

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

***St Mary's Catholic primary School***

DFES No: 935 3335

URN: 124780

For Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

Chair of Governors: Mr R. Wright

Headteacher: Ms V. Short

Denominational Inspector:

Mrs M. Betts

Dates of Inspection: 1<sup>st</sup> November 2011

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## **DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL**

St Mary's Catholic School is an average size primary school for pupils from 4 to 11 years. It is maintained by Suffolk Education Authority. The school is situated in the parish of Our Lady Star of the Sea but pupils also come from the neighbouring parishes and surrounding areas. There are 199 pupils on roll, over two thirds (68%) of whom are Catholic. Two thirds (67%) of teachers are Catholic. Pupils come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and many have non-British heritages. An increasing number of children speak English as an additional language. The proportion of children entitled to free school meals is below the national average. The school has gained an award for economic sustainability.

## **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL AS A CATHOLIC SCHOOL.**

### **Grade: 2**

St Mary's School is a good Catholic school with outstanding features. The strong Catholic identity permeates the school's daily life. The committed leadership of the headteacher is instrumental in inspiring a strongly inclusive and caring environment which promotes fully pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This reflects in their good behaviour and positive attitudes to faith awareness and learning. Relationships within the school are very good and reflect Christian love and concern for others. Pupils are proud of their school describing it as a place where "we all work together as a team". Prayer and worship are of pivotal importance in the school's life. The RE subject leader ensures that religious education (RE) has a high profile in the school and a good standard is achieved by pupils.

The headteacher and RE subject leader have a good overall view of the school's strengths and development needs gained through their regular monitoring of religious education. This represents very good progress since the last inspection. They have a clear vision for the future which includes plans for developing an outside prayer garden and a complete evaluation of the Catholic dimension of the school. Whole school worship is evaluated by governors. There are plans for further monitoring of classroom worship as well as governor involvement in evaluating RE teaching and learning. The school regularly seeks the views of staff and parents with questions specifically related to the pastoral care of the children. Views of the pupils are sought through the school council. All staff are committed to the success of the school and are willing to improve their skills through training. The school has a good capacity to continue to improve.

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

- Consistently provide challenging activities to more able pupils and, when appropriate, linking these to achieving their next target level.
- Involve pupils more in planning and presenting their own acts of worship.
- Further develop religious education marking procedures so that pupils have the opportunity to respond to extension questions suggested and so improve their work.

### **PUPILS. How good are outcomes for pupils, taking account of variations between different groups.**

#### **Grade 1**

The pupils benefit very well from the Catholic life of the school. They value the real sense of community created within the school and especially enjoy celebrating their successes and achievements with each other. The school mission statement is understood by pupils who try to achieve the values and expectations that underpin it. Pupils display respect towards each

other and to adults. They praise the friendly, caring attitude of the teachers who they say are helpful and kind and “full of forgiveness and understanding”. They are happy to talk about God. Pupils undertake responsibilities such as leading lunchtime clubs and singing, and show concern for others especially younger children to whom they act as play buddies. Their ideas are sought and taken into account through the School Council. They are being consulted at all stages in the planning for the prayer garden. The school promotes the well-being of pupils with a vast range of different needs.

Pupils respond very well to the school’s prayer and worship life. Worship engages and stimulates pupils and they participate with respect. Children say that worship and prayer makes them think harder about moral and religious issues. They understand the importance of prayer explaining that it is a valuable time to be with God and that it helps them to think more deeply about their daily actions. Pupils have opportunities to create their own prayers and pray their own intentions. In one session observed pupils sensitively said their own sorry as well as thank you prayers. Most pupils enjoy worship especially when led by a class and when awards are distributed. Pupils enjoy the singing of hymns and the choir’s contribution is of a high quality. Worship contributes extremely well to pupils’ spiritual and moral development.

Pupils make good progress in religious literacy during their time in school. They achieve age appropriate levels of attainment. They are developing a sound knowledge of the Catholic faith and the life of Jesus. From the early years pupils are encouraged to express their own ideas and ask pertinent questions. Most pupils enjoy their religious education lessons especially those linked to practical activities and illustrating work. Older pupils described discussing various views and opinions as one of the most interesting aspects of RE learning. Pupils work together very well. The pupils’ RE books are well presented and evidence a good coverage of the curriculum.

### **LEADERS AND MANAGERS. How effective are leaders and managers in developing the Catholic life of the school? Grade 1**

The headteacher is deeply committed to promoting the Catholic life of the school and her vision is leading to improving and empowering the whole school community. The mission statement pervades all the activities and work of the school and the gospel values are made explicit to pupils especially within the school prayer which children know well. Attractive and colourful displays around school confirm the Catholic identity. Leadership promotes pupils’ spiritual and moral development very well. The school also offers many varied opportunities for pupils to experience the Catholic traditions, examples being taking part in the Walsingham pilgrimage and in the May procession. The school has good links with parents who appreciate the care given to their children. There are strong and improving links with the parish through the involvement of the parish priest and parishioners with the school. Photographs of pupils’ activities are displayed in both local churches.

