



# Archdiocese of Birmingham

## Section 48 Inspection

### THE ABBEY CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Sutton Road, Erdington, Birmingham B23 6QL

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Inspection date 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> December 2017

Reporting Inspector Mr T J Hughes  
Assistant Inspector Mrs L Bury

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Type of School	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	4 – 11 years
Number on roll	418
Appropriate authority	The Governing Body
Chair of Governors	Tracy Smith
Telephone number	0121 373 1793
E-mail address	a.jackson@abbeyrc.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	September 2012
DFE School Number	330/3318
Unique Reference Number	103422

**Head Teacher** **Ms. J A Tallon**

Previous inspection: Outstanding

This inspection: Outstanding

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DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



## Evidence

- The inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors.
- 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 inspectors observed teaching across 12 RE lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Some of these lesson observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher, the RE subject leader and members of the senior leadership team.
- The inspectors 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, governors, the headteacher, senior teachers, the RE subject leader, the parish priest, and class teachers.
- The inspectors attended the celebration of Mass, assembly and collective worship and 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 inspectors reviewed a range of documents including the school's self evaluation, data about pupils' attainment and progress, the inspection data summary report, the school improvement plan, teachers' planning, and pupils' work.

## Information about the school

- The school is situated in the parish of St Thomas and Edmund of Campion (known as The Abbey) in Erdington, North Birmingham.
- The percentage of pupils from ethnic minority origins is in line with the national average.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils is currently 91%.
- The number of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average.
- The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with the national average.
- Attainment on entry is below national expectations.

## Main Findings

- At The Abbey Catholic Primary School the Catholic life and collective worship are outstanding.
- Religious education is good and is rapidly improving towards outstanding.
- Pupils are faithful, knowledgeable and honest. They take a lead in promoting the mission of the school.
- Relationships and behaviour and the level of care for all in the school are outstanding.
- Leadership at all levels is outstanding.
- The strength of the staff team is demonstrated by the way in which they tackle new challenges and make a success of new initiatives for the benefit of the pupils.
- Most pupils enter school with below average starting points and make very good overall progress in attainment of religious education.
- The pupils' response to all aspects of faith is sincere, thoughtful and mature.
- The teaching and learning in RE is good and a significant proportion is outstanding.

- The systems of mentoring and coaching to improve the quality of teaching in RE are very effective.
- The RE curriculum is inspirational; it is designed to enhance the pupils' skills and provide experiences to strengthen the depth of their spiritual thinking.
- Every day collective worship unites the school family in their faith.
- Staff and pupils are confident and comfortable in praying together in a wide variety of settings around the school.
- The headteacher lives out her role as spiritual director with dynamism. She engenders leadership at all levels for the greater realisation of the school mission.
- The RE subject leader utilises his personal faith to furnish the pupils with varied and practical ways in which they can go forth and make the world a better place.
- The skilful governing body demonstrate strong commitment to the school. They confidently challenge and support the headteacher and staff, navigating their responsibilities with wisdom to sustain the strength of the school.
- In a small minority of lessons, teachers need to make clearer to pupils exactly what their learning outcomes should be. Tasks should then be planned to support achievement for all within the time available.
- The moderation of pupils' work should be extended to help the school confirm or improve its standards in RE.

## 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.
- The school's mission statement, which was composed by a pupil, reflects each person's desire to be united in God's love as they work together –  
*'Follow in the footsteps of Jesus with our friends, family and parish.'*
- All at the school believe that they must go out into the world and spread God's message.
- The dignity of each pupil is the priority of the school. As a result, the school provides excellent opportunities for each child to learn, develop, grow and achieve.
- Since the last inspection there has been a notable investment of time and energy to monitor and improve the Catholic life of the school.
- Each member of staff plays a part in creating and maintaining the school's mission. As a result, the experiences for all children are spiritually rich and supportive, helping the pupils, whatever their needs, to thrive and realise success in all aspects of life.
- The school leaders have a vision for the developing enrichment of the Catholic life of the school.
- The governors show great determination in protecting the spirituality of the school, recognising that the uniqueness of each child is the greatest strength of the community.
- The headteacher passionately lives out her vocation to lead a Catholic community. She has a single-minded, yet all-encompassing, aim to make God's love a reality for every pupil.
- In recent years the headteacher has taken the school on a journey of growth and improvement. With her compassion and belief she has supported all on that journey, prompting and challenging where necessary.

