



## **CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL**

St Mary's is a Voluntary Aided Roman Catholic primary school serving the needs of the parish of St Mary's, Littleborough. This is an average size primary school serving a semi-rural catchment area to the northeast of Rochdale. There are 239 children on roll including part time nursery aged pupils. Attainment on entry is average but children leave having made good progress and achievement is above national average by the end of Key Stage 2. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible to receive a free school meal is well below the National Average at 14.1%. The school is predominantly White British with only 7.4% speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below the National Average at 4.5%. Attendance is consistently above national at 97.4%. 86% of the children are baptised Roman Catholic. The Headteacher commenced her headship in September 2013.

## **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL IS OUTSTANDING**

St Mary's is an outstanding Catholic primary school offering the children a rich faith experience alongside rapidly improving standards. The Headteacher is energised by the task of Catholic leadership, developing her team and continuous improvement. The cohesive team of governors and staff have dedicated themselves to the building up of a Catholic learning community which is a source of inspiration. Pupils enjoy and are challenged by their learning in Religious Education. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and learning is well matched to their level of need. Monitoring and assessment of the Religious Education curriculum by the Headteacher, and well supported by the Deputy, has ensured that there has been significant development since the last inspection. The celebration of Mass, prayer services and assemblies are well prepared and give pupils many opportunities to develop and enrich their prayer life. Parents expressed a high level of commitment to the school because it is a Catholic school recognising that their children were respected, valued and cared for. The school embraces and places a high priority on partnerships with the home and parish. All members of the school community are committed to the parish. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is fully embedded across all aspects of the curriculum.

## **THE KEY STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL INCLUDE:**

- The leadership of the Headteacher is outstanding. Alongside senior leaders and governors, she has led the school with vision, compassion and with an outstanding determination to improve standards.
- The Mission Statement is lived, visible and permeates all aspects of school life.
- Rigorous monitoring, analysis and self-challenge is having a positive impact on the raising of standards in religious education.
- Reflective and meditative prayer within school is outstanding.

## **THE QUALITY OF CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP IS OUTSTANDING**

The dedicated Headteacher is energised by the task of leading this school and under her leadership outcomes for children have rapidly improved. There is a strong sense of ownership and vision across the community: governors, staff team, pupils and their families are unified and guided by a living Mission Statement. The governors are fully supportive of and promote the school as a Catholic learning community. They demonstrate a clear understanding of and commitment to their role in taking the school forward in its purpose and mission. The Chair of Governors works closely with the headteacher to ensure all the governors are aware of current strengths and areas for improvement. Strong leadership from the Religious Education subject leader, who is also the Deputy Headteacher, has ensured that there has been significant improvement. Monitoring and assessment of the Religious Education curriculum by the Headteacher, supported by the Religious Education Subject Leader, has been rigorous and it has had a positive impact on raising standards. Appraisal is thorough and effective, and performance management objectives in Religious Education are a regular feature. The Parish Priest is fully involved in the religious life of the school and visits regularly going into the classrooms and talking to the children. Leadership skills for the children are

developed through the varied opportunities within the school, but we would like the school to continue on this journey by providing greater opportunities for pupils to lead prayer and learning in their RE lessons.

### **THE QUALITY OF THE WORD OF GOD IS OUTSTANDING**

Religious Education is at the core of the curriculum. Children are extremely positive about their learning in RE lessons and progress is outstanding, because the quality of teaching is very good overall. Teaching and learning is characterised by high expectations and is well matched to the needs of all pupils. The children are extremely proud of their RE book and they are encouraged to include examples of living out their faith at home and in the community. The work children produce and standards of presentation in their RE books is outstanding. Pupil background knowledge was found to be of a high standard due to significant prior knowledge and where the Philosophical approach is used the higher order thinking and questioning is resulting in exceptional learning and skills levels. They know and understand the Bible and are able to talk knowledgeably about scripture. In the best lessons, pupils were inspired by exceptional teaching and at each stage of the lesson the children were actively involved in their learning. Prayer and reflection are a strong feature in all lessons. Marking is having a positive impact on learning and pupils are responding to the teachers' comments. Pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural education was found to be outstanding. The Religious Education budget is set according to the needs of the curriculum and the Catholic life of the school and is adjusted on a yearly basis in line with other core subjects. The school prioritises Religious Education on its professional development programme for staff.

### **THE QUALITY OF WELCOME IS OUTSTANDING**

St Mary's is an extremely welcoming community where everyone is made to feel included. The pupils and staff clearly understand the importance of welcoming others into their community. They demonstrated their understanding in a variety of contexts and they are living examples of the school mission statement. The children are happy and secure within the school. The School Council, Chaplains and other pupil groups promote a sense of responsibility and pride. The importance of the dignity of the individual is clearly evident at all levels and pupils and staff consistently witness to Christ being at the heart of the community through excellent communication, relationships and a joyful holistic approach to daily life. Parents and friends play a highly significant part in school life and their contributions are valued. Parents are particularly appreciative of all the new initiatives introduced by the Headteacher over the last twelve months. Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in school life and they feel a strong sense of belonging to the school community. The EYFS staff make home visits to pre-school children to make them and their families feel welcome. Vulnerable Year 6 pupils have a tailored support plan for transition to High school. Staff work effectively as a team, morale is high and there is a clear sense of ownership and pride in the school community.

