



Archdiocese of Birmingham

Section 48 Inspection

ST. AMBROSE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Part of St. Nicholas Owen Catholic Multi-Academy Company

Leswell Street, Kidderminster, DY10 1RP

Inspection date	15-16 th May 2017
Reporting Inspector	Joseph Skivington

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Academy
Age range of pupils	4-11 years
Number on roll	205
Appropriate authority	Board of Directors
Chair of Academy Committee	Mr Peter Parry
Telephone number	01562 823568
E-mail address	office@st-ambrose.worcs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	July 2012
DFE School Number	885/3393
Unique Reference Number	141413

Executive Headteacher	Mr Andrew Dickinson
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Previous inspection:	Good
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This inspection:	Good
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DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Evidence

- The inspection was carried out by one Diocesan Inspector.
- The focus of the inspection was on the quality, leadership, and impact of the school's provision of Catholic life, collective worship, and religious education (RE).
- The inspector observed teaching across 6 RE lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. These lessons were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- The inspector completed a work scrutiny and held 3 discussions with pupils to evaluate their understanding of Catholic life, worship, and the impact of teaching on their learning over time.
- Meetings were held with the parish priest, the chair and vice chair of the board of directors, the chair of the academy committee, an academy committee representative, and the temporary executive head teacher.
- The inspector attended class assemblies, a whole school hymn practice 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.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation, data about pupils' attainment and progress, RAISEonline, the development plan, teachers' planning, and learning journals.

Information about the school

- St. Ambrose is an average size primary school serving the parish of St. Ambrose, Kidderminster.
- The school became part of St. Nicholas Owen Catholic Multi-Academy Company (SNOMAC) in October 2014.
- The percentage of pupils from ethnic minorities and pupils with English as an additional language is in line with the national average.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils is currently 90%.
- The percentage of pupils with special educational needs or disabilities is in line with the national average.
- Pupils enter the school with attainment typical for their age group.
- The temporary executive head teacher has been in place at the school since January 2017.

Main Findings

- The Catholic life of the school is outstanding; collective worship and religious education are good.
- The school's leadership and management of Catholic life is outstanding because it has robust and increasingly reliable processes of self-evaluation and acts decisively to implement change. The leadership and management of collective worship and RE are both good.
- The areas for development arising from the previous inspection have been comprehensively addressed. The creation of more opportunities for pupils to plan and lead a range of collective worship has been successful, while the study of other faiths has been well resourced and visits to other places of worship is planned.
- The pupils are confident in articulating what it means to be in a Catholic school. They recognise the enriching, inclusive community in which they learn, and they are internalising

its values. This is amply evident in their outstanding behaviour and care for one another, and their practical outreach to others in need.

- The pupils' response to collective worship is good. They participate willingly and reverently, and are developing the skills of planning and presenting their own acts of worship with growing confidence.
- The quality of teaching in RE is good overall, with some outstanding practice observed. This results in good or better learning outcomes for pupils, and good progress over time.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

Catholic life, collective worship and spiritual, moral and vocational development: provision and outcomes

- The pupils benefit significantly from the Catholic life of the school. Their input into developing this aspect of school life is strengthening. They provide vital feedback, through pupil voice, about how religious education and the Catholic ethos of the school could be further enriched.
- They appreciate and value the special Catholic ethos of the school and they are able to articulate what makes their Catholic school different from others. Pupils have participated in the evaluation and review of the school's mission statement '*We do our best by following Jesus*'. As a result, they are secure in understanding its meaning. Their outstanding behaviour and attitudes exemplify what the school values most; they show genuine respect and care for others, older pupils in particular are alert to the needs of the younger ones.
- Their capacity for praise, respect, thanks and forgiveness is very evident not only in their behaviour but also in their reflections and prayers gathered in their beautifully presented 'values' books. Pupils' learning from religion and their ability to make links between beliefs and people's behaviour are a real strength of the school.
- The Catholic Schools' Pupil Profile has been adopted and is being successfully promoted; it is the subject of assemblies, and is prominently displayed in the assembly hall and around the school.
- Year 6 liturgy leaders are assigned to each class and they take the initiative in planning collective worship with the pupils. They have joined with governors on learning walks to evaluate the impact of class assemblies, meditations, class prayer areas and displays. The liturgy leaders have successfully established prayer stations around the school; a significant number of pupils pause at these stations to say a prayer or recite a decade of the rosary. The liturgy leaders are eager to have more responsibility for the Catholic life of the school. This responsibility now needs to be extended to all pupils, who can then imitate the excellent Year 6 role models.
- The pupils organise their own charity fundraising events, demonstrating compassion for others in need, both locally and globally. There is a thriving junior St. Vincent de Paul group with over 30 pupils who have chosen generously to reach out to others in need. This group independently and efficiently conducted a planning meeting, where prayer was placed at the heart of their discussion, to raise funds for WaterAid.
- The quality of the provision for Catholic life is outstanding. The whole environment of the school reflects its Catholic mission and ethos. It is an open and fully inclusive community where all children are invited to reflect on and live out the values embedded in the ethos of the school. The staff are fully committed to the school's mission and readily attend training specifically focused on Catholic life.
- The pupils' spiritual, moral and vocational development is carefully nurtured by staff and pupils are encouraged to help and serve others. Every child has a prayer partner who looks out for them daily; Years 6 and 3, as sacramental preparation classes, are linked as prayer partners. Pupils reflect on and discuss the 'big questions', which they respond to in terms

of faith and spirituality. Big Question books include thoughts such as *'I see God in growth, and He makes us grow too'*. As a result, both pupils and staff are increasingly using religious language, and the language of the Catholic Schools' Pupil Profile with developing insight. The whole school curriculum contributes significantly to communicating the distinctive beliefs, values and the heritage of the Catholic community.

