

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



**INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL
CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

**ST MARY'S VOLUNTARY AIDED
CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Main Street, Aston-le-Walls, NN11 6UF

DfE No: 928/3400

URN: 122040

Head Teacher: Mrs K Yuen

Chair of Governors: Mrs R Iley

Reporting Inspector: Mrs P Cotton

Associate Inspector: Mrs L Maw

Date of Inspection: 23 May 2019

Date Report Issued: 19 June 2019

Date of previous Inspection: May 2014

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and in partnership with Northamptonshire
Local Authority

Information about the school

St Mary's Catholic Primary School is a smaller than average primary school with four mixed year group classes catering for children from age 4-11. It is located in the pleasant rural village of Aston le Walls in Northamptonshire and is part of the St Thomas of Canterbury Partnership. It is the oldest Catholic primary school in the Diocese of Northampton and serves the Catholic parishes of the Sacred Heart and Our Lady, Aston le Walls and St Augustine's, Daventry. Some of the children come from a wider geographical area which includes villages and small towns in the three neighbouring counties. There are 85 children on roll of whom 52 are Catholic (61%). In a compact team of teaching and support staff, two thirds of the teaching staff and three quarters of the support staff are Catholic. Over the last 3 years, diversity has noticeably increased in the school, where now 36% of pupils have English as an additional language.

Key for Inspection Grades

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Mary's is an outstanding Catholic school. Their mission statement, "*St Mary's ... a place of educational excellence with Christ at its centre*" is evident throughout the school. The children are able to explain what it means and can see the mission in action. Pupils embrace and respect the Catholic traditions of the school and respond well in prayer and worship, as witnessed during the May procession. They talk readily and thoughtfully about their faith. There is genuine respect among the children and between adults and children. Parents responded in good numbers to the questionnaire and replies were very supportive and favourable, describing the school as being "a real family that takes care of each child uniquely" and how the children help each other to achieve their goals, commenting also that "every child is recognised as special and their development is encouraged, physical, spiritual and personal". The school supports a range of charities and is linked to a school in Sierra Leone. Pupils' attainment in RE is good and the school achieved the RE Quality Mark Gold award in February 2018.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

There have been very significant staff changes since the last Section 48 inspection in May 2014; the headteacher, who was appointed in September 2015 has developed a new team, who are all enthusiastic, recognise and appreciate each other's strengths and are very willing to share expertise. The children are very responsive to adults and the school adopts a positive approach to behaviour and discipline, fostering outstanding behaviour and attitudes. Feedback from parents, visitors, lesson observations, and learning walks testifies to this.

The headteacher has high expectations. Recruitment, historically a challenge, has been stable for some years. The head has maintained high standards of achievement and constantly seeks to develop new ideas to ensure school improvement. She is realistic in self evaluation of the strengths of the school and the senior leadership team has ensured that areas for development identified during the last inspection have been addressed and continue to be monitored.

Leaders and all staff are committed to ensuring that the Catholic ethos of the school permeates all learning and daily life. Governors are conscientious about their responsibilities and are actively involved in all aspects of school life. The school is fortunate to have an extremely supportive chaplain, who supports the spiritual and moral development of children and staff and facilitates a variety of forms of worship. The headteacher works very closely with the chaplain to enhance school liturgies as well as leading the prayer life of the school. The children have a genuine love of their school and its real family atmosphere. This strong leadership and good relationships within staff and between staff and children mean that the school has a very good capacity to sustain improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to develop practices in assessment in line with new assessment requirements, building up a wealth of evidence and moderating across cluster schools.
- Continue to build on the work of Faith Ambassadors and pupil participation, placing emphasis on pupils planning collective worship.

Catholic Life

Grade 1

Pupils are enthusiastic about their faith and take an active part in shaping activities relating to RE and worship, ranging from leading Mass and prayer both in school and in church, being proactive in planning activities to raise money for charities, and pupil voice being instrumental in developing areas for prayer and reflection, most recently the outdoor prayer area. A large group of children serve at Mass. They enjoy enrichment days working vertically in their Houses, named after saints, and produce inspiring art work which is displayed around the school. Links with *Maronka Primary Sierra Leone* involving exchange of video have facilitated the children seeing the real impact of their actions: they also know that they have funded 6 children to be educated through *Educaid*. Support for the local hospice has developed through fundraising and visits and the school organised 40 to 50 Christmas boxes, which is a considerable achievement for a school this size.

Children know how the mission statement is linked to their *Golden Rules*: to always try our best; to show respect. They recognise the good deeds of others through awarding mission leaves. Needs of others are recognised in daily prayer. New pupils are welcomed with a prayer book and cross while leavers and those involved in sacrament preparation receive a religious gift. The parish priest, who is chaplaincy lead, speaks proudly about the school and has a strong relationship with the children. He also assists the school and parents in their effective sacrament preparation programmes for First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Elected Faith Ambassadors fulfil their role conscientiously and the *Head Boy and Girl* are ambassadors for the school, meeting parents and visitors and organising clubs for younger children. Drawing on evidence from parent questionnaires, children with additional needs are well supported so they thrive in a nurturing setting. Safeguarding is strong and supported through: the framework of *Come and See*; visits about bullying and staying safe; retreats; *Journey in Love* RSE programme to be implemented in June. The chaplaincy team meet regularly to plan and promote enriching experiences and staff pray together regularly.

