

Report of the Denominational (Section 48) Inspection of  
Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

***St Mary's Independent Junior and Senior School  
Cambridge***

DFES No: 873 6001

URN: SC 015290

For Catholic Diocese of East Anglia



Chair of Governors: Mr F. Morgan

Headmistress: Miss Charlotte Avery

Denominational Inspectors:

Mrs Wendy Lashmar  
Mr Damian Wallace

Dates of Inspection: 24<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> June 2014

Date and grade of previous Inspection: 5<sup>th</sup> May 2010, Grade 1

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## **Information about the school.**

St Mary's is an independent Catholic school for 658 girls aged 4 to 18, 90 are boarders and 161 attend the junior school. The school was founded by sisters from the Congregation of Jesus with an ethos based on Mary Ward's vision of the essential dignity of each person. The school is situated near the centre of Cambridge, with the junior school a short walk away in a separate building. Pupils have a range of ethnicities typical of the area with boarders mostly from overseas. 24% of students are Catholic. The school draws day pupils from a range of academic, business and professional families within a thirty-mile radius of Cambridge and serves a number of parishes including Our Lady and the English Martyrs, St Laurence's, St Philip Howard and Cambourne. 17% of students have Special Educational Needs, but none has a Statement and 8% of students have English as an additional language. 24% of teachers in the senior school and 39% of teachers in the junior school are Catholic.

## **Key grades for inspection**

1. Outstanding   2. Good   3. Requires Improvement   4. Unsatisfactory

## **Overall Effectiveness. How effective is the school in providing Catholic education.**

### **Grade 1**

St Mary's School is an outstanding Catholic school with a strong ethos which is lived out daily through Mary Ward values. The committed leadership of the Headmistress, Head of Juniors and the religious education team inspire a strong spiritual purpose and sense of social justice throughout the community. Prayer and worship is at its heart. Pupils thrive in this inclusive environment of Christian love and concern for others, as one pupil said, "You can be yourself in every way, you don't have to put on an act to fit in." Pupils are encouraged to be thinking, articulate, Christians who understand the demands of faith in action. The pupils' personal, spiritual and moral development is outstanding and this is reflected in their good behaviour, excellent relationships and positive attitudes. Pupils make very good progress in religious education.

The head of RE in the Senior School and RE Co-ordinator in the Junior School have established systematic strategies for monitoring teaching and pupils' learning. The areas of improvement from the last inspection have been addressed through financial investment, training and a diligent commitment from staff. The governors provide strong support for the Headmistress and the school's self-evaluation is accurate. Leaders have a very good overall view of strengths and direction for development. The school's development plan is detailed and gives a high priority to religious education and the Catholic life of the school. The school's capacity for continued improvement is excellent.

## **What the school needs to do to improve further?**

- Continue to develop a consistent approach to marking which is precise, linked to success criteria and encourages dialogue, enabling next steps in learning.
- Further develop systems for the moderation of assessment judgements both within school and externally to secure consistency of judgements.
- Review resources and traditions which further support and celebrate the strong Catholic identity of the school.

- **Senior School:** Develop the use of 'Theology of the Body' in order to support the ideas of 'Humane Vitae', evident in Year 10 work.  
**Junior School:** Include a target linked to the religious education development plan outcomes in the annual appraisal cycle for every member of staff.

## Outcomes for pupils.

## Grade 1

St Mary's School has a profound impact on the life and experience of its pupils. There is a real family atmosphere which centres around the heart of the Senior School, the chapel, and permeates daily life in the Junior School. Pupils have a firm sense of identity and self-worth alongside a caring concern for others. They are inspired and actively live out the core values of Mary Ward which are embedded into every aspect of school life. The faith is lived out in the prayer life of the school and in the strong sense of Catholic social justice evident in the wide ranging charitable activities such as the 'fun run', collection for Cambridge Foodbank and support for CAFOD. Depending on their age, pupils initiate and take responsibility for activities which shape the Catholic life of the school for example, Year 10 pupils run a fair trade stall. Other pupils run an environment committee which considers both global questions and school issues such as pond clearing and trialling the development of a vegetable garden. Past and present pupils accompany the diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes. Pupils' views are sought and considered through the school council and various committees. They appreciate the caring attitude of staff and know their achievements are valued. As one pupil explained, "Our teachers really support us and are willing to help, there is always someone to talk to". The highly successful individual pupil portfolios in the Junior School evidence achievements, offer challenges for pupils and provide opportunities for dialogue with staff. The intention to link these more closely with the Mary Ward values will further strengthen the Catholic life of the school.

