

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Mary's is a small voluntary aided Roman Catholic primary school serving the parish of the Immaculate Conception in Haslingden. Pupils are drawn from an area of Rossendale with considerable socio-economic disadvantages. The local area includes a range of private, council owned and older terraced homes. The age range of pupils is from 4 to 11 years. The school's admission number is 21. There are currently 76 pupils on roll 60 of whom are baptised Catholics. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is 10%. The school has identified 7 pupils as having special educational needs. 2 pupils have a statutory statement of special educational need and there is enhanced school action plus funding for a further pupil. 2 of the 4 full time teaching staff (50%) are of the Catholic faith.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Mary's is a good Catholic school. The caring ethos, happy environment and inclusive nature of the school are a true reflection of the recently reviewed Mission Statement. The worth and self esteem of all members of the school community and its extended parish family are valued and nurtured. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners is good. The Religious Education curriculum is well planned, resourced and monitored. The recently appointed headteacher has already identified the school's future development needs. Assemblies and classroom worship of good quality support the curriculum. The teaching observed was outstanding. Pupils were well motivated and behaviour was very good. From Foundation Stage to the end of Key Stage 2 pupils make good progress. The headteacher has assessed the leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school, the quality of teaching and learning, and the leadership and management of Religious Education to be good. However inspection evidence gathered indicates these to be outstanding.

Improvement since the last inspection

Since the last inspection the school has been through turbulent times. The threat of closure, the loss of staff and the appointment of a number of temporary headteachers have resulted in difficult times for the school. There were four key issues arising from the last Section 23 inspection in October 1999. Evidence indicates that two of those issues were addressed in full. Since the appointment of the new headteacher and new staff in September 2006 pupils are now given tasks to challenge and extend their thinking. There is still however the need to raise expectations with regard to the presentation of pupils' written work.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is comprehensive. The headteacher has a positive vision for the development of the school and receives strong support from the governing body. The leadership team is committed to the continuing development of the Catholicity of the school through effective provision and monitoring of the curriculum and prayer and worship. Priorities for further improvements are identified through discussion so that key decisions are achieved by mutual agreement and linked closely to the School Development Plan. The school has good capacity for further improvement

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise expectations with regard to the presentation of pupil's written work.
- Develop the use of the diocesan assessment materials in order to create a portfolio of examples of the levels at which pupils are working.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of St Mary's School are outstanding. All aspects of the school's life are a true reflection of the Mission Statement. The statement is displayed around the school together with a children's version which pupils know well and are able to quote. The parish priest is the link governor for Religious Education. He is a welcome visitor in the school and plays an important role in the religious life of the pupils. The governors make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic life of the school and, as regular visitors, are able to monitor the work of the school as a faith community. Performance management meetings this term will establish objectives for all staff to encourage the development of their own and the children's spiritual growth. The senior leadership team and governors are committed to upholding the strong caring, inclusive ethos which fosters the good relationships that exist between the home, school, and parish family. Partnership with parents is actively promoted through good information and reporting regarding the progress of their children. Parents are invited to share in school Masses, assemblies and liturgical celebrations. The school maintains good links with the diocesan advisors and the subject leader for Religious Education attends all relevant training, feeding back to staff when appropriate.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