The school's leadership is deeply committed to the Church's mission and the Catholic Life committee meets 4 times a year and focusses on the school's effectiveness. Frequent CPD for staff, both in-house and within the diocese and partnership schools supports those who are not Catholic and many staff are actively involved in parish life, often as Eucharistic

Ministers. Regular surveys of pupils and parents assist planning for improvements and the pursuit of the “excellence” mentioned in the mission statement. Governors monitor and attend activities regularly to ensure a thorough knowledge of school practices. Leaders including governors responded to the needs of parents in setting up wrap around care.

Religious Education

Grade 1

Pupils are interested, responsive and enjoy their RE lessons, clearly demonstrated when they reported that “our teachers put time and effort into making our lessons enjoyable”. The REQM assessor supported this view, stating: “Standards are high and children are able to articulate their understanding, which at times is impressive.” Some positive and thoughtful comments include: “RE is a strongpoint of our school – it inspires you to be a better person”; “RE helps to give us a better understanding of God and life and we can become more like Jesus. This is important because when you have Jesus with you, you will be really happy”. Pupils make strong progress from their starting points in RE. Over the last three years the number of children starting in Reception below expected levels has risen; however, monitoring and tracking show that progress through the school is at least good and high in some areas. Pupils with additional needs make strong progress in relation to their starting points; barriers to learning are removed through strong support and teachers’ scaffolded tasks. A range of enrichment experiences, for example, retreats, forgiveness day, Good Samaritan day, Remembrance Day enable the children to embed their learning.

The headteacher is confident that the quality of teaching and learning across the school is at least good with many examples of outstanding practice. Teachers plan lessons to consolidate and extend their pupils’ knowledge and to ensure that RE permeates the whole curriculum, such as a literacy lesson on letter writing was based on St Paul. Planning is linked to prior learning and differentiated. Staff are on board with the new assessment format and feedback marking is used effectively with pupils responding and involved in self-assessment in most areas. Assessments are moderated across partnership schools. The quality and quantity of work in the children’s books are impressive. Evidence to support judgements: lesson observations, planning, book scrutiny, monitoring, assessment file, REQM evidence.

The teaching of RE is regarded as a priority and is well-resourced, benefitting from a significant budget allocation. Time devoted to RE teaching is compliant with diocesan guidelines. Governors conduct a monitoring week termly. Attainment is reported to governors in the headteacher’s reports and end of year analysis and data is scrutinised at Achievement and Standards committee. Governors provide challenge, but also affirmation. The RE coordinator ensures that expectations of high standards in RE are achieved, through overseeing assessment procedures, interpreting data and identifying priorities to shape the RE development plan. She works closely with the Liturgy and Worship lead, and both of them, within the chaplaincy team, review resources and materials to enhance progress and identify priorities. Chaplaincy is central to the school, living out “Christ at the centre.” The school chaplain speaks proudly of the school: “We have a flag to fly and we are not afraid to fly it!” He is highly regarded by children and staff and invests considerable time and energy to support children and staff.

Collective Worship

Grade 1

Prayer and worship are integral to the life of the school. Pupils, even the youngest, respond well to collective worship, are calm and reverent when they pray, are able to reflect and meditate thoughtfully but also sing joyfully. Close attention to the school environment, to displays and prayer spaces encourages this reverent collective worship. Faith Ambassadors support prayer life and have led assemblies and set up activities for younger classes. Pupils are well versed in formal prayers, but are also happy to formulate and articulate their own prayers. Prayer pockets have been set up to build up a pocket of each child's own prayers, which they will take with them when they leave. Prayer bags are about to be relaunched and are being refreshed and renewed. All Year 6 children have some form of leadership role, such as supporting younger ones in church, as pastoral leaders or playground buddies. Children have a good liturgical understanding of the Church's year, evidenced in books, displays and in their attitude in church. They also have a genuine respect for all faiths and enthusiastically welcome speakers and visitors, ranging from Bishop Peter to a CAFOD representative and local imam.

The range of collective worship encompasses whole school, class and key stage, Masses, feast days and celebration days, reflection and meditation. The May procession and crowning of Our Lady, by the oldest and youngest children in the school, was conducted calmly and reverently, including walking to and from the Church and processing in the school grounds, and it was clear that the children are accustomed to taking part in church services and Masses. Teachers involve children in preparing class Masses: readings, writing bidding prayers and serving. Children are confident in their contributions to prayer. Parents and parishioners are invited to participate in worship or celebration. The children made a request for a prayer garden and assisted in the design and planning of a well organised area for reflection and prayer. Collective worship is part of the staff training agenda.

Collective worship is well planned reflecting the Gospel message and follows the rhythms of the liturgical year. Staff benefit from regular inset, are knowledgeable, and there is strong support for non-Catholic staff. Leaders provide examples of good practice and model leading worship. The school chaplain regularly leads worship in school for specific events and is on hand to support staff and encourage children. Governors get involved in times of prayer and worship.

The inspectors would like to thank the headteacher, staff and children for their warm welcome and for contributing to an informative and very interesting visit.