



Archdiocese of Birmingham

Section 48 Inspection

ST MARK'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Almond Croft, Great Barr, Birmingham, B42 1NU

Inspection date 22nd & 23rd May 2017
Reporting Inspector Rose Brookes

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	4-11 years
Number on roll	210
Appropriate authority	The Governing Body
Chair of Governors	Marie Naughton
Telephone number	0121 357 9892
E-mail address	enquiry@stmarkrc.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	16 th July 2012
DFE School Number	330/3383
Unique Reference Number	103468
Headteacher	Stephen Murphy
Previous inspection:	Outstanding
This inspection:	Outstanding

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 seven RE lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. All of these lessons were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- The inspector completed a work scrutiny and held 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 chair of governors, the RE link governor, the headteacher, the subject leader, the priest chaplain and the pupil spiritual council.
- The inspector attended whole school worship and class based worship, 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, a recording of a staff prayer service and learning journals.

Information about the school

- St Mark's Catholic Primary School is a one-form entry school situated in the parish of the Holy Name of Jesus. This parish has two Catholic primary schools (Holy Name in Sandwell, and St. Mark's in Birmingham).
- The school has a significantly higher than national average numbers of pupils from minority ethnic groups and children with English as an additional language.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils is currently 41%.
- The number of disadvantaged pupils is in line with the national average.
- The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is in line with the national average.
- Most of the children enter the school with lower than expected levels of knowledge and practice of the faith.
- There have been significant changes since the last inspection. There is a new leadership team consisting of the headteacher, deputy headteacher and two assistant headteachers. The school is part of two Catholic teaching school alliances. It works very closely within those collaborations serving two wider Catholic communities.

Main Findings

- Prayer is at the heart of this school and it has enabled the parish and school community to continually support each other through a very difficult tragedy.
- The senior leadership team and governors support and develop the staff so that this school can enable each child to reach their potential in RE and grow in faith.
- St Mark's school stands out as a beacon of light so that all who are there are inspired to realise their vocation to follow Christ as a disciple in today's world.
- St Mark's enables pupils to have the confidence to lead different forms of prayer and liturgy which the whole community participate in. This has had a very positive impact on the parish.
- One of St Mark's special strengths is the very high standard of RE and literacy. Every opportunity is used to ensure that the two subjects enhance each other.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

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

- The Catholic life of the school is outstanding.
- St Mark's is a school that is distinguished by its vibrant prayer life. The centrality of prayer to the school is the driving force behind its Catholic spirituality. Collective worship is outstanding.
- Staff spirituality is highly developed through staff retreat days and weekly prayer sessions which are led by year group teams of teachers, teachings assistants and student teachers. Consequently, the prayer life and spirituality of all staff are continually developed to a very high standard.
- Staff have confidence and expertise to pray with pupils in a variety of ways. For example, a teaching assistant organises a weekly rosary group. The confident modelling by staff when leading collective worship has impacted positively on pupils. Pupils are confident in regularly leading and taking responsibility for prayers in class, during whole school assemblies and prayer services.
- Pupils have a very good knowledge of different types of prayer; traditional, public and private. A May procession is held in the school grounds and is led by pupils; a series of Passiontide liturgies are also organised and led by pupils. Governors recognise the positive impact that this has had on the parish community.
- This continual focus on prayer has had a comforting and healing influence on the way that staff, governors, pupils and parents have supported each other through a recent tragedy in the school community.
- The school strongly lives out its Catholic mission statement 'to proudly and joyfully love, live and learn as God's children.' Stakeholders have chosen quotes from the Bible and from saints to reinforce the school mission statement. These are displayed in all areas of the school.
- In the entrance hall, there is a weekly display of pupils' high-quality writing from each year group about each of the virtues. This has contributed to the pupils' excellent level of understanding of the Catholic Schools' Pupil Profile (CSPP).
- All staff, governors and pupils have a strong sense of commitment to the Church's mission in education. They support and develop each other within a culture of outstanding care and a strong Catholic vision.
- Staff are mentored and robustly supported within St Mark's school. The headteacher and the deputy head are strong faith role models. They believe in listening to staff and supporting them in their personal and professional lives. The impact of this is that staff are happy in their vocation to teach and teaching standards in RE are excellent.
- The pupil spiritual council, which is made up of representatives from Key Stage 2, has led the design and maintenance of a beautiful prayer garden. This has enabled the whole Catholic community to prayerfully support each other to grow in faith.
- The spiritual council evaluate the Catholic life of their own school and another school within the collaboration. They discuss strengths and areas for development, as well as sharing good practice and any common goals. As a result, St Mark's has supported another school in their spiritual development.