The provision for collective worship in the school is good. Prayer and worship are carefully planned, organised and celebrated. An example observed during inspection was a whole school Harvest assembly led by the headteacher and attended by a small group of parents. Using posters as visual aids the Year 6 pupils told us which parts of the world provide us with some of the many foods we eat and reminded us that two thirds of the world's population do not have enough to eat. The story of Ebenezer, a man who refused to share the food in his barns, was dramatised. Pupils recognised the importance of sharing and their harvest gifts were then collected. The colours of the rainbow compared our red flowers and fruits with the scorching sun in Africa and our yellow corn with the parched grass too dry to feed African cattle. Pupils were reminded of what they had been doing to support the work of Cafod. The assembly concluded with bidding prayers read by the children and the joyful singing of "Were you there?". The recently established prayer room is well equipped, offering a quiet atmosphere for meditation and class or individual worship thus helping pupils to grow in their awareness of God's love and the importance of prayer in their daily lives. The school plays an important role in the parish Sacramental Programme.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education are good. 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 each Key Stage pupils' achievements are in line with those expected in the diocesan programme of work. In lesson observations learners were able to build on prior knowledge and attainment. As attentive listeners they respond well to questioning and contribute well in lively discussions. Activities are set appropriate to pupil's age and ability. Key Stage 1 learners are beginning to write short pieces of independent work. In Key Stage 2 the oral work in discussions is very good but the presentation of their written work lacks accuracy and a good style of handwriting. The school is encouraged to address this issue. In both key stages opportunities were given for learners to discuss, question and reflect on issues and to appreciate wonder and love. They are aware of God's presence in their lives and of His love and forgiveness. Younger learners understand that God created the world and that they have a special place in that creation. They were able to sequence creation as told in the bible. In Key Stage 2 pupils discuss their work with confidence, asking challenging questions and using appropriate vocabulary. They have a growing awareness of the beliefs and values of their faith and are able to relate them to their own life experiences. Across the school pupils work together creating a caring atmosphere that extends into the wider community as they show an increasing concern for the needs of others. The school gives generously 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 observed in both key stages was outstanding. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the Salford Diocesan Guidelines and use a range of techniques to encourage and support learning and meet the needs of all the children. Support staff are used very effectively in the classroom. All staff hold high expectations of their pupils. Using the diocesan guidance for planning for mixed age groupings lesson plans identify clear learning objectives, teaching strategies, and activities to develop pupils' understanding. Evaluation of lessons is evident in some planning. Current assessment through good questioning cannot, however, always give an accurate picture of the level at which a pupil is working. The school should work on the early development of diocesan assessment materials as identified in the School Development Plan. Praise and encouragement are strong features of teaching resulting in learners making good progress and achieving well in lessons. Interactive whiteboards and information communication technology are used effectively to create interest and enjoyment in the classroom. Teaching areas are bright and stimulating learning environments with colourful religious displays. A good example of teaching occurred during a lesson in Foundation Stage. The teacher introduced the bible story of creation to the Reception, Year1 and Year2 classes. Following a lively discussion the reception group supported by the classroom assistant re-created the sea using fish, rocks and plants and the land using a variety of animals and plants. Learners from Years 1 and 2 were engaged in sequencing the story of creation or God's diary of events for each day of creation. The pupils made good progress according to their age and ability. In all lesson observed learners were well behaved and their attitude to learning was good. They listened attentively and settled to the given tasks quietly.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The curriculum for Religious Education is good. Salford Diocesan Guidelines *REvision 2000* are firmly established throughout the school and supplemented by activities relating to the liturgical year. Time allocated to Religious Education lessons is in line with national and diocesan requirements. Staff are knowledgeable and confident in the consistency of their delivery of the Religious Education curriculum. They plan their lessons well ensuring quality time allows all pupils to produce work of a good standard. The organisation of staff for the planning and delivery of Religious Education lessons in Key Stage 2 contributes directly to the quality of religious curriculum provision in the school. Good resources including the use information communication technology give valuable support to the curriculum. School Masses together with assemblies and many liturgical celebrations have a positive impact in supporting and enriching the Religious Education curriculum

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education are outstanding. This term is a period of transition as the newly appointed headteacher has taken over the role of co-ordinator for Religious Education. With revised policies already in place she has a clear vision, shared by the governors, for the on-going development of the subject as a priority affecting the life and work of the school. The School Development Plan focuses strongly on the implementation of new assessment procedures to determine the levels at which pupils are working. Aiming to support the staff and further raise standards, the monitoring of worship, teaching and learning through observations will begin next half term. The scrutiny of teachers' planning and learners' workbooks is also part of an effective monitoring procedure. In-service training encourages all staff to challenge their own practice and be adventurous and creative in their delivery of the curriculum. Governors are informed of learner's progress and developments in the religious and community life of the school, having already shared with the staff in the review of the school's Mission Statement. Members of the governing body frequently visit the school for occasions of prayer and worship. The parish priest is a welcome visitor in school playing an active role in the religious life of the school community.