

# Diocese of Wrexham

in North Wales



## INSPECTION REPORT

### St Mary's Catholic Primary School Wrexham

Head Teacher: Mrs Rachel Acton

Chair of Governors: Mr John Droog

**Date of Inspection: 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019**

**Date of previous Inspection: February 2013**

**Inspectors:     Roisin Moores**

**Carol Morgan**

**Julie Johnson**

## **BACKGROUND TO THE SECTION 50 INSPECTION.**

During each inspection, the inspectors follow the diocesan framework for inspection agreed by the Bishop of Wrexham and held by the Diocese of Wrexham. The inspection looks at the school as a Catholic school required to fulfill its statutory requirements under Section 50 of the School's Inspections Act, 2005 and the school's inspection requirements held under the authority of the Bishop of the Diocese, (Code of Canon Law, Book III: 806).

**During each inspection the inspectors will aim to focus on three main questions of the school, as a Catholic school.**

**Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?**

**Key Question 2: How good is provision?**

**Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?**

Inspectors will provide an overall judgment on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement

**The inspectors will use a four-point scale and judgment.**

**What the judgment means**

Outstanding

Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice

Good

Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement

Adequate

Strengths outweigh areas for improvement

Unsatisfactory

Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

## Introduction

The inspection of the school was carried out by three Inspectors from the Diocese of Shrewsbury. They visited fourteen Religious Education lessons and held meetings with the Head Teacher and Religious Education Coordinator; two governors, including the Religious Education Link Governor; the Parish Priest; staff members; pupils and representatives of a local Care Home. They observed the school's work and provision, including prayer, mediation, Collective Worship and a Christmas Concert. They looked at a range of evidence, including key documentation such as the school's self-evaluation, school development plan, pupils' work, assessment and tracking information, monitoring information, questionnaires and displays.

## Information about the school

St Mary's is a Voluntary Aided Catholic Primary School in the Diocese of Wrexham. The school is situated in the centre of Wrexham and serves the parishes of Our Lady of Sorrows (Cathedral) Wrexham, St Francis of Assisi Llay, Christ the King, Rossett, St Mary's Ruabon, Chirk, Corwen and Llangollen.

The Mission Statement is: "Learning and Loving, Caring and Sharing, through the Message of Christ"

The school caters for pupils aged 3 to 11 years old and there are 375 children on roll (September 2019). Almost 95% of pupils are baptised Catholics. 5% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is considerably below the national average of 18%. St Mary's is an English medium school and very few pupils speak Welsh at home. The majority of pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds with approximately 50% of pupils having English as an additional language. Approximately 8% of pupils have been identified as having additional learning needs which is well below the national average of 21%. The school currently has 2 Looked After Children and 3 pupils who were previously Looked After Children.

The Head Teacher took up post in October 2016 and the school has two Senior Managers leading the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2. Of the nineteen members of the teaching staff, twelve are Catholic and two have the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (C.C.R.S.).

The school has reached Eco Platinum status, is a member the National Eco Committee and has retained its Green School Categorisation awarded by the Welsh Government.

## Summary of Inspection Findings

St Mary's is an outstanding Catholic school.

The school is outstanding overall in providing and promoting Catholic Education. The school's Mission Statement '*Learning and Loving, Caring and Sharing, through the Message of Christ*', is clearly at the heart of all aspects of school life, and is well understood and cherished by the whole school community. The behaviour and attitudes of the pupils are outstanding, and pupils eagerly participate in all learning activities. Pupils say that they love their lessons in Religious Education and for many it is their favourite lesson. Standards are very high and should continue to rise given the ambitious culture within the whole school community.

The school has close links with all the clergy from the family of parishes attended by pupils. The school makes a significant contribution to these parishes and the wider community. The school's support for a variety of charities is excellent and pupils clearly want to make a difference to their communities.

Since the last inspection the school has fully implemented Diocesan recommendations and is constantly seeking to improve its provision.

