



St Mary's RC VA First School

Hencotes, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 2EE

School Unique Reference Number: **122311**

Inspection dates: 26 – 27 January 2016
Lead inspector: Barbara Simpson

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Catholic Life:		Outstanding	1
Collective Worship:		Good	2
Religious Education:		Good	2

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Mary's RC VA First School is a good Catholic school because:

- The Catholic Life of the school is outstanding, the well-being and personal and spiritual development of each pupil is at the heart of the school's vision and the staff and governors are united in implementing this across all areas of school life.
- The quality of Collective Worship is good, it is central to the life of the school. All pupils, from a very young age, are reverent, respectful and enthusiastic during worship.
- The quality of Religious Education is good, pupils enjoy their Religious Education lessons, can explain their value and are keen to do well, leading to good progress in most lessons.

It is not yet outstanding because:

- Pupils across the school are not yet skilled in planning and leading Collective Worship independently in a variety of forms.
- In Religious Education there are inconsistencies across the school in the range and variety of activities provided during lessons, leading to inconsistencies in the rate of pupil progress.

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

- St Mary's is a smaller than average first school organised into four classes; Wilfrid (reception), Aidan (years one and two), Cuthbert (years two and three) and Bede (year four).
- The governing body recently appointed an interim executive headteacher, who is also headteacher of another Catholic primary school. The head of school is also new to the role.
- Almost all pupils are from white British backgrounds.
- The percentage of pupils with special needs is in line with the national average.
- The school serves five widely spread rural parishes.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Improve the quality of Collective Worship by:
 - Offering more opportunities for pupil involvement in planning, preparing and leading Collective Worship independently across the school.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - Ensuring a wider and more creative range of teaching strategies are implemented throughout the school.
 - Ensuring that additional adult support consistently contributes to pupil progress.
 - Ensuring that appropriate levels of challenge and questioning are integral to teaching and learning throughout the school.

CATHOLIC LIFE

THE QUALITY OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

1

- The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.
- The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.
- How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

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The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- All pupils have a deep sense of belonging to St Mary's school and enthusiastically embrace the demands that membership of the community entails. They take pride in organising and leading activities which promote the school's ethos within the school, parish and wider community.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of their mission statement, which they developed together through workshops and which they try to live by in their school and community on a daily basis.
- Pupils said that they all usually get on well with each other and that when there are disagreements they 'try to fix it first' but know that they can seek the help of an adult. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary.
- Supporting a wide range of charities such as, CAFOD, St Cuthbert's Care, the People's Kitchen, a local hospice and many more, is very important to the school community. These campaigns are very well supported. The Mini Vinnies group is particularly active and effective.
- From the youngest upwards pupils demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the liturgical year and its key celebrations.
- Links between school and parish are strong and effective and pupils are enthusiastically involved in parish celebrations and activities.

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- The core of the school's mission statement, 'We love, we learn, we live', is lived out in the provision of the Catholic Life of the school and is particularly evident in relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves.
- There is a very strong family ethos which is welcoming and caring. Parents talk about the school as being like 'one big family' and about its welcoming, loving and inclusive atmosphere.
- Clear policies are rooted in the teaching of the Catholic church and provide high levels of support for vulnerable pupils and their families, for example through the Rainbows project, for which several members of staff are trained.

- The learning environment is a reflection of the school's Catholic character evidenced through displays, artefacts and the creation of sacred spaces throughout the school. An attractive prayer garden in the centre of the school is well cared for and well used.
- Statements to live by are prominently displayed throughout the school and are clearly used as references to help pupils live in the way Jesus wants them to.
- Personal, social and health education programmes and relationship and sex education programmes are in place and refer explicitly to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- The executive headteacher and head of school have a very clear understanding of Catholic education and the role of the Catholic school in the mission of the church. They act as positive role models and effectively monitor and promote the Catholic Life of the school through a range of means, including questionnaires, professional development, staff meetings and reviews. As a result they know the strengths and weaknesses of the school very well.
- The governing body is highly ambitious for and supportive of the Catholic Life of the school and leads by example in its consistent emphasising of Catholic Life as a school improvement priority. All governors are actively involved in strategic planning for the Catholic Life and its evaluation. They refer to the school's strength as being the 'the seed that it sows'.
- Leaders and managers give high priority to the development of the Catholic Life of the school and seek out new ways to enhance it, particularly in the way they are developing very successful strategies for engaging with parents. Parents have a thorough understanding of the school's mission and are highly supportive of it. Some parents and carers have returned to practising their faith as a result of the school's support.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

2

- How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.
- The quality of provision for Collective Worship.
- How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

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How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship is good.

- St Mary's is a prayerful community. Collective Worship engages the interest of all the pupils and they respond with enthusiasm. A pupil told the inspector that Collective Worship 'brings us all together as one family'.
- All pupils from reception class to year four participate with reverence and respect; joining in prayers with confidence and singing with enthusiasm.
- Pupils know what constitutes the various elements of Collective Worship and are able to prepare and lead class worship with increasing confidence. However, pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to plan and lead worship independently in a range of contexts and some teachers do not have the confidence to stand back and allow the pupils to do so.
- Most pupils, from the very youngest, have a good understanding of religious seasons and feasts, for example, a pupil in reception told the inspector why there was a green cloth on the class prayer table.
- Pupils respectfully talk about other world faiths, particularly those who have a Muslim class mate. Holocaust day was remembered in the very moving whole school worship led by the Mini Vinnies.
- Pupils enjoy school and parish Masses and relish having a part to play in them.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship is good.

