



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MARIE'S CATHOLIC JUNIOR SCHOOL RUGBY

Inspection dates October 2007
Reporting Inspector Terence Dillon

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Catholic Junior
Age range of pupils	7 -11 years
Number on roll	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mrs Gill Spencer
School address	Merttens Drive Rugby CV22 7AF
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Parish	St Marie, Rugby
Date of previous inspection	12/13 June 2003
Headteacher	Mr Michael Floyd

Description of the school

St Marie's is Catholic junior school situated in Rugby. It has 210 pupils on roll, of whom 54.5 per cent are baptised Catholics. The majority of pupils are white European, mostly white British, and from working class backgrounds. In recent years a growing proportion of pupils have come from abroad from countries that include Portugal, Poland and Brazil. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is broadly in line with the national average. Attainment on entry varies but is broadly in line with the national average for all maintained junior schools. Four pupils have statements of educational need and 56 are on the school's list of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The level of mobility is well above the national average, with 44 per cent of new pupils joining the current Year 6 this year.

Overall effectiveness of the school

The school provides a satisfactory Catholic education for its pupils and is making sound progress to fulfilling its mission of providing the pupils with the highest standard of education and care while recognising the uniqueness of each child and enabling each to reach God-given potential in all aspects of his or her humanity. The governors are beginning to play a more effective role in supporting the headteacher and staff and acting as the school's 'critical friend' whilst the headteacher is working constructively with the co-ordinator for religious education towards strengthening the Catholic life of the school. As yet there remain some shortcomings in provision, which includes the overall quality of teaching and the opportunities for pupils to benefit from days of reflection and retreats designed to further their spiritual life.

The school provides well for collective worship and pupils have opportunities for class prayer, school Masses and the traditional prayers of the Church such as saying the Rosary in assembly. They respond well to these opportunities, praying with due reverence and being attentive in Mass. The Sacramental programme is well planned, with the parish priest being very supportive of what the school is doing. He plays a key role in the provision of worship in the school.

The headteacher is community minded and leads the school effectively in creating good links locally and beyond the immediate area. Pupils are helped to understand the importance of joining with other Catholic schools in various activities, of welcoming immigrants and of contributing to the general life of the local community. A range of local organisations make use of the school premises.

Standards of achievement in religious education are satisfactory, a judgement that is in line with that of the school, as is the overall quality of teaching and learning. The curriculum is sound and in line with the diocesan *Curriculum Strategy for Religious Education* and the most recent guidance provided by the diocese on curriculum organisation and assessment. A new and very positive feature is joint planning between teachers in the same year group, which has led to more coherence in provision.

The religious education co-ordinator provides sound leadership and manages the subject well. The recent changes in the management structure have raised her profile and improved her capacity to lead the subject. As a result she has begun to provide informed guidance to the rest of the staff, carry out some of the fundamental responsibilities of management, and monitor provision. She has yet to ensure that the findings of her evaluations are used to make the significant improvements she is committed to achieving.

The school has made sound and sometimes good improvement since the last inspection. The quality of planning among teachers is better and the school now allocates teaching time for religious education that is in line with the recommendations of the Bishops' Conference. Display around the school is distinctively Catholic and classroom focus-points are, in the main, appropriately positioned and used for prayer. The mission statement is on display. Successful efforts have been made to ensure that pupils of different abilities receive appropriate work. The quality of marking is still variable and pupils' exercise books are not always marked constructively.

The recent restructuring of management is having a significant impact on the role of the co-ordinator for religious education. Consequently, she is beginning to introduce changes that promise well for the future. She is being well supported by the headteacher and the governors, the latter benefiting from recent training and their greater understanding of the part they can play in lifting expectations in the school. The parish priest also has a clear vision as to ways in which the school can improve and adds to what appears to be a new impetus towards improving provision. If these different elements link effectively, the school could make noticeable progress.

What the school should do to improve further

In order to meet its aims the school should ensure that:

1. information gained from monitoring and evaluation is used in a constructive way to improve practice and raise standards;
2. governors develop the relatively new systems they have for monitoring the school and challenging practice so as to be able to measure the quality of the school's work and, if need be, take appropriate steps to ensure its progress
3. the quality of teaching improves through teachers:
 - having better formulated lesson objectives which lead to more challenging tasks for pupils;
 - ensuring, through end of lesson evaluations, that pupils have understood what has been taught;
 - use effective questioning techniques to challenge pupils to think about the issues they are dealing with.

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

The school's mission statement speaks of providing the pupils with the highest standard of education and care while recognising the uniqueness of each child and enabling each to reach God-given potential in all aspects of his or her humanity. The school leadership and management are making satisfactory progress towards this. With more precise self-evaluation techniques, and determination to act upon the findings, progress might be quickened.

Recent changes in the way the governors operate have meant that they are involving themselves more closely in the school's activities. Through governors being linked to various aspects of the school, information is now collected, reported back to the full governing body and properly recorded. They have undergone training in their role and responsibilities. Some governors visit the school on a regular basis and have taken opportunities to sit in classes to observe teaching and learning. They now feel more confident in giving support to the headteacher and challenging recommendations when they feel it necessary.

The headteacher is committed to ensuring that the school is a place in which staff and pupils develop their spiritual life. He joins staff in morning prayer and takes a lead in liturgy through his involvement with the choir. With the recent changes in the management structure he now has a satisfactory hold on provision in religious education and the Catholic life of the school. The joint efforts of the headteacher, the co-ordinator of religious education, the parish priest, the rest of the staff, and the governors are having a sound impact on the school's Catholic life. As yet there remain some shortcomings in provision, which includes the overall quality of teaching and the opportunities for pupils to benefit from days of reflection and retreats designed to further their spiritual life.

