

Report of the Denominational (Canon 806 & Section 48)
Inspection of
(Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

***St. Mary's Independent Catholic School
Cambridge***

DfE No: 873 6001
URN: SC015290

For Catholic Diocese of East Anglia



Chair of Governors: Mr Stuart Westley

Headteacher: Ms Charlotte Avery
Headteacher of Junior School: Mrs Jo Christian

Denominational Inspectors:
Mrs Margaret Stewart and Mrs Kate Pereira

Dates of Inspection: 22nd and 23rd June 2022

Date and grade of previous inspection: June 2014. Grade 1

DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL

St. Mary's Catholic Independent school for girls lies near the centre of Cambridge, predominantly serving the parish of Our Lady and the English Martyrs but with additional parishes of St. Laurence, St. Phillip Howard and St. John Fisher in Cambourne. There is a senior and junior site situated a short distance from each other. St. Mary's school is a Congregation of Jesus foundation whose ethos is underpinned by essential Christian values as lived out and expounded by the Venerable Mary Ward. Pupils range from age 3 to 18 and come from a variety of faiths and cultures representing 35 nations. In the junior school there are 146 pupils. 30% of pupils are Catholic, 27% are from other Christian denominations and 12% are from other world faiths. 48 pupils are identified as having a Special Educational Need and Disability (SEND) with none requiring to be supported by an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP). There are no pupils supported by Pupil Premium or by Free School Meals.

In the senior school there are 504 pupils. 18% are Catholic, 27% are from other Christian denominations and 8% are from other world faiths. 30% of pupils are identified as having SEND with no pupils supported by an EHCP. There are no pupils supported by Pupil Premium or by Free School Meals.

Of the teaching staff 24% are Catholic in the senior school and 29% in the junior school.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL AS A CATHOLIC SCHOOL.

St. Mary's Catholic Independent school is an outstanding school in all areas, Catholic Life, Religious Education (RE) and Collective Worship. It is a school where everyone is respected and valued for who they are. There are rich and varied opportunities embedded for pupils to succeed, thrive and to identify and explore their talents and vocations so that they can live out the cherished Mary Ward values as they mature into adulthood. The sense of belonging to a rich global community is highly valued and lies at the heart of the school's ethos. It is underpinned by a clear commitment to faith in action where fairness, dignity and respect for all is a shared responsibility even for the youngest of pupils. The outcomes for pupils are outstanding with many pupils achieving even greater depth in RE. Behaviour and attitudes in and around school is exemplary and the pastoral care for both pupils and staff is outstanding and indeed, a strength of the school. The quality of leadership is extremely strong; it is both enterprising and aspirational. The headteacher, head of the junior school, governing body and the senior leadership teams are dedicated to the community they serve and they share a clear commitment to its mission and vision as a Catholic school for today and the future.

Grade 1

Provision during COVID 19 Pandemic

The whole school community prioritised the care and welfare of all the pupils at St. Mary's during the pandemic. The provision of online learning was carefully planned and evaluated so that quality of learning was not lost. Provision for Catholic Life, RE and Collective Worship was maintained and staff became proficient at developing creative ways of teaching and assessing across a variety of platforms, reaching all pupils in school and at home in a variety of countries. Collective Worship was delivered by key members of staff and by Mary Ward Scholars and events within the liturgical year were joyfully celebrated. The needs of staff and pupils were carefully considered and evaluated and support was put in place where necessary to ensure a smooth transition back to school full time.

What the school needs to do to improve further.

- To review the school Mission statement with all stake holders so that it has clarity, visibility and ownership of the whole school community.
- Develop systematic cycles of monitoring and evaluation in RE that contribute clearly into timely actions for improvement in RE.

Senior school:

- Develop strong leadership roles in Chaplaincy, encompassing the work of the Mary Ward scholars to ensure there is greater participation in planning, preparing and evaluating Catholic Life and Collective Worship in a more systematic way.
- Provide additional professional development in Formative Assessment for those who teach RE to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently outstanding
- Increase Curriculum time for RE in Years 7 and 9 so that it matches other year groups in key stages 3 and 4 as required by the Diocese.

Junior school:

- For the Faith Council to broaden their reach of opportunities for Collective Worship and Faith in Action work by developing CAFOD clubs and Minnie Vinnies across all age groups.
- Explore methods of enquiry based learning in RE with a particular focus on 'Big Questions' to enable deeper dialogue, co-operative working, religious literacy and opportunities for investigation.

CATHOLIC LIFE:

Grade 1

The extent to which pupils of St. Mary's benefit from the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. The whole school community demonstrates a strong sense of belonging to life at St. Mary's. They uphold and speak passionately about how it supports them personally, spiritually and professionally. Pupils embrace the demands of being part of a Catholic school with understanding and confidence in what it involves. Moral, spiritual, ethical and theological development is carefully planned for and embedded in the learning opportunities and ethos of the school. All pupils are called to live out the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and to take a leading role in making a difference both locally and globally, seeking justice and fairness for everyone. They have an excellent understanding of vocation and are passionate about using their gifts in the service of others. Indeed these principles permeate through the deep ethos of the school. Reaching out to families affected by the war in Ukraine, members of the school community have welcomed families into their homes and the school has given bursaries for their children's education. One of the parents said they were so thankful for all the school had done for her and her daughter who was 'thriving' in school.

