



Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

INSPECTION REPORT

Cottesmore St Mary's Catholic Primary School
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DfES Number: 846 3341

Headteacher: Miss Rachel Holland
Chair of Governors: Mr Aleks Sczcerbiak

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Bishop of Arundel & Brighton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: 17 February 2011
Date of previous inspection: 6 July 2006

Lead Inspector: Mrs M Hughes
Associate Inspector: Mrs C Walker

Description of School

Cottesmore, St Mary's is a two form entry voluntary aided Catholic Primary School in the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. It is maintained by the Brighton and Hove Local Authority. There are currently 437 pupils on roll, most of whom are Catholic. The school serves three local parishes: The Sacred Heart, St Peter's and St George's. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage with only 6% speaking English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than found nationally, as is the proportion of pupils receiving free school meals. Most of the pupils transfer to the local Catholic secondary school at the end of Year 6. 47% of teachers are Catholic, four of them hold the Catholic Certificate of Education and two hold other Catholic qualifications. Since the last inspection there has been a change of both headteacher and deputy headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Satisfactory; Grade 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic School

Cottesmore, St Mary's is a good and improving Catholic school. It is clearly committed to developing the whole child and this is reflected in pupils' enjoyment, behaviour and attitudes. They are considerate, polite and sensitive to others' cultural and social background. They know they are valued and are encouraged to contribute to improving their school. Relationships in the school are excellent. They are based on justice and dignity of the human individual. The recently appointed headteacher gives strong leadership to the newly formed leadership team. Together they work well to inspire and encourage staff. This shared vision gives rise to a very strong Christian community which impacts on the inclusive Catholic ethos of the school. The governors understand and support the school extremely well, providing high levels of well informed challenge for senior staff. They are outstanding in the way they monitor and evaluate the Catholic life of the school and in the way they ensure that inclusion is part of the way of life for the whole community. Pastoral care is outstanding. Well developed support systems within the school are complemented by a range of partnerships with outside agencies to support the needs of even the most vulnerable pupils. Very strong liaison with parents and parishes further reinforces the school's ability to fulfil its ongoing Catholic mission. Prayer is always at the centre of school life and is interwoven into the school day. Acts of collective worship are stimulating and challenging, ensuring pupil interest and participation. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development underpins all aspects of school life and is outstanding.

The drive and ambition of the newly appointed headteacher have already secured significant improvements, particularly in teaching and learning. Pupils make satisfactory and sometimes good progress in interesting, well paced lessons, so many achieve levels in religious education that exceed national expectations by Year 6. The leadership team has recognised that pupils in both key stages could achieve more if teachers used the information from assessment systems to set individual targets and to plan challenging activities for all pupils, especially the more able.

Grade 2

Improvement since the last inspection

Very good progress has been made in addressing all the key issues identified in the last inspection. A new co-ordinator for Education in Personal Relationships (EPR) has been appointed and she has worked diligently to produce a new scheme of work for the subject. This has now been agreed with all stakeholders and its impact has been monitored effectively. A more creative approach to liturgy is apparent, as all teachers have good support in their planning of liturgical events. Assessment systems are now rigorous and the new RE team monitors teaching and learning systematically. After well focussed training, teachers have become more confident in using the different levels of attainment. Individual pupil progress is tracked and the information gained is beginning to have an impact on their planning.

Grade 1

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

The school's systematic and accurate self evaluation has helped to identify priorities for future development. The work of the senior leadership team demonstrates that the school is addressing them with vigour. Actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning are becoming effective and the impact of the focussed support given to teachers is helping to raise standards. Governors and staff are extremely enthusiastic and very committed to developing the Catholic life of the school. With the new RE team in place, the school has good capacity to improve.

Grade 2

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide activities that challenge the more able pupils so that attainment is raised and progress is consistently good.
- Use assessment systems more rigorously to identify under-achievement at all levels and to set clear targets for individual pupils.
- Continue to build on the improvements made with constructive marking so pupils know what they must do to improve their work.

