

Archdiocese of Cardiff



Inspection Report St Mary's RC High School, Hereford

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| Dates | 8 - 10 April 2019 |
| Reporting Inspector | Mr Garry Maher |
| Accompanying Inspector | Mr James Torrance |
| Type of School | Secondary |
| Age range of pupils | 11-16 |
| Number on roll | 745 |
| Local Authority | Herefordshire |
| Chair of Governors | Mr Pat Burbidge |
| School Address | Lugwardine, Hereford, Herefordshire, HR1 4DR |
| Tel No. | 01432 850416 |
| Email Address | admin@st-maryshigh.hereford.sch.uk |
| Parishes served | Our Lady Queen of Martyrs, Hereford St Ethelbert, Leominster St Frances of Rome, Ross-on-Wye St Francis Xavier, Hereford St Joseph's, Bromyard St Michael and All Angels, Belmont Abbey St Thomas of Hereford, Weobley The Most Holy Trinity, Ledbury |
| Date of previous inspection | 3 - 4 March 2014 |
| Headteacher | Mr Stuart Wetson |

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Archdiocese of Cardiff and Inspection of denominational education under Section 48 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 |
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| 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 Archdiocesan website:
www.rcadcschools.org

Context

St Mary's RC High School is a voluntary aided mixed 11-16 school. It is a school within the Catholic Archdiocese of Cardiff and is maintained by Herefordshire County Council.

There are currently 745 pupils on roll. This compares with 742 pupils at the time of the previous inspection in 2014.

St Mary's RC High School serves the north-eastern edge of Hereford and draws pupils from a wide catchment area including Bromyard, Ledbury, Leominster and Ross-on-Wye. Their social and economic circumstances vary with around 4% of the pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM).

46% of pupils are baptised Catholic children which is below the average when compared to other schools in the Archdiocese. An additional 50% of pupils come from other Christian denominations and approximately 1% come from other World religions.

Most pupils speak English as their first language. Around 12% of pupils have special educational needs which is lower than the national average and 0.6% of these pupils have an Education Health Care Plan. Most pupils are from a white British background. Around 16% of pupils speak English as an additional language which is above the national average.

The leadership team is made up of the headteacher, who has been in post since April 2018, a deputy headteacher, three assistant headteachers, a bursar and two temporary leadership secondments.

The average individual school budget per pupil for St Mary's RC High School in 2018-2019 is £4,124 per pupil which is in line with other schools in Hereford.

Summary

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| How effective is the school in providing Catholic education? | Excellent |
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Catholic education at St Mary's RC High School is based on its Mission Statement and its ethos is firmly rooted in Gospel values. The school provides an excellent level of Catholic education because:

- the governing body are fully involved and bring a wealth of experience and skills to the school in order to support continued improvement.
- the headteacher has a clear vision for Catholic education and provides outstanding leadership.
- teaching in the Religious Education department is consistently good with many excellent features.
- the engagement of pupils in lessons is impressive in nearly all lessons observed.
- the chaplain makes a significant contribution to the ethos and spiritual life of the school and his work in fostering positive relationships is exemplary.

- the school is a welcoming and inclusive community where pupils feel valued for everything they achieve.
- pupils are immensely proud of their school and speak enthusiastically about the school's distinctive Catholic nature.

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| What are the school's prospects for improvement? |
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| Excellent |
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The prospects for improvement are excellent because:

- the last diocesan inspection in 2014 judged the school to be excellent and this remains the case.
- very good progress has been made in addressing all of the recommendations highlighted in the last inspection and many have been met in full.
- leadership and governance are extremely effective in promoting, monitoring and evaluating both the provision for the Catholic life of the school and religious education and have the overwhelming support of staff, parents and pupils.
- the new link governor for Religious Education provides good support and challenge within the Religious Education department and in the Catholic life of the school.
- the Religious Education Department improvement plan accurately identifies priorities for improvement and is already on the way to addressing them successfully.

