

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Margaret Mary's is a Roman Catholic voluntary aided primary school in the Diocese of Salford. It serves the parishes of St. Margaret Mary in New Moston and St. John Vianney in Moston. The school is located north of the city of Manchester on the border with Oldham. The area covers some of the most deprived parts of the city with high incidences of ill health, youth crime and unemployment. Learners come from a wide and varied range of social and economic backgrounds. The age range of the learners is 3-11 years. The indicative admission number is 45 and there are 258 learners on roll including 30 in the Nursery unit. 220 of the 228 primary aged pupils are baptised Catholics. 16.3% are eligible for free school meals. 26 learners have been identified as having special educational needs and 2 have a statutory statement of special educational need. All 11 teachers are Catholics (100%)

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Margaret Mary's is a good Catholic school. The school offers its learners a good traditional Catholic education in a secure and supportive environment. The dedicated staff, together with the governing body, well led by the chair of governors and acting headteacher, ensure that all learners and their families are fully supported on their faith journey. Learners enjoy coming to school. They work hard, are well behaved, friendly and polite. They have a good knowledge of their faith. Musical talents are fostered and developed. This is particularly evident in the class led assemblies. Celebration of the Eucharist is central to the life of the school. The chair of governors and the recently appointed headteacher have clear plans to continue the development of the school. The school successfully promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the learners. Links between home and school are strong.

Improvement since the last inspection

Since the last Section 23 inspection in September 2000 there have been several changes of staff including 2 headteachers. Of the issues identified in the last inspection one has been successfully resolved and limited progress has been made in resolving another. The monitoring and evaluation of the Religious Education provision is in its early stages. Parents and parishioners enjoy and appreciate their involvement in assemblies and liturgical celebrations. Home, school, parish links continue to be fostered and strengthened.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is honest. The recent appointment of the new headteacher who has the experience and commitment to implement necessary changes bodes well for the future of the school. She is very well supported by the chair of governors and the development of the governing body in its role as "critical friend" to the school can only support this process. The capacity to improve is therefore good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Undertake a review of the school's Mission Statement
- Revise the policy on prayer and worship to support the development of class collective worship throughout the school.
- Establish a rigorous system for the monitoring and evaluation of the planning, delivery and assessment of curriculum Religious Education throughout the school.
- Ensure that all learners in Key Stage 2 have the time to record extended pieces of independent writing in Religious Education lessons

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are satisfactory with several good features. The school has a clear Mission Statement which is at the beginning of all school policies. It is over seven years since this was developed and the need to review it has already been identified. The school is encouraged to undertake this work. The governing body has developed a more pro-active role in the day to day life of the school. Designated areas of responsibility have been allocated to individual governors and corresponding links established with appropriate teachers. The well informed chair of governors has a clear vision for the future development of the governing body which will enable it to fulfil its role of “critical friend” in the monitoring and evaluation of provision. The recently appointed headteacher shares this vision and has the commitment and experience to implement necessary changes. The designated governor for Religious Education works in the school and the chair of governors is a frequent visitor to the school. Performance management objectives relating to the school’s Catholic nature have been a feature for those who exercise responsibility in school. The previous headteacher had begun the process of monitoring the teaching of Religious Education and the recently appointed headteacher has already extended this to include the scrutiny of pupils’ work. The school fully supports the Sacramental Programme which is valued as a successful aspect of parish life. The governing body is committed to appointing to the school Catholic teachers who hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies, or equivalent, or teachers who aspire to achieve the qualification when appointed.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

