



# Archdiocese of Birmingham

## INSPECTION REPORT

### OUR LADY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL COWLEY, OXFORD

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Inspection dates 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> July 2013  
Reporting Inspector Brenda Beale

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Type of School	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4-11 years
Number on roll	307
Appropriate authority	The Board of the Dominic Barberi MAC
Chair of School Committee	Mr Declan Brolly
School address	Oxford Road Cowley Oxford OX4 2LF
Telephone number	01865 779176
E-mail address	office.3836@our-ladys.oxon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	February 2010
DFE School number	139477(Dominic Barberi MAC)
Unique Reference Number	123215

**Headteacher Mrs Hilary Webb**

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DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



## **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 RE lessons, one with the headteacher and two with RE leaders. 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. She held meetings with the chair of governors and staff. She attended Mass, joined the Foundation Class for prayers and undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of learning and teaching in RE, the presentation of the Catholic life of the school, and pupils' behaviour. She looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self evaluation such as RAISEonline, the development plan, teachers' planning, and learning journals. Alongside the validation of school self evaluation, the inspector gathered evidence about good lessons, evidence which will be shared with other diocesan schools.

## **Information about the school**

Our Lady's Catholic Primary School serves children in the parish of Our Lady Help of Christians. Our Lady's is a one and a half form intake primary school situated in the east Oxford and Cowley ward of Oxford City. The very large majority of pupils are baptised Catholics. For the last four years the Foundation intake has been wholly Catholic. The percentage of children who have English as a second language is 52% with 38 different languages spoken. Three children with complex needs have statements; 11% of pupils are currently on the SEN register. The local area, which has previously been a stable community, is changing and growing with great rapidity. Until recently skilled and semi skilled employment was high but during the last two years several factors have led to a marked increase of redundancy and unemployment. This has led to a rise in free school meals.

## **Main Finding**

The school, through its self evaluation processes, dependably judges all aspects of RE and its Catholic life to be good and pupil response to collective worship and Catholic life to be outstanding. This is a school that is currently facing a period of considerable challenge and change. It is sustained by its strong Catholic ethos and enduring Salesian legacy. Because of this, despite its challenges and changing circumstances the judgements it has made about its RE and its Catholic life are accurate and reliable. Processes for monitoring and evaluation of RE are in place and ensure that priorities for the further development of RE are appropriate and plans are being successfully implemented. Whilst it is wholly accurate in its judgement that collective worship and Catholic life are good or better, it would benefit further from establishing more formal monitoring processes to provide evidence and information to feed into school development plans.

## **School self evaluation**

At the time of inspection there are two RE leaders, one of whom is very experienced and a second person is who is developing the role in as part of good succession planning. They, together with the headteacher, deputy and assistant headteachers, work as a united team to effectively manage and lead RE, collective worship and the Catholic life of the school. Building on a previous successful RE inspection, RE leaders and the headteacher spent a day at the beginning of this academic year with the diocesan RE adviser planning the role of the second leader. An annual schedule was agreed, to include the regular monitoring of teacher planning, assessments, book trawls, pupil talk and lesson observations to take

place throughout the year and to ensure that appropriate support and feedback is available. This has led to the school being able to make very reliable judgements about pupil progress and attainment in both AT1 (knowledge and understanding of religion) and AT2 (learning from religion). The increased use and understanding of RE assessment focus sheets by all staff to track progress regularly has led to an enhanced focus on developing religious literacy and language and a clear process of evidencing pupil progress and attainment. Leaders ensure that RE is regarded as a high priority subject by providing newly qualified teachers and others who are anxious about subject knowledge with enhanced support and training and monitor their planning, teaching and pupil outcomes.

The robust partnership between the parish priest (who is a school governor), governors, headteacher, and RE leaders is strong. The governors see the development of the school Catholic ethos as a prime responsibility and so challenge and support leaders to ensure that this Catholic ethos remains at the centre of school life. Governors are involved in monitoring and evaluation through receiving reports from the headteacher and RE leaders via the mission and ethos committee. All members of Catholic leadership have an extremely good knowledge of collective worship and the Catholic life of the school; they are highly reflective and place the moral and spiritual development of every child as their highest priority. Developments and improvement are very evident and leaders correctly judge that the way in which pupils participate in and benefit from both collective worship and the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. But leaders acknowledge that in order to provide better evidence for their judgements establishing more explicit monitoring processes would be profitable. Some the monitoring of collective worship is exceptionally good. Pupils are involved in the auditing evaluating of prayer areas in classes and around the school. Attention to the quality collective worship is good and all members of staff keep a keen check on pupils' response and participation. It is an integral part of the culture of the school. Judgements about collective worship are also informed by pupil discussion and questionnaires and through the annual parent survey.

The provision of Catholic life is reliably judged by the school to be good and pupil participation in and response to it, to be outstanding. Leaders know this to be so and are able to demonstrate their knowledge through discussion and observations. Whilst there may not be extensive formal systems in place all members of RE leadership and school leadership are reflective, knowledgeable and very familiar with this aspect of school life. The close relationship with the Salesian sisters provides good quality assurance, support, guidance and advice. They are involved in ensuring excellent provision, particularly in the promotion of vocation in its widest sense. Again judgements about Catholic life are informed by pupil discussion and questionnaires and the annual parent survey.

The RE development plan is an integral part of the school development plan. All staff and governors are fully committed to the further development of the Catholic ethos of the school and are fully aware of all plans and initiatives. The RE leaders are responsible for the RE action plan, which is derived from improvement plan priorities and monitored throughout the year by the subject leaders. Plans for the development of collective worship and Catholic life are less explicit but because of the high priority placed upon this aspect of school life they continue to evolve and grow.

