



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF  
**ARUNDEL & BRIGHTON**  
EDUCATION SERVICE

## DENOMINATIONAL CATHOLIC SCHOOL INSPECTION REPORT

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

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School Unique Reference Number: 126037

Headteacher:	Mr Peter Edgington
Chair of Governors:	Mrs Sheila Higgins
Lead Inspector:	Mr Stephen C Horsman
Associate Inspector:	Mrs Elizabeth Hargreaves
Inspection date:	22 <sup>nd</sup> September 2021
	Previous Inspection: 1
Overall Effectiveness	This Inspection: 1
Catholic Life:	1
Religious Education:	1
Collective Worship:	1

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS/CARERS AND PUPILS/STUDENTS

St Mary's is an Outstanding Catholic school because:

St Mary's is a Catholic Christian community that lives out its vocation in fulfilling the Church's mission for education of making Christ known to all people, placing Christ and the teaching of the Church at the centre of its community. Pupils' sense of belonging is tangible and they make a significant contribution to the Catholic life of the school. They know and understand the mission statement and Governors are totally committed to the school.

The quality of religious education is outstanding because teachers use a great variety of differentiated tasks to enable pupils to achieve. Pupils respond enthusiastically to skilful questioning. Teaching and learning observed was never less than good, with most outstanding.

The quality of collective worship is outstanding because the pupils show reverence and respect and have a depth of enthusiasm for prayer and worship. There are a variety of prayer methods used to engage pupils and leadership and management have a depth of understanding of the formation and creation of liturgy.

# FULL REPORT

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Mary's was founded by the Servite Fathers in 1899 and serves the Bognor community and the wider parish community. 73% of the pupils are Catholic, 14% are from other Christian faiths, 5% are from other faith backgrounds and 8% are from no faith background. Many parents actively choose the school because of its Catholic ethos. There are 22 home languages, and the school has a very inclusive ethos accepting children from many different backgrounds and needs. 50% of children have English as an additional language (EAL), with the predominant one being Polish. The number of pupils with an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP) is 9, with 2 in process, and 36 pupils are on the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) register. 33 pupils are on pupil premium. The school serves a deprived coastal area with 28% of children in single-parent households, 13% white non-British, 23% identified as living in poverty and 17% living in overcrowded accommodation. 63% of teachers are Catholic, 15 teachers teach religious education, 3 teachers hold CCRS, and one holds a Theology Degree.

## WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Promote independence in liturgy, by increasing further, pupils' opportunities for leadership in worship.

## CATHOLIC LIFE

### THE QUALITY OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

- The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.
- The quality of provision of the Catholic Life of the school.
- How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

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**The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is Outstanding.**

St Mary's is an authentic Christian community. On entry to the school one is immediately immersed in its Catholic ethos. The mission statement is central to the life of the school. A video on the website describes how the mission statement permeates every aspect of school life and this is obvious in the school. Pupils can articulate the school mission statement and parents and carers are overwhelming in their support of the school. Solid relationships are built with the pupils and there is a clear impact upon home life.

Pupil engagement in Catholic life is a strength. The RE Council folder clearly shows the depth of involvement of pupils in further developing the Catholic life of the school. For example, they evaluate the Prayer Foci in each classroom praising what is good and making suggestions as to what could be better. Charity work is extensive; several fundraising ventures for CAFOD and other organisations take place throughout the school year. During the lockdown, pupils contributed to and assisted with a food bank and each Sunday morning some members of school staff support with providing breakfast for the homeless. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes reflect the Catholic character of the school. Pupils treat each other with utmost respect.

Parent questionnaires show overwhelmingly that the majority of parents feel the Catholic ethos of St Mary's has had a positive influence on their children. Phrases in the responses include for example, 'always well informed' and 'always welcomed'. One parent stated that, because of the positive effect on his child, he will be starting to attend Mass and 'taking church and religion seriously.' Another parent summarised the parents' and carers' view, saying, "St Mary's Catholic teachings are invaluable for our children. They do a wonderful job." During the parent interviews one parent articulated that they were non-Catholic, the school had been second choice and they feared feeling like outsiders. However, "this was not the case, we have been so welcomed and now our daughter wants to become a Catholic, too. We wouldn't change school now."