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

Highly committed school leaders and governors communicate a strong sense of spiritual purpose as they focus on developing high academic standards and the fullest possible personal development of pupils. They hold a shared vision for the school as a place where everyone works together "to make the most of every opportunity knowing that all have a special part to play in the building of God's world." The Mission Statement underpins the life of the school as pupils are encouraged to see God in themselves and others and to fulfil their potential spiritually, personally and academically. The newly appointed headteacher communicates a strong sense of purpose in the way she promotes an inclusive environment in which all are valued. She shares her vision explicitly with staff and parents, as she places the Catholicity of the school at the forefront of all development. With great strength she leads a newly formed senior leadership team, which is acting quickly to raise the quality of teaching and learning through monitoring provision rigorously and through addressing issues for improvement conscientiously. The team has been particularly effective in improving assessment systems by tracking individual pupil progress.

The work of the governors is outstanding. They are very closely involved in the life of the school and proactively monitor its Catholic life by regular visits and by the work of the Pupils, Parents and Community Committee. The designated Governor for RE meets regularly with the RE Co-ordinator, so he is fully aware of the issues concerning standards of teaching and learning. All are exceptionally knowledgeable about the school's strengths and priorities for development through their engagement in critical and constructive dialogue with senior leaders and the headteacher.

The pastoral care of pupils is excellent because it is based on personal knowledge of individual need. Exceptionally good management systems and strong liaison with outside agencies provide personalised support for the more vulnerable pupils. A strong special needs co-ordinator and an equally effective EPR co-ordinator ensure that those with learning difficulties are fully integrated into this happy school community. Parents are very appreciative of the support they and their children receive, with one saying "The staff look after our children so carefully that we are always grateful we have joined such a wonderful, happy school"

There are equally strong links with the Diocese, the three parishes and the local secondary school. Such excellent co-operation helps pupils to recognise their place in the wider community.

Grade 1

The Prayer Life of the School

The school places great importance on prayer being at the centre of all that happens during the day, so that staff and pupils can develop their personal relationship with God. The words of the Mission Statement "We pray and celebrate together" are translated into practice through a range of opportunities for staff and pupils to engage in personal and collective worship. A good programme of whole school and key stage assemblies, based on the liturgical year and supporting the RE programme, is planned to engage pupils at all levels of ability. Mass and special assemblies are shared with the whole community so parents and parishioners are invited. The Mass celebrated during the inspection was very inclusive. The priest, an exceptionally good communicator, formed a warm and productive relationship with the whole congregation. He encouraged everyone to take an active part in the celebration, which included drama, reading, music and above all joyful song. The use of the overhead projector to guide everyone through the key moments of the Mass enabled the pupils to understand its significance to their own lives. The whole occasion was a happy, memorable experience and demonstrated how the parish priests work in partnership with the school in developing the pupils' spirituality and understanding of their faith. Well focussed staff training and the new liturgy format support teachers in their planning of such events.

Pupils often take responsibility for their own prayer life, for example, by using the prayer area during lunch time. They are encouraged to take time for prayer or quiet reflection. They also appreciate their class prayer tables, which are colourful, interactive and support the current RE topic. Decorated "prayer stones" are often used as a means of focussing thought. Pupils are confident in sharing spontaneous and written prayer. Even in the Reception Class they were eager to listen as one pupil and then another prayed for their families in their own way. Young though they were, it was impressive to see them engaged in such quiet reflection. Most RE lessons include a time for prayer and appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their personal spirituality are offered. For example, Year 5 pupils were invited to reflect on how the disciples must have felt at the Last Supper. Through guided meditation they were encouraged to empathise with the disciples as they faced loss. The Year 6 pupils too reflected on the need for reconciliation in their own lives while they were shown how to live out the Gospel in the things they do and say.

Prayer and collective worship are carefully monitored by the Senior Leadership Team to ensure that provision is of a consistently good standard. Such provision contributes significantly to the pupils' spiritual, moral and personal development, which is outstanding.

Grade 2

How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?

This is a very welcoming and inclusive community. Inclusion is central to the mission of the school so senior leaders monitor and identify opportunities to promote it through all aspects of school life. Community cohesion is addressed vigorously through the Pupils, Parents and Community Committee and a nominated governor has responsibility for carrying out focussed school visits to monitor the effectiveness of school policy. The impact of such procedures is seen in the cohesive behaviour of everyone involved in the school. There is a strong emphasis on respect and courtesy, so all pupils, including those with special educational needs, grow in confidence to develop as well rounded individuals. Such interventions as "Rainbows" and "Circle of Friends" support the more vulnerable pupils. Relationships are harmonious at all levels and pupils are quick to recognise the need for reconciliation. A member of the School Council summed it up by saying: "We are all a family in this school so we don't accept bullying and we are always helped to make up if we fall out." To further encourage trust and communication skills, pupils have been involved in a Working with Others project. This has had a positive impact on pupils' ability to work alongside people with a range of strengths. They are also quick to accept responsibility and cheerfully act as "buddies" and play leaders to those younger than themselves. Collective worship supports community cohesion by offering opportunities for "buddies" to celebrate Mass together.