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| Recommendations and Required Actions |
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What does the school need to do to improve further?

R1: Review the curriculum time given to Religious Education to ensure that it meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference and Archdiocesan expectations.

R2: Embed the monitoring of standards and progress of pupils in Religious Education to ensure that attainment improves particularly for disadvantaged and middle attaining learners at key stage 4.

R3: Ensure assessment procedures are consistent across the department to reflect the best practice.

R4: Ensure that differentiation is planned effectively so that all learners at key stage 3 make progress in line with expectation.

R5: Continue to develop opportunities for all children to be involved in the systematic preparation and delivery of worship and provide opportunities for spontaneous prayer.

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 will be monitored by the Archdiocese.

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| Main findings |
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| KQ1 How good are outcomes? |
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| Excellent |
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Catholic education at St Mary's RC High School is based on its mission statement 'to educate the children in a community which has Gospel values, traditions and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Faith as the kernel of its ethos'. Pupils are immensely proud of their school and speak enthusiastically about the school's distinctive Catholic nature and fully embrace the many opportunities provided for all to grow in faith. Pupils treat each other with respect and listen attentively when discussing religious concepts and alternative views, and gain a confident understanding of the impact of faith on their lives.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons, at break time and at lunchtime is exemplary and is a tribute to the high level of trust that pupils believe they are given by their teachers. Pupils participate reverently in prayer, assemblies and important celebrations during the liturgical year and appreciate the opportunities to work as part of the Chaplaincy Team. During the inspection pupils were involved in Morning Prayer, penitential services, the Sacrament of Reconciliation and voluntary Mass. The atmosphere created was deeply spiritual and was enhanced through the use of music, candles and religious imagery. Pupils also report that they have the opportunity to participate in house Masses, year 7 welcome Mass, year 11 leavers' Mass, Adoration and also to say the Angelus during Advent.

Pupils are aware of their responsibility to help those less fortunate and demonstrate genuine concern for everyone around them through extensive, planned charitable activities, including support for CAFOD, St Michael's Hospice, The Foodbank and the Christmas Shoebox Appeal. Pupils also benefit from the work undertaken through 'World Challenge'. Pupils are involved in the student council and appreciate the many opportunities to take responsibility and participate in decision making through their elected form representatives. They speak eloquently of a number of initiatives they have developed and believe that senior leaders genuinely listen to their requests and act on those which are practicable.

'The People of God' programme is used in the planning and delivery of work at key stage 3 and is supplemented with a variety of additional resources to ensure pupils enjoy their learning and participate fully in lessons. Through discussion and good use of questioning, pupils are able to reflect on their learning and explore their faith and how it applies to them in their daily lives. However, in a very few lessons work is not differentiated well enough to enable less able learners to make progress in line with their peers and give them a sense of success. Work is assessed in line with the NBRIA Levels of Attainment which is consistent with Archdiocesan requirements for assessing and reporting learning progress.

Pupils at key stage 4 follow the AQA syllabus including Mark's Gospel. Pupils are very articulate and explain religious concepts fluently. Written work is well presented and

includes evidence of independent work and extended writing tasks are completed well using appropriate expression and key terms in context. Boys' writing skills are not as well developed as those of the girls and a variety of different tasks should be implemented in order to improve these. Attainment in GCSE Religious Education has shown fluctuating outcomes from 72% A*-C in 2015, to 79.5% in 2016, to 75.2% in 2017. The average point score for the new GCSE examination introduced in 2018 was 4.8 with 70% of pupils achieving a pass at 4+. This is 7% below that achieved in English and demonstrates a three-year downward trend with middle ability boys and disadvantaged pupils being the main target groups for improvement. Strategies have already been put in place to address this and initial analysis indicates that these strategies are making an impact. This remains a priority for the future.