## The quality of provision of the Catholic Life of the school is Outstanding.

The impact of the school's mission statement is evident in all areas of school life. The staff retreats are a priority in the school year and attendance is always very good. This enables all staff to participate fully in the Catholic life of the school. Opportunities are provided for all staff to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation or simply have a conversation with the priest. The retreat includes a 'business' element which illustrates clearly that the Catholic life of the school permeates all aspects of school life.

Pupils value the parish and are very involved in the community. KS2 pupils attend Friday morning Parish Mass, which continued through live streaming during the pandemic. The Parish Priest commented that a positive outcome of Covid was last Holy Week. The pupils took the lead in a Stations of the Cross on the field, which involved all staff, teaching and non-teaching; for example, the site manager made the cross for the purpose! The pupils also produced thoughtful and moving work through liturgical dance, drama and art.

The Parish Priest promotes and is fully supportive of, the Catholic life of the school. He is regularly in the school playground, available to chat with the pupils. He celebrates the sacraments with the school community and is the Chair of the Catholic Ethos Committee. Minutes show that the committee offers rigorous challenge along with support to the Headteacher and Senior Leadership team. Outcomes are fed into full Governing Body meetings. The Parish Priest feels part of the community of St Mary's. He stated that the "school welcomes the Parish" and the "Parish Hall is in the school." The Servite Sisters who founded the school are regularly invited to school events such as the Nativity Play.

Pastoral care is a significant strength. Parents expressed that their children were cared for and feel safe. This was echoed by the pupils who stated that they "felt safe and part of the community." Pupils were not afraid to challenge visitors. One pupil asked an inspector, "Who are you?" and wanted to see the identity badge. They are fully aware of the protocols required during Covid. They feel safe and care for one another, as expressed by one pupil, "our friends look out for us." Relationship, Sex and Health Education is supported by the TenTen Programme to which the pupils respond positively. One pupil stated that he especially loves doing the work in the TenTen Programme. Parent questionnaire responses overwhelmingly show that they are fully committed to its implementation and stated that "this is a very caring school; Catholic life and values permeate all levels and activities."

St Mary's is a community where all involved promote high standards of behaviour. Through modelling behavioural expectations, staff promote high standards of behaviour among the pupils which contributes to a harmonious community of mutual respect and forgiveness.

The curriculum, both in its academic and wider sense, reflects the school mission to serve the common good and respect our common home. Catholic life permeates every aspect of the curriculum. The dignity of each person is at the heart of everything the school does, providing extensive opportunities for the moral and spiritual development of all pupils and staff.

## How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school is Outstanding.

Leaders and governors are totally committed to the Catholic life and character of the school. Governors told an inspector that the structure of the Governing Body includes a Catholic Ethos Committee, with whom the inspector met. Minutes of meetings showed that Governors challenge as well as support the Headteacher and SLT appropriately. Governors attend acts of worship and offer feedback through the committee. Governors were involved in writing the School Evaluation Form for the Catholic School Inspection.

Leaders and governors help shape and support the vision and direction of the Catholic life of the school through strong links with the Parish, the Deanery and the Diocese. They continuously monitor and evaluate the Catholic life of the school through conversations with parents and pupils, reviewing portfolios, and attendance at various events. In addition, governors described the school as a place of “gentleness and pastoral support that was inclusive.” They cited an example of staff reaching out during the pandemic to those of key worker children through emails, telephone calls and, if needed, home visits.

The school is very effective in engaging parents in the education of their children. Parents and carers are fully informed about their child’s activities in the school. Parent questionnaires and interviews stated that the school keeps them up to date daily through the website, parent-mail, newsletters and Zoom and that the school is ‘always looking at and encouraging parents to take part in school activities’ such as, during Covid, using stickers to remind parents about, for example, assemblies.

Induction into the Catholic ethos for new staff and inset on Catholic life are instrumental in developing a deep awareness of what it means to work at St Mary’s School. The efficacy of prayer and the foundation of Gospel values show that teachers strive for the best for each other and for all pupils and their families.

# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

## THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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- How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.
- The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education.
- How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

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**How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is Outstanding.**

Lesson observations showed carefully differentiated lessons were planned to move all learners forward and provide enjoyable tasks for every group. For example, in a lesson about forgiveness, the focus was the Parable of the Prodigal Son where pupils were asked to match pictures to the story. The more able were given stretch and challenge using pictures of people who had suffered injustice or violence and had then forgiven. The pupils again had to match to the text but also say why. The depth of knowledge and profound questioning of the pupils was exemplified by one pupil who asked, "Why would anyone want to shoot someone as good as the Pope?" and another pupil was able to tell an inspector the story of the Prodigal Son, while at the same time, adding exegetical comments.