It is evident that the core Gospel values lie at the heart of life in school, clearly witnessed by the positive and caring relationships that exist between all groups and the behaviour and attitudes of the pupils towards their learning and each other.

Governors have a spectrum of expertise and effectively challenge and support strategic plans for development ensuring rapid improvement of the Catholic life of the school. Pupil and parents'/carers' views and responses are highly valued and carefully listened to. Their considerations influence and shape the Catholic character of the school.

Junior school

Pupils' understanding of the importance of taking responsibility for shaping the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. 'At St. Mary's we have lots of opportunities to help others and to become a better person'. Pupils enjoy the responsibility of taking on leadership roles in serving each other, leading prayer and liturgy and being active Christians in helping and supporting others, locally and globally. The Faith Council carefully plan and prepare acts of collective worship alongside the RE co-ordinator to reflect the rhythms of the liturgical year and para liturgies such as the Remembrance service. They are involved in supporting many CAFOD campaigns such as 'Step up to the Plate', allowing for all pupils to contribute and observe how their actions make a difference. Further leadership opportunities are provided through the Eco and Student Councils who work together to address the needs of the community and engage pupils with moral and ethical issues. Pupils would benefit further in having an active role in evaluating the Catholic Life of the school in a more systematic way so that they can identify what is working well and negotiate next steps for improvement. The richly diverse community of the school is highly valued by all and there are many strategies in place to ensure each pupil and their family are made to feel welcome. During World Religions Week, parents and pupils shared information about their faith and culture, celebrating and respecting the diversity of the school community. Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) is carefully taught in an age appropriate way using resources from 'Journey in Love' with full liaison with parents.

Senior school

Pupils' contribution to Catholic life is outstanding. Pupils enjoy taking part in activities that promote Catholic Social Justice such as the Fairtrade stall and the fun run and deeply value the charisma and ethos of their school. Pupils feel empowered to lead on projects and initiatives through committees such as the International and Wellbeing committees and feel it is their duty to take up opportunities provided for them. Pupils are positive about the community feel of the school and say that the school encourages them to develop a moral compass by working together in friendship and by respecting diversity. Mary Ward Scholars help to prepare activities for younger year groups such as planning an assembly for Chinese New Year in the junior school. Pupils say that they live out what it means to be a Christian through their involvement in the community aspects of the school including the wellbeing days.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

Grade 1

Pupils make very good and often outstanding progress from their starting points including late starters and pupils with SEND. From the youngest age, pupils are highly articulate and use a well-developed religious vocabulary during discussions, clearly drawing on sound previous learning. It is evident that pupils enjoy their learning in RE and feel challenged and motivated by the content and skills presented in a variety of creative and engaging ways.

Junior school

The junior school effectively use a variety of creative teaching resources, for example, expert use of Godly Play was observed to explore moral and ethical issues. In a key stage 2 class, pupils were engaged in an interactive activity reflecting on the meaning of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They were then asked to consider the power of the Holy Spirit in the work of our Apostolic Successors. In class discussions and partner work it is evident that pupils are given time to reflect and review their learning, to make links with their own lives and build empathy and a sense of true relevance for the topic being taught. The use of High Performance Learning strategies (HPL) were used in some lessons to help pupils identify the skills and attitudes they are employing in their learning. The headteacher has prioritised this as a development that needs to be adapted and embedded further. Other faiths are taught and resourced to the highest standard during World Religions week. Each key stage focusses on a different religion, brought to life by visitors and authentic artefacts and the study of celebrations and practices of the faith. Under the effective leadership of the RE co-ordinator, teachers use a range of formative and summative assessment tools to ensure the highest of standards are maintained in RE. Skill ladders are used termly to effectively track progress and inform future planning and teaching in RE. The consistent use of quality marking and feedback demands higher order thinking and further reflection from the pupils, often posed in the form of challenging questions. Opportunities for pupils to ask their own challenging questions around a concept or topic would increase engagement further and lead pupils into more enquiry based learning. Governors are fully involved in the monitoring of teaching and learning in RE. They uphold effective challenge and support and ensure planned improvements are fully implemented.