Nearly all pupils arrive at lessons on time, ready and willing to learn. Engagement in lessons in both key stage 3 and key stage 4 is impressive in nearly all lessons observed and is a strength of the department. It is clearly evident from both the lessons and from work in exercise books that pupils demonstrate increasingly sophisticated responses and develop their ideas in a meaningful way. Learners are therefore becoming religiously literate.

The tracking of progress against challenging department targets and the pastoral support that pupils receive is excellent and has a clear link to the school's mission statement. All pupils are cared for equally and this reflects the inclusive nature of the school's ethos. Pupils demonstrate genuine acceptance and support for children of different ethnic backgrounds and celebrate the diversity within the school. Transition arrangements are very effective with increasing numbers having joined the school in 2018. Co-ordinating activities with the high number of primary schools from which St Mary's draws its intake remains a challenge. However, high priority is given to ensuring the children transfer to St Mary's RC High School with confidence.

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| KQ2 How good is provision? | Excellent |
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Nearly all lessons observed across the Religious Education department were good with many excellent features. There was no unsatisfactory teaching observed during the inspection. In the 30% of lessons which were judged to be excellent there were clear objectives, challenging activities and good pace to develop pupils' thinking and deepen understanding. Lessons were well sequenced to build on prior learning and appropriate support was provided which enabled most pupils to achieve. Teachers' used their detailed specialist knowledge to ask searching questions which enables pupils to give thoughtful and reasoned responses. Nearly all pupils clearly enjoy Religious Education and make good progress and achieve well.

At key stage 3 planning for skills development is in place and meaningful homework is set which is designed to support pupils' knowledge and develop their understanding further. There are many very good examples of levelled work and assessment in books clearly

demonstrates the progress being made by pupils from Year 7 through to Year 9. Differentiation in key stage 3 is not planned well enough in a very few lessons to enable less able learners to make sufficient progress. Work for less able learners needs to be scaffolded in all lessons to create a sense of success and enable all learners to develop their responses in more detail. This has already been identified as an area for development by the department.

At key stage 4 reference is made to GCSE criteria for middle and high attaining learners and how to plan their responses using modelled answers. However, middle and lower ability learners need to be challenged further in order to develop their responses in greater detail. Good use is made of homework booklets to support pupils' understanding of the work being covered which encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning. This is a skill which is developing very well and appreciated by nearly all pupils observed.

More able learners at KS3 and KS4 write extended answers well using appropriate expression, subject language and in context. Pupils write fluently and develop their responses using reasoned arguments and consider other people's opinions sensitively and respectfully. Most pupils' writing skills at key stage 4 are excellent and many use biblical references well to support their answers.

The tracking of pupils' progress is becoming more robust and the SISRA progress and performance tracking system is used effectively to demonstrate the impact on outcomes for learners and allow for early intervention when pupils are not achieving in line with expectation. All teachers mark work regularly and most teachers provide comments which enable pupils to improve their work. Marking focuses appropriately on the accuracy of pupils' written work and teachers identify errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. There are a few examples of pupils not following up on advice from teachers particularly regarding incorrect spelling and there are a very few occasions when work remains incomplete in books.

There are good examples of peer and self-assessment and teachers mark extended work using a 'star and a target' for further improvement. However, the quality of feedback varies across the department resulting in a few learners not making sufficient progress. Where feedback is good there is clear unambiguous advice on how to improve. Excellent examples exist in books and this needs to be shared with all staff in the department to ensure that all pupils have the same high quality advice and guidance and attain in line with their targets.

Religious Education is currently taught by three full time and two-part time specialist Religious Education teachers. These staff are well qualified and make good use of their learning environment by ensuring rooms are well presented. However, displays do not always support and enhance the learning. Pupils receive 8% curriculum time for Religious Education at key stage 3 and 12% at key stage 4. This does not meet the requirements of the Bishops' Conference nor the expectation of the Archdiocese and needs to be addressed. The

Religious Education department is well resourced and receives an equitable share of the school's capitation in line with other core subjects.