Leaders judge the teaching of RE to be good or better. This is a reliable judgement because it based on a range of evidence. Formal monitoring of lesson observations, book trawls, learning walks, and informal observations by a range of observers including headteacher, parish priest and governors indicate that standards of teaching of RE are good or better. Regular lesson observations take place and particular attention is paid to ensuring that lessons provide real meaning and understanding to the experiences of the children's lives, promoting reflection on the application of their personal faith. Also whilst

monitoring lessons, particular attention is given to how effectively teaching assistants are deployed and how aware both they and teachers are of their pupils' capabilities and of their prior learning and understanding. The scrutiny of planning shows evidence of differentiation for children with additional needs support, and challenge for the more able. Scrutiny of work, pupil feedback, learning walks and analysis of assessment provide evidence of the quality of teaching overtime. Feedback after formal lesson observations is encouraging but leaders do not shy away from delivering hard messages.

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

Baseline assessment shows that children enter the Foundation Class with low levels of knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith. By the end of the Foundation Stage assessments show that three quarters of children are working at average or above. By the end of Key Stage 1 assessment data shows that 86% of children are working at or above the average expectations. End of Key Stage 2 assessments show that 92% children are working at average or above. Achievement is good and all children make very good progress in RE relative to their starting points and capabilities. Activities are carefully planned throughout the year, strictly in line with the diocesan framework and are linked with celebrations from other major world faiths. Expectations are high and good practice in teaching supports good quality learning. Children enjoy RE and are motivated and enthusiastic about religious education.

Pupils have frequent opportunities to lead, take responsibility and to participate in the Catholic life of the school and pupils relish this aspect of school life. They are involved in these activities both at school and within the wider community. A pilgrimage for Years 5 and 6 took place in January 2013 to visit the relics of St John Bosco at St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham. This was a deep and inspirational experience for these pupils. One wrote "the experience at St Chad's Cathedral has shown us how to use our talents and skills to their full potential. This allows us to help others and to do the best for them. It is great that Don Bosco's relics have visited our country because he couldn't. What an amazing experience!" Pupils are actively involved in fundraising. Pupils treat all members of the community with respect, supporting the most vulnerable, showing courtesy and good humour to those they meet. They understand the importance of forgiveness, both given and received. Children take full advantage of the opportunities which the school provides for their personal support and well being for example The VIDES group – organised through the Salesian Sisters. At the beginning of the summer holiday VIDES are organising a national camp which will take place at the school in partnership with the Sisters, parish, school and home.

Provision of collective worship is good and pupils' participation and response to it is outstanding. Children of different faiths are at ease, act with integrity when praying and have a choice to use their own prayer positions during collective worship. Children of all abilities enjoy actively participating in collective worship. Pupils respond well to opportunities to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation in school during the seasons of Lent and Advent. They take an active role in the many opportunities they are given through assemblies, class prayers, and the celebration of Mass and compose their own prayers. Pupils throughout the school lead prayers, proclaim the Gospel, sing in groups, role play through drama and accompany a range of hymns through actions and music. Pupils learn and are taught the understanding of a range of traditional prayers, beginning in Foundation Stage: the school prayer and prayer to St John Bosco and Our Lady Help of Christians are prayed at all school gatherings. Reflective, personal, open prayers, spontaneous and

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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.

meditative prayer opportunities are encouraged and offered to match the interest, age and ability of the pupils.

Provision for religious education is good. Teaching in the subject is consistently good or better. Teachers listen to, observe and continually question groups of pupils during lessons to reshape tasks and explanations to improve learning. Planning is linked to the current assessment of pupils' prior learning and is suitably differentiated in order to consolidate, build upon and extend learning for all groups of pupils. Teachers and teaching assistants continually ensure that pupils are confident in their area of learning and are provided with clear understandable steps for improvement. Teachers assess pupils' work accurately and have clear strategies to enable pupils to take the next steps in learning. Children know how well they are progressing as focused learning objectives and success criteria are routinely shared. Children are clear about what they need to do to succeed.

The RE curriculum is based on the diocesan Curriculum Strategy "Learning and Growing as the People of God" and is differentiated to ensure the needs and interests of groups of children. This curriculum is structured around the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, Catholic beliefs, faith and life. Planning and timetables are scrutinised to ensure the time allocation for RE meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. Pupils benefit from experiences which promote an understanding of Catholic culture and vocation: there is a strong school focus on Salesian "roots", parish youth groups, retreat experiences with the local Catholic secondary school, and residential visits to Alton Castle. The school supports the parish in the preparation of the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Holy Communion and Confirmation. Regular use is made of the *Walk With Me* Advent and Lent calendars and prayer books and of the diocesan publications for the Year of Faith. Sex and relationship education contributes to pupils' personal development. The school follows the diocesan programme which reflects the Church's teaching on sexuality and the dignity of life. Pupils learn about self respect and to have respect for others, which underpins all relationships.

The Catholic life of the school is reliably judged by its self evaluation to be very good and highly effective in providing Catholic education for the children in Cowley. The school is deeply rooted in the spirit of Don Bosco and the Salesians.

### **Recommendations**

- Develop more formal processes to monitor and evaluate the Catholic life of the school which will lead to more explicit and focused development plans in these areas.
- Develop links within the newly formed Dominic Barberi Multi Academy Company whilst ensuring the retention of the unique quality and ethos of the school.
- Develop support for the teaching of RE and provision of collective worship for newly qualified teachers and members of staff who are unsure or unfamiliar with the Catholic faith.