

**SALFORD DIOCESE
INSPECTION REPORT**



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

Ripley Street Tonge Moor Bolton BL2 3AR

Inspection date January 2009

Reporting Inspector Mrs. Margaret Dolan

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

Type of School	Catholic Primary
URN	105220
Age range of pupils	3-11
Number on roll	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of Governors	Rev. Francis F. J. McCauley
Headteacher	Mrs. Noreen Collins
Religious Education Co-ordinator	Mrs. Noreen Collins
Date of previous inspection	November 2005

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades 1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3 = Satisfactory 4 = Inadequate
Overall effectiveness of the school	1	
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	1	
Leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education	1	

The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Columba's is a voluntary aided Roman Catholic primary school serving the parish of St Columba in Tonge Moor, Bolton. The catchment area is in an area of high deprivation and the socio-economic background of the children is poor. The majority of the children live in council housing on surrounding estates and 40% of children are entitled to free school meals. There is a high incidence of drug and alcohol abuse, crime and vandalism in the surrounding area. There are 230 children on roll aged from 3 to 11 years of whom 80% are baptised Catholics. The admission number is 25 and there is a high mobility rate in the school. The school is oversubscribed in the younger classes. There are 39 children with special educational needs which is above the national average and 3 children have statutory statements of special educational need. There are 10 teachers in the school of whom 7 (70%) are Catholic. Six teachers have the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies or equivalent and 3 are currently studying for the qualification.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Columba's is an outstanding Catholic school which is well led by a committed and enthusiastic headteacher. She is well supported by her senior management team and able staff. The headteacher is also the Religious Education co-ordinator and she is well aware of the school's strengths and areas for development. There is a marked family atmosphere which establishes a good climate for work. The school is at the heart of the parish and the church is situated next door. Pupils achieve well and very good progress is made by the end of Key Stage 2. The Religious Education curriculum is well planned and owned by the school. The behaviour of the pupils' is very good overall. The Catholic ethos of the school is strong with very good provision for the pupil's spiritual and moral development.

