



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST BERNADETTE'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL BIRMINGHAM

Inspection dates 13th – 14th March 2013
Reporting Inspector Terence Dillon

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3-11 years
Number on roll	722 (of which 105 are in the nursery)
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mrs A McLaughlin
School address	Hob Moor Road Yardley Birmingham B25 8QL
Telephone number	0121 783 7232
E-mail address	
Date of previous inspection	February 2008
DFE School number	103460
Unique Reference Number	330 3372

Headteacher Miss Angela Cowings

DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Evidence

The inspection was carried out by one 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 12 RE lessons, four with the headteacher and two with the deputy headteacher. 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, staff, and parish priest. He observed a Mass and the beginning of a penitential service. He 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. He looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self-evaluation such as the development plan, teachers' planning, evidence from the school's monitoring, records of teachers' moderations of pupils' work, and assessment data. Alongside the validation of the school's self-evaluation, the inspector gathered evidence about the leadership of RE, evidence which will be shared with other diocesan schools.

Information about the school

St Bernadette's Primary School is one of two primary schools in the parish of Holy Family in Small Heath in Birmingham. It is a larger than average primary school, with 735 pupils on roll, of which 110 have a part-time nursery place. Approximately 70% of children are baptised Catholics. Most of the Catholic pupils come from the Holy Family parish but some pupils come from the neighbouring parishes. The majority of the pupils live in some of the most deprived areas of the city.

The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is currently 46%, well above the national average, and approximately 16% of pupils are on the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) register, which is above the national average. Approximately 47% of pupils come from minority ethnic groups and about 25% have a first language other than English. There have been significant increases in all these areas since the previous inspection. The overall level of attainment on entry is below the national average.

Main Finding

While the school judges itself conservatively to be a good Catholic school, St Bernadette's is an outstanding Catholic school which is working effectively to fulfil its mission. The school benefits from excellent leadership, as does RE. The school makes effective use of its extremely detailed methods of monitoring and evaluation in order to improve. From a very low baseline, pupils make excellent progress in their learning and reach good, and occasionally better, standards throughout each key stage. This is an outcome of the good and sometimes outstanding teaching. Pupils have a very positive attitude to their school; their behaviour and commitment to learning are outstanding. They are committed to the school's Catholic life, often leading and taking responsibility for shaping activities with a religious character in the school and the wider community. The school provides effectively for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils, with the result that they can speak impressively about how the school is impacting on their lives. RE is currently led by an acting co-ordinator, but the helpful organisational structure within the school is such, that leadership continues to be outstanding.

The school's self-evaluation

In its self-evaluation the school judges itself to be a good Catholic school. The inspection revealed that it is an outstanding Catholic school, which is in line with the judgement of the

previous inspection. The school's view that standards overall are good was verified by the inspection, as was the school's assessment that from a very low base on entry pupils make outstanding progress through the key stages. The carefully conducted baseline assessment indicates pupils enter with low levels or even no knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith, yet they reach good, with examples of outstanding, standards for their age by the end of Key Stage 2. The school rightly evaluated the quality of teaching as good, with outstanding examples. A high standard of monitoring provides the information to support this judgement.

Pupils' contribution to the Catholic life of the school is rightly assessed as outstanding. Pupils from different faiths spoke highly of the school and what helped it to be such an outstanding school. They were fully involved in preparations for the Mass observed, prepared prayers, did the readings and served on the altar. Interestingly, the school felt that collective worship was no stronger than good, though the inspection rated collective worship as outstanding. Pupils were seen to be fully involved in praying in class, in Mass, and in the penitential service, whilst they also indicated their keenness to pray the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross. The school's judgement on leadership is good, but the inspection indicated that the governors, the head and the senior management team have created an outstanding ethos within the school, which is recognised by even the very young pupils. The school's evaluation of those elements the school has judged below those of the inspection reflects its strong desire to further develop these aspects of school life.

