



# Archdiocese of Birmingham

## INSPECTION REPORT

### ST BERNADETTE'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL WALSALL

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Inspection dates 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> March 2014  
Reporting Inspector Paul Nutt

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Type of School	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3-11 years
Number on roll	183
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Fr David Mellor
School address	Narrow Lane Brownhills Walsall WS8 6HX
Telephone number	01543 452921
E-mail address	postbox@stbernadette.walsall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	March 2009
DFE School number	335 3325
Unique Reference Number	104242

**Headteacher** Mrs Ann Taylor

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DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



## Evidence

The inspection was carried out by 1 Diocesan Inspector, with a second being trained. 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, 4 RE lessons were jointly observed, 3 with the headteacher and one by the 2 inspectors. In addition the inspector completed a work scrutiny and held a discussion with pupils to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time. He held meetings with the chair of governors, who is also the parish priest, and an associate governor. He observed a whole school Mass, a whole-school celebration assembly, stay and pray in the Nursery, a CAFOD liturgy, and sacramental preparation with pupils from St Francis of Assisi Catholic Technology College. He also observed philosophy for children in Year 6 and undertook a learning walk to look briefly at aspects of learning and teaching in RE, the presentation of the Catholic life of the school, and pupils' behaviour. He looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self evaluation such as RAISEonline, the development plan, RE documentation, and outcomes of surveys and questionnaires.

## Information about the school

St Bernadette's is a smaller than average, single-form entry Catholic primary school serving the parish of St Bernadette in Walsall. It has an average deprivation indicator. The number of Catholic pupils is currently 39%. The proportion of ethnic minority pupils is 20%. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average, while 20% have some learning difficulty or disability. Baseline evidence suggests that many pupils enter the school with limited knowledge and understanding.

## Main Finding

In its self-evaluation St Bernadette's judges itself to be a good school with some outstanding features. The evidence available during the inspection broadly supports this judgement, though the stronger processes for monitoring and evaluation recently introduced will take time to be consistently applied with demonstrable outcomes and impact. All aspects of collective worship and the prayer life are outstanding, and Catholicity throughout the school is very strong. The school has undergone significant changes of leadership, staffing and governance over the past few years; however, there is now a settled and committed leadership team with coherent targets and developing procedures for sustained improvement; enthusiastic and determined governors, many with close links to the school, offering active support and increasingly able to offer challenge. The school benefits particularly from the positive, continuing impact of the relationship with the chair of governors/parish priest. Leadership of religious education is currently shared by the headteacher, deputy headteacher and SENCO. This situation should be clarified as soon as possible, rather than left to next school year, so that the strong capacity for rapid improvement, evident during the inspection, is not stalled or dissipated.

## School self evaluation

The school judges itself to be good, with some significant outstanding elements. This is broadly accurate, although, in the area of RE the school acknowledges that there is a lack of monitoring evidence over time to support judgements. The school's evaluation of its Catholic life and collective worship as outstanding are secure and well evidenced. Many pupils contribute significantly to the Catholic life of the school and benefit accordingly, as they themselves confirm. The school mission statement is at the centre of much of its daily life and the high quality of behaviour, almost total absence of inappropriate behaviour and

interpersonal relationships at all levels witnessed during the visit. The Catholicity imbues every area of the school: there are crucifixes, statues and religious artefacts throughout, rich prayer corners in all classrooms, with artefacts, pupils' work and resources linked to the liturgical year, displays to celebrate individual pupils' prayers and links to individual class saints. The Wednesday Word is used in class liturgy, involving all pupils in the Gospel message; this inclusivity is evidenced throughout Catholic life, including stay and pray sessions in Nursery, attended by parents. The buddying scheme linking older and younger pupils affords benefits to all. Prayer features regularly in the daily life of the school; however, this could be further developed beyond the 4 prayers currently used for specific purposes. The headteacher and chair of governors meet regularly to discuss and evaluate Catholic life. Outcomes and recommendations are then included on the agenda of governors' meetings, shared with staff and included, where appropriate, into subsequent staff meetings, action plans and training opportunities. Specific support is given to non-Catholic staff, as elsewhere in school life, and all staff are encouraged to discuss ideas and concerns with senior staff or governors at any time.

Collective worship is, rightly, judged as outstanding. The close work and support given by the parish priest plays a significant part here, as well as in the areas of Catholic life and wider pastoral involvement. Children and staff prepare and lead each weekly class Mass, with guidance by the parish priest. Parents respond in good numbers to the invitation to attend collective celebrations and attest to the quality of collective worship: during the inspection at both whole-school Mass and the celebration assembly. Pupils behaved with reverence yet participated with enthusiasm, consistent with the school's self-evaluation. The parish priest has prepared guidance materials for non-Catholic staff, to enable them to support the pupils and be engaged in the celebrations. Collective worship is monitored informally by the senior team, parish priest and governors, who discuss regularly the school's programme of assemblies and Masses. More formal discussion takes place during governors' meetings.

