



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

OUR LADY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

St Faith's Road, Alcester, Warwickshire B49 6AG

Inspection dates 23rd-24th September 2015
Reporting Inspector Mr Paul Nutt

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4-11 years
Number on roll	89
Appropriate authority	The Governing Body
Chair of Governors	Mr M Davis
Telephone number	01789 762555
E-mail address	head3500@we-learn.com
Date of previous inspection	July 2012
DFE School Number	937/3500
Unique Reference Number	125704

Executive Headteacher Mrs Jacqui Le Maitre

Head of School Mrs Teresa Unitt

Previous inspection: 3

This inspection: 3

DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



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Evidence

- The inspection was carried out by 1 Diocesan Inspector.
- The focus of the inspection was on the effectiveness and use of the school's self evaluation of religious education (RE) and Catholic life.
- To validate the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation of teaching and learning, the inspector observed 3 full RE lessons with the head of school or executive headteacher.
- The inspector completed a work scrutiny and held a discussion with pupils to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time.
- Meetings were held with governors and the parish priest.
- The inspector observed a whole-school Harvest Mass and a Year 6 prayer service, and undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of learning, the presentation of the Catholic life of the school, and pupils' behaviour.
- Other documents such as RAISEonline, the improvement plan, audit of Catholic life, and minutes of meetings were read alongside the self-evaluation.

Information about the school

- Our Lady's is a smaller than average Catholic primary school serving the parish of Our Lady and St Joseph in Alcester.
- It is one of 3 federated Catholic primary schools, with a single governing body.
- The area served by the school is a mixed area of council and private housing. The intake is predominantly White British. Mobility is an ongoing challenge.
- The number of Catholic pupils is currently 54% and the proportion of ethnic minority pupils is 16%.
- The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is average and the proportion with special needs and/or disabilities supported at school action is above average.
- Attainment on entry is below the national average overall.

Main Findings

- Our Lady's is a Catholic school in which collective worship, pupil attainment and teaching are accurately judged in its self-evaluation as good. Catholic life and religious education can only be judged as requiring improvement to be good, as there are not sufficient systematic processes in place in either area; also the school does not distinguish adequately between RE and Catholic life.
- Strong and committed leadership is evident in all areas of the school, notably in its faith life and ethos through the personal commitment and example of the head of school, and evidence of support for teaching and staff development has been available throughout the inspection.
- Improvement planning in all areas, especially in Catholic life, would benefit from more formal, regular and systematic processes leading to targeted school improvement
- There is strong and committed governance within the federation, and governors for Our Lady's demonstrate sound knowledge of the school; engagement and commitment are evident in their regular visits and involvement with school life.
- Pupils' understanding of vocation and service, and knowledge of other faiths, were shown to be very limited during the inspection

School self evaluation

Catholic Life and Collective Worship

- While collective worship, pupil attainment and teaching are good and the school's judgement that they are so is accurate, self-evaluation of the school's work was judged at inspection as requiring improvement to be good overall.
- Although Catholic life in school is very strong, there are not sufficiently structured, systematic processes in place for self-evaluation to be judged good at this stage: there is not enough evidence of impact or analysis leading to school improvement.
- Good knowledge and awareness of the school and strong commitment to its mission by all involved produce quantitative descriptions rather than qualitative evaluations and consequent structured improvement planning.
- The mission statement, significantly displayed around the school, provides a point of reference for good relationships and behaviour, and maintenance of the quality of school life and ethos. Together with good quality displays, prayer corners and artefacts. This provides opportunities for pupils to practise their faith, in line with a recommendation in the last inspection report.
- The prayer life of the school is often good and beneficial to all pupils, individually and collectively. As they progress through the school, opportunities for focused personal prayer and reflection are developed. Strong, personal engagement from school staff, here as elsewhere, ensures that the faith life of the school is monitored and evaluated, though too little written record is kept to support substantiated school improvement planning.
- The faith and liturgical life of the school are strong, with positive engagement from the parish priest in sacramental preparation, whole-school worship, governance and less formal visits. This affords a sound basis for continuity and further development following his imminent departure.
- Senior leaders discuss the life of the school and outcomes for all children's learning and development in faith; these discussions and developments are then presented to governors as part of the executive headteacher's report, at least termly.
- Pupils were reluctant to discuss the Catholic life of the school, and few were able to offer evaluation, fewer still to address the question of vocation, which is an area for development. This may, in small part, be because the school council had only recently been reconstituted, though the situation was similar during lessons observed. They were, however, able to explain some of the charitable support offered by the school, locally and further afield.
- Parents receive regular information from the school and are invited to express their views through parents' meetings and occasional questionnaires; the results are collated and subsequently discussed. They are actively included in sacramental preparations. Recently purchased prayer bags should provide further opportunities for their involvement in the faith life of their children and the school community.
- Harvest Mass was celebrated during the inspection. It indicated a very high level of engagement and reverence from the pupils, singing with enthusiasm, acting with sincerity, praying attentively and listening to readings and the homily. Pupils were actively involved in all required roles.
- Collective worship is monitored by the head of school on a regular basis; governors and the parish priest are also very active in ensuring the quality and appropriateness of whole-school worship. The Harvest Mass was well attended by parents and parishioners.

