

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Mary's is a Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School in the Diocese of Salford. It serves the parish of St. Mary's in Horwich on the outskirts of Bolton and has a very mixed catchment area. Learners come from a very wide range of economic backgrounds. There is a very low percentage of ethnic minority learners in the school with 3 having English as an additional language. The age range of pupils is from 3 to 11 and the indicative admission number is currently 34. This will be reduced to 30 from September 2006 on the advice of both the Salford Diocese and the Bolton Local Education Authority. There are currently 248 learners on roll of whom 246 are baptised Catholics. 11.4 % of the learners are eligible for free school meals and 20 have been identified as having special educational needs with 3 having a statutory statement of special educational need. 11 of the 12 teachers (92%) are Catholics.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Mary's is an outstanding school. It offers its learners a traditional Catholic education in a secure, caring and supportive environment. The leadership and management provided by the governing body; led the knowledgeable chair of governors, together with the experience and commitment of the headteacher and senior management team, is outstanding. The strong, home, school parish links ensure the whole school community is fully supported in its faith journey. Learners are very well behaved, friendly and polite. They have good attitudes to their learning and respond well to the quality of the teaching they experience. The school is very successful in promoting the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its learners.

Improvement since the last inspection

Since the last Section 23 inspection in 2000 the school has been consolidated onto one site. This consolidation and the enhancement of the learning environment continue to have a positive effect on the overall provision at St. Mary's. Self evaluation and establishing clearly defined priorities have been effective features of this successful development and an exemplar of outstanding practice. The issues identified in the 2000 inspection have been addressed and satisfactorily resolved. St. Mary's is a thriving, successful Catholic community.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is very thorough, objective and realistic. The leadership and management of the school have a clear and focussed vision for the further development of the school. There is a genuine commitment to ensuring that all involved in the school community recognise the important role they play in the future development of this successful Catholic school as it lives out the aims of its Mission Statement. The school's capacity to improve is therefore good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the full 10% of curriculum time is allocated to curriculum Religious Education in all Key Stages.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. The Mission Statement, developed by staff, governors, parents and learners, is reviewed regularly and permeates all aspects of the school's life. It appears at the beginning of all the school's policy statements and is prominently displayed in pictorial form throughout the school. The Mission Statement is brief, based on the 4 precepts of "we pray, we care, we play, we work". Staff and governors share in-service development days and celebrate Mass at the end of the school year. The chair of governors gives clear direction to the governors several of whom are also involved in the daily life of the school. As designated governor for Religious Education the chair of governors meets regularly with the headteacher and Religious Education co-ordinator. On his many visits to the school he is able to monitor the provision thus keeping other governors fully informed. The detailed reports from the headteacher, together with the reports of subject co-ordinators to the full governing body, are examples of good practice. The Religious Education co-ordinator and other staff have a performance management objective related to their roles. 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 parish life. All Catholic teachers hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies or equivalent. A staff meeting is held each month to monitor and evaluate the Catholic life of the school.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship at St. Mary's is outstanding. There is policy statement and throughout the year parents, parishioners, staff and learners are offered a range of rich and meaningful opportunities to develop their relationship with God. Whole school and class Masses are celebrated in school, at the parish church and in the local chapel of St. Anthony. In all these celebrations, learners are fully involved in the readings, bidding prayers, music and processions. The school Mass attended during the inspection was a genuine spiritual experience for all present. Key stage assemblies which are very well prepared and led are held weekly reflecting the liturgical year and the Religious Education curriculum. All pupils are given the opportunity and the responsibility to lead collective worship. The support of the parish priest and his involvement with these celebrations is appreciated and acknowledged by staff and parents. The headteacher and staff lead by example and at all times pupils respond in a reverent and respectful manner. Collective worship is incorporated into teachers' planning. These class experiences are evaluated by teachers and their plans are kept by the Religious Education co-ordinator in a comprehensive file. Displays in classes and throughout the school indicate that learners are encouraged to express their spirituality through prayer. Every classroom has an attractive, well maintained focal area for prayer. Several staff have attended the "Following the Heart" sessions organised by the Diocesan Religious Education Centre and this has impacted positively on the overall provision. The school is not complacent and continues to seek ways of improving the already outstanding provision.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education are good overall with some examples of outstanding achievement. Throughout all key stages consistent progress is made and pupils develop a good factual knowledge of their faith. By the end of Key Stage 1 learners have a good knowledge of the life and times of Jesus. They speak with confidence about characters from the Old Testament and use good religious vocabulary to explain their ideas. The discussion observed in the Year 2 class on the feelings of Mary at the Annunciation exemplified high achievement. Learners show genuine interest and enthusiasm for their work and record their ideas with care. In Key Stage 2 good standards are evident. The Year 3 pupils discussing reconciliation demonstrated a good understanding of right and wrong. The oldest pupils discussing their ideas of the prophets' role in today's world articulated meaningful ideas and opinions which were shared in a sensible manner. Well written pieces of extended writing are evident in upper Key Stage 2. Learners take pride in their presentations and work on other faiths is evident. The standard of marking throughout the school is very good. Appropriate praise is given to acknowledge good work or special effort. The standard of recording in both key stages is of a very high quality. Assessments are noted in workbooks including evaluative comments made by all staff.

