



# Archdiocese of Birmingham

## INSPECTION REPORT

### ST PHILIP'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL SMETHWICK

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Inspection dates 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> November 2013  
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	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Wendell Gopaul
School address	Messenger Road Smethwick Birmingham B66 3DU
Telephone number	0121 5581643
E-mail address	stephen.murphy@st-philips.sandwell.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	March 2010
DFE School number	333 3404
Unique Reference Number	104001

**Headteacher** Mr Stephen Murphy

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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 4 full RE lessons, 3 with the headteacher and 1 with the subject leader. 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, an associate governor and the parish priest. He observed a whole school Mass, a full school assembly and an optional lunchtime prayer service for Years 3 and 4, 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 Philip's is an average size, single-form entry Catholic primary school serving the parish of St Philip Neri in Smethwick. It has a very high deprivation indicator. The number of Catholic pupils is currently 54%. The proportion of ethnic minority pupils is 92%. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above average, while 20% have some learning difficulty or disability. Attainment on entry is well below the national average overall.

## Main Finding

In its self-evaluation St Philip's judges itself to be a good school. The evidence gathered during the inspection not only supports this evaluation, but gives strong indications that there is both progression and capacity towards a higher judgement, with prayer life outstanding. The school has moved forward significantly from the situation reflected in its last Section 48 Inspection in 2010. The recommendations have been implemented and, as a result, teaching is now secure and consistent, well supported by clear internal procedures for development; the RE curriculum shows clear improvement in the areas suggested, though further work on other faiths is still encouraged. The inspection confirmed the internal evaluations of teaching, with 75% good or better. Religious education is well led by the subject leader, and the school's evaluation is securely founded on a wealth of supporting evidence. The school's motto, which is based upon a pupil's suggestion, is at the heart of so much of its Catholic life, which is widely evident and inclusive. The role of the parish priest is pivotal to much of what is good. Here, as elsewhere in the school, there is a collaborative approach that affords continuing development and improvement. Leadership is very positive, giving clear strategic guidance and accurate evaluation. The school is well supported in this by its governors, who have a very clear understanding of priorities and high expectations.

## School self evaluation

The school's evaluation of its Catholic life and religious education is broadly accurate. It is a very good school, with many strengths. The school self-evaluation document is overly descriptive in places rather than evaluative and analytical, and there is some information that is misplaced. However, the inspection visit confirmed the school's internal judgements, and suggested the capacity for further improvements. There are systematic processes in place for monitoring and evaluating religious education and Catholic life, with a strong emphasis on inclusivity. For example, in addition to regular learning walks and lesson observations by senior staff, all are involved in a programme of work scrutiny and

moderation. Input from all stakeholders, including pupils, governors and parents, is sought, through questionnaires, surveys and minuted meetings; the returns are recorded and subsequently considered for implementation. The school would benefit from more overt emphasis on vocations, and wider inclusion of other faiths, in addition to the structured programme of multi-faith visits for all children.

Self-evaluation is reliable as it is planned, regularly carried out and discussed by headteacher, RE leader and link governor. This produces an action plan, which is reviewed as part of the performance management process and informs target setting. There is an agreed termly, published monitoring cycle, which links directly to the cycle of staff meetings. Lesson observations and book scrutiny are undertaken by the headteacher and RE leader, with outcomes recorded and fed back to individual teachers; RE work is scrutinised by all teachers, producing recommendations for in-house training, scrutiny notes with exemplar activities, moderation and assessment sheets that support levelling and shared understanding. These processes are coordinated by the RE Leader. The school collaborates with a cluster of other LA Catholic primary schools: they observe and share best practice, with notes to inform school improvement at St Philip's.

Leadership, and governors on occasions, undertake learning walks, and sound two-way communication with staff contributes to the improvement identification processes. Outcomes are recorded, along with outcomes from formal lesson observations. The headteacher reports termly to governors on RE and Catholic life: his reports, and minutes of the meetings, indicate that they hold him to account and together they develop targets for school improvement. An annual audit, feedback from parental and pupil surveys and from the school council are reported to governors and inform the improvement plan for the following year. Collective worship is monitored informally by the headteacher and subject leader, by the parish priest and the governors, who discuss regularly the school's programme of assemblies and Masses. Collective worship forms part of the termly headteacher's report to governors, the occasion for formal evaluation and improvement identification.

The school assesses attainment in RE to be good. There is much valuable evidence to confirm this judgement. Baseline records indicate that most pupils enter the school with weak knowledge and understanding overall; however, incremental progress is evident across both key stages, delivered through relevant learning and teaching and closely targeted support from a strong team of LSPs. Attainment data indicates that outcomes in RE are close to other core subjects by the end of Key Stage 1, and are broadly comparable with literacy by Year 6. The quality of learning and progress in RE are good, as indicated particularly in discussions with children, who speak positively of their lessons and teachers. This judgement was shown to apply to all groups within the school.

Leadership and management are currently a strength in the school. The headteacher and his deputy, who leads on religious education, have 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. Strong and committed leadership is evident at all levels within the school. As indicated earlier, there are effective procedures in place for monitoring and evaluating both Catholic life and religious education, leading to focused planning for school improvement. Staff meetings always afford opportunities for discussion, and staff are encouraged to alert management informally to any ideas or developments. The headteacher has developed a performance management process that ensures collaborative staff professional development and target setting, which prioritise RE appropriately in the school. The governing body plays a significant role in challenging and supporting school leaders and staff. 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 regular reports to committees; oversee the production of documentation; maintain active involvement in school improvement.