The religious education subject leader, with strong support from the headteacher, ensures this subject has a high profile across the school and is evaluated thoroughly. A clear direction for improvement has been set. Religious education is monitored regularly and formal feedback provided to the staff. The RE subject leader supports and guides staff very well and leads regular training. She models RE lessons for less experienced staff. Before a new topic begins she encourages the whole staff to think about their personal response to the theme and also leads a whole school introductory assembly. The budget provided is in line with that given to other core subjects. Religious education is well resourced.

Governors fulfil their statutory and canonical responsibilities. They are very supportive and well informed about the work and monitoring outcomes of the school through the

headteacher's and subject leader's reports. Many governors visit the school regularly, and are a visible presence daily around the school. They join trips and other curriculum activities. They monitor whole school worship and feedback their evaluations to the rest of the governing body.

The school is a very welcoming and inclusive community where all members are respected and valued. Non-Catholic pupils are fully involved in the school's life. Pupils and their families from different cultures are respected and this diversity is recognised and celebrated using pupils' and parents' contributions. Pupils show compassion for others by their fund-raising for local, national and international charities including their support for a child in Zambia. The school choir attends local community events such as singing at the town's Churches Together services and to the local elderly. Provision for spiritual development effectively provides opportunities for pupils to link the learning with their own experiences. The school participates with parishioners and parents to share celebrations and other events. Pupils learn about other world faiths and it is planned for parents and children from other religions to contribute to the learning.

## **PROVISION. How effective is the provision for Catholic education: Grade 2**

Worship, prayer and Holy Mass are central to the life of the school community. Worship is well planned using visual presentations, bible stories, drama, and music to promote pupils' interest and develop their thinking. A quiet calm reflective atmosphere is created and well chosen hymns enrich the themes. The attractive prayer tables in each classroom provide a clear focus. The parish priest makes a significant contribution to the sacramental life of the school and is developing his chaplaincy role with staff. An opportunity for individual confession for the older children is provided during Advent and Lent. Voluntary prayer opportunities are also provided in these two seasons, these taking place in the sacred space in the library. Mass is celebrated with the whole school on special days in both the school and the church. Pupils, twice a year, lead and present class assemblies. Parents and parishioners are invited to these and to the Holy Masses. Attendance is high.

The quality of religious education lessons overall is good with some outstanding features being observed. Teachers' knowledge is sound. Where lessons are best visual presentations and artefacts are used; the teachers' questioning develops pupils' thoughts; clear success criteria is made explicit to the pupils; challenging tasks are given to the more able; and practical motivating tasks are undertaken by the children. In one class pupils devised a song to demonstrate ways of showing God's light to others and will share it in assembly. Pupils of all abilities made progress with extra support given if needed. Parents receive regular information relating to the RE topic and how they can help with this at home.

Assessments of pupils' work are undertaken and linked to the National RE Levels of Attainment. These are recorded and tracked. Work is moderated to give consistency of standards. Marking gives appropriate praise and comments and often suggests questions to extend the learning. In one class pupils were given opportunities to make these improvements but this practice is not consistent throughout the school.

The quality of the curriculum is good, and suitable for the age and abilities of the learners. It fulfils the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. 10% of curriculum time is used for religious education following the "Here I Am" programme. Scripture is used well during teaching. In one class, young children were researching Jesus' baptism story using adult Bibles. The parish priest and the church are used as extra resources for RE learning. Pupils are encouraged to become aware of the demands of religious commitment. Religious education is linked to other curriculum areas particularly to Literacy, Drama, craft, painting and music making and occasionally to information and communication technology (ICT).

One class observed researched the internet for tea light designs before making their own from clay. Pupils are invited to contribute their own artefacts and photographs to aid learning as evidenced during the Baptism topic. Other faiths are studied. The curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Very attractive and colourful religious education displays around school give added value to this core subject.

The inspector wishes to thank the headteacher, staff and children for their very warm welcome and for contributing to her very enjoyable and interesting visit.

## EAST ANGLIA DIOCESAN SCHOOLS' SERVICE



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### **Letter to pupils explaining the findings from the diocesan inspection.**

3<sup>rd</sup> November 2011

Dear Pupils

#### **Diocesan Inspection of St Mary's Catholic Primary School.**

Thank you for making me so welcome at your school. Thank you to all those pupils who spoke to me especially the group from Year 6. I was very interested in your views of your school. I enjoyed being present at Reception, Year 2, Year 4 and Year 6 Religious Education lessons. It was a great privilege for me to share in your All Saints' Holy Mass and to end my day with a quiet reflection and prayer time with Year 5 children. Well done to everyone involved.

Here are some of the things I especially liked:

- The strong Catholic ethos of your school that provides many opportunities for prayer, worship and Holy Mass.
- You are friendly and considerate to each other and are well cared for by your teachers.
- The school provides very good opportunities for you to develop personally, spiritually and morally.

I have asked your teachers to consider when they are planning your lessons to check that you are taught skills and knowledge needed to achieve the next RE level. I think you would learn from planning and preparing more of your own acts of worship. I have also asked that you are given time to respond to your teachers' marking of your RE work.

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

Yours sincerely

Mrs M. Betts  
Diocesan Inspector