

Archdiocese of Cardiff



Inspection Report

St Mary's Catholic Primary School Merthyr Tydfil

Inspection dates	1 – 4 October 2018
Reporting Inspector Accompanying Inspector	Catherine Power Christopher Cherry Gareth Rein
Type of school	Primary
Age range of pupils	3-11
Number on roll	222
Local Authority	Merthyr
Chair of Governors	Mrs Judith Budding
School Address	Caedraw Rd Merthyr Tydfil CF47 8HA
Tel. no.	01685 351802
E-mail address	office@st-marys.merthyr.sch.uk
Parishes served	St Mary's, Merthyr Tydfil St Benedict's, Merthyr Vale
Date of previous inspection	10 – 11 February 2014
Headteacher	Mrs Karen Wathan

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Archdiocese of Cardiff and Inspection of denominational education under Section 50 of the Education Act 2005

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on prospects for improvement.

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector leading practice or practise that is both consistent and highly effective.
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The table below shows the terms that Archdiocesan inspectors use and a broad idea of their meaning. It is for guidance only.

Proportion	Description
With very few exceptions	Nearly all
90% or more	Most
70% or more	Many
60% or more	A majority
Close to 50%	Half/around half
Below 40%	A minority
Below 20%	Few
Less than 10%	Very few

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Archdiocese of Cardiff Schools website: www.rcadcschools.org

Context

St. Mary's Catholic Primary School is a Voluntary Aided school in the trusteeship of the Archdiocese of Cardiff. The school is situated in the town of Merthyr Tydfil and serves the parishes of St Mary's Merthyr Tydfil and St Benedict's Merthyr Vale.

The current headteacher was appointed in September 2013. In September 2015 her role developed to include the post of consultant headteacher at St Illtyd's Catholic Primary in Dowlais and executive headteacher over both schools following the establishment of a formal federation between St Mary's Catholic Primary School and St Illtyd's Catholic Primary School in September 2017.

There are currently 222 pupils on roll at St Mary's. 69% are baptised Catholics, 6% belong to other Christian denominations, 1% are from other world religions and 24% have no religious affiliation.

The pupils at the school come from varied backgrounds, with the majority of pupils coming from homes which are neither economically advantaged nor disadvantaged. 13% of pupils at the school have additional educational needs and 11% receive Free School Meals. 41.4% pupils have English as an additional language (EAL). No pupils speak Welsh as their first language.

The school currently employs 10 teachers, 50% of whom are Catholic. 38% of support staff are Catholic. No members of staff hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies.

The School has a number of awards, most recent being the Unicef UK Gold 'Rights Respecting School Status'. It is also a 'Fairtrade Achiever', a healthy school and an Eco school. The Mini-Vinnies group has a high profile in the school.

This federation is currently part of a consultation for the reorganisation of schools with a religious character in Merthyr Tydfil.

The previous Section 50 Inspection was conducted in February 2014

Summary

How effective is the school in providing Catholic education?	Good
<p>Catholic education at St Mary's is good because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the schools in the federation have a strong Catholic ethos. • the quality of leadership across the federation is good. • standards in Religious Education are good. • St Mary's is a welcoming and inclusive school. • positive relationships exist in the school community. • the sense of community cohesion at the school is strong. • partnership with parents/carers and the parish community is good. 	
What are the school's prospects for improvement?	Good
<p>The school's prospects for improvement are good because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school leaders are committed to ensuring the best possible Religious Education provision for all pupils in the federation. • leaders are receptive to feedback and show a desire to improve teaching and learning in Religious Education. • the enhanced opportunities provided by being part of a two-school federation promote joint working, shared resources and common strategies/planning. 	

Recommendations and Required Actions

What does the school need to do to improve further?

R1: Review the current roles of the RE Coordinators to:

- Establish a rigorous monitoring timetable across the federation, with a focus on improving standards of Religious Education teaching and learning.
- Encourage effective joint working to share identified good and excellent practice in Religious Education teaching and learning.

R2: Improve the Religious Education Self-Evaluation process so that:

- Religious Education specific self-evaluation reports link effectively to an achievable Religious Education Action Plan that will have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
- the progress / impact of Religious Education Action Planning is reported to the governing body as a standing agenda item.

R3: Enhance the structure of school worship by:

- involving pupils more fully in leading and contributing to school worship.
- more regularly inviting parents / carers and other school stakeholders to join in worship.
- involving children in singing hymns as part of school worship to more fully celebrate the rich Welsh Catholic musical tradition.

What happens next?