Internal evaluation of teaching and learning, together with records of internal observations over time, is reliable in its judgements. There are some examples of outstanding teaching. The head and deputy have a clear understanding of current practice in school, and have in place a support programme for the newly qualified teacher (NQT). Assessments in RE are structured, books marked regularly, and effective use is made of this information for planning. There are "I can, I have" sheets in exercise books, but pupils would be helped by consistent use of formative marking strategies and examples. 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, parents and governors.

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

Outcomes and provision for all pupils are good. Baseline evidence indicates that children enter nursery and reception with extremely low levels of understanding of the Catholic Faith. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils' attainment is slightly below national expectations for RE; by the end of Key Stage 2, attainment is in line with national expectations, and standards in other core areas of learning. Learning and progress are good. Lessons are well planned and incorporate a range of high quality resources that interest and engage the pupils. These include music, drama and IT. All classrooms are well resourced and have excellent displays, which are relevant and colourful, with celebrations of pupils' work and prayer corners. 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. The subject leader and other staff have been involved with training offered by the diocese, and a cluster of schools in Sandwell, which ensures that colleagues are conversant with current trends and new initiatives.

Teaching is secure and well planned, with 75% regularly good or better. Assessments in RE are well structured, and effective use is made of this information for planning. Teachers and support staff demonstrate good subject knowledge, and lesson observations indicate that teachers use a range of learning opportunities, questioning techniques and clear differentiation; books are marked regularly. As a result children participate enthusiastically in RE lessons, where relationships, as around the school more generally, are positive, empathetic and consistently appropriate. The use of prayer and reflection contributes significantly to this. Pupils 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 on entry. The school motto is central to its life, with artefacts, statues, prayers and displays prominent throughout. The contribution of the parish priest is of huge significance to the life of the school. He celebrates whole-school Masses and other opportunities for collective worship, but in addition makes regular visits to classrooms to support teaching, learning and prayer. There is considerable pupil involvement in the faith life and collective worship of the school, notably in preparing for and leading masses, but also in the wider parish community Masses. Given the demographic of the school and the community it serves, it is important to develop strategies for sustaining and developing the multi-faith and multi-

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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.

ethnic dimension to the wider curriculum. This has been partially addressed with the school having recently introduced a structured timetable for all year groups to visit a different major place of worship each year, but this needs to be sustained and developed further.

Many pupils contribute significantly to the Catholic life of the school and benefit accordingly, as they themselves confirmed. The school motto is at the centre of so much of its daily life and the high quality of behaviour and interpersonal relationships at all levels. These in turn contribute to all forms of collective worship, where classes lead the preparation and delivery on a rota basis and participation is total and enthusiastic: for example, all pupils went forward to receive communion or a blessing in whole-school Mass. The prayer life of the school is outstanding. The purposes and development of prayer are taught progressively year by year, and prayer has a significant part in all aspects of its daily life. There are rich prayer corners in every classroom, the hall and outside, with artefacts, pupils' work and resources linked to the liturgical year. 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. The guidance and engagement of the parish priest play a major part in the faith life of the school. In addition to collective worship and prayer life, he visits pupils and staff during lessons whenever he can.

Leadership and management are a current strength of the school, though the forthcoming changes in leadership will need to be addressed and managed promptly and effectively. There is a clear sense of purpose, vision and direction which is shared at all levels, including the parish priest and governors. There is close collaboration between the different levels, but the strategic lead given by the governing body, and the operational effectiveness of the headteacher and subject leader, combine to drive the school forward. The parish priest and governors are regular visitors, and this regular contact helps to inform understanding and the monitoring and evaluation cycle. Communication is also good and includes families and the wider community through meetings, letters, newsletters, questionnaires, and a very informative and well-maintained website. There is a willingness to consider suggestions and new initiatives with the continual aim of improving in-school provision and outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

- develop the use of formative assessment and exemplification in exercise books, to target future learning in religious education
- enhance the place and profile of vocational development in school
- shape strategies for sustaining and further developing a multi-faith/multi-ethnic dimension to the wider curriculum
- in view of the imminent change of headteacher, and the later maternity leave of the deputy headteacher/RE leader, responsibilities for Catholic life, self evaluation and RE should be resolved as soon as possible, with an action plan developed for smooth transfer and professional development to ensure that the huge progress is not stalled.



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19 November 2013

Dear Parents and Carers

**Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St Philip's Catholic Primary School, 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

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.

The school has developed and built upon the recommendations in its last Section 48 Inspection in 2010. It is a very good Catholic school with an outstanding prayer life. The leadership of the headteacher and his team is very positive, giving clear strategic guidance to all the staff. The school is well supported in this by its governors, who have a very clear understanding of priorities and high expectations, and by the parish priest. 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 number of Bible stories, and have a good understanding of the importance of personal and traditional prayers.

I have recommended that, in order to continue to make good progress, the school should ensure greater consistency in its assessments to help all pupils understand how to develop their work; enhance the place and profile of vocational education in school; shape strategies for sustaining and developing a multi-faith/multi-ethnic dimension to the wider curriculum.

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 between the school and the wider community to ensure that all the children live happy and enjoyable lives.

Yours sincerely

Paul Nutt  
Diocesan Inspector