The quality of collective worship is good with some aspects which are outstanding. There is a brief policy statement on prayer and worship which is included in the Religious Education policy. This should be updated to reflect current provision. Learners are provided with a range of opportunities to strengthen their relationship with God throughout the school year. School Masses are held in church to celebrate Holy Days and other feasts. Class Masses are held in the convent chapel. On these occasions learners are fully involved in readings, bidding prayers and music. A harvest festival, May procession and a day of reflection for the oldest learners enhance the provision. Whole school assemblies are held weekly and a detailed record of them is kept. The assembly led by the Year 4 class which was observed during inspection was of very high quality. All learners were involved. They knew their words perfectly, captivated their audience with their dramatic skills and their singing was excellent. The theme reflected work being covered in the Religious Education curriculum. The worship observed during the inspection was a genuine spiritual experience for both learners and adults. Resources were very well prepared, appropriate to the age of the learners and complemented the Religious Education curriculum. This very good practice should be implemented throughout the school to embrace class collective worship for all since this is only a feature of the provision in the Foundation Stage. Learners pray reverently and respectfully. Classes have attractive focal areas for prayer and these are well used by teachers and learners. Throughout the school displays reflect its faith life and altar areas are a feature on corridors. Learners know the traditional prayers of the church and are happy to express their spirituality in spontaneous prayers.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education are good. All learners have a good factual knowledge of their faith appropriate to their age. Learners are articulate and use good religious vocabulary when discussing their faith. They take pride in their presentations. The learners enjoy their lessons and behaviour is good. They are very keen to be involved in class discussions and ask meaningful and perceptive questions as observed during “hot seating” sessions. Learners have a good knowledge of the Jewish faith. There are good instances of careful marking throughout the school with the best strategies also including suggestions for how work may be improved. Generally good progress is evident within and between key stages. By the end of Key Stage 1 learners are able to retell stories in their own words and write simple prayers. In lower Key Stage 2 good quality work is evident from the youngest learners. However progress is somewhat restricted in upper Key Stage 2 where in some classes too much of the work produced is copied from the board restricting the opportunities for learners to express their own ideas and reflect their knowledge in extended pieces of writing. Discussions with the learners indicate standards could be higher if these opportunities were developed. This has already been identified as a priority for change by the headteacher. The assessment strategy produced by the diocese will be implemented throughout the school from the summer term. The good provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development supports the learners’ work in Religious Education.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall the quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is good with evidence of very good teaching in some classes. All lessons are well planned and based on the *REvision 2000* guidelines. Clear objectives are explained to the learners. A range of teaching styles is used appropriate to the age of the learners including the use of information communication technology. In the best lessons resources are carefully selected and prepared and used effectively thereby enhancing the learning. Tasks are set which meet the needs of all learners. Plenary sessions are well used to bring the lessons to an appropriate conclusion. Most work is well marked. Praise is given for good work and suggestions made for improvement when necessary. The school has an assessment strategy but it is not being consistently implemented throughout the school. Strategies used in the Foundation Stage are good. Learners who need help are well supported. All learners are very attentive to the teacher and listen respectfully to others' input into the lessons. They move quickly to begin their work and keep on task until it has been completed. Learners take pride in their presentations. Behaviour in lessons is generally good due to the teachers ensuring that all are involved in the discussions and activities. Learners work well in small groups - discussing and sharing their ideas co-operatively. Learners could be given more opportunities to express their own ideas and thoughts on their faith in extended pieces of independent writing, particularly in some classes in Key Stage 2.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The Religious Education curriculum is satisfactory and follows the *REvision 2000* guidelines. The school has a brief, undated policy statement on Religious Education. The appropriate amount of curriculum time is allocated to Religious Education to meet national and diocesan requirements. However the length of lessons, in some classes, is too short to be used effectively to enable learners to produce the quality and quantity of writing necessary to improve standards further. Learners discuss moral issues in their Religious Education lessons and through their involvement in the school council they are encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility. The learners give generous support to local, national and international charities. The well organised and successful parish Sacramental Programme initiative supports the Religious Education curriculum. The visits to the nearby church and the valued support of the parish priest together with the quality of the assemblies, particularly through the music and drama content, enhance the overall provision. The headteacher has already begun an audit of the current situation and established clear priorities for monitoring and reviewing the provision.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall the leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education are satisfactory. The long term absence of the Religious Education co-ordinator has restricted progress in recent months and limited the support available for staff. When the recently appointed headteacher came to the school she took on the responsibility for this area of the curriculum. The previous headteacher had begun monitoring Religious Education lessons and this has now been extended to scrutiny of learners' work books. A rigorous system for the monitoring and evaluation of the provision for Religious Education should now be implemented. The governing body is informed of developments in curriculum Religious Education through the headteacher's reports and a designated governor for Religious Education has been identified. Links between curriculum co-ordinators and the governing body have been identified as a priority for development by the chair of governors and the headteacher. In all these matters the support of the parish priest is much valued. Resources for Religious Education are adequate and a variety of books on religious topics is available for learners to loan from the school library. All the teachers in the school are Catholics and six hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies or equivalent