The school will submit a Post-Inspection Action Plan to the Director of Religious Education that shows how it will address the recommendations. Submission should be within 45 working days of publication of the report. Progress in addressing the recommendations may be monitored by the Archdiocese.

Main Findings

KQ1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Nearly all pupils at St Mary's Catholic Primary School display enjoyment and interest in Religious Education. Pupils arrive in school at a range of starting points and most pupils make good progress, the remainder make adequate progress.

From lessons observed, nearly all pupils in Foundation Phase classes are keen to do well and most pupils work competently when provided with appropriate tasks and guidance. Many display growing confidence and most accurately describe events of the life of Jesus from previously shared bible stories. In Key Stage 2, most pupils' display a tangible enthusiasm for Religious Education that naturally transfers into active discussions, showing a mature understanding of religious sources, beliefs, ideas and feelings, using their personal life experiences to make links between them. Pupils are increasingly able to identify sources in biblical texts. Teachers are currently seeking more effective ways of recording these outcomes to provide a more extensive evidence base.

Most pupils are able to discuss their learning and talk about the opportunities available in school to help and support others as their personal response to God's unconditional love for them. Pupils are also very enthusiastic in explaining the school's adopted Catholic Pupil Profile programme. The school has given a high profile to the development of these and pupils consistently refer to these elements during conversations about their learning. Older pupils especially are actively making real links between these virtues and values and their day-to-day life actions.

Teaching is good overall; however, there is some variation with grades ranging from adequate to good, with a minority considered good with some outstanding features. In the best practice viewed, pupils engage well in the range of activities

and tasks on offer. Most pupils, in these lessons, show sustained concentration and work at a good pace. However, the recorded Religious Education work of a majority of pupils across the school, at this time, remains insufficient, with work either incomplete / brief or displaying limited coverage of the 'Come and See' scheme of work in use, thus reducing its potential impact.

The extent to which the pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school is good. Pupils take on responsibilities and participate constructively in the Catholic life. The pupils are proud of their school and are able to articulate how they are beginning to play a more active part in school links with the parish, wider and global communities. Members of the School Council played a significant part in reviewing and developing school life with respect to the 'Rights Respecting School' Gold Award. Opportunities are available for pupils to understand the need to give witness to the Catholic faith in the wider community. The 'Mini Vinnies' have only been in operation for two years and have already supported the work of the St Vincent de Paul Society through organising two events, including a meal and entertainment event for local elderly people. Other pupil groups participate in fundraising for a number of charities including CAFOD. These activities offer real opportunities for pupils to understand ways in which they can show support for others, be considerate and make a positive difference in both the local community and the wider world. The school has effective links with the parish, although the church is some distance from the school, and pupils were able to talk with confidence and display they understand the importance of key liturgical celebrations. The school supports the parish in undertaking sacramental preparation for Reconciliation and First Holy Communion. These links enhance the Catholic life of the school and help to develop a sense of belonging for pupils. Pupils showed a good knowledge of the Catholic Pupil Profile adopted by the school and were able to relate how these virtues can benefit those in the wider community.

Nearly all pupils at whole school, key stage and class levels value collective worship. Pupils and staff enter respectfully and reverently. These occasions are clearly an opportunity to speak and listen to God in a calm, sacred space. Acts of worship observed consistently display considerable effort involved to set the scene. Gospel readings are used to effect. Pupils confidently respond to questioning, linking worship themes with their own life experiences and contribute with gusto to prayers (a mixture of English and Welsh). The use of sacramental symbols is strong, however, worship observed is predominantly teacher-led, although pupils read from scripture and sang beautifully at the limited opportunities provided during school worship. Pupils highlight that some of them are involved in school choir performances, largely held in the parish church.

KQ2. How good is provision?	Good
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Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Nowhere was the quality of the teaching of Religious Education less than adequate. Teachers plan learning activities with reference to the school's 'Come and See' scheme of work, however there are

examples where the number of units required within each term is not being reached. This will inevitably leave gaps in pupil learning and understanding.

Lesson observations indicate examples of very effective use of end of session plenaries and mini-plenaries ('pit stops') to check on levels of understanding, to maintain pace and provide opportunities to extend pupil learning. The school might usefully consider sharing identified very good practice across all classes.

Nearly all teachers have established positive relationships with pupils and their subject knowledge is appropriate. The quality of provision is also enhanced due to the actions of many of the Teaching Assistants and adult helpers. Where this is evident, it is very good indeed, with Teaching Assistants operating autonomously, taking active responsibility to match the needs of their learners to the task set and promoting independent learning.

