

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Bernard's is a voluntary aided Roman Catholic primary school within the Salford Diocese serving the parishes of St. Ethelbert and St. Vincent. It is located on the Ladybridge estate, Bolton and serves the area of Deane with its partner school, St. Ethelbert's. The estate is well established with mainly private housing and the majority of parents employed. The school caters for pupils from 4 to 11 years old. There is no pre-school provision at the school but the majority of pupils have attended pre-school or nursery prior to school. The standard admission number is 17 and the total number on roll is 113. Of these 105 (93%) are Catholics. Attainment on entry is average to above average. 2% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. There are 16 pupils on the special educational needs register of whom 4 have a statement of special educational need. There are 6 teachers all of whom (100%) are Catholics

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Bernard's is a satisfactory Catholic school with some good qualities. The school is marked by a happy, friendly atmosphere which establishes a good climate for work. This judgement is mostly in line with the school's own evaluation of its Catholic life and provision for Religious Education. The standards attained by pupils in curriculum Religious Education are slightly below average especially in their written work. Teaching is satisfactory with good aspects observed during inspection. Monitoring and evaluation of Religious Education are not yet in place. The curriculum in Religious Education is well planned and adapted to the school's needs. Pupils' behaviour is good. The Catholic ethos of the school is strong with good provision for pupils' spiritual and moral development. The headteacher leads the school well in its Catholic life and has a clear understanding of its development needs in curriculum Religious Education.

