

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Mary's is a Roman Catholic voluntary aided primary school in the Diocese of Salford. It serves the parishes of St. Mary in Langho and English Martyrs in Whalley - affluent areas in the Ribble valley of Lancashire. Children come from a wide and mixed catchment area with the majority living in privately owned homes in a region of high employment and social prosperity. The age range of pupils is from 4 to 11 and the indicative admission number is currently 40. There are 250 children on roll of whom 98% are baptised Catholics. 2% of the children are known to be eligible for free school meals and 25 have been identified as having special educational needs with 6 having a statutory statement of special educational need. 11 out of the 12 teachers (92%) are Catholics and 9 hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies or equivalent. 2 teachers are currently studying for the certificate.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Mary's is an outstanding school with an exceptionally strong Catholic ethos. It is driven by its Mission Statement which was drawn up by staff and governors with an annual review. There is a children's version of the school's Mission Statement which is said daily as a prayer. The leadership and management provided by the governing body, led by the knowledgeable chair of governors, together with the experience and commitment of the headteacher and school management team are outstanding. Staff at all levels are strong, positive role models for pupils and are dedicated and committed to the school. They work hard to provide a welcoming, caring and stimulating environment in which all aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Learners are very well behaved, friendly and polite. They have good attitudes to their learning and respond well to the quality of teaching they experience. Pupils, including gifted and talented and those children with special educational needs, achieve well as a result of an excellent differentiated Religious Education curriculum which meets the needs of all children.

Improvement since the last inspection

Following the last Section 23 inspection in 2000 the school has successfully addressed the key issues. All class timetables include at least 10% of curriculum Religious Education. There is now a consistent approach to planning. Focused and extremely thorough systems of monitoring, evaluation and review with related feedback are in place. The development and extension of the use of assessment ensures that tasks set meet the needs of all learners. A comprehensive range of information is provided for the parents which includes an overview of the Religious Education curriculum. Pupils' reports include comments on attainment and progress in curriculum Religious Education. There is very high quality leadership which provides clear direction for the school. This has had a significant impact on the development of Religious Education over the last six years.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation, which is supported by the findings of the inspection, shows a good capacity for ongoing improvement. The headteacher's energy and drive have moved the school forward significantly and she demonstrates a clear vision for the school's needs and development. She is strongly supported by the parish priest, the chair of governors, the active and knowledgeable governing body and the hardworking, committed staff.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to develop assessment in curriculum Religious Education by accurate levelling of learners' work using the latest Salford Diocesan guidelines.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. This is due chiefly to the exceptionally strong leadership of the headteacher, the dedicated leadership team and the wholehearted support of all the staff. The school benefits to the full from a very active, knowledgeable and supportive governing body which discusses and revises Religious Education policies. The parish priest, who is the link governor for Religious Education and demonstrates an impressive knowledge and understanding of school life, is a very regular visitor to the school when he meets with staff and visits learners in their classes. He is well known to them all. During his many visits to the school he is able to monitor the provision thus keeping other governors fully informed. In addition the detailed reports from the headteacher, who is the co-ordinator for Religious Education, enable governors to monitor closely the work of the school as a faith community. The governors' curriculum committee evaluates provision for collective worship and liturgy and members of the committee visit classes to observe Religious Education lessons and the attitudes of learners relating to behaviour and work. Governors join staff for in-service training days for Catholic partnership activities. The headteacher and other staff have a performance management objective related to the Catholic life of the school. The school is firmly at the heart of the parish and fully supports the well-organised Sacramental Programme which is valued as a successful aspect of school life.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship at St. Mary's is outstanding. It is a key feature of the school and pervades all aspects of school life. It is underpinned by a clear Religious Education policy, which includes prayer and worship and by associated detailed guidelines for the development of this aspect of the school. Whole school and key stage Masses are celebrated in school and in church. Assemblies and services reflecting the liturgical calendar are planned annually in conjunction with the 3-year liturgical cycle and celebrated with the parish priest, parents and parishioners. A common planning format is followed for class collective worship and assemblies which includes and evaluates key elements such as gathering, focusing, reflecting and responding. The quality of collective worship and the children's response is monitored regularly by the headteacher. All learners observed during inspection were fully involved and supported in the planning of celebrations which included readings, drama, music, dance and art. Pupils are provided with opportunities for personal and reflective prayer. Children display confidence and pray with respect and reverence demonstrating a developing awareness of the importance of prayer in their lives. Displays in classes and throughout the school indicate that learners are encouraged to express their spirituality through prayer. Every classroom has an attractive focal area for prayer.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education are good. Very clear and effective strategies and systems introduced since the 2000 inspection have ensured that this aspect of the school's life and curriculum has been prioritised in order that high standards be achieved and maintained. Scrutiny of work, assessment books and the portfolio of children's work indicate that learners make at least good progress and often better. This good progress is well supported by a clear scheme of work, a wide range of resources and very thorough planning which identifies focused objectives and outcomes and highlights appropriate differentiation. In observations during inspection learners were provided with opportunities to debate, question and express themselves both orally and in their written and art work. Children respond very positively to Religious Education. They enjoy the subject, are well motivated and take pride in their work. Across the whole school community there is a feeling of self-worth and self-esteem. Learners are aware of God's presence in their lives and of His forgiveness and love. They are aware of the needs of others and give generously to a number of worldwide and local charities.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The inspector agrees that teaching and learning in Religious Education are good with some outstanding lessons observed. Teachers have high expectations for themselves and their learners and work hard using a variety of interactive teaching strategies. They demonstrate good subject knowledge, an understanding of Religious Education and make good use of *Revision 2000* guidelines which have been adapted to cater for the ages and abilities in mixed age classes. Detailed planning with clearly stated objectives which are fully explained to the learners lead to well structured lessons incorporating a good range of activities. Assessment systems have been developed to evaluate teaching and learning and provide a focus for future planning. The school should continue to develop assessment in curriculum Religious Education by accurate levelling of learners' work using the latest Salford Diocesan guidelines. Marking provides feedback and direction for improvement. Information technology is widely used to support teaching and learning and teachers capitalise on opportunities to link Religious Education across the curriculum.