An appropriate Sex and Relationships Education Policy is in place and 'Fertile Heart' is the programme of study being followed. Nearly all parents report that they are very happy with the content of what is being taught. However, a few parents acknowledged that the language being used was not always accessible and a minority of pupils also indicated that the programme did not always meet their needs. The school has also highlighted that the scheme will be reviewed.

The Chaplain makes a significant contribution to the ethos and spiritual life of the school and this is an outstanding feature. His work in fostering positive relationships is exemplary and is a strength of the school. He is ably supported by members of staff from across the school. The Chapel is purpose built and provides a sacred space which is a focus for pupils throughout the day and particularly in times of need. Being situated close to the Religious Education department it allows for whole school open air Masses to be held which are appreciated by pupils. Excellent opportunities for pupils to deepen their faith are offered through the school with pilgrimages to Belmont Abbey, Lourdes, Kintbury and Rome.

The 'Catholic Pupil Profile' is evident throughout the school and is used as a focus for prayer, worship and assemblies. The work of the Chaplaincy Team is excellent and they are fully involved in the planning and preparation for assemblies and acts of worship throughout the liturgical year. The Chaplaincy Team encourages all pupils to be involved and most pupils respond confidently and reverently to prayer. However, the opportunities for spontaneous prayer, particularly during tutor time, are underdeveloped.

The school is a truly inclusive community and pupils from all vulnerable groups are supported very effectively. The sense of community cohesion is very strong and is celebrated by pupils who acknowledge the richness that diversity brings to the community as a whole. The belief in the school as an extension of the family is testament to the work at St Mary's RC High School and excellent relationships exist between staff, pupils and parents.

397 parental questionnaire responses were returned prior to the start of the inspection and nearly all were overwhelmingly positive about the school, the quality of education and what the school contributes to the formation of its pupils. Good links exist between parishes, and local clergy make themselves available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Lent and to celebrate voluntary Mass at various times throughout the year.

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| Q3 How good are Leadership and Management? | Excellent |
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The Headteacher has a clear vision for Catholic education and provides outstanding leadership. He is unequivocal in his drive to improve outcomes for all pupils as well as developing the spirituality of all stakeholders involved with the school. The Headteacher has ensured that robust systems are in place to achieve this. He is well supported by a strong

Senior Leadership Team and work together as a highly effective team to ensure the promotion of the school's Catholic life is at the centre of its strategic direction.

The Chair of Governors has a detailed knowledge and understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and is fully committed to his role and provides appropriate support and challenge to the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team. The Governing Body is encouraged to be fully involved and governors bring a wealth of experience and skills to the school in order to support continued improvement. Governors understand their role in holding the school to account for the Catholic life of the school. The new RE link Governor has strong links with the Religious Education department and meets on a regular basis to discuss issues for development and holds members of the department to account well which will secure further improvement in outcomes for learners.

Whole school self-evaluation and improvement planning is good. Robust systems have been introduced and initial data forecasts indicate that intervention strategies are making an impact on improving outcomes for learners. The School Development Plan has appropriate priorities in place and includes interim evaluation of progress against targets which is detailed and provides areas for further development. Self-evaluation processes are developing in the Religious Education department and enable pupils who are underachieving to be identified and appropriate intervention to be put in place to secure improvement with disadvantaged and middle attaining learners being identified as a priority for improvement at key stage 4.

Department improvement planning identifies areas for improvement accurately. However, this planning lacks detail regarding skills development and this needs to be reviewed to ensure pupils achieve expected outcomes and attain in line with their targets. Unusually there is a head of key stage 3 and a head of key stage 4 for Religious Education. Excellent working practices exist and close liaison between the department leaders ensures there is continuity of provision. This allows for appropriate sequencing of lessons to enable pupils to build on prior knowledge and apply this to new topics. Roles and responsibilities within the department are clear and both key stage leaders are challenged appropriately. Department staff believe they are more accountable for the outcomes that pupils achieve.

