



7<sup>th</sup> June 2014

Diocesan Education Service,  
Don Bosco House,  
Coventry Road,  
Coleshill,  
B46 3EA

The Oratory RC Primary School  
Oliver Road  
Ladywood  
Birmingham  
B16 9ER

Dear Mrs Dickinson

### **Section 48 Monitoring inspection:**

Thank you for the welcome you, your staff and pupils gave to me when I inspected your school on 4<sup>th</sup> June and for the information you provided both before and during the inspection. I am grateful for the time given by all to speak with me including the parish priest who is an Oratorian and the brothers from the Oratory in speaking with me.

The inspection was a “light touch” monitoring inspection because your school was judged at the last section 48 inspection to be an outstanding school and because it is now five years or more since you last received a diocesan inspection.

The purpose of the inspection was to assess the quality of the school’s self-evaluation and improvement planning for Catholic life and religious education. In order to make this judgement I read school documents, including a summative self-evaluation, interviewed senior leaders, the chair of governors, the subject leader for religious education (RE), and the pupils. I observed three (part) lessons, and looked at a sample of pupils’ written work. In addition, I gathered evidence of some of the outstanding practice in the school as part of a diocesan wide survey of good practice in Catholic life and religious education.

### **Catholic Life**

The school self-evaluation judges the quality of its Catholic life and collective worship to be outstanding. This judgement is accurate and fully justified because there are both informal and formal processes in place. A great strength in sustaining and building upon the outstanding practice is the commitment of the headteacher and her senior team which includes the RE subject leader and the frequent support that they receive from the parish priest and the Oratory brothers.

Systems are in place which enables, pupils, staff, parents and governors to contribute and make their views known, including well constructed questionnaires to invite informed opinions. Recently a questionnaire was sent out to parents to find out their opinions on the Catholic life and collective worship of the school. The results showed that the majority of parents are pleased with the high quality provision, and noted that the Catholic ethos is obvious in all the school’s work. Shortly afterwards a joint training day was held with staff and governors to reflect and evaluate the Catholic life of the Oratory school. A particular strength noted from the monitoring is the tripartite relationship between home, school and parish. A group of pupils from Year 6 devised their own questionnaire to find out pupils’ views on the Catholic life of their school. Children would like more opportunities to lead, deliver and evaluate whole school liturgies. Pupils’ behaviour and their living out of the Gospel values are rigorously monitored by all members of staff. The school community works together to help the children to live up to the high expectations which the school has of them. The parish priest, who is also the RE link governor works very closely with the school, meeting weekly with the RE subject leader and fortnightly with the headteacher to discuss and reflect on the many aspects of the Catholic life of the school. He is well supported by the Oratory brothers and they all work together for the benefit of all pupils. They are involved in class based learning, sacramental preparation both in Year 3 and Year 6 and undertake learning walks in the school. Leaders spend a significant amount of staff meeting time affirming and reaffirming the uniquely Catholic ethos of the school. There are daily opportunities for collective worship and prayers, all of which demonstrate clear links with the liturgical calendar. Children have some opportunities to be involved in the planning and leadership of prayer



services but they have identified that they would like more opportunities to lead, deliver and evaluate whole school liturgies. Collective worship and classroom environment are monitored by the subject leader and the headteacher. Staff are given written feedback which focuses on what went well and suggestions given for further improvement. Regular feedback is given to the governors' mission and strategy committee. Governors are fully informed and confident in providing high levels of professional challenge for Catholic life and RE. They know that theirs is an outstanding school but they continually focus on sustaining Catholic life and RE which is greatly appreciated and beneficial to all.

## Religious Education

Self-evaluation accurately judges progress in RE to be outstanding and attainment in RE as above average. RE is monitored in a variety of ways through lesson observations, book trawls, learning walks and pupil conferencing. Lesson observations findings are fed back to staff reinforcing the high expectations that are held by senior leaders. The school is rightly proud of the quality of their RE lessons; nothing but good or better is acceptable. Staff are given support from the RE subject leader and the parish priest to ensure that everyone delivers high quality lessons. The quality of the teaching impacts greatly on pupils' spiritual, moral and vocational development. Children were enthusiastic and engaged in their learning. Rigorous assessment is in place, with a specific assessment focus each year. Evidence is looked at by senior leaders so that progress of different groups of learners is being monitored and action taken to address any areas of concern. More able pupils are not being challenged sufficiently. The school is taking steps to improve the outcomes for this group of pupils. The school has identified that the monitoring cycle for RE could be improved by ensuring that monitoring takes place at appropriate intervals and the findings recorded, drawn out and evaluated.

The curriculum is carefully planned and based on the Diocesan Strategy *Learning and Growing as the People of God*. All members of staff seek ways to support and enrich the curriculum and they are well supported by the RE leader. The curriculum is enhanced by a visual, auditory and kinaesthetic approach to learning. Full advantage is taken of opportunities to develop pupils' skills in speaking and listening, drama, music, art, reading and writing, mathematics and scientific enquiry. Pupils are confident in assessing their own work and others' work and can share ideas for improvement. Spiritual Inspire workshops are held yearly for each class and cover a range of topics including, Sacramental Preparation, Our Church, the Mass, Stations of the Cross. Parents are becoming ever more closely involved in this partnership with their child. Parents are asked, 'What will you do differently at home with your child as a result of this workshop.' Parental feedback from these activities is positive and more parents use the *Wednesday Word* and support their children's prayer bag use. The classrooms are excellent spaces for learning with displays to celebrate their work and faith. The children clearly enjoy their work in RE and gain enormously from it.

A particularly outstanding aspect of the Catholic life of the school is the home, school and parish partnership. The school has an exceptionally strong link with the Oratory fathers and brothers and their commitment to the school has a great impact on Catholic life, collective worship and RE. The children in Year 6 had a deep understanding of the importance of their faith and gained a lot from the witness of the members of the Oratorian community. The dedication and daily commitment of staff at all levels shows the children how to 'shine as to be a light to others'. These outstanding aspects have been used as subjects for the purpose of a survey identifying best practice in the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

In order to sustain its outstanding practices, the school has rightly identified that it needs to establish a more robust system for monitoring RE which is carefully adhered to and ensure that the most able pupils are being challenged in RE lessons.

Yours sincerely

Sister Susan Collins  
Diocesan Inspector