- The headteacher has presided over the raising of the profile of the Catholic mission, modelled liturgy practices for colleagues, enhanced the school environment, increasing the number of opportunities for pupils to pray around school and provided a wealth of ideas that inspire reflection.
- The school leaders provide strong and positive role models in terms of faith and commitment. They freely share their own faith experiences with the pupils to promote Gospel values. One example of this has been how members of staff have volunteered at a homeless centre; in turn enlightening the pupils about the challenges faced by disadvantaged people in the community.
- There has been an effective programme of training in the presentation of spiritual themes for all staff, which has improved the confidence of teachers in making the mission statement alive for their pupils.
- When evaluating the Catholic life of the school the governors are strong and clear thinking. They are able to make good use of the range of skills they possess as a body and draw on a rich well of faith.
- The governors are fully involved in monitoring the Catholic life. They have systematically undertaken learning walks, work scrutinies and the completion of audits for all aspects of Catholic life provision. As a result of their involvement, they have been able to influence developments in the ethos of the community.
- The governors are sympathetic and realistic to the needs of all and understand their role in maintaining the momentum of the school to improve.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils entering Reception class has decreased recently. The senior staff and governors are looking at this carefully and are taking steps to ensure that all new parents are informed and supported as their children embrace the mission of the school.
- The outstanding collective worship is central to the personal growth of every member of the school family.
- Mass is celebrated by the parish priest each week in the church. This celebration is sacred, joyous and carefully planned by the staff and pupils. Members of the parish feel their own faith is strengthened by joining the pupils in worship.
- Parents and governors attend the school Masses and further support the prayer life of the pupils by attending the worship at the weekend in the parish church. As a result, the pupils embrace the celebration of Mass with reverence and commitment. In turn, the programme for sacramental celebration has strengthened and Mass attendance for pupils has improved.
- The headteacher and other senior staff lead a Gospel assembly each week where they reflect on aspects of the liturgical year, explore contemporary themes about faith in their lives and promote the virtues of the Catholic Schools' Pupil Profile.
- The working week for the staff begins with a prayer service led each time by a different team member. Each leader of the service brings their own approach to prayer to the hearts and minds of their colleagues.
- Pupils are always highly reverent and engaged during assembly and liturgy. They are exposed to and have a thorough knowledge of a variety of prayer experiences.
- Children are familiar with prayer being led by many different individuals. Increasingly, the pupils are involved in planning and delivering liturgies. The Chaplaincy team supports those who are less confident about prayer and helps other pupils throughout the school to plan their own liturgies. As a

result, the pupils are confident in presenting and sharing their faith through prayer.

- Prayer services outdoors are particularly rich and help the pupils connect with the gift of creation and appreciate the school environment, which has been enhanced to compliment the spiritual depth of the school.
- There is planned and regular monitoring of collective worship, which includes pupil, staff and governor evaluations. The staff and pupils use a 'what went well' and 'even better if' model when monitoring collective worship. The actions taken as a result of this monitoring have had an impact. For example, during all prayer times the correct liturgical cloths, candles and religious icons and artefacts are used to focus the hearts and minds of the pupils. Also the 'Go Forth Message' has been enhanced and pupils are given a 'Go Forth' sticker after Mass to remind them to take the Gospel message out in to the world.
- The pupils' responses to the Catholic life experience provided are outstanding. The pupils display very good levels of growing spiritual maturity. They are willing to discuss their faith and consider the impact it has on their lives. They understand the presence of God around them. They have a growing awareness of the needs in their locality and the wider world.
- The sacraments have a very high profile in the life of the school. Preparation for Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation is thorough, shared by all and has the appropriate level of depth, enhancing the pupils' relationships with God and one another.
- In the planned curriculum the sacraments are a focus. Attractive and inspirational resources have been recently purchased to immerse the pupils in the associated themes.
- The school has initiated a 'Baptism Birthday' celebration. Pupils wear a sash on the date of their baptism to remind them of this sacred occasion and support discussion about the Sacrament.
- Pupils engage with enthusiasm in the promotion of charity for national and international causes. The children take responsibility for selecting causes and present ideas during assembly. Recently 3 pupils led the CAFOD 'Wear it Bright Day' and raised funds for this charity.
- The Gospel virtues and the school's mission statement underpin the pupils' excellent behaviour in school. This inclusive approach, which is driven by deeply held belief in the sanctity of each child, has resulted in some pupils with particular challenges improving with their personal behaviour, integrating into the school and respecting others.
- It is striking how pupils will use the language of the virtues to explain their actions and responses to each other and the world around them.
- Parents are both confident and complimentary about the Catholic life of the school. Over 90% of parents who responded in a questionnaire about Catholic provision, stated that their children are exceptionally well supported in their faith and that the school lives out its Catholic mission through its daily practices.
- Communication with parents and the community about the faith life of the school is strong. Newsletters, the school website, updates through the parish are informative. Recently the 'Twitter' feed has been a live and vibrant medium for sharing school news.