The school has an excellent range of systems by which to judge its strengths and the areas that need further development. The detailed records of the school's monitoring and evaluation as reflected in the detailed lesson observations, the scrutiny of pupils' written work, the clear assessment data and the quantity of acknowledgements from the parish and wider community in relation to the work of the school, provide strong indicators of the school's effectiveness. Regular meetings of staff and their joint moderation of pupils' work provide the insight that enables them to reach conclusions about the progress being made by pupils and what is required to improve provision and raise standards. As a result of its findings, the school recognises that to ensure continued improvement it needs to achieve consistency when moderating levels of achievement and to ensure that the most able pupils are appropriately challenged.

Religious education is currently led by an acting co-ordinator, who has been rigorous in his approach to monitoring and evaluating standards in school and has worked closely with the previous co-ordinator who laid strong foundations to ensure a successful department. Together, the previous RE co-ordinator and the acting co-ordinator (the deputy head) provide staff with the detailed information on which they can base their planning. The headteacher oversees the whole process, working closely with the deputy and former co-ordinator, and plays her part in monitoring progress and provision. She has a good overview, therefore, of the progress being made by the children and how they are responding to the provision. During the inspection, she and the deputy joined the inspector in observing lessons. Both showed a genuine understanding of the process and reached conclusions not dissimilar to those of the inspector. Both were able to outline the strengths of the lessons and how they could have been improved.

Regular parental questionnaires and the pupils' council feed in valuable information which is used to provide an environment that is fully supported by pupils, staff and parents. Their evaluations also help the headteacher, governors and senior management to be alerted to the needs of its stakeholders as it seeks to fulfil its Catholic mission. The school's self-evaluation takes into consideration what is learned through the extensive monitoring and reflects the positive approach to furthering the school's Catholicity. Religious education also benefits from the planned monitoring and evaluation of its work. It explains the highly

organised approach to planning, teaching and assessment. This has continued under the acting co-ordinator and there is a structure to the department that is impressive.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

The headteacher provides excellent leadership and has succeeded in winning staff, parents and pupils over to the school's strong ethos. She is well supported by the senior management team and staff. She has encouraged and supported a very effective system of monitoring and evaluation. The programme of observations and work scrutiny is clearly spelled out and the outcomes are used to further the school's aims. The governors have an effective structure, which enables them to know how well the school is providing for the pupils. They are keen for the school to fulfil its mission and recognise Catholic life and RE as key elements in the school. The link governor for RE is the parish priest; he makes regular visits to the school and has an excellent working relationship with staff and pupils.

The RE department is very well led. The school's organisational structure has been used to great effect during this period in which the previous head of RE has moved to a part-time position and the deputy head has taken over in an acting capacity. The school's faculty structure has meant that the head of the arts faculty has been able to give support in ensuring that established practices have continued; these include effective joint planning by teachers, the provision of differentiated materials designed to help children of all abilities make progress, and effective monitoring. Monitoring and evaluation are used well in the school's efforts to improve. For example, staff discussion of the diocesan *Curriculum Strategy* has led to some modifications, resulting in the curriculum fitting the particular needs of the school and providing experiences that pupils enjoy.

Overall standards in RE are good and occasionally outstanding. Pupils can recite a good range of traditional prayers and are aware that Christ's teaching carries messages for the way they should conduct their own lives. They show good understanding of parables and the lessons that Jesus' life teaches. They effectively relate these to the way they should live their own lives. The recognition of the moral lessons in the Biblical stories is evident in the way pupils discuss words such as 'forgiveness', 'merciful', and 'change'. Pupils know a very good range of prayers, the result of the emphasis given to prayer by the school and the parish priest, and they write their own prayers with genuine feeling. They prayed devoutly in Mass, in class prayers, and in the penitential rite. They find the school-produced prayer and Mass books most helpful.

