



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST NICHOLAS CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL BIRMINGHAM

Inspection dates 10th&12th March 2009
Reporting Inspector Brenda Beale

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Catholic Primary
Age range of pupils	4-11 years
Number on roll	213
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mrs Patricia Platt
School address	Jockey Road Sutton Coldfield West Midlands B73 5US
Telephone number	0121 355 2649
E-mail address	enquiry@st-nicholas.bham.sch.uk
Parish	St Nicholas
Date of previous inspection	May 2006
DCSF School Number	330/3403
Unique Reference Number	103475

Headteacher Mrs Anna McGuire (Acting)

Description of the school

St Nicholas School is a one-form entry primary school. There are 213 pupils on roll and a waiting list of parish Catholics for all classes. The school serves the parish of St Nicholas, Boldmere. 100% of the pupils are baptised Catholics and live inside the parish boundary on entry into school. The school is in the Vesey ward, which is predominantly a middle-class area, with good housing and high employment. The percentage of pupils on free school meals is 1.4%. All of pupils, but one, speak English as their first language. The number of pupils on the special needs register is below the national average. Attendance is very high and pupil mobility is low.

Overall effectiveness of the school

St Nicholas is a good Catholic school with many outstanding features. The whole school community is committed to living out its mission statement, 'St Nicholas is a welcoming Catholic Community where together we pray, live and learn with Jesus Christ'. At the time of the inspection both the headteacher and deputy headteacher are acting in role; together they provide strong leadership and support for the faith journey of each child. Pupils, parents and staff are rightly proud of their school and it is evident through the pupils' attitudes and behaviour that they have an excellent understanding of Catholic values and what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The children flourish in an ethos of respect, praise and affirmation. They enjoy school and feel happy, safe, confident and able to achieve well. Their behaviour is outstanding. Parental support is very good and in most respects the governing body fulfils its role well in relation to the school's Catholic foundation. Collective worship is very good with many well planned opportunities for Masses, liturgies, assemblies and prayer. The parish priest fully supports the worship and spiritual life of the school.

Attainment is high and pupils of all abilities make excellent progress. Teachers have high expectations of what the children can achieve in all aspects of their development. The quality of the whole curriculum is outstanding and religious education is promoted as the first core subject. There is a downward trend in RE attainment on entry to the school. However at the end of their first year the children have made above average progress. Pupils continue to make excellent progress throughout the school and by Year 6 they achieve very high standards in RE. This achievement is assisted by excellent teaching, clear guidelines, thorough planning and good assessment procedures. Since the last inspection the only area for further development has been addressed and the monitoring of children's books has been refined in order to ensure that marking is constructive and challenging in all year groups thus building upon the best practice in the school. In most areas of its Catholic life and RE the school has an accurate view of its own strengths and development needs. Most aspects of school self-evaluation are thorough and effective. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good, but dependent upon the appointment of a substantive headteacher.

What the school should do to improve further

- Appoint a substantive headteacher to lead the Catholic life of the school
- Install a whiteboard, sound system and necessary accompanying technical equipment to enhance the worship life of the school

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

The governing body generally fulfils its role well in relation to the school's Catholic foundation and is seeking to provide clear direction and support for the leadership and staff in the maintenance and development of the Catholic life of the school. The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher have a clear understanding of the school's role in the educational and evangelical mission of the Church. Through her day to day dealings with and attention to the spiritual life and well-being of all those in the school community the headteacher provides excellent support and care. The headteacher has strong links other heads in the archdiocese and within secondary feeder pyramids to stay abreast of current best practice. The deputy headteacher who lives within the parish provides an excellent role model and witness to the faith and is involved with other members of staff in the life of the parish church. The leadership has maintained the Catholic ethos and delivery of high quality RE through a period of staff change. The mission statement is clearly displayed throughout the school and each academic year begins with a mission statement review, which leads to the creation of a class code of conduct signed by all pupils. Governors monitor the Catholic life of the school informally and more formally through feedback and the headteacher's report at governors' meetings. Sacramental preparation is thorough and special efforts are made to include those children in the parish who have been unable to gain admission to this oversubscribed school. The school has very good links with parents who are invited into the school for Masses, assemblies, liturgies, sacramental preparation programmes. Parents are also involved in the recently reviewed and revised excellent family life programme. The whole school is involved in the implementation of the SEAL programme (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning). Every member of staff understands the importance of its implementation in line with the Catholic ethos of the school. Catholic assembly materials have been purchased to support staff in this implementation. The school council meets regularly and feeds back information to the classes. School council and pupils' views are sought through class feedback and a suggestion box. The number and quality of artefacts and displays also give witness to the Catholic life of the school. The leadership provides clear documentation, guidance and advice on liturgy, the Church and the teaching of RE. The parish priest works closely with the school and fully supports the liturgical and Catholic life of the school.