The spiritual life of the school is closely linked to the outstanding level of pastoral care. It is clearly evident that the pupil's feel known, valued and well cared for.

**Senior school:** The lay chaplain and Director of Christian Life work hard to ensure that collective worship is embedded and contains a high level of pupil involvement. Pupils enjoy participating and frequently take roles and responsibility in planning and delivery. The Christian life of the school is further enhanced by 'Days of Reflection' which are clearly enjoyed and valued by the pupils. There are also numerous opportunities to participate in various styles of meditation and silent prayer and pupils respond with respect and a prayerful attitude.

**Junior school:** Prayer is part of the daily rhythm of school life and pupils show reverence and respect. All prayer begins with the sign of the cross and includes both traditional prayers and pupils' own words. Pupils enjoy participating and frequently take roles of responsibility in worship presentation. A good example of this is the dramatised Stations of the Cross liturgy which takes place in Lent. Worship is enriched by outstanding singing. A lunchtime reflection group is regularly well attended and parents have their own school prayer group. Collective worship reflects the liturgical year, but assemblies are also based on 'Word of the Week' which takes a Mary Ward value for reflection and pupils rise to the challenge of putting these values into action.

**Senior school:** St Mary's enjoys superb A Level and GCSE results. This is down to the outstanding and engaging teaching. An incredible 'buzz' of learning was observed in all

lessons. These were challenging and revealed the excellent knowledge of the pupils who were encouraged to talk, discuss and share their ideas. The teachers were excellent at assessing the understanding of the pupils and moving them on to the next level. A high level of differentiated material was utilized for identified EAL (English as an Additional Language) and SEN (Special Educational Needs) pupils.

**Junior school:** Lessons observed were outstanding, pupils were engaged and challenged in imaginative ways through discussion, art and drama. Pupils' comments show they enjoy religious education, for example, "I like being creative in RE because it helps you understand and remember." Lessons develop pupils' listening and reflection skills and encourage them to debate the significance of what they have learned for their own lives. Year 6 pupils explained, "RE makes you more open and to reflect on things. RE shows you your true self – it shows you are unique and God's special creation." RE books exemplify evidence of good progress made throughout the year and from year to year. They are well presented with helpful marking which stimulates a response and often encourages further research.

## **Leaders and Managers.**

## **Grade 1**

School leaders and those with a responsibility for Religious Education share a strong vision of the Catholic nature of education with the Mary Ward values as the vehicle for delivering the Catholic ethos. Together with the governors, they are deeply committed to promoting the Catholic life of the school. The Headmistress communicates this vision clearly and enthusiastically to the school community and leads by example. Leaders have set up systems to review and evaluate the school's mission in education which informs future development. Staff are encouraged to participate in the religious life of the school and whole school training is provided, for example on Catholic identity and mission with sessions which reflect on integrity, dignity, truth and vocation. Induction training for new staff includes the Catholic ethos, Mary Ward values and practical aspects of the Catholic faith. The appointment of a part-time Lay Chaplain for the Senior School and the regular support of Fr. Henry in the Junior school have been significant. The Head of RE has also taken on a new role as Director of Christian life and has specific responsibility for developing and promoting the Catholic ethos. Governors provide enthusiastic challenge and support, utilising individual expertise. They are well informed about the work of the school through the Headmistress's report. They fulfil their statutory and canonical responsibilities. Governors are visible in the school community. They regularly attend parents' events and celebrations and are involved in monitoring activities and meetings. Fr Peter Leeming meets with the Headmistress monthly to discuss ethos and chaplaincy. Governors ensure the Headmistress has an annual performance management target focussed on Catholic ethos.

The Head of RE in the Senior School and the RE Co-ordinator in the Junior School work closely together to ensure the continuity of RE throughout the school. Together they ensure that RE has a high profile. Their dedication and hard work is appreciated by the teams they lead. Together with the Chaplain they provide opportunities for pupils to grow their relationship with Christ and to help them understand the demands of religious commitment in everyday life. A number of staff are actively involved in their parish and are excellent role models for their pupils. There are systems for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress and the provision for RE. This gives direction to the development plan which has a high profile in whole school improvement. The subject is well resourced and the budget provided is in line with that given to other core subjects.

