

INSPECTION REPORT

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**Inspection carried out Under Canon 806
and in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005**

Name of School **St Mary's RC Primary School, 72 Whalley Rd, Langho, Blackburn BB6 8EQ**

Inspection date 1st May 2019

Reporting Inspectors Dennis Harrison, Pam Macro and Helen Arnold

Type of school	Primary
URN	119642
Age range of pupils	4-11
Number on roll	262
Appropriate authority	The Governing Board
Chair of Governors	Cath Mehta
Headteacher	Caroline Boden
Religious Education Subject Leader	Laura Orr
Date of previous inspection	July 2014

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades
Overall effectiveness of the school	2	1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3=Requires Improvement 4 = Inadequate
Catholic Leadership	1	
The Catholic Life of the school (incorporating Welcome, Welfare and Witness)	1	
Religious Education (incorporating Word)	2	
Collective Worship	2	
The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements		

CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

St Mary's RC Primary School serves the parish of St Mary's, Langho. It is a slightly larger than average primary school with 262 pupils on role, with a pre-school group of 13 children attending. The school is due to expand from an admission number of 40 to 45 to assist Lancashire's basic need extension programme. 90% of pupils are baptised Roman Catholic. The majority of pupils are white British (90%) and there are very few pupils with English as an additional language. The number of children supported by Pupil Premium is well below the national average at 6.2%. 2.93% receive Free School Meals. The percentage of pupils with SEND is below the national average at 3% with no children with an Education Health and Care Plan. The ability of pupils entering the school into Reception is marginally higher than that expected nationally and represents the full ability spectrum. The school has entered a more settled time since the arrival of the new headteacher in April 2018 following some turbulence in leadership and staffing.

THE KEY STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL INCLUDE:

- **Determined and passionate leadership at all levels, especially from the headteacher, which has steered the school through unsettled times and set a positive direction for the future.**
- **The wonderful family atmosphere that envelops the school and its community.**
- **Charming and engaging children who provide a joyous welcome, behave beautifully and who love coming to their school.**
- **The impressive links with the parish of St Mary's, under the pastoral stewardship of the parish priest, cementing excellent relationships and a true sense of belonging.**

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL IS GOOD

This rapidly improving Roman Catholic primary school is now benefiting from a period of calmness with a new ambitious direction for the future. The headteacher provides excellent leadership, wisdom and determination to St Mary's, Langho. She is well supported by the Religious Education subject leader who fulfils her role enthusiastically. The Governing board now provide effective support and challenge and their commitment to the school is unerring. The much loved and highly regarded parish priest has supported the school during times of turmoil. He remains a life prop to the school, always there to advise, encourage and guide. His outstanding pastoral stewardship enhances the day to day experience for the children and their families. The Catholic Life of St Mary's is outstanding because the school welcomes everyone with warmth, cares profoundly well for the children and proclaims the Gospel message loud and clear in this part of the Ribble Valley. The wonderful children are excited about school life because they know they are part of an uplifting plan, one which will see them take greater leadership roles in prayer and worship and they welcome that the school is so keen to give them the best that it can! Parents articulate their praise for the school clearly stating how accommodating leaders and staff are and how they appreciate the new sense of purpose and ambition. With ever higher expectations of what the pupils can achieve and consistently high outcomes in children's work visible across the school and in the children's books, St Mary's will be providing a truly outstanding Catholic education for its children and families.

THE QUALITY OF CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

Overall St. Mary's is led outstandingly well. There is no doubt that the school has undergone a period of instability due to changes in leadership at all levels in recent years. However, upon the appointment of the current headteacher five terms ago, a period of stability has emerged under strong leadership. She has immediately set about engendering a new passionate direction for the school. She has seen the huge potential of St Mary's and leads by example in striving for rapid and sustained improvement so that the school becomes a beacon of excellent practice across the board as soon as possible. She has

brought calmness and wisdom to the leadership of the school and this inspires and challenges in equal measure. The entire school community rightly hold her in high esteem because her love of the children and her devotion to the school are infectious. She is very well supported by the acting deputy headteacher who is also the skilful and knowledgeable Religious Education subject leader. The governing board have recently undertaken a review of governance and are now effective in the support and challenge for the school leadership team. They have a refreshingly honest and accurate knowledge of the school's journey and share a deep founded commitment to move from the difficulties of the past into a bright and successful future. They now support the school with strategic challenge and leave day to day operational responsibilities to the skilled leaders in school. In the midst of all this is the constant care of the parish priest who has supported the school every step of the way. The self-evaluation process should now focus on the impact of the actions that have been agreed and involve all parts of the community, especially the children, to gather views on how well the school is doing. The school has begun to deepen the skills of middle leaders and it is important that all staff have full access to the Catholic leadership programmes provided by the Diocese and the North West Diocese Alliance.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL (incorporating Welcome, Welfare and Witness) IS OUTSTANDING