Membership of the school council serves to encourage a sense of responsibility in the learners. They give very generous support to local, national and international charities.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The inspector agrees with the school that the quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have a comprehensive knowledge of the *REvision 2000* guidelines and use this to plan their lessons in detail. Lessons have a clear focus and learning objectives are fully explained to the learners. Teachers have high expectations and a variety of approaches is used to meet the needs of all pupils. In all key stages resources are very well prepared and used effectively to enhance learning. Teachers demonstrate good questioning skills, involve all pupils in class discussions, set a range of activities which enthuse the learners and use plenary sessions to bring lessons to a suitable conclusion. Those pupils needing extra help are well supported by teaching assistants. The learners in Key Stage 1, tasting a variety of foods Jesus might have eaten as a boy and recording their opinions, and the oldest pupils watching a power point presentation to stimulate discussion are examples of very good practice. The behaviour of learners at all times is very good. They listen attentively to the teachers and respect the input of others into class discussions. They are very eager to be involved in lessons, take great pride in their written work and keep on task until their work is completed. Learners work co-operatively in group activities and move around the classrooms with an air of quiet confidence and purpose.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The school has a policy statement for Religious Education and the quality of the Religious Education curriculum is outstanding. All lessons reflect the diocesan guidelines and the Religious Education co-ordinator was a member of the working party which developed them. 10% of curriculum time is not allocated to curriculum Religious Education in all key stages and this issue should be addressed although the quantity and quality of the work covered does not appear to be affected. The diocesan programme on other World faiths is a feature of the provision. The curriculum is enriched through extra-curricular opportunities including the Year 5 residential visit to the Peace Centre in Warrington The strong links with the parish Sacramental Programme together with joint social links with the parish, as at Harvest Time, encouraged and supported by the involvement of the parish priest, ensure the quality of the provision is outstanding. It is regularly monitored by the Religious Education co-ordinator and leadership at all levels gives clear direction for future development. The quality of the assemblies and liturgical celebrations all impact positively on the curricular provision. Curriculum planning, delivery and the scrutiny of pupils' workbooks are well established with detailed evidence collected including examples of assessment activities moderated by staff.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education are outstanding. The Religious Education co-ordinator has been in post for 4 years but has been involved with the development of this curriculum area for several years. She leads by example and keeps excellent records. This includes the use of monitoring and evaluation to determine and identify priorities for further development. She leads staff through regular meetings, involves the diocesan advisers in the school and continues her own professional development by attending diocesan courses. She is fully supported by the headteacher and parish priest as designated governor for Religious Education.

Resources for Religious Education and collective worship are plentiful. Attractive displays clearly reflect the faith life of the school. Effective focal points for prayer and reflection are evident throughout the public areas and corridors. There is a genuine commitment to ensuring that Religious Education will continue to have a very high profile at St. Mary's school.