The curriculum enables pupils to appreciate the different socio-economic backgrounds of the local community by encouraging an understanding of poverty and homelessness in this country and abroad. As a result pupils support St Anne's Day Centre for homeless people. They also work with other groups, such as Brighton and Hove Albion Football Club, to help disadvantaged people in the local area. The curriculum also deals with a range of cultural and religious beliefs through the "Here I Am" programme and through such opportunities as Multi Faith weeks and Arts Week. Because the school is predominantly Catholic, it actively seeks ways to celebrate difference. Pupils are encouraged to respect the faith traditions of others and to recognise the richness they bring to the community. They do this on a local basis by inviting pupils from a non-faith school to join in their Sacramental celebrations. Good links have been formed with a school in France and with a school in Senegal so pupils have an understanding of their role as global citizens. They recognise the impact their partnership has on other communities as they become involved in FairTrade issues and in fund raising for such charities as CAFOD.

Grade 1

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Children enter school with above average levels of achievement for their age, especially in relation to their personal, emotional and social skills. Most children also have a positive experience of Church. They settle quickly in the Early Years Foundation Stage thanks to the excellent care and support they receive. By the end of Key Stage1 their attainment in religious education matches national expectations. This indicates satisfactory progress because, given their starting points, some pupils could be expected to reach higher levels of attainment. Pupils'

achievement in RE is not as high as it is in literacy. However, there is evidence of some improvement this year that written work is beginning to match the good oral work. Pupils at this stage are already confident about discussing their beliefs and they use religious language appropriately. They know that Jesus left his disciples to carry out his work after the Last Supper and that this event is reconstructed at every Mass. One young pupil explained clearly the meaning of Jesus' words "Do this in memory of me".

Progress steadily improves throughout Key Stage 2, especially in the older classes, and by Year 6 almost all pupils reach, and some exceed, national expectations of attainment. However, a significant number of pupils do not make the expected rate of progress each year which suggests that in some classes they are not challenged sufficiently. Considering their ability more of them could be expected to achieve higher levels in RE. Improved systems for monitoring pupil progress are identifying under-achievement of those who find learning more difficult. Well-targeted support ensures that this group of pupils is making good progress. The system is not yet used rigorously to identify those more able pupils who could achieve higher standards through extended activities. At this stage, pupils build on their already strong oral skills by discussing complex issues such as what Jesus might mean by the words: "This is my body which is given up for you". They are confident in their understanding of Scripture. When challenging activities were observed, such as using Venn diagrams to compare and contrast Scripture passages, pupils made very good progress in their critical thinking and showed a mature depth of understanding.

Pupils respond positively to RE, working well in groups and independently. As they move through the school, their work reflects an ability to apply their learning to their own lives. For example, they were able to relate their understanding of the Last Supper to a time when they shared a special meal together. Many demonstrate a growing ability to make balanced judgements on moral and social issues as they reflect on life and learning through their concern for other people. Consequently they make very good progress in their personal and social development.

Grade 2

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Teaching is generally good because positive relationships and strong class management allow pupils to thrive in a supportive learning environment. Teachers plan their lessons carefully to ensure that they correspond with pupils' life experiences so that they are relevant and engaging. They build successfully on previous learning and some share "Stepping Stones" to success, so that pupils know what is expected of them. A climate of enquiry exists in the best classrooms as teachers plan and ask key questions to challenge pupils' thinking. Because of the good relationships established, pupils feel free to make mistakes, knowing that their answers will be validated. In the lessons visited, a range of activities was employed to secure a lively pace to learning. In a Year 1 classroom effective use was made of ICT, "easispeak" and smartboards to motivate pupils. In many classes "talk partners" were used to good effect and pupils responded positively to the carefully planned items for discussion, such as "How does the Eucharist help us to reflect on our lives and make changes?" In this Year 6 class the learning was put into context through visual maps, art work and excellent use of key vocabulary. After well targeted Diocesan training, teachers are becoming more confident in planning a variety of activities to match the different abilities of their pupils. In most cases this ensures that the needs of those with learning difficulties are well addressed, especially with the sensitive support of classroom assistants. Challenging, open-ended activities are not, however, consistently offered to the more able pupils and differentiation is often by outcome only. There is evidence to show that this situation is improving as teachers' understanding of assessment criteria for different levels of ability has been aided by their sharing of work samples. Good systems for tracking pupil progress are now in place and are beginning to have an impact on the attainment of the less able. However