Collective Worship

The school provides well for collective worship and for the spiritual, moral and social development of the pupils. Pupils have opportunities for class prayers, school Masses and the traditional prayers of the Church, such as saying the Rosary in assembly. Pupils responded well in the school Mass celebrated during the inspection. Several were involved in reading the lessons and bidding prayers as well as the offertory procession. The singing of the choir was of high quality and the rest of the school joined in the hymns appropriately. Pupils listened with interest to the homily and made the responses with conviction. The school's good policy of inclusion was demonstrated by the numbers that not only went to communion but also for a blessing by the priest and the deacon. Pupils entered and left the Church in a very orderly manner.

Pupils' attention to prayer is no less obvious in the classroom. When prayers are said, at the beginning or during lessons, the great majority of pupils know how to make the sign of the cross, to recognise the importance of the lighted candle, and to pray reverently. A particularly striking example of the opportunities for collective worship was observed when the whole school joined together in praying the Rosary at an assembly. Tasteful role play highlighted the mysteries, while the knitting into the occasion of the Hail Mary in Polish by the Polish pupils re-emphasised the school's commitment to inclusion.

The sacramental programme for pupils taking First Holy Communion or being confirmed is well structured and ensures that families and children are properly prepared. The parish priest, who is very supportive of the school, is much involved. He also plays a key role in worship in school and in the parish church.

Community Cohesion

The headteacher is community minded and leads the school effectively in creating links locally and beyond. The school has good links with other local Catholic primary schools in the area. Pupils occasionally join in Mass with the nearby English Martyrs School, for example, and participate in the joint Catholic carol service each year. The school also represents the Catholic schools in the Town Centre Partnership. The choir is renowned in the local area and sings at a variety of venues and events. A strong feature of the school's endeavours is the way it has opened its arms to the new Polish community. About 20 Polish children are now in school and they have access to the Bible, Catechism and First Holy Communion in Polish.

The school contributes to a number of charities, some local such as Myton Hospice and the Sacred Heart Charity for the homeless. The school contributes beyond its Catholic connections well. Pupils make donations to St Andrew's soup kitchen and take part in the annual intercultural festival. The school is made available to the East Warwickshire Centre for Football, the Irish Dancing society and the Rugby Operatic Society. It also has fruitful links with two local secondary schools. Such activities demonstrate the school's willingness to be involved with the local community.

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Standards are average, a judgement that is in line with that of the school. Pupils have a basic knowledge of some of the Old and New Testament stories and can articulate their knowledge satisfactorily in writing and speech. They know some of the key prayers of the Church and, for example, can join in praying the Rosary. In class they rarely respond in detail orally while there is a good deal of variation across the school in pupils' work in exercise books. Their knowledge of particular incidents is often confused and in recounting the biblical stories they show some misunderstanding. They do not always appreciate the historical or religious context within which they are working. The presentation of their book work varies across the school but overall they should be taking more care.

Quality of Provision for Religious Education

Teaching and Learning

The quality of teaching and learning vary across the school, with that in the more senior classes tending to be somewhat stronger than some of that among classes in the junior section. Overall, it is satisfactory, which agrees with the school's judgement.

Teachers manage the classes well and have good relationships with the pupils. As a result, most classes have a good working atmosphere in which pupils can get on with their work, often without close supervision. Teachers in each year have begun to plan together, which is benefiting both teachers and pupils. It means that there are common approaches and joint consideration of how best to approach particular lessons. Teachers agree objectives and share these with the pupils, though they are not always precise enough to lead to appropriately challenging work. They tend to be more closely linked to process than to outcome and sometimes offer a range of objectives that lead to fragmentation in the work pupils are expected to do. Questioning is often not sufficiently challenging so that pupils are not encouraged to provide extended answers or give reasons for the answers they offer.

A major strength of the teaching is the way in which teachers provide different work suited to the different abilities of the pupils. In all classes pupils work in different ability groups on different tasks and receive support either from the teacher or a learning assistant. The work of the support assistants was of good quality. In some lessons observed, the presence of Polish speaking support was a great help to both teacher and pupil. Support teachers are well used in these instances.

Teachers mark books regularly and provide encouraging comments. They do not always indicate how work might be improved or ensure that pupils spend more time on topics on which their written work shows that they are confused.

When interviewed, pupils said they enjoyed religious education. There is little doubt that they concentrated in lessons and were keen to learn. They related well to their teachers and to their peers.

Curriculum

The school follows the Diocesan Strategy for religious education. It has also adopted, recently, the guidance provided by the Diocese on curriculum organisation and assessment. These steps have led to satisfactory provision.

Teachers have long-, mid- and short-term planning, which is guided by the religious education co-ordinator . A new and very positive feature is joint planning between teachers teaching in the same year group. This has meant that pupils of the same age are receiving a common curriculum and that in most instances teachers are sharing best practice. These features are evident in the short term planning, the areas covered and the tasks set for pupils.

Leadership and Management of Religious Education

The religious education co-ordinator provides sound leadership and manages the subject well. She has led the subject for several years, but in the recent changes in the management structure her profile has been raised, improving her capacity to lead the subject. She has begun to provide informed guidance to the rest of the staff whilst carrying out some of the fundamental responsibilities of management. She looks at teachers' plans and sits in lessons. She also uses questionnaires to test out pupils' views of religious education and collective worship. It is a strength that she collates the evidence that these produce so as to inform staff and make recommendations for improvement, though she has yet to ensure that any recommendation are carried out fully. She has the leadership and management skills to recognise that it takes time for these measures to impact fully on the quality of provision.