The school evaluates religious education as good. This could not be fully validated during the inspection. As the school acknowledges, there is currently insufficient hard evidence of strong processes, outcomes and impact over time. Responsibility for RE is currently shared by three colleagues. The rationalisation of this area of leadership, planned for the autumn term, should be brought forward to ensure that the strong progress towards secure processes, outcomes and impact is sustained. The senior leadership team has been in place since September, and it has a clear vision of the areas for further development, as indicated by the targets for improvement in several sections of the SEF. The school development plan has as its first key issue improving the quality of teaching and learning in RE. A more rigorous monitoring plan is now in place to sustain improvement. All staff are familiar with this. Baseline evidence indicates that many pupils enter the school with weak knowledge and understanding, but they make incremental progress through each key stage, and are developing their competence as learners. Good practice is shared during staff meetings.

The deputy headteacher, responsible for teaching and learning, has introduced a programme of model lessons and teaching and learning now forms part of a regular monitoring cycle. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge, and use a wide range of strategies, including IT, music, prayer and scripture, to secure engagement and good progress. All children benefit significantly from the breadth and appropriateness of the school's curriculum, as well as the many opportunities to develop a maturing understanding of their faith. This judgement was borne out during the inspection, notably in conversations with children, staff and governors.

Lesson observations, complemented by learning walks and drop-ins that involve governors, indicate that teaching over time is at least good. The recorded results are shared with individual colleagues and used to inform performance management cycles and school improvement planning. There is a termly staff training session for RE, and each teacher has an annual target specific to RE. All are involved in a termly programme of work scrutiny and moderation, included in the school calendar, and pupils are interviewed annually. Evidence has been gathered as exemplars of work for each assessed unit, and these are centrally held as a standards bank.

There has been an inconsistency in assessment procedures. Pupils are tracked over three years (typically) per year, following a four year cycle of assessment strands. Books have been regularly marked, with trawls taking place once per term. However, there is a significant absence of formative marking, and an inconsistency in the use of assessment sheets. These elements are included in the development plan, though evaluation and next steps are not identified.

There is strong evidence of pupils' willing involvement in support and work for charities and good causes, as well as the liturgical life of the school and parish. This develops pupils' awareness and understanding of community. The judgement of good for curriculum effectiveness was confirmed, though greater emphasis should be placed on vocation. The school regularly supports specific charities across a range of sectors, notably a local food bank and women's refuge, Fr Hudson's and CAFOD, and a summer fayre for the parish.

Leadership and management in the school are very good, consistent with its own evaluation. The headteacher reports termly to governors on RE and Catholic life: minutes of the meetings suggest that they are beginning more consistently to challenge and together develop targets for school improvement. The headteacher has a clear vision of the nature of Catholic education, the importance of raising standards and the promotion of individual faith development for pupils and staff. Her strong and committed leadership is evident at all levels within the school, and the impact of her recently-appointed deputy is evident in the current development plan and increasing consistency in monitoring processes and evaluation. There are regular opportunities for informal discussions and evaluations of Catholic life for staff. Indeed, staff are encouraged to alert the head and colleagues to any ideas or developments. Evidence is considered of pupil involvement in activities, feedback from parents and pupils, and the school council. Individual governors visit the school, and some have been involved in learning walks and observations. They monitor and evaluate the work of the school; receive reports to committees; oversee the production of documentation.

### **Overall effectiveness of the school<sup>1</sup>**

Outcomes and provision for most pupils are generally good, though less so for learners with specific learning needs. Pupils make incremental progress through each key stage, and are developing their competence as learners. The quality of learning and progress in RE is broadly in line with expectations, and pupils enjoy the creative experiences that teachers plan and deliver. The level of challenge is not always high enough, however. The close work and support given by the parish priest plays a significant part here, as well as in the areas of Catholic life, collective worship and wider pastoral involvement.

By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils' attainment is much closer to national expectations for RE; by the end of Key Stage 2, almost all pupils work at or above Diocesan levels of attainment. Lessons are well planned and incorporate a range of high quality resources

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<sup>1</sup> As the quality of the school self evaluation has been affirmed, the judgements in this section of the report conform to those of the school.

that interest and engage the pupils. These include music, scripture and IT, where iPads are being increasingly used by children to stimulate learning and develop records of key experiences. Differentiation is included in all planning across three broad bands within the class. All classrooms are well resourced and have excellent displays, which are relevant and colourful, with celebrations of pupils' work and prayer corners linked to the liturgical calendar. The headteacher, as subject leader, and other staff have undertaken training offered by the Diocese. Links to RE are being developed in other curriculum areas, for example philosophy for children currently in Year 6.