- The curriculum is effective in promoting the pupils' spiritual, moral, and vocational development. For instance, the annual 'Vocation Week' in school includes visitors who link their work with their faith and service. There are many opportunities to develop their moral sense of responsibility towards others, especially in exercising their spirit of generosity through outreach to others less fortunate than themselves, and to live out their faith in practice and to meet Jesus in others. This is clearly seen in the many fruitful fundraising events run by pupils in aid of local and global charities.
- The pupils' response to collective worship is good. Even the youngest pupils respond with attentiveness and reverence during times of prayer and acts of worship. This is due in no small way to the excellent role modelling provided by the older pupils and every staff member. The pupils sing with enthusiasm at hymn practice.
- The school is increasing the opportunities for more pupils to take the initiative in planning collective worship. The school has set itself a challenge to ensure 'that most of the leadership and initiative for collective worship comes from the pupils'. Key Stage 2 classes have already started to lead 'Parent Prayer Services' which bring parents into school and involve them in prayer.
- The pupils compose many beautiful prayers, which are displayed in their class collective worship books and are used in class. They are aware of the different ways of praying and types of prayer. A pupil led liturgy group is encouraged to monitor the quality of focal prayer points, while the younger pupils very quickly learn the symbolism of the religious artefacts used in these areas.
- The school provides a variety of liturgies, worship, and prayer both in and out of school. The children say traditional prayers at relevant times of the day and according to the liturgical seasons. There is good progression in learning traditional prayers as pupils move through the school. The whole school assemblies reinforce the values and mission of the school, using the good example of pupils themselves to inspire their peers, especially at the award celebration assemblies. This role modelling sends out a powerful message to other children.
- Masses are celebrated regularly. Special liturgies take place during Advent and Lent, as well as major feast days, in which the pupils participate with enthusiasm through drama and music. The parish priest, who contributes regularly to governors' discussions of Catholic Life, is a frequent and welcome presence in the school.
- Pupils have the opportunities to go on retreat and where they have time and the opportunity to reflect on their faith. The Year 5 pupils have attended the academy anniversary Mass and the annual Good Shepherd Mass.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership of Catholic life and collective worship

- Leadership of Catholic life is outstanding and the leadership of collective worship is good. The promotion and nurturing of the Catholic life of the school is of paramount importance to its leadership, at academy committee and board levels, and the closely involved RE & ethos sub-committee. This has been evident in their vital support through recent challenging times, following the departure of the principal in December 2016, as well as in managing significant teacher mobility.
- At present, the school is led by an inspirational temporary executive head teacher. He has successfully communicated a renewed, positive vision for the school in a short time, and

has been able to implement improvements effectively. The school improvement planning and academy committee minutes provide clear evidence of challenge. Catholic and sacramental life, prayer and RE are all rigorously monitored and evaluated, with the close support of the multi-academy company. The monitoring and review systems are accurate, consistent, and are at the heart of the outstanding provision and outcomes for Catholic life. Reviews of the quality of assemblies, Masses, liturgies and the school's Catholic environment are detailed and lead to rapid improvement and positive impact.

- The school's mission statement '*We do our best by following Jesus*' is visually prominent and is often addressed and interpreted in assemblies and lessons. Leadership provides opportunities for pupils to reflect on, and discuss their own interpretations of what mission means for them. This could be encouraged even further with pupils' ideas formally recorded.
- Links with parents and carers are strong. Parents are invited to assemblies, Masses and other liturgies. They are made welcome and their feedback is elicited orally and through questionnaires. They are generally kept well informed about their children's progress in RE, and forthcoming events in the school's life.
- The provision for spirituality and Catholic life has been very fruitful, leading to a growth in the variety of opportunities for prayer and worship. Provision is made for the staff's own spiritual development and prayer life. For example, all the multi-academy schools' staff came together for a spiritual and inspirational retreat in January of this year. Another event that supported the Catholic life of the school was the whole staff training day in February, led by the RE coordinator, which reflected upon 'What makes a Catholic school?'
- While the leadership of Catholic life is strong at present, the board of directors is well aware that the executive head teacher's role is temporary. A permanent senior leader needs to be found to secure the capacity of the school to sustain and develop improvements in the long term.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Leadership, outcomes from and provision for religious education

