

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Catherine's is a Voluntary Aided Roman Catholic Primary School serving the parish of St Catherine of Siena in Didsbury, South Manchester. The school is situated in close proximity to the church and approximately half of the pupils live within the parish. They come from a wide range of professional, business, trade and one parent family backgrounds. There are also children in the school currently in the care of the Catholic Children's Rescue Society. The age range of pupils is from three to eleven years. It is a large two-form entry school with an admission number of 60. There are currently 417 pupils on roll one of whom is not of the Catholic faith. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is 6% which is below average. The school has identified 44 pupils as having special educational needs 5 of whom have a statutory statement of special educational needs. All of the teaching staff are of the Catholic faith. At the time of inspection the Headteacher had been in post since September after the retirement of the previous post holder.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Catherine's is a good Catholic school. The caring ethos within its community creates a happy environment in which all aspects of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. The Religious Education curriculum is well planned and supported by Key Stage assemblies of outstanding quality. Teaching is good. From Foundation Stage to the end of Key Stage 2 pupils make good progress. The school's recently appointed headteacher has accurately evaluated the Catholic life of the school and the Religious Education curriculum as good.

Improvement since the last inspection

Following the last Section 23 inspection in December 2000 there were no Key Issues. However the previous headteacher and the Religious Education co-ordinator did identify some areas for development. Parents are now informed termly of the religious topics to be studied by each year group. Discussions of their children's progress in these topics are held at two parent meetings during the year. Extra resources to support prayer and worship have been purchased. The adoption of the diocesan scheme "World Faiths" ensures a systematic development of the awareness of other faiths and cultures. These improvements have been monitored through the school development planning and reports to the governing body.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is accurate and comprehensive. As detailed in the current Development Plan the school is committed to developing the assessment advice anticipated soon from the diocese. This will support the assessment opportunities currently in use. The headteacher has a clear vision for future developments and is supported by a committed senior management team. Future support for Religious Education will include purchase of ICT software resources.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the role of the Religious Education co-ordinator in the monitoring of teaching and pupil learning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school is good. The governing body has an organised committee structure with well-defined roles. The parish priest who is chair of the governors is highly committed and fully involved in the religious life of the school. A shared vision for the ongoing development of the school as a Catholic community is reflected in governor appointments to the staff of committed Catholic teachers. These appointments contribute directly to the quality of their religious curriculum provision at St Catherine's. With the emphasis of Religious Education as a core subject the co-ordinator is a member of the school senior management team. The school maintains good links with the diocesan advisors and attends all relevant training providing feeding back to staff when appropriate.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship in the school is outstanding. Prayer and worship throughout the school is carefully planned, organised, celebrated and recorded. This ensures that a range of rich and meaningful opportunities is a regular and integral part of the learners' prayer life. In the key stage assemblies observed learners were fully involved in praising, thanking, and petitioning God through readings, drama, music, art and personal and reflective prayer. In prayer times and class worship even the youngest children prayed with reverence and respect showing a growing awareness of the importance of prayer in their lives. Opportunities for learners, parents and staff to pray together occur in May and October when the Rosary is said before school. At the time of inspection a whole school Mass was celebrated in the church. This was well attended by many parents and members of the parish community. Pupils from Year 5 prepared the Mass and readings and the whole school participated in the responses and joyful singing. The school plays an important supportive role in the parish led Sacramental Programme.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education are good. On entry to the Nursery attainment of pupils is often above average. In Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 pupils make good progress. By the end of Key Stage 2 progress is very good. At the end of both Key Stages standards are in line with those expected in the diocesan programme of work. In observations learners built on prior knowledge and attainment. They enjoyed lively discussions and activities appropriate to their age and ability. Half-termly assessment tasks and positive marking of pupils' work enable staff to track pupil progress. By the end of Key Stage 1 learners are beginning to write pieces of independent work. However in some classes the over use of worksheets which require only a minimum input from the children stifles the development of independent writing. In lower Key Stage 2 there is a variation in the expected standard of the presentation of pupils work. As learners move through the key stage independent writing is good as they record their work in a variety of forms including prose, poems, prayers and letters. Opportunities for learners to debate, question, reflect on issues and appreciate wonder and love encourage awareness of God's presence in their lives and of His love and forgiveness.

Across the whole school community there is a feeling of self-worth and self esteem. Learners are increasingly aware of the needs of others as evidenced by their generosity to a number of local and world wide charities.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good with some outstanding teaching in Key Stage 2. All staff have a sound knowledge of the Salford Guidelines. Planning is monitored by the Religious Education co-ordinator. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives and activities to develop each topic. Evaluation of lessons is evident and assessment opportunities are identified. Each classroom is a stimulating environment as teachers use a range of techniques to encourage and support pupils' learning. Quality resources are well prepared and used effectively to create interest and enjoyment in the classroom. A very good example of this was a lesson in Year 6 as pupils were considering the nature and purpose of prayer. The teacher displayed eye catching newspaper headlines and photographs depicting recent major world disasters. Pupils were challenged to consider their reactions and feelings on seeing the events and the plight of the people caught up in those disasters. Many recalled being moved to individual prayer. The pupils' written responses were in prayer or as a letter to a friend and revealed deep empathy with the suffering and feelings of others. The pupils are well behaved and their attitude to learning is good. They listen attentively, respond to questions and use appropriate religious vocabulary in their own questions. They are interested in their work and settle quickly to given tasks.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The curriculum for Religious Education is good. The school follows the Salford Guidelines *REvision 2000*. Time allocated to religious lessons is in line with national and diocesan requirements. Teachers' plans show that learners in the same year group are taught the same curriculum. Lessons are observed and feedback given to ensure good quality of teaching and learning. Half termly assessments are recorded in the pupils' workbooks. Masses, assemblies, circle time and many liturgical celebrations have a positive impact in supporting and extending the Religious Education curriculum at St Catherine's.

The school plays an important supportive role in the preparation of pupils for the Sacramental Programme.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school has assessed the leadership and management of Religious Education as good. Inspection evidence gathered supports this judgement. The parish priest is a regular and welcome visitor in the school. Headteacher's reports to the governors ensure they are well informed of religious matters. There is regular governor attendance at the end of week assembly. The experienced co-ordinator for Religious Education has a comprehensive job description. She offers support to all staff and ensures the provision of quality religious resources is adequate. As a member of the school's senior management team she is fully involved in establishing the order of priority given to Religious Education in the School Development Plan. She attends training provided by the diocese and communicates developments in Religious Education at staff meetings. The monitoring of teaching and learning carried out by the previous headteacher is not yet part of her role and is an area for future development.