- The prayer life of the school is given a high priority and there are many opportunities for staff, pupils and parents and carers to become involved in the prayer life of the school in a meaningful way.
- There is a clear policy for Collective Worship and the school ensures that it is regular and inclusive. Themes are based on the liturgical calendar, the scheme of work and current topics. Families are involved in pupils' liturgical and religious development through a variety of means, such as travelling cribs, newsletters and the school website.
- Parents, carers, parishioners and governors respond enthusiastically to invitations to share in a variety of acts of worship throughout the year and speak about particular experiences they have found inspiring. Members of the wider community attend worship when invited, for example a member of the Mini Vinnies organisation and staff from the local hospice took part in a whole school worship.

- Acts of worship are well resourced and planned using diocesan guidelines. There is some good practice in developing pupils' skills in planning and preparing worship independently, however this is not yet consistent across the school.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship is good.

- The headteacher and senior leaders are enthusiastic and know how to plan and deliver good quality experiences of Collective Worship. They have a deeply rooted understanding of the church's liturgical year, its seasons, rites and symbols and ensure that displays and artefacts around the school reflect this.
- Through the school's monitoring and evaluation systems, including formal monitoring of class worship, leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development of Collective Worship and staff know that expectations are high. They also seek the views of parents and carers, pupils and governors to continuously strive to improve and enrich acts of worship, responding appropriately.
- Leaders are keen to continually improve the quality of provision of Collective Worship in all its forms, through the diocese and local Catholic cluster of schools, however, it is not yet part of the formal professional development cycle for all staff.
- Leaders model good practice for all members of staff through class and whole school Collective Worship and Masses. They lead the school community in showing how Collective Worship can inspire their daily lives.
- Governors are regular visitors to the school, taking part in Collective Worship and contributing to its monitoring and evaluation.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

2

- How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.
- The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education.
- How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

2

2

2

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is good.

- Most pupils enjoy Religious Education and can explain its value. They understand that it is a core subject and are keen to do well. They work hard in lessons and behaviour for learning is excellent. Pupils have an understanding of how well they have done and how to improve.
- Pupils spontaneously use a variety of religious vocabulary, for example, pupils in year four used the terms 'visitation' and 'annunciation' when studying works of art.
- Pupils in most classes acquire knowledge quickly and are able to identify links with previous learning. They are developing well in their knowledge and understanding, as well as in their ability to reflect on meaning and are able to consider the impact of religious ideas on their own lives.
- All groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, make good progress in Religious Education within lessons and over time, given their starting points. Pupils' books evidence a good standard and quantity of work across the school, although there are inconsistencies in the standard of presentation.
- The majority of pupils attain above diocesan average at the end of key stage one and at the end of year four.

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is good.

- Teaching is mainly good, therefore most pupils and groups of pupils make good progress over time.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use diocesan plans and guidance to good effect. Tasks are often differentiated although some differentiation is by outcome.
- The school has a good range of resources and strategies to promote learning and teachers usually use time well. Lessons observed during the inspection included effective use of drama, paired working, individual work and group working. However, utilising a range of activities and strategies for learning is not consistent across the school.
- In some lessons activities are not always sufficiently matched to pupils' abilities, leading to a slower pace of learning in some groups.
- Pupils usually respond articulately and reflectively to teacher questioning. However, opportunities to extend pupils' learning by the use of targeted questioning at particular groups, is sometimes missed.

- Additional adult support is usually used well, ensuring good progress for most pupils, but this is not consistent across the school.
- Marking and feedback are carried out regularly and pupils are usually given time to improve. This is most effective when feedback is of a high quality. Pupils are using 'I can' statements to good effect, helping them to evaluate their own progress.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is good.

- Senior leaders are committed, knowledgeable, enthusiastic and well informed about current developments in religious education.
- Leaders ensure that their vision for Religious Education is shared through staff meetings, briefings and attendance at diocesan training events. As a result religious education has a high profile in the school and is well planned to meet the needs of all the pupils.
- Religious Education compares favourably with other core subjects in terms of staffing, resources and time; although only the minority of staff have the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies. Leaders are however, committed to providing training and support when needed.
- Through a programme of systematic and rigorous monitoring activities, including lesson observations, work and planning scrutiny and in-house and cluster school moderation, leaders have an accurate picture of the provision for Religious Education and the impact on achievement.
- Robust tracking and analysis provide a firm base for diagnosing strengths and areas for development. Planning for improvement is therefore based upon sound evidence and data and the school is well placed to improve and support teaching.
- Governors hold leaders to account for performance in Religious Education and are regularly involved in monitoring activities.
- Pupils have access to good quality sacramental preparation jointly provided by the school and parish catechists.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

HOW EFFECTIVE THE SCHOOL IS IN PROVIDING CATHOLIC EDUCATION:**2****CATHOLIC LIFE:****1**

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.

1

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP:**2**

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.

2

The quality of provision for Collective Worship.

2

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

2

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:**2**

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

2

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education.

2

How well leaders and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

2

SCHOOL DETAILS

School name	St Mary's RC VA First School
Unique reference number	122311
Local authority	Northumberland
This Inspection Report is produced for the Rt. Reverend Séamus Cunningham the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle Diocese under canon 806 of Canon Law. For voluntary aided schools it also fulfils the responsibility the Governing Body has to inspect the school under s48 of the Education Act 2005.	
Chair of governors	Mr T Neeson
Choose School Leadership Type	Executive Headteacher: Mrs B Pye
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