**Senior School:** The Director of Christian Life has worked hard to ensure that the use of 'Examen' forms the basis of the prayer life at St Mary's. This prayer follows a cycle and includes reflections for past pupils and a wide range of other issues. This approach emphasises that once a member of St Mary's you are always part of that family. The local Church, Our Lady and the English Martyrs, and the school work very closely together. The School runs the Confirmation programme and the Church ended its Corpus Christi procession in the school grounds. In ways like this the school follows and embraces the Church's year. Spirituality and ethos of the school is supported and succeeds as a result of the involvement of many key staff around the school, including the Heads of Year.

**Junior School:** Prayer and worship are at the centre of school life and a key part of school celebrations. Prayer opportunities for staff, pupils and parents encourage participation and inclusion. Worship is well planned and follows the liturgical year. The school provides a 1<sup>st</sup> Holy Communion programme for the Catholic pupils.

**Senior School:** The excellent relationships between staff and pupils allowed the lessons observed to flow with an air of respect and co-operation. It is clear that the school places great value on the importance of RE, not only through financial commitment, but also the high calibre of staff who teach it. A key step in the future will be the consistent application of the RE marking policy across the department. A written dialogue should exist with the marking of key pieces to ensure that pupils know where they are in their learning and understand how to make the next step.

**Junior school:** RE lessons are excellent and consistency is maintained by having one teacher throughout the school. They are imaginative and use a variety of teaching and learning styles which inspire pupils and generate enthusiasm. For example, freeze-frame drama was used effectively in a lesson to show how Jesus worked through the actions of the Apostles in the early church. Demonstrations, high quality questions and discussions, art and visual presentations are also used effectively to motivate pupils. Plans are thorough and support class teachers in their follow up sessions, reinforcing the importance of RE and whole staff involvement. Lessons end with prayer or reflection, emphasising RE as a special time. Marking is matched to targets given and pupils are challenged and expected to respond. In explaining the use of a vocabulary 'box' for specific religious vocabulary one pupil said, "It is pointless if you don't understand what you are writing, sometimes we are given extra things to research, like miracles." A tracking system based on the *National Levels of Attainment* has been developed and progress is monitored termly. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their own progress.

**Senior School:** The Head of RE has worked hard to ensure that there is a broad and varied curriculum which challenges the pupils' written and oral skills. The subject is rightly regarded as a key academic subject within the school. As a result of this approach it is clear that St Mary's pupils are great thinkers, orators and equally can put their ideas and understanding on paper with due skill.

**Junior School:** The quality of the curriculum is very good and meets the needs of all learners. It fulfils the requirements of the Bishops' Conference and 10% of time is used for religious education following 'The Way, The Truth, and The Life'. This provides the basis for Catholic teaching together with 'Godly Play' and CAFOD materials. Religious education is enhanced through links with other curriculum areas, engaging displays and quality prayer

tables in every classroom. Scripture is used effectively in lessons, for example a lesson showing how beliefs have shaped the way some people have led their lives included a letter of St. Paul. Other world faiths are studied. The RE curriculum contributes well to the excellent spiritual and moral development of the pupils.

The inspectors wish to thank the Headmistress, Head of Juniors and all members of the school community for their very warm welcome, hospitality and for contributing to a very interesting visit.

# EAST ANGLIA DIOCESAN SCHOOLS' SERVICE



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## Letter to pupils explaining the findings from the Diocesan Inspection

**29<sup>th</sup> August 2014**

Dear Pupils,

We would like to thank you for your warm welcome and hospitality when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed our time with you. A particular thank you goes to all the pupils who answered our questions and shared their work with such enthusiasm, we were very interested in your views. We enjoyed being present at your assemblies, prayer times and many of your Religious Education lessons. Well done, everyone.

Here are some things we especially liked:

- Your strong sense of fairness and social justice lived out in your dedication to Mary Ward values.
- The strong Catholic ethos of your school which offers you a variety of opportunities for prayer and worship.
- The excellent relationships you have with each other and with the adults in school, making yours a very caring community.
- The school provides excellent opportunities for you to develop personally, spiritually and morally.

We have asked your teachers and governors to continue to improve the marking of your RE work so that you know precisely how well you have done, what you need to do to improve and to give you the chance to respond. We have also asked your teachers to make sure that when you are assessed they all agree on the standards you have achieved so they can track your progress carefully and continue to help you achieve well. We want your school to celebrate its strong Catholic identity by making sure good use is made of Catholic resources and traditions.

Thank you again for your help. We wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs J.W. Lashmar  
Lead Diocesan Inspector

Mr D. Wallace  
Diocesan Inspector