It is moving to witness the smiling faces of the children as they arrive at school each day. They are warmly welcomed with their families and gladly share their stories and successes because they know they are loved and valued. Despite the upheaval of a significant building programme and a new entrance some distance away, the headteacher and her staff meet families as they arrive in rain and shine. Older children care for the little ones tenderly (as gardeners and seeds) and this means everyone feels safe and protected. The children chat about their lives confidently, for example one little girl announcing to an inspector that her smart new hair cut was because she had given her long hair to charity. The calm and purposeful atmosphere around the school ensures that the children have the space to grow and 'to love one another as I have loved you'. The children are very aware of their place in the world and global responsibilities. The school is right to deepen this provision so that every child is fully aware of living in modern Britain and types of radicalisation. The school meets the needs of its families very well. The culture of kindness and care ensures pupils lead not only the outreach within the school but also locally and globally. Based on the school's banner mission statement the children articulate how important their work is in reaching out to those in need. Whenever a little issue arises they know the best way to resolve it 'is to find common ground'. St Mary's is known as a caring Catholic community that is highly regarded in the locality. Parents praise the school for being open and approachable, always acting swiftly on any issues. A parent new to the school commented, 'This is my perfect school and it is a joy to come here!'

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (incorporating Word) IS GOOD

Inspectors agree with the school that Religious Education (incorporating Word) is good. Standards and expectations are rising under the drive of the Religious Education subject leader and the headteacher. The elements of outstanding teaching witnessed always followed detailed planning, clear learning objectives and strong indications to pupils of what a high quality outcome looks like. In an upper Key Stage 2 class, where imaginative media was blended with astute and searching questioning around the Ascension of Christ into heaven, the children contributed with deep thinking and soul searching. In a lower Key Stage 2 class learning was enhanced by a 'Question Time' style panel of apostles answering searching questions about the coming of the Holy Spirit. In all classes the outstanding attitudes and behaviour of the children is the bedrock of effective learning. Teaching was not as strong when less thought was put into planning and when learning outcomes and what was expected at the end of the lesson was not clear or not sufficiently challenging. This also reveals a mis-match between the expectations and teaching skills in some classes with the same age of pupils. Whereas none of the teaching observed was less than good, the opportunity for modelling the best lessons and outcomes will set a clear path for even further improvement. Standards of work in the Religious Education books are good and at least as good as those in Literacy. Leaders are highly ambitious for outstanding outcomes based on skilful teaching to be consistently practised in all classes. Children across the school are very literate and use their language skills to great effect. Even in Key Stage 1 lovely use of language can be witnessed, for example a Year 2 child wrote as part of a poem, 'Jesus stood with hands tied, Courage, with purpose, he refused to hide'. The positive atmosphere and sense of teamwork at St Mary's will be a strong foundation as the school moves towards outstanding provision. Sacred Scripture is becoming well known and understood across the school. The mission banner statement 'Love one another as I have loved you' is known and understood by everyone. The

school could consider strengthening the mission by incorporating statements of intent providing the opportunity for the whole community to take part in the school's exciting and rapid journey of improvement.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP IS GOOD

There is a calm and prayerful atmosphere at St Mary's. The children meet God each day in the caring and loving relationships that typify this happy school. Prayer is at the heart of daily life and the children are becoming naturally prayerful, enjoying their experience of prayer and worship at school. It is not yet outstanding because prayer and worship across the school depends too heavily on adult involvement limiting the creativity and ownership of pupils. The school has recently introduced the 'Lectio Divino' steps of prayer. This is currently led by the teachers and unfolds over a number of days. Knowing that the children have excellent attitudes and creditable maturity the school should set the children free to plan, deliver and evaluate these activities and many other times of prayer so that a child-like wonder sits at the heart of prayer. The school prayer is known well and when the school meets as a community it is a calm and harmonious. Traditional prayers and the saying of the Rosary are beautifully observed. Teachers plan many special assemblies and themed gatherings which are enhanced by the children's excellent behaviour. This can be developed even further by creating time and space for the children to have time to sit silently in the presence of God, accessing the grace and stillness of quiet meditative prayer that focusses on listening. The school will need to provide training for all staff with this area. This is provided by the Diocese and through sharing practice with outstanding providers.

AGREED AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- **Develop a system of self-evaluation that involves all parts of the community, especially children, and that clearly demonstrates the impact of actions agreed.**
- **Raise the expectations in the provision of Religious Education so that outstanding teaching and learning and outcomes are commonplace in all classes.**
- **Extend the provision in prayer and worship to ensure pupils have regular opportunities for times of prayerful silence in the presence of God.**
- **Ensure pupils have deeper opportunities to plan, create, deliver and evaluate their own prayer and worship.**