### **THE QUALITY OF WELFARE IS OUTSTANDING**

Parents spoke highly of the pastoral support their child receives in school. Structures and procedures ensure that all pupils and staff feel safe. Provision for safeguarding and keeping children safe is outstanding. Vulnerable pupils and their families are exceptionally well cared for and supported. Every morning, several vulnerable children go to the Rainbow room before school to ensure a quiet and calm start to the day. Pupils are confident that if they have any problems they can speak to a member of staff and that any problems will be dealt with sympathetically. In addition to the support children receive on a daily basis, a member of staff is made available on Friday afternoon to listen to and deal with any particular concerns children may wish to share. Teachers are approachable and parents feel able to talk with them about issues that concern them; concerns are dealt with effectively. Behaviour and movement of pupils around the building is outstanding. All staff follow procedures set out in the schools behaviour policy and there are a various reward schemes in operation. The school promotes high attendance and punctuality. Pupils within the school clearly have a voice and are listened to through School Council and other initiatives. They make decisions about ways in which the children can raise money for the school's chosen charities. The quality of transition is such that all children quickly feel part of the school community. The provision for SRE is through 'In the beginning' programme, although the school are currently reviewing their provision.

### **THE QUALITY OF WORSHIP IS OUTSTANDING**

The spiritual life of the children is held in high regard with children afforded opportunities every day to be involved in collective worship. All classes pray together in the morning, at lunchtime and at the end of the day. There are weekly masses to which families and parishioners are invited. During Mission Week, the children developed prayer boxes that continue to be used by the school community. Whole school assemblies reflect on personal faith, moral issues, festivals, special occasions and other religions and cultures. During the whole school assembly, the Headteacher encouraged the children to reflect upon the school community and how God loves each member of the community. Several opportunities were given for personal prayer and reflection. 'Statements to live by' are used weekly in assembly and they are encouraging all to reflect, act upon and promote Christian values. All staff are trained and supported in furthering the prayer life of the school. The pupils have developed a good knowledge of traditional prayers. However, greater opportunity for pupils to take a leadership role in engaging with families and parish in prayer and worship will enhance current practice. The recently developed Chaplaincy room and the prayer garden will promote a more spontaneous approach to prayer. The collective worship in the classroom was reflective, child-centred and spiritually uplifting. The organisation and implementation of this activity was excellent and resulted in a deeply spiritual experience for all those present. Nevertheless, these activities could be improved even further by greater pupil participation and leadership. Throughout the school there is evidence of high quality resources in all areas. Prayer tables in classrooms, display materials and artefacts demonstrate creativity and relevance to the children, although displays could be further enhanced with scripture and religious vocabulary.

### **THE QUALITY OF WITNESS IS OUTSTANDING**

An explicit Catholic culture permeates the whole of the school and is clearly articulated and witnessed. There were frequent references to the Mission Statement in assemblies and lessons. The school encourages and supports its pupils to develop a relationship with God and to share their beliefs with others through words and actions. It fosters a spirit of awe and wonder through religious education and the broader curriculum. A strong sense of belonging to the school community exists based on the teachings of Jesus. Relationships are excellent between all members of the community and staff demonstrate positive behaviour. Pupils clearly demonstrate witness to justice, compassion, reconciliation, love and forgiveness. Close links with the parish are enhanced with the regular visits of Father Nearey and the work of the catechists for the sacramental programme. Observations showed that children treated each other with respect, care, patience, concern and with dignity and there is an emphasis on creating a pleasant working environment for everyone in school. The school Chaplaincy team give awards to children observed doing kind acts and following the example of Christ. Although the Chaplaincy team is still in its infancy, they are enthusiastic and proud of the work they have done during the autumn term. The pupils are keen supporters of local and international charities; including the highly successful shoe box appeal and supporting the Rochdale food bank. It is clear that the school stands as a witness to Christ's love, forgiveness and compassion when challenged. The support for families in difficulty is exceptional.

### **AGREED AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT:**

- To develop the children's confidence to lead and plan prayer and worship. To actively prepare pupils to take on leadership role in engaging the school community in prayer and worship.
- Continue to ensure that pupils make exceptional progress in religious education. Ensuring that teachers give pupils enough time and opportunity to engage in challenging, creative and collaborative learning activities.

Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2015

Dear Pupils

Thank you so much for the wonderful welcome you gave me when we came to visit you. I really enjoyed learning about all the wonderful things you do at St Mary's. You and your teachers are working so hard to always do your very best and as a result your school is outstanding.

We enjoyed being part of your lessons and we were sorry not to see everyone. Your work is of a very high standard and we could clearly see that you take your learning very seriously and you are proud of what you are achieving. We were impressed with the standard of work in your RE books.

It was wonderful to see how you participated in Collective Worship and talked to Jesus during silent prayer. Your behaviour was exemplary during assembly and we really enjoyed the liturgical dance. The chaplains are doing a wonderful job. I hope you use the new Chaplaincy room to prayer and relax. We were very impressed with your use of your P4C work and the Peace Garden.

We have asked your teachers to give you more opportunities to lead and plan prayer and worship and to actively prepare you to take on a leadership role in engaging the school community in prayer and worship. We have also asked your teachers to give you more time for learning and greater opportunities to work in groups.

Thank you for the warm welcome we received from everyone.

God bless you all and enjoy the spring term.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Susan Gedzielewski and Mr James Graves  
(Section 48 Inspectors)

 **DIOCESE OF SALFORD**  
Department for Formation, Office for Education

**Summary Report to Parents**

On 28<sup>th</sup> February 2015 the school was inspected in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

The full report has been made available to the school and can also be accessed via both the school website and the Education section on the website of the Diocese of Salford.

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Yours sincerely

Mrs Susan Gedzielewski and James Graves  
(Section 48 Inspectors)