The use of Information Technology to complement learning is good, in most instances. Tablet devices (predominantly Chrome Books) were used extensively and effectively during the inspection. Pupils are confident in both their set up and use and little time was wasted in starting their work.

The resources in place to support Religious Education are good, in most instances, and reflect the significant and ongoing investment in resources to support the effective teaching of Religious Education. Particularly impressive are the commercially produced visual displays which ensure a high profile for the values and virtues approach adopted by the school. These and the use of the associated Tag Cloud in each classroom and around the school are making a significant impact on pupil thought processes. They are frequently referred to by pupils in conversations, with older pupils making mature links to everyday living. Teacher- and pupil-created displays of work celebrate success and generally enhance the learning environment. Religious Education-focussed displays are plentiful and attractive, consistently displaying clear messages that support the spiritual development of pupils. In the Foundation Phase, although very bright and attractive, the extent of the resources available is beginning to make learning areas less defined and cluttered.

Marking is carried out consistently. It is positive in nature and it relates to learning objectives. The school has introduced Progress Pointers (PP) written in green ink, with an expectation that pupils respond to the suggested way forward. There was little evidence of peer-assessment in pupil's books and very few examples of instant feedback by the use of Assessment for Learning (AFL) techniques. This area remains underdeveloped. The school's adopted scheme of work provides a good programme of learning for pupils and allows for appropriate progress.

Pupil wellbeing is a strength of the school. Pupils benefit from a committed, supportive Catholic community, fully involving governors, staff and parents. The significant number of pupils from ethnic minorities are very well integrated into school life. Pupils report that they are well cared for and feel safe in and around the school.

The quality of prayer and worship is good. During the inspection, pupils attended collective worship and nearly all listened well. Staff leading these occasions created a prayerful atmosphere based around elements of the Catholic Pupil Profile. Prayer, personal and collective, plays an integral part of daily school life with the Welsh language featuring strongly.

KQ3.How good are leadership and management?
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Good

School Leaders are deeply committed to the Church's mission in education and to ensuring that the Catholic life of both schools in the federation nurture the academic, spiritual and moral development of all pupils. The development of the R.E.S.P.E.C.T. mission statement with 'Christ at its centre' underpins strategic leadership by both the governing body and headteacher, who together strive to ensure that the Catholic life across the federation continues to flourish.

An experienced chair and vice-chair lead the governing body. Together with the headteacher, they have led both St Illtyd's and St Mary's through a period of significant change. Their determination to tackle underperformance, initiate building improvements and manage finances effectively has had a positive impact on the quality of education offered to all pupils.

Governors are frequent visitors to the school, regularly attending school celebrations and events. Regular reports at governing body meetings given by the headteacher outline developments in the Catholic life of the school. Participation in sub committees, learning walks and presentations from Religious Education co-ordinators ensure that members of the governing body are actively involved and well placed to make decisions in the interests of both schools in the federation.

The recently appointed link governor for Religious Education supports the work of the Religious Education co-ordinators, taking part in services, listening to learners and undertaking book scrutiny. This involvement enables him to develop an understanding of the strengths and challenges of the Catholic life of the school and curriculum Religious Education and work closely with co ordinators to ensure the best possible provision for Religious Education for all pupils across the federation.

The headteacher shows great commitment to her role and is passionate about her work within the school community. She is an excellent role model, promoting Catholic values and positive relationships between the federation and its parishes. Visits to the schools by both parish priests provide support for the development of the spiritual life across the federation and enrich the Catholic ethos. The parish priest at St Mary's commented very positively on the involvement of St Mary's and St Illtyd's staff in Sacramental preparation programmes. Their regular attendance at weekly Mass and support for parish fundraising has encouraged an increasing number of families to engage actively with the church.

Provision for Religious Education meets the requirements of the Bishops'

Conference. The school follows the “Come and See” Religious Education programme, enriched by cross-curricular links where appropriate. The Religious Education co-ordinators are deeply committed to their roles; their enthusiasm is evident. Together they lead the provision and standards in religious education. They offer support and guidance to staff and attend diocesan training. They also provide induction for new staff, introducing them to the distinctive nature of the Catholic school and to the ethos of the federation. Their joint working practices, i.e. policy development, data analysis, the introduction of Christian meditation, the Catholic Pupil Profile, Archdiocesan initiatives and overseeing pupil tracking, promote consistency of approach, are having a direct impact on the Catholic life of both schools and are beginning to have a positive impact on the raising of standards across the federation.

