

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

***St Mark's Catholic Primary School***

DFES No: 935/3342  
URN: 124786

For Catholic Diocese of East Anglia



Chair of Governors: Mrs Lindsay Francis

Headteacher: Mrs Theresa Barker

Denominational Inspector:

Mrs Marion Betts

Dates of Inspection: 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2015

Date and grade of previous inspection: February 2008. Grade 1

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## **DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL**

St Mark's Catholic Primary School is an average size school for pupils aged from 4 to 11 years. It has 211 pupils on roll, 76% of whom are baptised Catholic. The majority of pupils are from the parish of St Mark's but the school also serves the Catholic parishes of Felixstowe and Hadleigh. Pupils come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds and a variety of nationalities. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is slightly below average. 39% of teachers and half the support staff is Catholic. The school was the first school in Suffolk to achieve the prestigious NACE (National Association for Able Children in Education) award in December 2014.

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

### **Grade: 1**

St Mark's School is an outstanding Catholic school. The extremely strong Catholic identity permeates the school's daily life. This very effectively promotes pupils' excellent behaviour, respect and care for each other and positive attitudes to their learning. Gospel values linked both to Scripture and to Saints, are taught. Pupils strive to achieve these in their lives, actions and decisions. As a result pupils' personal, spiritual and moral development is outstanding. The committed leadership of the headteacher is instrumental in very effectively developing the school's Catholic identity; in inspiring and empowering staff to fully fulfil their roles; and in powerfully fostering pupils' growing awareness of their Catholic faith and their understanding of how to live this out in their lives. The governors are equally dedicated to promoting and sustaining the school's high quality Catholic education. Prayer, worship and sacramental celebration are of pivotal importance in the school's life. The Catholic ethos is tangible around school with many vibrant and attractive Catholic and religious education displays. Staff are committed to the very high profile given to religious education (RE) and thus ensure pupils' high standard of RE work and the very good progress they make throughout their school life. One pupil explained "I like RE because I love Jesus".

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

- Continue to increase pupils' involvement in planning worship by providing opportunities for groups of pupils to prepare and present short acts of worship within their class setting.

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

#### **Grade 1**

The extent to which pupils benefit from the school's Catholic life is outstanding. They know and understand the school's values and that these are rooted in the teachings of Jesus. They strive to achieve them in all areas of their school life. Through this, pupils develop an understanding of forgiveness as well as a readiness to celebrate and enjoy the wide range of experiences that the school offers them. Pupils highly value these enrichment opportunities and the encouragement they are given to develop their individual skills and talents. Pupils are proud of their school and show respect and concern for the well-being of others as demonstrated by the older children patiently supporting the younger ones as they learnt to use their rosary during the lunchtime prayer session. Pupils are regularly given opportunities to express their own views and ideas and are confident that these are followed up and action taken. One example of this being that new older pupils are now given intense signing tutoring so becoming familiar and confident with this activity more quickly. Pupils' achievements are recognised and valued. Pupils praise the friendly, caring attitude of the

teachers and teaching assistants who listen to them, help solve any problems and make learning fun.

All pupils respond extremely well to worship, prayer and meditation. They participate respectfully and with ease. Pupils appreciate the benefit of their daily opportunities for quiet reflection and prayer. They use their "Talk to Jesus" books appropriately and reverently. Pupils greatly enjoy worship. One pupil said "The assemblies make me happy". Pupils' high quality and enthusiastic singing enhances their worship. Leaders emphasise the practical ways the message could be acted upon. Hence worship inspires pupils to think deeply and to give heartfelt responses. Their own prayers are displayed and valued. Pupils have a good understanding of the liturgical year and enjoy experiencing its celebrations. The new pupil mission group have prepared acts of worship and pupils enjoy taking an active part in the delivery of daily assemblies. During the worship observed, many pupils participated by demonstrating how they used their hands for God's glory. Pupils also share in the presentation of Mass. Worship contributes very well to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

Pupils know RE is regarded as important. Through it they develop a sound knowledge of the Catholic faith. Their standard of work is high and in line with or above that of other core subjects. All pupils make very good progress throughout their time in the school with many exceeding the national expectations. Pupils willingly tackle challenging activities and one pupil said "We really have to think in RE". Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons immensely, especially when given practical tasks such as the young pupils having to find examples of different colours to be found within God's creation. Pupils are fully engaged during RE lessons. Their books are very well presented. Their responses in class and RE books show evidence of their growing depth and maturity of thought. They appreciate collaborative work when they share their ideas with each other. For example, pupils have worked together to relay by poster or powerpoint presentation, the work of charitable organisations who protect animals and the environment.