Self-evaluation systems are rigorous and accurate and fully shared by all staff and governors. Provision for Religious Education and Collective Worship is outstanding. Assessment procedures are fully embedded in school practices, and in line with Diocesan policy.

The leadership of St Mary's, at all levels, is both aspirational and inspirational and the Head Teacher is a strong, compassionate and effective leader. Given the dedication and commitment shown by the leadership of the school, there is excellent capacity for sustained improvement. The Head Teacher has a clear vision for the school, and she is ably assisted by a strong Senior Leadership Team, hard-working staff, a very committed and dedicated Governing Body and very supportive clergy.

## **Recommendations**

**R1 Consider ways to involve parents in the annual review of the school's Mission Statement to encapsulate the views of the whole school community**

**R2 Consider the timing of lesson observations so that the teaching of a variety of topics is observed**

**R3 Make links with 'Laudato Si' to enhance further the excellent 'Eco' work being done in the school**

**R4 Share the school's excellent practice within the diocese and beyond**

## **What happens next?**

St Mary's Catholic Primary School will create an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. The Diocese of Wrexham will support and monitor the school's progress.

## **KQ1 How good outcomes are for individuals and groups of pupils**

During discussions, in lesson observations and in responses to questionnaires, pupils demonstrated overwhelmingly that they are very happy in their school and very proud of it, as one pupil commented: 'It is one big family and I feel loved and respected.' They thoroughly enjoy their lessons which they describe as being full of 'fun' and they say the activities their teachers provide are creative, challenging and give them opportunities to work independently. Much evidence was seen, during the inspection, of excellent collaborative learning, with very effective use being made of 'Talking Partners'. Pupils state that they cannot think of any way that their lessons could be made better! Standards are high and almost all pupils make at least expected progress from their low starting points. The school consistently meets the Diocesan expected end of Key Stage levels. Pupils are particularly articulate when talking about the Scriptures and even the youngest pupils

are able to speak with confidence about scripture and what it means to them. Pupils have a very strong sense of social justice and respond generously to fundraising for local, national and international causes such as CAFOD, Mission Together and other local appeals. The school works closely with local Care Homes and Year 3 pupils take turns to visit two homes each week where residents are highly appreciative of their visits. Managers commented that even residents who usually stay in their rooms are keen to participate during these visits.

Pupils are fully involved in the review of the school's Mission Statement and the recently formed, and very active, Messengers of Christ group led this year's review. The Mission Statement is at the very heart of the school's everyday life and creative interpretations of the Mission Statement are to be found in all the classrooms. Pupils are very knowledgeable about prayer and maintain their own Prayer Journals and they show great religious literacy when speaking about the Church's liturgical year. They are proud to be part of a praying community and see that attending a Catholic School helps them to be 'Close to God in the way that we live.' Pupils take an active part in liturgy, including being commissioned by the Parish Priest to distribute ashes on Ash Wednesday.

Pupils' books are very well-presented and of a high standard and teacher feedback supports pupils to understand the next steps they must take to progress. Good use is made of the 'I can statements' and 'Driver' words to ensure work is well planned and accurately assessed. The school maintains rigorous tracking systems to ensure all pupils make appropriate progress.

Pupils plan and lead Collective Worship with great confidence and enthusiasm and a variety of forms of Collective Worship are prepared including daily Meditation. Class Collective Worship books record the variety of liturgies experienced. Pupils really enjoy the times they come together for Collective Worship, as a class or as a whole school and also enjoy praying alone. They participate in all Collective Worship with great respect, reverence and enthusiasm. A parent commented; 'My children enjoy being part of Collective Worship and their involvement is encouraged in this.'

Pupils eagerly participate in the many extra-curricular activities the school offers them, such as the Messengers of Christ group, the School Council, the Eco Committee, the Singing Squad, the recently formed Credit Union, various sports' activities and the whole school Eisteddfodau activities. The school actively promotes opportunities to develop the Welsh culture and there is excellent use of incidental Welsh around school, within prayers and within lessons.