- Leadership of religious education is good. Outcomes and provision are also good.
- The executive head teacher, RE coordinator and academy committee ensure regular in-service training is provided to develop staff's understanding and commitment to the Church's mission in education. This is vital for new teachers but all staff benefit from this good support, both for their own spirituality and to secure their RE subject knowledge.
- The RE coordinator is also now the acting head of school. While undertaking both of these roles the post-holder is, temporarily, unable to teach RE. The board of directors understands the need for a discrete head of RE who can devote time to the subject, maintain its parity with other core subjects, and model best teaching practice.
- Renewed structures have been put in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of RE and its impact on outcomes, through lesson observations and work scrutinies, as well as asking the pupils themselves what helps them to learn better. Provision and learning outcomes are improving as the leaders focus more closely on the impact of the RE action plan.
- The school is making fruitful use of the diocesan age related expectation indicators, and sharing work and moderation with the other schools throughout the multi-academy company. Assessment and moderation of pupils' work provides a clear picture of progress, but this data needs to be used more effectively to plan challenging learning objectives in lessons. There is also still work to be done on interpreting the RE syllabus in an engaging and challenging way, and ensuring progression through the curriculum and key stages.
- On entry to the school, pupils' baseline knowledge, experience of the Faith and prayer life broadly matches diocesan expectations. The early years children are given an excellent

start in religious literacy, symbolism (such as the candle representing Jesus the Light of the World), as well as story and meaning through the parables and miracles in the Gospels. By the end of Key Stage 1 most pupils are working at, and some above, diocesan expectations. This represents good progress year on year. Pupils in vulnerable groups and disadvantaged children make similarly good progress through targeted support and intervention by proactive learning assistants.

- The end of Key Stage 2 data shows that pupils have continued to make good progress, if slower than Key Stage 1 because of inconsistency in the level of teachers' challenge, and the effectiveness of the learning objectives in lessons.
- Pupils are generally RE literate and engaged with the subject. They have very positive attitudes and excellent behaviour for learning. Their enjoyment of RE lessons varies, with the more able pupils expressing some frustration that the tasks they are given are repetitive and unchallenging. The pupils would benefit from taking more ownership of their learning. To facilitate this teachers need to encourage independent learning and whole group in depth discussions.
- Pupils' written work often consists of short pieces of writing on a variety of topics, usually completed to a good standard. The school's own book scrutinies have highlighted the need for more extended writing, questions 'to elicit greater depth' of learning from RE, and self and peer evaluation. Pupils' own feedback has led school to reflect on suggestions about: *'more writing about what we learn'*, *'not enough group work'*, and that pupils appreciate that *'displays, word mats and discussion give you words to write and ideas to write about'*. To enable pupils to make greater progress teachers need to set more challenging learning objectives, and tasks that accurately match individual learning needs. Increased opportunities for extended, reflective pieces of writing would also enable teachers to assess individual progress more accurately.
- The quality of teaching is good, with some outstanding practice observed. Teachers who are new to teaching at St Ambrose are very well supported in their professional development. The best teaching challenges pupils to make real intellectual effort through keen questioning which demands response, but also checks carefully that understanding is secure. Where the school has identified weaker teacher subject knowledge support and some team teaching has been used to good effect.
- Teaching assistants are proactive and provide effective support for the less able pupils; they are involved in the planning and evaluation of lessons.
- Teachers have a good rapport with their pupils, and plan their lessons using a variety of strategies. These, together with the pupils' positive behaviour for learning, results in good progress over time. Progress is sometimes hampered by teaching which is over instructive. This limits the extent to which pupils develop as independent learners.
- The much improved procedures for recording and reviewing the quality of teaching of RE, through lesson observations and book trawls, have highlighted the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. This has enabled targeted support and advice to be given to teachers where it is needed.
- End of unit assessment is becoming more accurate through collaborative moderation with SNOMAC partnership schools. At present assessment data is not always dependable. Some teacher assessment is over generous and does not match pupil outcomes recorded in books. Monitoring needs to ensure that the learning tasks set in lessons accurately match the abilities of the pupils. Marking is having an impact on pupils' learning when the formative comments made by teachers are challenging, and the written response by the pupils are thoughtful.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets all canonical and statutory requirements of the Bishops' Conference. The school is already working to ensure the curriculum is better designed and modified to meet the needs of individuals and groups, so that there is continuity and progression within and between key stages.
- Pupils have the opportunity to explore other faiths in the topics on world religions, which enables them to understand and respect other faiths and beliefs. Parents have visited

classes to support pupils' learning and to give them a first-hand insight into other faiths. There are some planned visits this term to other places of worship.

- The sex and relationship programme is in place and monitored to ensure it is consistent with the teachings of the Church and reflects Catholic teaching and values.
- The provision for the pupils' development of Catholic Christian values is good. The values listed in the Catholic Schools' Pupil Profile have been highlighted and they are referred to on a daily basis, through assembly topics and built into lesson planning. As a result, they have become part of the pupils' lives and awareness. This is duly recognised and encouraged in a half termly special assembly with certificates awarded for staff and pupils.

Recommendations

- Improve the consistency and quality of all teaching to outstanding.
- Give pupils more ownership of their learning by encouraging independence, whole group in-depth discussions, self and peer assessment, and more opportunities for extended, reflective writing.