Governance

- Governance within the federation is secure. The close links of individual governors with the school, and their effective and frequent involvements, ensure that they offer both support and challenge. However, at the time of the inspection, they were only 2 in number, largely as a result of recent resignations and the imminent departure of the parish priest as chair.
- Governors are very well informed about the school, to which they have a very strong commitment; they recognise and celebrate the quality of its life and ethos. In this regard, they pay fulsome tribute to the outstanding leadership and personal faith example of the head of school, which was evident throughout the inspection.
- Governors receive a report at least termly from the executive headteacher, which can include Catholic life, and use the opportunity to enquire and challenge. Contact with the head of school, who is also RE subject leader, are on a less formal, though more frequent basis, and much of it unrecorded.
- The role of the link governor, though nominally for RE, is very valuable equally in Catholic life and collective worship. She visits school regularly, meets with senior staff, speaks to the children, and contributes to observations and work scrutiny.

Religious Education

- The school's judgement that teaching, progress and attainment in RE are good can be validated as reliable: of 3 lessons observed, 2 were outstanding whilst one required improvement to be good. This last was taught by a teacher who is being provided with a programme of professional support from the RE subject leader.
- Planning of lessons is sound, using a good range of strategies, including IT, music, prayer and scripture, to secure engagement and progress. Support staff are very well deployed, to support identified pupils or work more widely as appropriate.
- Significant staffing changes have taken place since the last inspection. This has led to greater consistency, and teaching is now secure and well planned. The lessons observed revealed close agreement with the judgements of senior leaders, as well as recorded evaluations over time, the result of termly observations involving the executive headteacher, the head of school and the link governor.
- Book trawls are conducted termly, and exemplars of moderated pupils' work are available to support staff. Individual support is developed with teachers, as appropriate, especially for non-Catholic colleagues, with effective use made of professional development opportunities available from the diocese and within the federation.
- While the subject leader evaluates progress in attainment in RE effectively, analysis of progress in learning is less secure. Feedback to pupils and the use of assessment for learning strategies are inconsistent, and opportunities are missed to develop understanding of, for example, vocation and other faiths.
- Most teaching, including that by non-Catholics, demonstrates good subject knowledge, using a range of questioning techniques and sensitivity, which encourages all pupils to take part in lessons. The very good practice observed in Year 6 should be shared with all teaching staff. Marking and feedback given by teachers would be more consistently effective if it included the best assessment for learning practice seen in one class, mindful of the demands of mixed-year groupings.

- In response to the last inspection, the school has made progress towards improving teaching and learning in RE, seeking greater coherence between objectives and activities and catering for mixed-age classes. This work has also improved learning outcomes and should continue.
- Baseline assessments on entry indicate low starting levels of knowledge and understanding. Thoughtful target setting ensures that progress across the school is generally good, and that overall attainment outcomes at the end of Key Stage 2 are broadly in line with expectations, as indicated in the school's self-evaluation.
- The curriculum for religious education is well planned, with clear links to the recommended diocesan programme, and pupils' spiritual and moral development. Vocational development, however, requires significant attention and improvement, as there is little evidence available in planning, around the school or conversations with pupils.
- Although there is a thoughtful balance between learning about and learning from religion in lesson planning, pupils' understanding would be further developed through increased exploration of meaning and purpose in discussions and tasks set. This could be supported by more precise differentiation, supporting in turn the challenges of mixed-year groupings.
- The timing of the inspection did limit the quantity and range of pieces of work available for the current school year. However, work in exercise books indicates that consistent approaches to appropriate challenge, formative marking and presentation require further development in some groups, and that assessment for learning could be more widely used.

Overall effectiveness of the school

- Attainment in RE is low on entry to the school, but progress for all groups is good. By the end of Key Stage 2, all pupils are working at or above levels in English.
- Pupils' learning in RE is good overall. They respond positively in lessons, where there is a wide range of teaching styles and differentiated approaches: for example, drama, music, art and IT.
- All teaching in RE is at least good, with some outstanding. Subject knowledge is secure in all teaching staff and assistants, who work together collaboratively and effectively. Lessons are well planned, with shared objectives and good use of questioning.
- The curriculum is based upon "Learning and Growing as People of God", with assessment and monitoring of end of unit expectations. It is planned fully in line with DES guidance, with topics adapted to the needs of all pupils.
- The classrooms provide a rich learning environment. There are relevant displays to support learning, and prayer corners which contribute to the faith life and ethos of the school. Effective use is made of pupils' own prayers.
- The school's self-evaluation indicates an emphasis on the spiritual, moral, vocational, social and cultural development of the pupils, supported by its rich and varied RE curriculum.
- The school leadership and governors continually promote the Catholic life of the school, which is strong. They serve as role models to bring alive the faith. The executive head keeps the governors informed through her termly reports.
- Collective worship is good. It is given a high priority and the pupils' responses and reverence are of a high order. Worship is planned in line with the school's agreed

expectations, and reflects the liturgical year. There is a range of different opportunities for collective worship, daily in classrooms, whole-school assemblies on Tuesday and Friday mornings with Mass twice each half term. Pupils are encouraged to take an active role, individually and collectively. There are also pre-arranged assemblies led by invited guests and charities.

- Parents and parishioners attend Masses; the parish priest leads the celebration, chairs the governing body, and visits the school informally at other times.
- The sacramental programme, led by the parish priest, is very carefully planned and reviewed to ensure that it provides excellent preparation for both pupils and their families.

Recommendations

- Develop more formal systematic processes for monitoring and evaluating Catholic life and RE, using findings to inform school improvement
- Conduct a thorough review of vocation and service in all aspects of school life, in order to strengthen pupils' understanding
- Review and develop practice of questioning and formative assessment, to ensure consistency with best practice in the school.