Improvement since the last inspection

The key issue outlined in the last Section 23 inspection report in March 2001 was "to ensure that plans to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning are developed and put into action". This key issue has not yet been addressed. Development of Religious Education is not addressed in the School Improvement Plan. The school's curriculum Religious Education and prayer and worship policies have been revised. The diocesan scheme for assessment and standardisation in Religious Education has been introduced.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is mostly accurate. It does not yet relate to the School Improvement Plan. Priorities for improvement of Religious Education are not derived from the self-evaluation. The headteacher has an understanding of what needs to be improved and all staff and governors are committed to improvement. There is good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in curriculum Religious Education by developing and putting into practice a system for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning.
- Establish an action plan for the above and include it in the School Improvement Plan.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are good. The governing body fulfils its role well in respect of its Catholic foundation. It has good knowledge of the Catholic life of the school through headteacher reports, frequent meetings between the headteacher and chair of governors and visits to the school by the parish priest. Priority is given to employing Catholic teachers where possible. The Mission Statement lies at the heart of the school's aims, policies and expectations. "Loving and caring for one another is part of everyday life in school." The headteacher sets clear direction for the Catholic life of the school and, together with the Religious Education co-ordinator, leads the staff in promoting learner's spiritual and moral development. There is a strong Catholic ethos in the school characterised by Gospel values, inclusion and a spirit of reconciliation. Resources are good and are reviewed regularly. The parish based Sacramental Programme is planned and run effectively with support from the school together with its partner school, St. Ethelbert's. There is strong support for the school from parents and parishioners. Children are given many opportunities to care for those less fortunate than themselves through donations to the Harvest Festival, St. Joseph's Penny, Francis House, CAFOD and Runworth High School - a local special school - where pupils provide refreshments for the annual charity walk.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship in the school is good both in respect of frequency and quality. The policy for prayer and worship reflects the range of opportunities for collective worship provided for learners. These include whole school Masses at the start and end of term and on feast days, key stage and whole school assemblies, class prayers and special devotions such as the Rosary and Stations of the Cross at special times of the year. The headteacher intends to introduce class assemblies and would like to have occasional class Masses if this were possible. There are prayer corners in every classroom and effective liturgical displays throughout the school. Prayer boxes in each classroom give learners the opportunity to write their own prayers and these are often used in class prayers and assemblies. Pupils are involved in the planning, preparation and presentation of assemblies and Masses and take a full part in them. This was seen to very good effect in the Harvest assembly observed during the inspection period. The children read and sang well and prayed with respect and reverence. The simple musical accompaniment further enhanced the celebration. Parents, grandparents and parishioners are very supportive and are happy to attend these celebrations. Collective worship makes a very good contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the learners.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education are satisfactory. Pupils' levels of ability on entry to the school are above average. Pupils make some progress in the school but, by Year 6, achievement is slightly below average. Pupils with special needs are well supported and make good progress. The diocesan scheme of assessment and levelling has been introduced but standards and achievement in curriculum Religious Education are not monitored or evaluated by senior members of staff. The school is improving its systems for assessment and setting targets but these have not yet been applied to Religious Education. Marking varies from class to class with no general guidelines being obviously applied. The standards of writing in Religious Education books are lower than those in pupils' literacy books. Learners enjoy their work in most classes and respond well to questioning. Pupils' spiritual development is clearly rooted in the beliefs of the Catholic Church. Learners are well behaved generally and the few examples of disruptive behaviour observed were dealt with appropriately. Orally pupils have a secure understanding of the life and teaching of Jesus and are able to apply his teaching to their own lives and experience. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong and the school provides well for their moral development. They learn that they should respect themselves, each other and those in the wider world. The school council makes a positive contribution to the school. Older children are given opportunities to look after younger ones.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The inspector agrees with the school's judgement that teaching and learning in Religious Education are satisfactory. Teaching in the lessons observed during inspection was good overall with some which was satisfactory. Lessons are well prepared and mostly conducted at a good pace which maintains pupils' interest and enjoyment. However, not all teachers set high expectations and challenging targets. Questioning is usually effective with good use of open questions. Where teaching is satisfactory pupils are not engaged and on task throughout the lesson. A good example of holding pupils' interest by using a range of activities was seen in a lesson in lower Key Stage 2 where group work, talking partners, individual and whole class activities enabled learners to explore how Jesus' teaching can affect our behaviour. The creation of a quiet, reflective and peaceful atmosphere in a lesson observed in upper Key Stage 2 helped learners to achieve a sense of awe and wonder and inspired them to make their own spontaneous prayers. Learners are encouraged to ask questions and respond well to the opportunities given to them. Learners with special educational needs are well supported. The quality of the written work seen in the pupils' books is slightly below the standard of that expected nationally especially at upper Key Stage 2. Learners in most classes are well behaved and show interest in their work. Overall the school should now aim to raise standards in curriculum Religious Education by developing and putting into practice a system for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The Religious Education curriculum is good. It is well planned using diocesan guidelines to adapt the curriculum to the needs of the small school with mixed age classes. It is balanced and broadly based. The time allocated to curriculum Religious Education is in line with national and diocesan requirements. The curriculum is made accessible to all pupils and support is provided where necessary. Extra challenge is not always given to high achievers. Monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum together with assessment need to be developed to raise standards of attainment. The development of Religious Education is not addressed in the School Improvement Plan. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to make a smooth transition to secondary school. The inclusion of the study of world religions gives pupils the opportunity to understand and respect other religions and cultures. Extra curricular provision is good with a range of opportunities for pupils to develop their talents and skills in activities such as music and sport. The Religious Education curriculum makes a good contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the learners. It is enriched by the range of opportunities for prayer and worship provided by the school.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school has assessed its leadership and management of Religious Education as satisfactory. The findings of the inspection would support this judgement. The governing body is beginning to fulfil its role well as a critical friend. The strategic focus group set up with support from the diocese will ensure that this development continues enabling the governors to monitor and challenge the standards achieved in curriculum Religious Education. The headteacher is aware that the clear direction for improvement in the core subjects needs to be applied to Religious Education. No lesson observations or scrutiny of pupils work or teachers' planning have taken place in the last few years. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning need to be implemented in order to raise standards of attainment. This was a key issue in the last Section 23 inspection and has not yet been addressed. The diocesan programme of assessment and standardisation has been implemented but the findings are not yet being used to give a clear understanding of pupils' achievements. The development of Religious Education is not included in the School Improvement Plan and this issue should be addressed. The time allocated to Religious Education is in accordance with national and diocesan guidelines. All teachers are Catholics and the school is committed to provide an effective Catholic learning environment for its pupils. Relationships in the school are very good and help to provide equality of opportunity for all learners. Resources are good and the clean, bright environment is enhanced by attractive displays.