Collective Worship

Provision for collective worship is outstanding. The liturgical life of the school provides many excellent opportunities for prayer including Masses, class prayers, guided meditations, assemblies and celebrations. Liturgical seasons are planned with a whole school focus to include assemblies, class based work, opportunities for reflection and individual prayer. A rota of assemblies is carefully planned and displayed in the staffroom. The use of music at the beginning and end of the assemblies helps to set a reflective atmosphere for both parents and pupils. The use of ICT in assemblies is good, engaging the interest and attention of pupils. Involvement by children in these assemblies ensures that they are interested and stimulated. Neither Mass nor a class-led assembly were observed during the inspection but there was ample evidence of past and recent high quality celebrations. Two very good staff led assemblies were observed during the inspection where the children were fully engaged, reverent and sang well. Whole school Masses are at times celebrated in the adjacent church and at other times the school hall is used. The school is involved in parish Masses on Sundays. During the inspection a Year 1 class was observed praying at the end of the lesson, asking God our Father to help them with their Lenten promises. The children were reverent, focused and able to speak honestly about their success and difficulties. The Foundation Class pupils could all make the sign of the cross correctly and most are able to pray the Our Father. The children throughout the school show progression in their knowledge of formal prayers and ability to pray in their own words. The school has been celebrating its fortieth anniversary climaxing in a celebration Mass, the installation of an etching on a window dedicated to St Nicholas, tiles depicting each child's name and a mural of the school. The Mass was led by Bishop Pargeter who used the occasion to share the celebration of his golden jubilee. The Year of St Paul was introduced in an assembly using a PowerPoint presentation. School productions reflect the liturgical calendar: a

carol service or Key Stage 1 nativity play at Christmas, Key Stage 2 Easter Celebration, Stations of the Cross, liturgy services attended by children and to which all parents, parishioners and the wider community are invited. Each classroom has a devotional area with a crucifix, correct liturgical cloth and religious display. Parents really appreciate the worship life of the school which combined with the loving and caring ethos helps to bring families back to the church. The school uses the 'Walk with Me' calendars during Lent. There are generous resources to support the worship life of the school. The worship life of the school significantly contributes to the children's moral and spiritual development. Pupils in the Foundation Stage are fully involved in the worship life of the school, they attend and are involved in whole school Masses, assemblies, whole school and class prayer services, the Christmas Nativity and lead their own class assembly.

Community Cohesion

Community cohesion is outstanding. Pupils are provided with a well rounded education that will equip them to make valuable contributions to society. Through the Gospel values promoted by the school the children are keenly aware of the situation of others and of their own ability to provide help and support. The RE curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to ask the big questions concerning injustice, poverty, war and discrimination. The school is involved in fund raising events and activities which widen the pupils' knowledge and understanding of other people's cultures and situations. The pupils are involved in the work of many charities and organisations including CAFOD, Fr Hudson's Society, CART (Christian African Relief Trust), Brushstrokes, National Children's Homes, the Fireside Centre, St Vincent De Paul Trust, Barnardo's and many more. Visits are made to the Leonard Cheshire Home for disabled adults with invitations to school performances and celebrations. Pupils are encouraged to talk to residents about their lives and the ways they managed their disabilities. There is an excellent family life programme in the school. The school hosts North Area choir and gala concerts for children in the Sutton Coldfield cluster of schools. Children actively participate in the school band; those who learn instruments outside of school are encouraged to join in and take part in rehearsals and performances. The school offers a wide range of high quality curriculum activities that are well attended by pupils and these are supported by specialists; gardening club, art club, chess club, French club, multi skills, judo, football, creative dance drama and library. There is high demand and take up for out of hours learning activities. The diversity of the provision ensures that all learners are able to develop skills and access activities that they enjoy. Provision is on site for before and after school care. Links with a small island school in the Orkneys produces greater understanding of community similarities and differences and allows pupils to consider their own community. There is an active parents and friends association which is very supportive of the work of the school. The school works closely with the parish and is particularly sensitive to families who have been refused admission due to oversubscription. Children from those families are invited to be involved in Sacramental programmes and other school activities. Pupils are able to contribute to their local community through the parish church. Children of all abilities achieve well and make valuable contributions to their community..