Pupils spoke confidently and many with enthusiasm, about their religious education lessons. Progress of pupils with EAL is equal to those without. In-school data for 2020 showed 87% of pupils at expected progress or better and 27% of pupils made better than expected progress.

Pupils actively seek to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills through the use of collaborative working, enhanced by the skilled questioning of teachers and support staff. Pupils enjoy their learning; differentiated tasks provide exciting opportunities for learning, as was observed through a hand painting activity entitled 'God loves me very much'.

**The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is Outstanding.**

All lessons observed during the inspection showed teaching which was never less than good and often outstanding. Lessons observed showed that teachers were confident and understood the subject well. Teachers and support staff worked together well. In an observation the inspector noticed a Teaching Assistant work with a pupil who needed support and then once settled to work, moved around the room giving others support.

There was a variety of tasks observed which engaged all pupils and enabled extension and independent learning for the more able. Work scrutiny showed that feed-forward interactive marking helped children assess their own work. Timing was used to great effect allowing pace and motivation to enable pupils to achieve well. Questioning observed was used very effectively to identify prior learning and deepen understanding of new areas of learning.

Regular and effective dialogue between governors and the school ensures governors are fully informed about the standards of teaching and learning. Governors carry out regular visits to the school which include learning walks accompanied by the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher, who is the subject leader for religious education.

Parents were very enthusiastic in their support for religious education teaching. One parent stated, "Even during Covid, R.E. classes were taught on-line, and a variety of materials were provided to support lessons. We all had opportunities to listen to acts of worship on Zoom as well as explore R.E. as a family."

### **How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is Outstanding.**

Leaders and governors ensure that the religious education curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference in every respect and in each key stage. The required amount of 10% curriculum time is dedicated to religious education. The subject leader for religious education is proactive in ensuring that this is a clear consistent approach among staff, with high expectations the norm. The school follows the 'Come and See' programme in-line with the expectation of the Diocese and new teachers have lessons modelled by the subject leader and have attended training on 'Come and See' at the Diocese. The subject leader is aware of continuing challenges facing the pupils, particularly the lack of independence as a result of being at home during the pandemic. Appropriate support is put in place, an example of which is that older pupils have their own Bible, in which they can make notes.

Leaders and governors monitor religious education through school visits and learning walks. The Headteacher's report includes a section dedicated to religious education and governors stated that tracking and monitoring is done with the same rigour as other core subjects. Minutes of Governor Meetings showed evidence of this. The Deputy Headteacher/RE Subject Lead, demonstrates strong and inspirational leadership of teaching and learning in religious education. She regularly monitors teaching and learning through learning walks, lesson observations and work scrutiny. The resulting feedback to teachers enables them to continually develop their teaching.

Religious education is well resourced, and the quality of pupils' display work reflected the depth and understanding of the pupils. The very effective subject leader for religious education uses tracking systems which give clear information regarding the progress of the pupils, in comparison with other core subjects. This tracking system allows for monitoring of individual pupils and analysis and evaluation of the impact of religious education across the school. This coupled with the 'Come and See' programme, is effective in supporting improvements in planning and the learning and achievements of all pupils.

# COLLECTIVE WORSHIP / PRAYER AND PRAYER LIFE

## THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP & PRAYER LIFE

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- How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship and Prayer Life.
- The quality of provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life.
- How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life.

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**How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship and Prayer Life is Outstanding.**

Acts of worship fully reflect the Catholic character of the school and are inclusive of those not of the Catholic faith. Pupils showed reverence and respect on entry to a whole school act of worship, on the theme, 'Take Nothing for the Journey.' They listened attentively, responded positively during paired talk and gave answers which showed a good theological understanding of the theme. One pupil responded, "All we need on our journey is God." In addition, pupils showed a good knowledge of liturgical actions.

Pupils clearly recognise that prayer is part of the daily rhythm of school life. A class liturgy showed a variety of ways of prayer in a gentle, prayerful ambience and all pupils were included using different techniques to engage individuals. The inclusivity of St Mary's was evident, when for a pupil for whom this would be a challenge, the teaching assistant used an alternative approach to enable the pupil to engage with the class liturgy. Pupils were also encouraged to write their own individual prayers and add them to the class prayer. Styles of prayer used are age appropriate and allow pupils to build self-confidence. The impact of this was exemplified by one pupil who, we were informed, when first attending the school, had communication challenges, stood in front of the class and shared his own prayer.