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

### **Grade 1**

The leadership of the school's Catholic life is outstanding. The headteacher, senior leadership team and governors are deeply committed to promoting and constantly developing the Catholic life of the school and plan strategically to achieve this. A clear powerful vision is effectively demonstrated by the richness of pupils' Catholic life experiences; the strong spiritual purpose throughout the school; by the high quality education provided; and by the strong encouragement given to pupils to respond and commit to Catholic values. The vibrant educational environment very effectively promotes the Catholic ethos of care and celebration of the faith. The school is a welcoming inclusive community where all members are respected and highly valued. Staff and pupils' well-being is of high priority to the school leadership. Governors are very supportive and regularly review the work of the school. Through rigorous and regular monitoring activities the leadership have a good overall view of the school's strengths. These also provide a firm basis for future developments. Staff well-being and pupils' pastoral care have a high priority in the school. The school works in partnership with parents who respond extremely positively to the regular questionnaires. Parents mentioned the caring family atmosphere of the school and the high quality of teaching. Many charities, both local and global, are supported by the staff, parents and pupils, and they also raise funds for two African schools. The school has very strong links with the parish through the close involvement and regular input of the parish priest, who makes a valuable contribution towards the pupils' spiritual journey. Other

parishioners also support the school in a variety of areas. Very attractive RE displays and good quality artefacts around the school confirm the Catholic identity.

Religious education is extremely well supported by the school leadership. This ensures this subject has a very high profile in line with or above other core subjects. All aspects of religious education teaching and learning are monitored rigorously and a clear direction for improvement has been set. The school has not remained complacent since the last inspection, but has continued to further develop pupils' understanding of Catholic life and religious education. The improvement issue from the last Diocesan inspection has been fully completed. Pupils are assessed regularly and pupil progress is tracked with appropriate support put into place when needed. The RE governor is committed to her role and challenges the school leadership to maintain and develop their RE practices. She regularly reviews the pupil achievement data, pupil perception outcomes, planned developments, RE monitoring, and ensures that appropriate actions are taken. She leads staff training and provides firm support and guidance. The RE budget is generous and in line with that given to other core subjects. Parents receive regular newsletters explaining their child's RE learning and how they can support this at home. Religious education is very well resourced. Visitors including clergy are invited to share their expertise.

### **PROVISION. How effective is the provision for Catholic education: Grade 1**

Worship, Mass and prayer are central in the school's life. Pupils' liturgical formation is extremely well planned to ensure the widest possible experiences of the richness of the Catholic tradition of prayer and worship. For example, there is a fully equipped child-sized church in the school grounds where children freely act out the services and place their prayers on the altar. Each child is provided with a single decade rosary to pray with. The worship observed very effectively used visual presentation, pupils' individual skills and talents, drama, signed liturgical greetings and song to convey the gospel message and develop pupils' thinking and responses. Worship themes are linked to the forthcoming gospel reading and to other scripture or quotes from saints. A calm reflective atmosphere is created daily for "Start the day" prayers and reflections. Visits greatly enhance pupils' worship experience and three older classes visited the local Carmelite community at Quidenham joining them for worship and talking to the nuns about their vocation and lives. The parish priest makes a significant contribution to the sacramental life of the school. Reconciliation services take place at key times of the liturgical year.

The quality of religious education lessons overall is outstanding. Teaching very effectively uses creative planning and delivery; lively pace; open and challenging questioning; and talking partners to motivate and interest pupils, inspiring them to work with enthusiasm and independence. Tasks are mainly open-ended so that all pupils make good progress. Pupils are encouraged to make a personal response to their learning. For example, in a lesson that focused on the Pope's latest encyclical letter on the environment, and after discussing how God must feel when he sees how we are harming the planet, pupils were enthusiastic to suggest ways each person can do their part to help remedy this. Teachers demonstrate sound subject knowledge and are supported by skilled assistants. Marking is thorough with appropriate praise and constructive feedback that effectively enable pupils to extend their learning.

The quality of the religious education curriculum is outstanding. It meets all requirements of the Bishop's Conference. At least 10% of curriculum time is used for religious education following "The Way, the Truth and the Life" programme with additional material linked to saints. Scripture is linked very well to the learning. The school has fully embraced the Bishop's evangelisation initiative "Fishers of Men". Following work with this theme, pupils

have written and displayed on fish shapes both linked quotes from the Bible and Saints as well as their individual promised responses. Other faiths are studied twice a year. Tasks often have creative and dynamic links with other curriculum subjects for example Art, Drama, History, Music, ICT, and Literacy. Pupils are strongly encouraged to become aware of the demands of religious commitment and hence the curriculum contributes very well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Attractive religious education displays, complementing the imaginative, creative classroom environments, give added value to this core subject.



## **EAST ANGLIA DIOCESAN SCHOOLS' SERVICE**

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

25<sup>th</sup> September 2015

Dear Pupils

#### **Diocesan Inspection of St Mark'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 those from the Mission Group. I was very interested in your views of your school. I enjoyed being present at your assembly and at each class' Religious Education lesson. 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 a wide range of prayer and worship activities.
- 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.
- Teachers present your RE lessons in creative and thought-provoking ways that leads you to really enjoy the learning.

After the excellent example from the Mission Group of planning and presenting worship, I have asked your teachers to consider giving all the older children opportunities to plan and lead in small groups their class worship sessions. Your teachers of the younger children may devise ways in which they also may take an increased role in presenting their class worship.

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

Yours sincerely

Mrs Marion Betts  
Diocesan Inspector