## LEADERSHIP

### Leadership of Catholic life and collective worship

- The success of the school in providing a rich, inclusive and appropriate Catholic education is largely due to the outstanding leadership of the headteacher, RE subject leader, senior leaders, teachers and governors.
- The headteacher is the spiritual director of the school and has a clear vision for the school, which is motivated by her faith and belief in the dignity of each person as being made in the image of God. Together with the staff team, she has set about creating a school which offers each child security, challenge and a connection with the Gospel values. As a result, all pupils, whatever their life experiences, are able to grow in faith and personal strength and achieve in their tasks.
- The headteacher promotes leadership at all levels. Through her example and her confidence in her colleagues, she nurtures a desire in others to share their spiritual ideas and approaches to faith. She has the highest expectations of the staff team and the pupils.
- Many of the most enlightened aspects of the Catholic life have been suggested by support staff. For example, to bring the season of Advent alive midday supervisory staff set up hands on activities in an outdoor covered area for pupils to engage in and enjoy at lunchtime.
- In undertaking the 'National School of Formation' the headteacher has recently brought greater breadth and reflection to the leadership of The Abbey School. Consequently, she has been able to furnish the staff and pupils with experiences, which have inspired them.
- The governors are resolute in their purpose, school reports to parents begin with the phrase 'Each child is made in the image of God'. They strive to enrich the faith in the pupils so that they may lead better lives.
- The governors challenge and support the senior teachers by bringing their many skills and perspectives to the development of RE. For example, they recognise the pressure to accomplish all of the planned developments for RE in the time available. As a result, the governors question the senior staff about sustaining all of the developments and make sure the staff have training and resources to deliver RE.
- The governors trust and respect the work of the headteacher and her team. They are proud of the children's achievements and recognise the great strides made in recent years.
- The governors support the school in the constructive relationship that it has with its other local Catholic primary and secondary schools. They recognise that collaborative working enhances provision through training, moderation and shared spiritual events. They are engaged in a debate as to how the school will work with other local Catholic schools in the future.
- The leadership of the school has established systems whereby pupils take a role in development of the Catholic life and the direction of the school. The chaplaincy team, comprising 30 pupils from across the age bands, is active in preparing and leading the worship in the school and in training other pupils.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### Leadership, outcomes from and provision for religious education