Improvement since the last inspection

Following the last Section 48 inspection in 2005 the school has developed assessment procedures in curriculum Religious Education. Staff have attended diocesan training and are now using the diocesan assessment guidelines. Work is levelled and is monitored by the Religious Education coordinator. The coordinator is now developing a Religious Education assessment portfolio which will be moderated and can be used by all staff.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is outstanding. Religious Education is well monitored and there are good examples of children's work in the assessment files. The headteacher is aware of the needs of the staff and children and there are high expectations of all members of the school community. The school's capacity to improve is therefore outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to establish the diocesan 'Moving the Vision On' syllabus as it becomes available.
- Maintain the high standards of religious life already evident in the school.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of St. Columba's school are outstanding. The headteacher and staff have a clear vision of the direction for the school and work hard to bring this vision to fruition. A strength of the school is the firm faith base of the headteacher and staff which leads to the exemplary religious life of the school. The Mission Statement permeates every aspect of school life including policy statements and admissions and is particularly evident in the school's commitment and response to challenging children. The parish priest, who is also chair of governors, is a daily and supportive visitor to the school. The governors are kept well informed by the headteacher's comprehensive reports regarding the religious life of the school. There is a new Religious Education governor who is being introduced into the role. The previous governor had acted as a critical friend to the headteacher and had attended most celebrations and events connected with the religious life of the school. The Catholic life of the school and its commitment to community cohesion is further enhanced by the help the children give to charities through their donations. These charities include the homeless of Bolton (Winterwatch), CAFOD, the diocesan Children's Rescue Society, the Shoebox Appeal, world emergencies and various local charities.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship is outstanding. Every week there is a celebration family assembly to which parents and friends are invited. Masses and assemblies are planned and evaluated to meet the needs of each age group and reflect the liturgical year and world and local events. The very good Key Stage 2 assembly observed during inspection was about the parables of Jesus and two children from Year 6 had independently prepared a power point display to enhance the presentation. The children celebrate Mass in church regularly and also have Mass in their classrooms attended by family and parishioners. The school policy for prayer and worship ensures that children are introduced to different forms of prayer including formal prayers, children's own prayers and time for reflection. During Lent and Advent there is a weekly early morning Mass attended by children, staff, families and parishioners followed by toast and hot chocolate. Year 3 had a reflective collective worship session during inspection when they looked at Jesus the healer and related this to people who are sick in the community. Year 1 took part in a lesson on psalms when they used percussion instruments to illustrate the songs of praise and joy. Before staff meetings staff are invited to contribute a prayer or reflection to remind them of their role as educators and role models in the lives of their pupils. During the week before Holy Week the Year 6 children take part in a dramatisation of the gospel for passion Sunday in school which is then performed for the parish on Palm Sunday. During Advent the children take part in an Advent Carol service which is shared with the school, parish and local community. Each class has a prayer focus area and there are religious displays in the classrooms, around the school and in the school hall. Parents are made aware in the school prospectus of their right to withdraw their children from curriculum Religious Education and collective worship but this facility has never been requested. The school ensures that prayer and worship offers an inclusive nature for other beliefs and cultures in the community.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education are good. The teachers have high expectations and the standards in the children's Religious Education books are comparable to those in other areas of the curriculum. There is an atmosphere of calm and diligence in the school and the children are keen to present their best work. Children make good progress which is evident in the portfolio of work. Planning, monitoring and assessment is thorough. Although many children enter nursery with poor social and communication skills extra staffing and intervention strategies ensure that the children achieve well by the end of Key Stage 2. Children are invited to reflect upon their faith and the use of techniques from 'Philosophy for Children' encourages them to raise questions and share and respect the opinions of others. The school council provides a forum for children to discuss issues, make decisions and contribute to the running of the school. After consultation they decided to donate their PTA Christmas present money to CAFOD and they collected CDs for Barnardo's Young Carers showing that they are aware of the needs of the wider community. The school council is involved in decision making in school and council members were keen to make a difference through their own efforts by litter picking in the local community and helping in the school playground. They have organised 'tasty Tuesday' sales of ice pops to raise money for outdoor equipment.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is good. Prayer focus points are a feature in each classroom and the theme is changed regularly. Children with special educational needs have differentiated work and children with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported. All children enjoy their work and make good progress. The teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject and try to make lessons interesting and relevant. Teachers have high expectations and challenge pupils. A variety of teaching strategies is employed to meet the needs of all the learners and the work in the children's books is good. Interactive whiteboards are used as seen in the lesson in Year 6 when the children looked at the story of Zacchaeus. After listening to the story the children considered the emotions of Zacchaeus and the people around him by 'freeze framing' their role play and listening to each others' interpretation of what could be happening. Teachers' planning is clear and concise and lessons are interesting and appropriate for the age of the children. Lesson objectives are clear and a variety of strategies are used to meet individual learning styles and the age of the learner. Staff training on 'Philosophy for Children' has impacted favourably on class discussions around the Religious Education curriculum including reflective and spiritual issues. The diocesan assessment file is being used in school and assessment activities are recorded and monitored by the Religious Education co-ordinator. The children are attentive in lessons and complete their work.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The Religious Education curriculum is outstanding and is consistent throughout the school. *REvision 2000* and *Moving the Vision On* is used and the children make steady progress through each key stage. The curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of all the children. Planning from the diocesan schemes is closely followed although staff exercise initiative by re-emphasising or re-visiting parts of the curriculum to match the needs of the children. During inspection the nursery children were introduced to the story of creation in a darkened room which was then lit by a candle and sparkling lights. The children were delighted and the right atmosphere of awe was created before formally telling the story. The curriculum is broad and balanced and promotes intellectual, religious and personal development and prepares children for the next stage of their education. There is regular work scrutiny and discussions with the children reveal that they are knowledgeable about their religious experiences in school and church. Prayer, worship and liturgy are closely woven into all work in Religious Education and the links with other areas through the 'International Baccalaureate' programme enriches this provision. There is strong liaison with the associated Catholic high school through curricular and sports links as well as transition visits. Pupils from Year 8 work with Years 1 and 2 children on developing prayer and they then lead a prayer session with them. Children are introduced to the teachings, beliefs and values of other religions and cultures through their international links through Comenius and by following the diocesan World Religion schemes as part of their personal, social and health education programme. Resources are well presented and centrally stored for the use of all staff. Religious Education is taught in all classes for at least 10% of the time.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education are outstanding. The Religious Education co-ordinator, who is also the headteacher, has a clear understanding of the school's expectations and there is a governor who is directly responsible for the monitoring of the Religious Education curriculum. The co-ordinator attends diocesan training and reports back to the staff on any new developments. Teachers spend the recommended amount of time on Religious Education in accordance with national and diocesan guidelines. Parish links are very good and the children develop strong links with the community through their prayer partners during the sacramental programme. Staff are encouraged to change their prayer tables regularly and to have Religious Education displays in their classrooms. Music is played to create atmosphere in lessons and the children sang the school song beautifully in the assembly observed during inspection. Priority is given to Religious Education in the School Development Plan. The plan informs future priorities within the context of budgetary considerations. The headteacher's regular reports to governors list all achievements and developments in the Religious Education curriculum and its links to the spiritual life of the school.