Pupils love their school – as one pupil commented: 'All of my classmates are lovely and so are my teachers.' Pupils feel that they receive an excellent education and that they are challenged and given lots of opportunities. They particularly appreciate the fact that their teachers trust them to work independently. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary – they show respect for all, as one pupil commented: 'God wants us to treat other people well.'

Taking all the above aspects into account the school is judged to be outstanding for the outcomes achieved by individuals and groups of learners.

## **KQ2 The quality of the school's work in providing Catholic education**

The quality of teaching seen across the school was at least good overall with many examples of outstanding, and at times, inspirational practice. In all lessons clear links were made to prior learning and effective use was made of technology and of opportunities to create cross-curricular links, such as Geography, English, Art, and Music. All lessons observed were very creative and

engaging and links were made to pupils' experience of Church and liturgy. Lessons were conducted in a calm and purposeful environment which emphasised the very strong and effective relationships that exist between staff and pupils.

Teachers' subject knowledge is very strong, and coaching and mentoring is used effectively to support less experienced staff. There is a real sense of teamwork within the school and teachers and support staff work very effectively together. Teachers plan in teams and all planning is thorough and includes a wide range of engaging activities that enable pupils to learn new skills and to embed their learning. Teachers maximise learning opportunities for all pupils and pupils are highly motivated learners. Teachers intervene appropriately in lessons to ensure that all pupils, including those with particular needs, make good or better progress. Resources are very effectively used to enhance provision. Staff and pupils are equally aspirational and, as a result, outcomes are outstanding. Pupils' behaviour for learning within lessons is outstanding.

Pupils concentrate extremely well and are able to work for sustained periods independently. Pupils work very well collaboratively, and Talking Partners is a particularly successful strategy. Pupils enjoy being challenged and are able to talk articulately about different 'zones' for learning, recognising that the best place to be is in the 'Learning' zone! A range of ways to record and enhance learning are used, including the use of an application called 'Seesaw'. Teacher questioning is used to good effect and pupils are given many opportunities to express their views, which they do so, confidently and articulately.

There is a rigorous tracking system in place to record formal assessments and any informal assessments. 'I can' statements and 'driver' words are used to support teaching and learning. The Head Teacher and staff work very well, with other Catholic schools in their cluster, and in the Diocese, and the schools regularly moderate work together.

The school uses the 'Come and See' Religious Education programme, in line with Diocesan recommendations, which meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. The school ensures that 10% curriculum time is dedicated to Religious Education, thereby fulfilling the requirements of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. The school is to be commended on its Religious Education provision which goes well beyond just using the scheme and meeting the needs of its pupils. The school has a well-developed policy for Relationships and Sex Education, 'Journey in Love' and this has explicit links to the topics covered in 'Come and See'.

Collective Worship is central to the life of the school and staff are highly skilled in helping pupils to plan and lead Collective Worship. The school endeavours to include parents and carers in many aspects of school life and every effort is taken to promote parental attendance at the wide variety of liturgies and celebrations on offer. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and are very appreciative of all that the staff do.

The whole school is united in its pursuit of inclusivity: all staff work very hard to meet the needs of all pupils. Pastoral support is a real strength of this school and it provides a welcoming, nurturing and loving environment for all pupils and families. The school is committed to fully living out its Mission Statement: *'Learning and Loving, Caring and Sharing, through the Message of Christ'*,

Taking all the above aspects into account, the school is judged to be outstanding for the provision achieved by individuals and groups of learners.

### **KQ3 How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the school**

The commitment of the highly ambitious team of leaders, governors and managers to the Church's mission in education is exemplary. The school's Mission Statement: *'Learning and Loving, Caring and Sharing, through the Message of Christ'*, is at the core of the work of all involved in leading and managing the school. The Mission Statement is reviewed annually, and the newly formed Messengers of Christ pupil group led the review this year.