- Class RE and prayer displays, class *love, live and learn books* and the whole school values and virtues book celebrate the rich Catholic life of the school.
- The dialogue throughout the school about the CSPP and the related virtues is rich and meaningful. Pupils are able to speak with maturity and confidence about what the virtues mean in their lives. They understand that they are called to a life of service and they have a strong sense of commitment to serve others.
- Vocation is a frequent focus in assemblies. Consequently, pupils are able to talk with clarity about how vocation means discipleship and how they need to act with responsibility and integrity in their lives.
- Teachers and teaching assistants frequently refer to vocation in lessons and this has enabled pupils to realise that they are called by God to serve each other.
- Pupils are well prepared for the sacraments of first Holy Communion and Confirmation. Staff work alongside the local clergy to catechize parents as well as the children and celebrations happen in partnership with school, home and parish. As a result, parents are given the opportunity to renew their own faith and learn how to prepare their child to receive the sacraments.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership of Catholic life and Collective Worship

- This inspection agrees with the school's self-evaluation that the leadership of Catholic life and collective worship is outstanding.
- St Mark's Catholic Primary School is strongly and passionately led by a dynamic and faith filled headteacher who is deeply committed to the Church's mission in education. He articulates a shared vision which everyone within the school family is dedicated to.
- He is supported by a highly committed senior leadership team who inspire and motivate other members of staff to quickly develop their questioning and differentiation in an outstanding way.
- Self-evaluation in all aspects of Catholic life and worship shows a coherent reflection that has involved a continual process of rigorous monitoring, searching analysis and self-challenge.
- Strong governance holds the school to account and regularly evaluates all areas of Catholic life. The governors are dedicated and active in their evaluation of the school's spirituality and promotion of Gospel values. They assess provision through learning walks, the scrutiny of pupils' work, regular link governor visits, attendance at assemblies and through the reports and discussions at meetings with the headteacher and senior teachers.
- Governors continually measure the impact of improvement planning. They ask meaningful questions which enables outstanding whole school development for Catholic life and worship.
- Governors appreciate the excellent impact that the outstanding Catholic life and worship has on the two Catholic schools within the teaching alliance and on the wider parish community. St Mark's is a school that shares its expertise in the leadership of Catholic life and collective worship.

- However, governors and senior leaders could develop further a clear strategic plan, to include succession planning for the key roles of the leadership and management of Catholic life, worship and RE.
- As a result of well targeted plans, pupils play an important role in leading the Catholic life of the school. During the inspection pupils continually led liturgies and different forms of prayer. They spoke with passion about their continual involvement in leading Catholic life. They knew that this was part of their vocation. The school stands out as excellent in the way it facilitates this.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Leadership, outcomes from and provision for religious education

- Lesson observations, work scrutinies and pupil conversations during the inspection confirmed that the school accurately judged itself to be outstanding in religious education.
- Religious education is led by the experienced deputy head teacher who has implemented thorough monitoring and evaluation procedures. All staff are robustly supported so that they can be continually developed.
- The school systematically focuses on developing future RE subject leaders from within its staff, some of whom have only been teaching for a short time.
- All teaching observed was at least good with most being outstanding. A variety of different forms of age appropriate pupil led prayer was a focus in every lesson. This enables children to know that RE lessons are distinct from other lessons. Pupils speak about how much they enjoy their RE.
- Teachers' questioning encourages the children to think at a deeper level. In all lessons observed, both staff and children made links to the Catholic Schools' Pupil Profile and vocation. This is a strong feature across the school.
- Pupils' work in RE books compares favourably with the high standards in English books.
- The standard of the pupils' RE written work is outstanding and every opportunity is utilised to allow RE and English to enhance each other.
- Quality learning experiences, which regularly use drama, art, geography, science and IT research skills, engage pupils in high quality RE learning. As a result, they are highly motivated.
- Pupils ask questions and apply what they have learnt in RE to their lives today. During the inspection Year 6 pupils were challenged to make comparisons between God's covenant in the Old Testament and Pentecost.
- Lesson planning consistently shows social, moral, vocational, spiritual and cultural aspects. In one lesson, some children said the *Our Father* in Polish. Pupils are taught to appreciate the rich diversity of cultures and languages in the school. It is clearly evident that pupils believe they are privileged to be part of such a diverse community.
The school's analysis of assessment data rightly shows that attainment in RE over time is in line with the excellent standards in the other core subjects. Any attainment gaps are quickly identified through the analysis of assessment data and teachers work hard to provide differentiated RE activities so that targeted pupils make good progress.

- The school has identified that a high proportion of pupils enter foundation stage at low levels of attainment. Analysis of progress in foundation stage shows that they quickly start to make good progress.
- Attainment is outstanding for the vast majority of pupils. By the end of both key stages, the vast majority of pupils make outstanding progress. The school now needs to ensure that outstanding progress is consistent across all groups of pupils.
- Attainment of pupils who have English as an additional language is low compared to other pupils in Foundation stage and Key Stage 1 but rapidly improves in Key Stage 2 so that pupils leave the school having reached diocesan age-related expectations in RE.
- In the future St Mark's School will need to make preparation and provision for the emerging challenges of the reduction in the school's budget so that the high standards in RE continue.

Recommendations

In order to improve the school should:

- Ensure that governors and senior leaders have clear strategic plans, including succession planning for the key roles that will include the leadership and management of Catholic life, worship and RE.
- Make preparation and provision for the emerging challenges of the reduction in the Catholic school's budget so that the high standards in RE continue.
- The school needs to ensure that outstanding progress in RE is consistent across all groups.