The School Improvement Plan outlines priorities for the further development of the Catholic life of the school. However, classroom observation and book scrutiny undertaken during the inspection indicate that although the Catholic life of the school is strong, there is a need to raise standards and improve pupil outcomes in Religious Education. Reports in the co-ordinators' files also indicate that monitoring by co-ordinators lacks sufficient rigour and does not effectively inform future priorities. The school is currently working with the local cluster and school improvement group to improve provision and develop teaching and learning in Religious Education throughout the school.

The school has established many links with outside agencies and the wider community. Transition links with Bishop Hedley High School support the continuity of the education journey from the primary phase well. Further partnerships include those with Cardiff Blues Rugby, Active Merthyr Sports, the Police, Dental Health, Careers Education and the local library. Pupils take part in residential courses eg 'The Call of the Wild'. The school also offers parents opportunities to take part in parenting and counselling courses. Parental engagement programmes (e.g. The Reading Café) support integration of EAL families and develop language acquisition. These activities and partnerships help both pupils and their parents to develop new skills and access useful knowledge; they complement the work of the school.

Links with the local parish community are also strong. The donation of Fairtrade Stations of the Cross by 'The Friends of St Mary's' to the school has helped to enrich the Spiritual development of all pupils. Other school-based events also support links with the parish (e.g. The 'Why' programme led by the parish priest. Afternoon tea, MacMillan coffee mornings, parish choral events & sacramental programme parish prayer cards). Parish events promoted through the school (e.g. Italian/Irish nights) contribute to a strong sense of community between the school and parish. A particularly successful partnership has been developed with the Sisters of Charity who support the spiritual development of pupils in the reception classes with the delivery of the 'Catechesis of the Good Shepherd' Programme.

The commitment of leaders to supporting Catholic education is evident. In addition to their responsibilities within the federation, they willingly share their knowledge and expertise in a number of forums, e.g. the chair/vice-chair of

governors attends the cluster Governor Improvement Group (GIG) with a focus on the development of the Catholic Pupil Profile and school leadership. The executive headteacher is a mentor for the Welsh Church School Leadership Programme. These partnerships ensure that Leaders have an up to date knowledge of educational developments.

Community cohesion is well developed. There is a good sense of belonging in the school; all are welcomed in a spirit of equality and respect. Pupils across the federation are developing an awareness of the common good and spoke about their fund raising activities for agencies such as CAFOD and HCPT. Through the various committees and clubs, e.g. Junior Road Safety Officers, Playground Leaders, Digital Leaders, pupils are beginning to understand the role they have as leaders in the school and wider world. Through the work of the Eco Committee and their recent work towards the 'Rights Respecting School' Gold Award they have a good awareness of their responsibilities as global citizens.

Appendix 1

Responses to parent questionnaires

31 parental responses were received from parents at St Mary's.

Parental questionnaires are overwhelmingly positive about the Catholic education provided at St Mary's School. They mention that communication is well developed. Parents are informed of the Religious Education topics and events on the attractive school web site and in newsletters.

Parents comment that they chose the school for their children because:

- 'The staff are wonderful, caring, passionate and fully invested in the educational, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the children.'
- 'The school has a good reputation both academic and spiritual.'
- The caring environment, with a strong emphasis on respect and sharing. In order for my child to develop her spirituality and to foster an early relationship with Jesus as her friend.
- The school gives a good education and values.
- High standards of learning, Catholic faith, a community feel and a positive message from others.
- The ethos of the school. The school welcomes all children and develops them as individuals, nurturing their God-given talents.

Appendix 2

Evidence Base

- Discussion with the headteacher.
- Discussion with the parish priest.
- Discussion with the chair and vice-chair of the federation.

- Discussion with the Religious Education co-ordinators.
- Meeting with parents.
- Listening to learners.
- All policies linked to Religious Education.
- Religious Education Improvement Plan.
- Religious Education Self Evaluation Document.
- School Self Evaluation Document, Action Plan and other relevant documentation.
- Whole-school acts of worship.
- Class-based acts of worship.
- Attendance at Christian Meditation.
- Foci for prayer and reflection.
- Observations of lessons in all classes.
- Playtime, lunchtime routines.
- Teachers' planning.
- Evidence of Assessments.
- Pupil tracking.
- Use of IT.
- Deployment of learning support assistants.
- Samples of pupils' workbooks.
- Photographic evidence.
- Quality and range of available resources.
- Observation of school routines
- EPR/PSE programme
- Links with the parish/ Sacramental Programmes.
- Information from links with charities.