- Religious education at the school is good and is rapidly improving to outstanding.
- RE is very well led by the co-ordinator. He routinely monitors and reflects upon the school's provision, adjusting and enhancing planning, teaching, learning and assessment to achieve high standards. The leadership of RE is gaining momentum as the leader aspires to outstanding provision across all areas.
- The strength of the school's provision of RE has been brought about by the support that the RE leader provides for his colleagues. He ensures that all staff are clear and confident about the syllabus and how to deliver the RE curriculum. He administers useful guidance and appropriate liturgical resources to the teachers to bolster and enhance the experiences for the pupils.
- Towards the end of last academic year the RE leader and senior staff recognised the need to improve the pupils' thinking about how their faith makes a difference to their lives. The staff then worked hard to embed spiritual reflection into all lessons. For example, when looking at a Gospel story a teacher may ask pupils how the different characters in the story felt about the work of Jesus and what message can be drawn from that Gospel story and applied in their own lives.
- Given the low starting points of pupils entering the school, the levels of needs and the challenges faced due to social and emotional issues, the pupils achieve very well indeed.
- In each phase of the school all groups of pupils make very good progress. Year on year pupils grow in knowledge of the Faith and improve their skills in RE. Their reflections on the spiritual content of RE become increasingly mature. By the time pupils reach Year 6 the majority meet or exceed the expected outcomes in RE assessments.
- The pupils enjoy RE, they take great pleasure in the stories, prayers, religious imagery, the themes of the liturgical seasons and the many celebrations of faith.
- The teaching of RE is consistently good and a significant proportion is outstanding.
- The best teaching is brought about through teachers' thoughtful questioning, a clear focus on the objective of the learning, the well established routines and the inspired content of the lessons.
- The children's work and development of skills are supported by a dialogue in the teachers' marking, which is delivered across all year groups and provides opportunities for the pupils to reflect on the spiritual content of a lesson, as well as being prompted to enhance their thinking about faith.
- Teachers' expectations are high and as a result pupils' presentation in their writing and illustrations are impressive.
- Two particular facets of the very good teaching are the mature discussions, which enliven all RE lessons and the teachers' subject knowledge, which strengthens the pupils' understanding of the Gospels.
- An even sharper focus on the actual learning to be achieved by pupils in RE lessons would bring about a greater level of outstanding learning and teaching.

- Teachers ensure that all pupils can access learning and make progress in lessons by providing tasks, which are matched to their needs and by using appropriate and vivid resources to engage the pupils.
- The fastest progress in RE lessons is achieved where teachers prompt pupils to move quickly on to more challenging tasks, rather than work through activities which they grasp easily.
- Regular lesson observations and learning walks, conducted by senior staff, monitor the quality of teaching and serve as a catalyst for the promotion of the very good provision.
- RE as a subject is prominent in the planned curriculum. It is given equal, if not greater, status to the other core subjects of English and mathematics. The standards achieved in RE mirror the good results secured in English.
- The development of RE is the first target on the school improvement plan. Furthermore, in setting objectives for all members of staff performance management, individual aspirations for the promotion of RE always feature.
- The school has taken advantage of opportunities to moderate English work with other schools to check standards. To improve the quality of RE work the school could look for similar opportunities with other Catholic primary schools to obtain a broader view of RE outcomes.
- In recent years there has been a concerted effort to design and deliver an RE curriculum which is broad and inspiring. The curriculum is now rich with prayer, exploration of the lives of saints and activities which encourage detailed knowledge of the bible. Spirituality may also be found in the school's wider curriculum. For example work undertaken in science, geography, personal social health education and art teaches pupils to value all of creation and their own bodies as part of God's gifts to the world.
- Pupils and staff are very comfortable in working and worshipping outdoors. The school's forest area and sacred prayer garden are used extensively in all weathers, helping the pupils make connections with God's natural world and with Old and New Testament events.
- Pupils learn about aspects of other world faiths and the many cultures that form British society. As a result, they are curious about the world and respectful of all members of the local and wider community.
- The school has also utilised the international backgrounds of many of its pupils and looked in detail at how Christianity is manifest in other parts of the world.
- RE and the Catholic life of the school are elevated by superb music. The quality of singing in terms of harmony, depth and enthusiasm is exceptional. An inspirational and talented staff musician motivates pupils and staff alike.
- Relationships and sex education is successfully delivered through the 'All that I am' programme.
- Assessment is purposeful and serves to illustrate the pupils' outcomes and what next steps are to be taken. Through a combination of end of unit tests, teacher-pupil discussions and the monitoring of pupils' RE work, all staff have an accurate understanding of pupils' achievement.
- Specific cohorts of pupils, who have not reached the expected standards, have been identified through assessment processes and targeted planning for these pupils has brought about improvements.



- The displays and artefacts around the school reflect the breadth of the RE curriculum. The rich and vivid religious displays remind the pupils of the liturgical seasons, key elements of faith and identify the mission of The Abbey Catholic Primary School.
- Activities provided in RE support the pupils' understanding of vocation. They are clear that they have been given particular talents and opportunities, which they must use to improve the lives of others to enable them to flourish as they walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve the school should:**

- Moderate RE work with other Catholic primary schools to verify standards.
- Secure outstanding RE teaching and learning across the school by:
  - Ensuring that pupils are absolutely clear about the learning objective of the lesson.
  - Prompting pupils to move on more quickly through differentiated activities.