Pupils showed sensitivity, respect and reverence during worship and in sacramental liturgies. The Parish Priest commented that at the first Mass since lockdown, at the beginning of the academic year, the pupils showed a reverence greater than they had previously. Pupils take the lead in preparing and sharing liturgical experiences. Inspectors observed a class liturgy where the pupils planned the liturgy, using music, ambient lighting and included an activity for each pupil to complete as part of the reflection.

Leaders and governors have a clear understanding of liturgy and worship and its planning. They are actively supported by the Parish Priest who gives clear guidance in this regard. They have a good depth of understanding of the Church's year and the symbols and rites of the Church. Liturgies are age appropriate, and retreats help in the spiritual development of the staff. Collective worship has a high priority in the school and is included in the school improvement plan (SIP). Governors monitor the provision for collective worship through reports from the Headteacher, attendance at acts of worship and discussions with parents and pupils.

### **The quality of provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is Outstanding.**

Collective worship is central to the life of the school, forming the heart of every school celebration. Praying together is part of the daily experience of all pupils and staff where staff prayer is equally an integral part of all school activity. In addition, during the staff retreat opportunities are provided to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Acts of worship fully reflect the Catholic character of the school and those observed were age appropriate and engaging. In addition, knowledgeable and skilled education helps non-Catholic staff to be included. Pupils have a programme of collective worship which is varied and engaging. It includes opportunity for formal and spontaneous prayer and sacramental celebrations. This was evidenced in the RE Council folder which showed consistency of pupil leadership over time. There were examples of preparation of prayers and a collective worship prayer rota which followed the liturgical year. During lockdown these continued and had a very positive impact on the wider school community. Parents commented that "St Mary's did a superb job keeping collective worship going during lockdown. The worships were supportive, engaging and uplifting, helping the children to feel part of the St Mary's family even when at home."

Themes chosen include the spiritual aspirations of all pupils. The acts of worship observed had themes of journey and of forgiveness and pupils were encouraged to take the message of the act of worship away with them; teachers would ask pupils about this message during the day. Teaching assistants are used well in supporting pupils with SEND to engage with the prayer life of the school.

Class worship and liturgies observed showed that class teachers are highly skilled in helping pupils plan and deliver acts of worship and teachers showed a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the purpose of collective worship. The Parish Priest is very active within the school, supporting many activities, one being the Rosary Club.

Relevant staff have an excellent understanding of the Church's liturgical heritage, its rites and seasons and displayed a passion for ensuring that pupils have high quality experiences of the Church's liturgical life. The Parish Priest stated that the school and parish is blessed to have the Headteacher and Deputy Head Teacher as active participants in the parish.

## How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is Outstanding.

Leaders and governors have expert knowledge of how to plan and deliver quality experiences of collective worship. It is embedded in the school improvement plan, is part of the rhythm of daily school life, and is a standing item for Governing Body meetings. It is also impacting on the daily rhythm of home life. One parent stated that she asked her daughter why she had started praying before meals and she replied, "that is the way we pray before our lunch at school."

Leaders and governors are effective in supporting the development of thought-provoking, age-appropriate and accessible acts of worship for all pupils, irrespective of ability, faith or culture and parents told inspectors that they are "always invited to assemblies and Mass." This was clear in observations made during the inspection. Pupils told inspectors that they prepare and lead liturgies and contribute through, for example, being an altar server. Leaders and governors are committed to further developing the leadership potential of all pupils to lead acts of worship for the wider community.

Collective worship observed by inspectors showed that leaders and governors are highly visible leaders of collective worship within the school and are models of outstanding practice for staff and pupils. School documents and minutes of meetings showed that leaders and governors place a high priority on the development of quality experiences of collective worship and undertake regular review. Pupils, staff and parents'/carers' views are sought, and responses are acted upon. Parents stated that they were "kept informed at every level" and that "there is always a warm welcome" from the school.

# SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

How effective the school is in providing Catholic Education.

**1**

## Catholic Life

**1**

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.

**1**

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

**1**

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

**1**

## Religious Education

**1**

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

**1**

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education.

**1**

How well leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

**1**

## Collective Worship and Prayer Life

**1**

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship and Prayer Life.

**1**

The quality of provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life.

**1**

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life.

**1**