teachers do not always use the systems to set clear short term targets that challenge the more able. Developmental marking is helping pupils to recognise how well they are doing but further dialogue with teachers would enable them to determine what they should do to improve their work.

Grade 2

Quality of the Curriculum

Religious education infiltrates all areas of learning. It is taught through the ethos of the school and through an increasingly creative curriculum. In line with the Bishops' requirements, 10% of the curriculum is also specifically designated to RE. It is based on the "Here I Am" programme, builds on the foundation of home and is linked to the pupils' life experiences. It helps them to develop religious literacy through gradually escalating their knowledge and understanding. It is designed to encourage spiritual, personal and theological development of all pupils, irrespective of ability. The improved use of assessment systems is helping to keep the programme relevant and ensures equality of access for all. The introduction of a more creative curriculum provides good opportunities for pupils to use their skills in literacy, art and ICT to solve problems in real life situations. In both key stages famous paintings of the Last Supper were used successfully to stimulate discussion about how the disciples might be feeling. Early numeracy skills were harnessed too in counting the plates and cups at the table. Music permeates all areas of school life and is an important feature of the RE curriculum. It helps pupils in their personal, joyful response to learning. In addition, the diverse range of music and art opportunities, such as attending a local jazz workshop and team teaching art with the secondary school, have promoted pupils' cultural development. Pupils often experience trips and visits which enrich their learning and the many visitors to school make learning fun. Such events as Arts Week and participation in the Brighton Festival and FairTrade Fortnight all serve to enhance provision. The curriculum enables the pupils to relate well to the local community by encouraging an understanding of the range of socio-economic and religious backgrounds. Visits to the nearby synagogue and mosque help pupils to understand different beliefs and traditions.

The EPR programme is closely linked to the RE programme and is also very well planned to ensure progression. It is crucial to the pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development as it offers them models of positive behaviour and relationships. Personal development is given strong and effective emphasis, particularly for those who experience difficulties.

An annual audit of resources and the careful monitoring of provision ensure that teachers have all they need to deliver RE.

Grade 1

Leadership and management of Religious Education

The headteacher, senior staff and governors are strongly committed to the faith development of pupils and to raising standards in religious education. Due to the recent change in leadership, restructuring at all levels has taken place. The new RE co-ordinator is part of the Senior Leadership Team and has responsibility for teaching and learning. He has secured considerable improvements in both, due to careful monitoring and evaluation of the subject and through implementing improved assessment procedures. The previous co-ordinator retains responsibility for worship and spirituality. She demonstrates her extensive knowledge of Catholic tradition in the way in which she supports staff in their delivery of prayer and liturgy opportunities. Both co-ordinators have excellent subject knowledge and are passionate about their subject. They are innovative practitioners and model good practice for the staff. The equally excellent EPR co-ordinator completes the strong team. Between them there is a very good balance between

leadership and management, with processes in place to enable the Catholic vision to be put into practice.

All co-ordinators write focussed action plans based on the results of their monitoring. They have correctly identified the need to develop the use of assessment to challenge all pupils appropriately as a focus for improvement. They all coach and mentor staff who have specific development needs and good use is made of Diocesan support at whole school training days. The impact of all professional development is correctly measured against pupils' learning. This is why improvements are so evident.

The good co-operation with the RE Governor ensures that the governors are fully aware of the strengths and issues for development in the subject. They are also totally committed to the pastoral care of staff and to tackling discrimination of all kinds. The impact of this robust co-operation is seen in the strong sense of spiritual purpose in the school, making it a place where adults and pupils thrive.

Grade 1