The Head Teacher is transformational, inspirational and aspirational and leads the school community with great compassion and honesty. Together with the governors and senior leaders she is committed to the continued development of the Catholic Life and character of the school, including developing even greater links with all the parishes associated with the school. Much has been accomplished since the Head Teacher took up post in 2016 and there has been no room for complacency.

All senior staff and governors are fully informed about plans for Religious Education in the school, with the Mission and Purpose Committee taking responsibility for the strategic planning. This group meets every half term with an agenda set by the highly effective and dedicated Religious Education Co-ordinators, and it benefits from the contribution of the pupil group, Messengers of Christ. Monitoring and self-evaluation processes are rigorous, and the governing body provides an appropriate balance of support and challenge to the senior leadership team. Priority is given to Religious Education in the School Development Plan and there is a comprehensive Religious Education Action Plan in place. All are rightly proud of the school's outstanding provision for Religious Education.

The governors are kept very well informed by the Head Teacher and Religious Education Co-ordinator on all aspects of Religious Education through reports and attendance at Mission and Purpose committee meetings. Governors are fully involved in the analysis of academic standards within school. The Link Governor regularly takes part in monitoring and evaluation activities, for example, Learning Walks, and reports back to the Governing Body any implications or outcomes that need to be considered. Collective Worship is also monitored regularly. The governors prioritise the setting of a Performance Management target related to the Catholic Life of the School, for the Head Teacher and ensure that all staff are set a similar target, thus ensuring that the highest priority is given to the school's core purpose.

Provision for pupils' well-being is central to the school's ethos and mission. The pastoral care programme provides a comprehensive range of interventions to support pupils who are vulnerable or who have additional needs – this programme is a real strength of the school. Much work is also done to ensure that those pupils for whom English is an additional language are provided with the necessary support to achieve well and to thrive. Parents and pupils appreciate the love and care shown to them and say that they feel safe and cared for.

Staff and pupils fully understand the importance of the clearly articulated Gospel values that underpin the Catholic life of the school. One member of staff commented on: 'the wonderful atmosphere to work in where I feel valued and appreciated.' Staff are very supportive of one another and they feel well supported by the 'strong Catholic ethos throughout the school' and 'the daily

acknowledgement of faith.' All staff are very proud of their 'forward thinking school' and feel very well supported by their 'strong, compassionate, effective Head Teacher.' Less experienced staff commented on the generosity of more experienced staff in supporting and nurturing them in both a professional and personal capacity. Staff commented on the effectiveness of communication within school. There are strong relationships with all the parishes and mutual benefits experienced by all.

All parents speak highly of the school and the positive responses on the returned parental questionnaires show that parents appreciate the care and encouragement their children receive. A significant drive to engage parents and promote their attendance at school events and Masses in church has been very successful.

The clergy are frequent visitors to the school and are extremely supportive of the work the school does within the community. The Parish Priest is positive about the progress the school is making in developing various aspects of its Catholic Life. He feels that the school makes a good contribution to the spiritual life of its pupils and that teachers work hard to develop the pupils' knowledge of the Catholic faith.

A wide range of religious celebrations is organised by the school, including whole school Masses, class Masses, shared Family Masses, the Rosary, Services of Reconciliation, Stations of the Cross and Retreat days. The Parish Priest is working with the Messengers of Christ group to develop even more opportunities for worship. The First Holy Communion programme takes place within the parishes and is supported by the school and parish catechists. Following completion of the sacramental programme, an annual whole school First Holy Communion Mass allows all members of the school family to celebrate together.

All displays are of a very high quality and do much to support the Catholic life of the school. All the 'Come and See' displays are interactive and reference Gospel values and 'The God Who Speaks' and relate to both the liturgical season and the topic being studied. Excellent use is made also of Working Walls and teachers use a wide range of resources to enhance the teaching environment.

The school has excellent links with outside agencies which support its work with children and families.

Taking all the above into account the school is judged to be outstanding in relation to the Leadership and Management of the school. The definition of which is as a school, St Mary's has '*Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice.*'