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Attainment and progress in RE is outstanding. Assessment shows that there is a downward trend in the pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Faith on entry to the school. However at the end of their first year the children have made above average progress. Pupils continue to make excellent progress throughout the school and by Year 6 they achieve a very high standard in RE. This achievement is assisted by excellent teaching, clear guidelines, thorough planning, good assessment procedures and the pupils' active participation in the worship and Catholic life of the school. All pupils from the most able to those with learning and behavioural needs make outstanding progress and achieve well. The learning skills in literacy are transferred to RE; there is evidence of excellent extended writing. Pupils throughout the school are familiar with the seasons of

the Church and are able to talk about the events and colours connected with those seasons. Pupils have a very good knowledge of the structure of the Bible and are able to recall and empathise with a wide range of stories and events found in both Old and New Testaments. They have an excellent knowledge of traditional prayer and are able to say and write their own prayers. They have a knowledge of the Sacraments that is very good for their age.

Quality of Provision for Religious Education

Teaching and Learning

All lessons observed were judged to be outstanding. The work in pupils' books and displayed around the school, the knowledge and understanding of the children and their enthusiasm for RE demonstrate that teaching and learning are outstanding. The children are willing to take risks with their learning because they feel confident, happy and safe. Work is well matched to pupils' abilities and learning is supported by skilled teaching assistance. Thinking skills are encouraged through a range of activities and high quality questioning. Thorough assessment procedures are being implemented in line with best practice and diocesan guidelines; marking of work is constructive and developmental. There are a range of guidelines in place to demonstrate best practice and good training is provided to assist with the teaching of RE. Good use is made of partner discussion and feedback during plenary sessions. Teachers use praise effectively and there is a passion and commitment within the staff towards the teaching of RE and the passing on of the Faith. Spiritual and moral development is outstanding. Parents, grandparents and carers are encouraged to be involved in the children's learning and spiritual development. Invitations to Masses, liturgies and assemblies and well planned Sacramental programmes assist this aim.

Curriculum

Curriculum provision is outstanding. The time allocation for RE more than meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference and the curriculum fulfils the *Curriculum Directory for Religious Education*. The pupils follow the *Diocesan Strategy for Religious Education*; and short term planning is well thought out and clear. There is evidence of cross-curricular work, particularly in relation to the school's recent celebration of its fortieth anniversary; in the hall a large scale time line linking world events, including the life and work of the Blessed Mother Teresa, to the history of the school. This display is a testimony to the parents' involvement in their children's learning. Well planned Sacramental preparation is reinforced through the outstanding delivery of the RE curriculum. Year 6 pupils have a retreat at Oscott College and visit St Chad's Cathedral as part of their preparation for Confirmation. The curriculum is enriched by the pupils' involvement in the work of various charities including CAFOD, which provides excellent teaching materials. The skilled use of ICT supports the delivery of the curriculum. Well planned assemblies, the rich Catholic ethos of the school and high quality delivery of the curriculum fosters the pupils' excellent moral and spiritual progress. The diocesan personal, social and spiritual education programme is *All that I Am* is included as part of the school's well planned *Family Life Programme*. Performances at Christmas and Easter are linked to the seasons of the Church and further enrich the pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Faith. The school evaluates this aspect of its provision to be outstanding and the inspection confirms that this is an accurate judgement.

Leadership and Management of Religious Education

Leadership and management of RE are outstanding. The subject leader, who is also the acting deputy head, is passionate and committed to the teaching of the Faith. Her secure subject knowledge, excellent management skills and the high regard in which she is held by the parish priest, pupils, parents and staff enable to carry out her role in an exemplary manner. She is an outstanding witness and practitioner which go to make her an excellent role model for pupils and staff. She is fully supported in her work by the acting headteacher, who places the teaching of the faith as the highest priority in the school. The subject leader has put in place clear guidelines for

worship, spiritual development and the teaching of RE, which combined with good INSET ensures the outstanding delivery of her subject. The headteacher and subject leader have ensured through creative timetabling and staff deployment that the pupils receive the best possible teaching for RE. The subject leader is reflective and thorough and introduces new initiatives by building staff confidence, providing clear guidance and sharing good practice. She effectively monitors and evaluates her subject through a range of strategies. The governors effectively discharge their responsibilities in ensuring the leadership and management of religious education. The parish priest fully supports and endorses the subject leader in her work within the school.