The good teaching creates an excellent learning environment in which pupils behave and respond remarkably well. The excellent relationships encourage pupils at all levels to become involved in lessons, asking and answering questions. Teaching is extremely well planned, ensures a common experience for all pupils, and provides a range of different activities that encourage enthusiasm in the pupils and help their learning. Knowledge about other world faiths, for example, is strengthened by planned visits to the places of worship of different faiths. Teaching has clear objectives and identified success criteria, which are shared with the pupils. The tasks set are interesting, though not always designed to achieve the designated success criteria. Effective use is made of the white board, paired and group work, clear exposition, and, occasionally, the computer. The Bible is used appropriately. In the best lessons, teaching ensures that learning is kept to a brisk pace. The provision of work matched to the different abilities in the class is common practice, encouraging pupils across the ability range to progress. Pupils' work is marked regularly, and pupils are occasionally encouraged to make a response to a comment, but too often insufficient written guidance is given to help individual pupils improve their work or meet the targets set;

¹ 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.

there is no evidence of pupils doing work again to improve it or the teacher checking later work with the earlier comments in mind. A tendency in lessons is for questioning to look for expected answers rather than encouraging pupils to explore their responses with one another, and on more than one occasion, teaching concentrated on particular groups rather than managing the class as a whole, resulting in a slight loss of concentration and in the pace of learning. Nevertheless, the response of pupils in lessons is generally excellent. They enjoy what they are doing, willingly participate and when working with others cooperate effectively. They respond with enthusiasm to the variety of work they are given and the way they are treated by staff. They enjoy the opportunity for retreats, for participating in the penitential rite, and speak enthusiastically about sacramental preparation. Pupils with special educational needs are well known to staff and receive good support through the tasks given and the help they receive from support assistants.

The overall ethos in the school is excellent. Pupils speak highly of their teachers and other pupils, having no hesitation in saying that this is a 'great school' and they would have no hesitation in recommending it to others. Non-baptised Catholics are as committed to the school's mission as those who are baptised. Relationships throughout are excellent. In this sense, the school is working effectively to live out its mission. The approach of pupils to the prayer life provided within the school is excellent. They speak positively about the opportunities for prayer, through praying the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross and the Angelus as well as at various other times during the school day. They willingly talk about their participation in the wide range of charities which they support and organise (they raised over £5000 last year) and the links they have with the local community and the parish. These are factors that contribute positively to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Recommendations

The school will continue to improve if it does the following:

1. Ensure that marking is used to identify points for improvement and to indicate in later work the extent to which progress in those areas has taken place.
2. Ensure that activities in teaching are designed to keep the pace brisk, help pupils to reach the planned outcomes, and are managed so that all pupils work effectively throughout the lesson.



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March 2013

Dear Parents and Carers

**Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School,
Birmingham**

I am writing this letter to share with you the findings of the diocesan inspection of your children's school. Diocesan inspections now explore 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 continued to provide an outstanding educational experience for your children, a judgement reached at the time of the previous inspection in 2008. There is no doubt that the school is committed to living out its Catholic mission and to that end has persevered with its excellent procedures for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of its work. The school's excellent leadership is well supported by the governing body.

The school works well with the parish and the local and wider community. The pupils, about seventy per cent of whom are baptised Catholics, have a real commitment to making progress and clearly enjoy what the school has to offer them. Their response in the religious education lessons, in the Mass that I observed, and in the conversations I had with them was impressive. Many pupils have limited knowledge about their faith on entry but through the overall good and sometimes outstanding teaching they make excellent progress in their learning. As a result, children achieve good and sometimes outstanding standards for their abilities. They know a good many prayers, a good range of Biblical stories, and they recognise that Christ's teaching carries messages for the way they live their lives.

In order for the school to sustain and improve its high level of provision, the inspection report has recommended that teachers should ensure marking is used to identify points for improvement and to indicate in later work the extent to which progress in those areas has taken place, and that learning activities are designed to keep the pace of learning brisk, help pupils to reach the planned outcomes, and are managed so that all pupils work effectively throughout the lesson

It was a pleasure and privilege to inspect the school. I was welcomed by the staff, the pupils, the parish priest and the chair of governors, all of whom are keen to do their best for the school.

Yours sincerely

Terence Dillon
(Diocesan Inspector)