Classroom management and organisation are highly effective. Behaviour is excellent throughout the school with pupils co-operating when working with others or independently. They listen attentively, respond to questions and use appropriate religious vocabulary. They show an interest in their work and an eagerness to learn. Teaching assistants provide very good support for those pupils requiring extra help.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The Religious Education curriculum is outstanding. Religious Education has a very high profile in the school, both as a key element in school improvement planning and also in spending plans. At least 10% of teaching time in all classes is allocated to the subject. The diocesan *Revision 2000* guidelines are followed throughout and supplemented by activities relating to the liturgical year. Teachers' planning is thorough and together with pupils' learning is closely monitored by the headteacher through scrutiny and observation. Regular Religious Education staff meetings and impressive in-service training, provided both in-house and externally, ensure that its profile within the school remains high and that practices and curriculum are under constant review and development. The headteacher's monitoring of work, lessons and planning further inform this review. Appropriate feedback is given and acted upon by individuals and whole staff to ensure good quality teaching and learning. Curriculum Religious Education and collective worship are linked effectively together to ensure that both knowledge and understanding and spiritual development are promoted to the full. Termly written reports to the governors include a significant Religious Education element and are discussed fully with good input from the nominated governor for Religious Education and the governors' curriculum committee who attend some of the in-service training. The school plays an important supportive role in the preparation of pupils for the Sacramental Programme enjoying strong links with the parish leader.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school has assessed the leadership and management as good. Inspection evidence gathered judges this to be outstanding. The headteacher who is also the co-ordinator for Religious Education has excellent knowledge of her subject and is well placed to advise and support her motivated staff and knowledgeable governors. She has a clear vision of her role within the school and provides strong leadership and direction. Her key strategic position as headteacher helps to ensure that Religious Education is held first and foremost in the life of the school. She appreciates and promotes the way in which Religious Education should pervade the whole school and fully involves the stakeholders at all levels of decision making. Governors are kept fully informed of Religious Education and prayer and worship by written and verbal reports from the headteacher, link governor, curriculum committee, by visits to the school and by attending various celebrations and functions. They are seen as "critical friends" who hold the school to account for its performance. Their input is valued. Resources for Religious Education and collective worship are plentiful. Attractive displays throughout the premises reflect the faith life of St. Mary's school where Religious Education and prayer and worship have a very high profile.