

**SALFORD DIOCESE
INSPECTION REPORT**



**ST. COLUMBA'S
ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL
Bolton**

Inspection date November 2005

Reporting Inspector Mrs. K.A. Morris

Inspection carried out in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School Catholic Primary
 Age range of pupils 3-11
 Number on roll 187
 Appropriate authority The governing body
 Chair of Governors Rev. Fr. F. McCauley
 Headteacher Mrs. N. Collins
 Religious Education Co-ordinator Mrs. N. Collins
 Date of previous inspection November 1999

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

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Columba's is a Voluntary Aided Roman Catholic Primary School serving the parish of St. Columba in the Tonge Moor area of Bolton. The school is situated on the Hall i'th wood estate which is part of East Bolton Regeneration Area and is adjacent to the church. The school admits pupils from 3 to 11 years of age, with an admission number of 25. The current number on roll is 155 with 32 in the nursery. Most children live in the vicinity of the school in a mixture of privately owned and local authority rented accommodation. Many come from disadvantaged backgrounds and the vast majority is of white British heritage. The school has identified 39 children as having special educational needs 2 of whom have a statutory statement. 37% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Of the 9 full-time teachers 7 (78%) are Roman Catholic. 6 hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies or equivalent and 2 are studying for the qualification. The current headteacher joined the school in September 1999 - two months prior to the last inspection. Since her appointment there have been considerable changes in staffing with 5 teachers leaving and 5 joining the school. The management structure has also been strengthened by the appointment of an assistant head.

The school runs a before and after school and holiday club, employs a learning mentor and has a nurture group to help those children with social and emotional difficulties to cope better with school life. There is also parents' and toddler group. The Catholic Rescue Society is available on site fortnightly. The school's Investors in People status has been renewed this year.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Columba's is an outstanding school with an exceptionally strong Catholic ethos. Leadership and management ensure a welcoming, caring, stimulating environment in which all aspects of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The Religious Education curriculum is well planned and supported by assemblies of outstanding quality. Teaching is good overall with two excellent lessons observed during the inspection. All staff provide strong positive role models for pupils and are dedicated, committed and hard working. The excellent support they receive from the learning mentor and nurture group enable vulnerable children to make very good progress. Gifted and talented learners also achieve well as a result of an excellent differentiated Religious Education curriculum that meets the needs of all children.

Improvement since the last inspection

Following the last Section 23 inspection in 1999 the school has effectively addressed the key issues. All staff are involved in planning, monitoring and evaluation of prayer and worship and curriculum Religious Education. They have accessed in-service courses in order to raise standards in this subject. Pupils are now very adept in both spontaneous prayer and writing their own prayers to be used in all areas of worship. All class timetables include at least 10% of curriculum Religious Education. External links have been strengthened with parents, parishioners and governors invited and welcomed into the school for various celebrations and Masses. 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 and prayer and worship.

Capacity to improve

The school assessed itself to be good in all areas however the inspector has judged many aspects to be outstanding. 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, who is the chair of governors, the active and knowledgeable governing body and the hardworking staff. A new Religious Education policy was drawn up after consultation with governors and staff and advice from the diocesan advisers. This is regularly reviewed and supplemented with additional guidelines as appropriate.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop the well-established assessment procedures in curriculum Religious Education using the new diocesan guidelines on the levelling of pupils' work..

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 to the exceptionally strong leadership of the headteacher and the wholehearted support of the staff. The school benefits to the full from a very active, knowledgeable and supportive governing body whose chair is the parish priest. The newly appointed link governor for Religious Education, who also links the Foundation Stage, is a regular visitor and helper in school and as a grandparent and parishioner very well acquainted with the school. Pupils and staff are well known to her. The governors have developed a keen awareness of Religious Education in the school. They regularly discuss and review Religious Education policies and the school's aims.. They have also recently ratified a new Mission Statement which was drawn up by staff and link governor.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship is outstanding. Prayer and worship throughout the school is carefully planned, organised, celebrated and recorded. 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 thus ensuring rich and meaningful opportunities for learners to develop their prayer life. Whole school masses are held at the beginning and end of each term and on Holy Days. Assemblies, key stage services, and the celebration of Mass during Lent and Advent are planned with pupils taking an active part. During inspection Advent was the theme in Early Years class worship and Key Stage 2 assembly. On both occasions the pupils played an active role in drama, writing, speaking and reading their own thoughts and prayers appropriate to their age groups. There was good use of music, singing and power point presentations. All children displayed confidence and prayed with respect and reverence demonstrating a developing awareness of the importance of prayer in their lives.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education are good. By the end of Key Stage 2 there are clear indicators of outstanding progress. Effective strategies and systems introduced since the last inspection have ensured that this key aspect of the school's life and curriculum has been prioritised in order that high standards be achieved and maintained. There is a clear scheme of work, a wide range of resources and thorough planning, which identifies focused objectives and outcomes and highlights appropriate differentiation. Scrutiny of work and lesson observations during which learners were provided with opportunities to debate, question and express themselves in their written work and orally indicate that children make at least good progress and often better.

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 this is evidenced by their generosity to a number of worldwide and local charities.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The inspector agrees that overall the quality of teaching and learning is good with some outstanding lessons observed in Key Stage 2. Teachers have high expectations for themselves and their learners. They demonstrate a secure knowledge of the Salford Guidelines and work very hard using a wide variety of interactive teaching strategies. Detailed planning with clearly stated objectives lead to well structured lessons incorporating a good range of activities. There is effective use of resources including information technology and power point presentations. Appropriate differentiation is identified and is well informed by assessment with consequent provision for the less able child and the high achiever. The school's marking policy is consistently applied and targets for improvement are set.

Management and organisation in all classes are very good. 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. This was evident in lessons observed where all teachers made lessons interesting and meaningful to the learners. The younger learners enjoyed their lesson on preparing for a birthday party and could relate this to preparing for the birth of Jesus. They wrote about their own gift for Jesus which included smiling, tidying up for mum and not fighting. These were then placed on a gift tree on the prayer table which also held an advent wreath. The younger Key Stage 2 pupils dramatised an everyday occurrence whereby they were in the wrong and had to say sorry thus demonstrating knowledge of right and wrong. This was their lesson on reconciliation in their own lives. Year 6 learners were also discussing Advent within the context of Mary listening to God's word. There was excellent use of bibles with learners well able to find texts and read them aloud with confidence. Relative to their age, all learners demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of their religion and of the liturgical year.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The Religious Education curriculum is good. Religious Education has a very high profile in the school both as a key element and 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 and by a range of other resources and learning experiences. Teachers' planning is thorough and together with pupils' learning is closely monitored by the headteacher through scrutiny and observation. Regular Religious Education staff meetings ensure that its profile within the school remains high and that practices and the curriculum are under constant review and development. Curriculum Religious Education and collective worship work 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 extensive input from the nominated governor for Religious Education.

The school plays an important supportive role in the preparation of pupils for the Sacramental Programme liaising well with the parish leader who is a regular visitor to the school.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school has assessed the leadership and management as good. Inspection evidence gathered judges this as 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 can appreciate and promote the way in which Religious Education pervades the 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, 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.