Teaching is secure and well planned, with all regularly good or better. Assessments in RE were conducted in the autumn term, but assessment was not regular before this. Targets for RE were introduced in January 2014 and recorded in pupils' exercise books. Teachers and support staff demonstrate good subject knowledge, and the NQT, a non-Catholic, is replaced with her class by a member of senior team. Teachers use a range of learning opportunities, questioning techniques and clear differentiation. Books are marked regularly, and the school has a marking policy, but there is very little use of formative assessments to consolidate learning or support next steps. This does feature on the current development plan. Children participate enthusiastically in RE lessons, where relationships, as around the school more generally, are positive, empathetic and consistently appropriate. Four prayers are regularly used in lessons and elsewhere, at the beginning and end of the day, and before and after lunch. There are examples of pupils' prayers by year group on display in the hall. Pupils enjoy their lessons and are for the most part engaged and attentive. They speak confidently about the positive impact upon them: they enjoy school and feel safe and valued.

The Catholic life of the school is very strong, with a clear ethos and commitment evident everywhere, inside and out: for example, outside there are the Stations of the Cross and a Lourdes grotto, inside photographs, and tweets by Pope Francis. The school hall serves a number of purposes but has clear evidence, including a new altar, artefacts and displays including pupils' prayers by year group, that this is a Catholic school. There are opportunities for all pupils making sacramental preparation to go on retreat to Colwich Abbey. Pupils lead and contribute to regular fundraising and charity work, well documented both on displays and in Catholic life folders. Pupils' involvement in the life of the church is good, inside and outside school, especially at times of collective worship. During the weekly class Mass, pupils perform all the functions and duties not specific to the priest. Each class, on a rota basis, develops the content of the Mass, with a theme given by the priest who collaborates by email or in person to ensure appropriateness. All Masses and assemblies are prayerful and reverent occasions.

Leadership and management are a strength of the school, with a new senior team formed in September 2013 demonstrating good capacity for improvement. There is a clear sense of purpose, vision and direction which is shared at all levels, including governors. There is close collaboration between the different levels, and everyone is encouraged to contribute to planning and implementing school improvement. Governors are regular visitors to school and to classrooms, and this contact helps to inform understanding and support the implementation of the recently-finalised monitoring and evaluation cycle. Details are fed into subsequent meetings. Communication is also good and includes families and the wider community through meetings, letters, newsletters and occasional questionnaires. Plans have been made for major improvements to the school's website. The recent introduction of class prayer bags is also contributing to this. There is a willingness to consider suggestions and new initiatives with the continual aim of improving in-school provision, standards and outcomes, and ensuring that RE is core to the curriculum.

## Recommendations

The school should:

- Develop consistent and regular assessment and exemplification in RE to improve standards and accurately target future learning
- Develop the pupils' knowledge and understanding of prayer and scripture
- Clarify as soon as possible the leadership of RE



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March 2014

Dear Parents and Carers

**Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School, 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> March 2014**

I am writing this letter to share with you the findings of the diocesan inspection of your children's school. Diocesan inspection now explores in detail the school's own view of itself as expressed in its self-evaluation. For this reason, much of the report is more technical than used to be the case. You are still entitled to have a copy of the full report should you want one and it will be available on the school website or by request from the school office.

St Bernadette's is a good Catholic school with outstanding collective worship and consistently strong teaching. The leadership of the headteacher and her senior team is very positive, giving clear strategic guidance to all the staff. The school is well supported in this by its governors, who show a strong commitment to its continuing success. There is evidence that the school is building upon the recommendations in its last Section 48 Inspection in 2009. Catholicity is evident in every area of the school.

The pupils speak with enthusiasm about the school and its Catholic life, enjoy their learning and feel safe and happy. When they first arrive at the school many children have limited religious knowledge but they make good progress and, by the time they leave, they have achieved good standards. They are developing a good knowledge of Christ's teaching and understand the basic tenets of our Catholic faith. They know and can talk about a modest number of Bible stories, and use with confidence the prayers that form part of their daily experience in school. Pupils' involvement in the life of the Church is good, both within and outside school, especially at times of collective worship.

I have recommended that, in order to continue to make good progress, the school should develop consistent and regular assessment and exemplification in RE to improve standards and accurately target future learning; develop the pupils' knowledge and understanding of prayer and scripture; clarify as soon as possible the leadership of RE.

It was a pleasure and a privilege to spend time in your school and see how well your children are doing. I was made really welcome by everyone, and was very impressed by the collaboration and mutual support, within the school and beyond, to ensure that all the children live happy and fulfilled lives.

Yours sincerely

Paul Nutt  
Diocesan Inspector