Masses and presentations.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education are mostly good. In a few classes they are satisfactory. Teachers plan from the diocesan programme *REvision 2000*. The stimulating and well organised environment for the nursery stage provides a very happy, challenging introduction to school life and learning. Most learners meet the required targets by the end of each key stage but the diverse range of ability in classes creates a need to address the provision of tasks for all abilities. This is an area to be addressed by the school when evaluation and assessment procedures are fully in place. In a few classes there is a need to increase the quality and quantity of pupils' written responses and avoid copied work to enable secure judgments in the monitoring and assessment of progress in Religious Education. All learners know and understand the Catholic beliefs, values and way of life. They are encouraged to relate this to their own lives, to follow Jesus' example, to show love of God and to make appropriate choices. All know about and respect other faiths and cultures. There is an obvious realisation of God's love for them and good knowledge of Bible stories as was evident in the lesson in Year 2 when the learners discussed Jesus' appearances after Easter and enacted the scene of the apostles fishing on the lake. Learners' clearly enjoy Religious Education. They respond confidently to opportunities to use research skills, explore ideas, discuss, raise questions and make decisions. Behaviour is good and there are structures in place to promote and reward this positively. Parents are happy with their children's achievements. Example set by staff, curriculum content, teaching and prayer and worship all ensure good spiritual, moral and cultural development. Through prayer, good works and fund-raising learners show real care for others in need both in school and beyond.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The quality of teaching and learning is mostly good. It is never less than satisfactory. Teachers are well qualified and have a secure knowledge and understanding of the *REvision 2000* programme. The weekly planning format is consistent throughout the school. Not all teachers plan tasks for pupils with differing abilities and learning needs. This is to be addressed along with making the best use of teaching assistants. Most teachers have high expectations and set work which challenges learners to achieve the best outcomes and results. This was observed during inspection. In some cases teachers' constructive marking helps learners to develop thoughts and ideas. Creative use of resources was seen to enhance learning. The interactive white boards are proving to be a valuable teaching and learning aid. Some measures have been taken to improve assessment of individual learner's work as identified as a key issue in the last inspection but further action is needed and the school's action plan includes effective use of the diocesan assessment material as a base for development. The school is encouraged in this work. Behaviour is good with most pupils being co-operative and attentive. They clearly enjoy the varied teaching styles and techniques and the tasks and experiences offered. Learners work well together, share ideas and respect each other's views.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The quality of the Religious Education curriculum is good. The school aims to "create a Christian environment where pupils can learn and grow in the love of God and each other". Time allocated for curriculum Religious Education meets national and diocesan guidelines. The school follows its policy of recognising learners' individual needs with special attention to social, moral and spiritual development. Aims relate to the *REvision 2000* Programme. A standard planning format has recently been introduced and is followed by all teachers. Work is supplemented by the use of interactive white boards in every class. Information communication technology, audio-visual aids and a range of quality books and resources stored centrally are also used. Teachers aim for all learners to be actively involved in class discussion, presentation and drama. There is a need to ensure tasks are appropriate for all abilities in some classes. Teaching assistants in classes make a valuable contribution. Excellent examples of this were observed in the nursery with shared preparation and involvement and in Year 6 on an extension task with a more able group of learners. The school's action plan includes a review of assessment procedures. It intends to use the diocesan assessment guidelines as a basis for the introduction of target setting and formal assessment of individual learner's work to ensure secure judgments and to aid future planning. Prayer, worship and liturgy are clearly related to all work in curriculum Religious Education together with other appropriate curriculum links to enrich provision. Work on other faiths and cultures is undertaken throughout the school and links, to include visits, have been forged with outside groups and other schools. A wide variety of extra-curricular opportunities is offered to pupils to help them to realise their full potential.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education are good. The school has experienced turbulent times. The recently appointed head teacher is committed to the importance and quality of Religious Education as being central to the whole life and ethos of the school. His qualifications, knowledge and experience are instrumental in leading the school forward in his aim to provide, with the governors' support, the best teaching and learning to ensure equal opportunities for all learners. In formulating a development plan his vision is clear and supported by shared involvement of the new co-ordinator, senior management team and governors. Written policies are in place for curriculum Religious Education and prayer and worship and are to be regularly reviewed. The new co-ordinator is dedicated, keen and enthusiastic. She has undertaken a full audit of resources and scrutinises teachers' planning and pupils' work. She works closely with the headteacher in all aspects of development needs. Her past experience and example will help in the understanding of the school's further needs and implementing assessment strategies with the co-operation of staff. Staff development is promoted through attendance at diocesan briefings and courses and in-service training within school and beyond. Governors are supportive, well informed and take an active role in the school's religious life in pursuit of its aims. The parish priest, as chair of governors, informs all governors of activities and developments in Religious Education and provides much valued guidance, help and support.