Religious Education is recognised as a core subject and all teachers are well-qualified subject specialists and provide expertise in planning appropriate schemes of work. Understanding of the requirements of the new GCSE Religious Education syllabus are becoming embedded and department staff are encouraged to attend Diocesan training events and advisers have provided support to secure continued improvement. 10% of staff have completed the CCRS and 2% of staff have completed the MA in Catholic Leadership.

The school is a truly cohesive community which reflects Gospel values and pupils feel highly valued for everything they achieve. Pupils are extremely proud to be a pupil at St Mary's. There is a strong sense of belonging and all pupils are welcomed in a spirit of equality,

inclusiveness and respect and this is a strength of the school. Liaison with partner primary schools is good with a planned programme of Transition events involving Year 5 and 6 which enables pupils to successfully transfer to St Mary's. Planned activities are in place for local businesses, banks and visiting speakers from colleges and other inspirational presenters from other relevant organisations are provided for pupils to enhance the delivery of the PSHCE programme and promote learning and raise aspiration. Pupils gain valuable experience in working as part of the Young Enterprise scheme.

All children including non-Catholic children of other or no religion are encouraged to participate fully in the life of the school. The school has a diverse population and this is recognised and celebrated. Pupils' well-being is extremely well promoted in a variety of activities and pupils are encouraged to be healthy and safe, and articulate this well. Targeted support for Pupil Premium, FSM, EAL and SEN children is embedded to raise aspirations and mentoring of pupils and support provided for vulnerable pupils is an outstanding feature of the school. Attendance is monitored closely to secure continued improvement and school attendance rose from 95% in 2017 to 95.6% in 2018. Current data for 2019 demonstrates a further improvement at 96.1%.

Nearly all parents who responded to the Questionnaire overwhelmingly agreed that they are happy with their child's Religious Education and with the Catholic life of the school. Parents and carers feel valued and listened to and appreciate the way that issues or concerns are dealt with. Parents also commented on the outstanding relationships that exist between staff and pupils and the inclusive way of learning which enables all children of all abilities to thrive. Parents also highlighted that standards were promoted throughout the school and that the relationship between culture and Gospel were clearly evident in everything the school strives to achieve.

Appendix 1

Responses to parent questionnaires

- 397 parents/carers completed the parent questionnaire and were overwhelmingly supportive of the school.
- Nearly all parents/carers are happy with the values and attitudes that the school fosters and are made to feel welcome in the school.
- Nearly all parents also believed that the school sought their views and concerns and took them into account.
- Nearly all parents and carers believed that the school gave them a clear understanding of what is taught in Religious Education and nearly all agreed that the school enabled their children to achieve a good standard of work in Religious Education.
- Nearly all parents were also happy with the help and guidance available to their children and nearly all believed that the school enabled their children to develop spiritually through prayer and worship.

- Nearly all parents and carers believed that the school kept them well informed about their children's progress in Religious Education.
- Parents and carers stated that they chose St Mary's RC High School because of its reputation, strong sense of community, previous association with the school and the values pupils are encouraged to develop and the inclusive way of learning which enables all children to succeed.
- Pastoral care is outstanding and pupils are supported well throughout their time at St Mary's.
- Parents commented that the chaplain provided outstanding support, care and guidance for pupils.
- Parents also highlighted that St Mary's RC High School respected each child as an individual, that standards were upheld and promoted throughout the school and the relationship of trust between teachers and pupils was a strength of the school.

Appendix 2

Evidence base

- The school's self-evaluation report and school improvement plan.
- Meetings with the headteacher, head of key stage 3 and key stage 4 Religious Education, pastoral heads of year and assistant headteacher responsible for tracking pupil progress and other members of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings with the chair of governors and Religious Education link governors.
- Meetings with the school chaplain and local clergy.
- Lesson observations.
- Scrutiny of planning and assessment.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work.
- Attendance at school assemblies, acts of worship and liturgies.
- Attendance at tutor time.
- Discussions with pupils.
- Parent questionnaire returns.
- A meeting with parents.