Senior school

RE outcomes in the senior school are outstanding. At GCSE pupils have achieved at least 97% level 4 or above for the past 4 years with positive value added scores. At Advanced level although the entry numbers are low pupils achieve very well within the A* - C range. The RE Curriculum is well planned and the schemes of work follow the current RE Curriculum Directory. Teaching and learning in RE is strong with some outstanding aspects. In the best lessons, teachers use questioning effectively to probe, build and challenge; teaching is responsive to the needs of individuals and pace is appropriate. Positive relationships and strong subject knowledge were observed across all lessons. Common tasks are marked consistently across the department with an effective learning dialogue evident which supports pupils to improve. Pupils say they enjoy RE when the activities are interesting and they particularly enjoy collaborative learning. Pupils would benefit from teachers using a wider repertoire of formative assessment tools in order to further improve the rates of pupil progress. Curriculum time for RE is under the 10% required by the Diocese in Years 9 and 7. The Ten Ten Programme 'Life to the Full' used for Relationship and Sex Education is currently taught within the RE Curriculum. Unfortunately this has meant that some aspects of RE in Year 9 i.e Prophecy have not been taught. There are plans in place to deliver PSHE as a separate lesson from September so that RE time is quite rightly not affected. Leadership of RE is strong and monitoring is done through tracking assessment data, work scrutiny of specific common tasks, informal drop-ins by the Head of RE and formal lesson observations by senior leaders. The department works in a collaborative manner sharing best practice. Governors receive reports from the Head of RE in the Governance committee which details all aspects of RE and Catholic Life. The Head of RE would benefit from more involvement in the formal monitoring of teaching and Learning in RE in order to check that the right improvements are being made within appropriate timescales.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP:

Grade 1

Collective worship is highly valued by the whole school community and is central to the experience of all those attending St. Mary's, irrespective of background, faith or ability. Pupils are confident in a variety of prayer styles and are provided with many outstanding opportunities to worship in both contemporary and traditional ways including the use of art, drama and music to enhance their spiritual experience. The rich diversity of cultural and faith perspectives is embraced and respected by all and regarded as a cherished enrichment to the character of the school.

Junior school

Pupils are enthusiastic about opportunities to plan, lead and participate in prayers, reflections and liturgies. They have an excellent understanding of the feasts and celebrations within the liturgical year and can talk about some events in detail in an age appropriate way. A key stage two pupil spoke about what Easter meant for her, 'Jesus gave his life for us, and it was because he loved us'. Pupils are prepared for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist by the chaplaincy team and this is recognised as a joyful celebration within the school community. Prayer life is an integral part of the school day and pupils value it 'as a way of growing closer to God'. It nourishes both pupils and staff on their spiritual journey and is clearly recognised as an experience that supports wellbeing and positive mental health. Collective worship is carefully planned and resourced reflecting a deep understanding of the themes within the liturgical year and the Church's mission in education. A number of staff are highly skilled in helping pupils to plan and deliver quality worship for others across the school and support staff who need further guidance with this. Governors and leaders prioritise the monitoring and evaluation of collective worship to ensure it is of the highest quality and these opportunities are planned to become more systematic and timely.

Senior school

Pupils participate in and benefit significantly from the Collective Worship provision of the school. Pupils lead with confidence and flair and often choose their own themes for prayers and assemblies. The chapel is a place of peaceful reflection and used well by students and staff for private prayer. The tabernacle is appropriately placed and respected and voluntary morning Mass is now celebrated again following the Pandemic. During a Year 9 assembly pupils' behaviour and engagement was exemplary especially during the impressive pause for stillness and silent prayer. Pupils had planned the assembly and led it with confidence, although it would have been even better if pupils had been invited to make the sign of the cross. The current lay chaplain is well respected and uses her time well to support pupils and staff, although the school would benefit from this role having a bigger time allocation in order to widen her reach and to reduce the workload for the Head of RE who is also the Director for Catholic Life. The Mary Ward Scholars help to plan and lead collective worship and governors prioritise its monitoring and evaluation. To further improve the planning and evaluation of Collective worship, a Chaplaincy team consisting of a broader range of participants including governors and key staff, would widen its reach.



EAST ANGLIA DIOCESAN SCHOOLS' SERVICE

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Letter to pupils explaining the findings from the Diocesan Inspection

Dear Pupils

3rd July 2022

Diocesan Inspection of St. Mary's Independent School Catholic School

Thank you very much for making us feel so welcome when we came to visit St. Mary's. We were able to see that you are all very proud of your school and that you value the many opportunities it provides for you to succeed and become global citizens of the future.

Here are some of the things we especially liked:

- You demonstrate a great enthusiasm for becoming involved in enterprises that invoke change and eliminate injustice.
- You enjoy your learning in RE and rise to the challenges it provides.
- Your teachers and other adults prioritise care for your wellbeing.
- The school carefully plans for your spiritual and moral development
- You show an excellent understanding of what it means to be ambassadors for your school in the wider community.
- You are very enthusiastic about planning and preparing prayer and liturgy and enjoy the variety of ways to worship together.

We have asked your school to consider for all pupils -

To develop the chaplaincy roles within school so that you can experience greater responsibility for leadership in the areas of Catholic Life and Collective Worship.

For senior pupils –

For your RE teachers to further develop their expertise in assessment so that they can ensure your learning continues to be outstanding and for curriculum time to increase slightly in years 7 and 9.

For junior pupils –

For your teachers to plan more opportunities for you to ask challenging questions in RE to encourage deeper thinking and discussion.

We wish you all every success in the future,

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Margaret Stewart

Mrs Kate Pereira

Diocesan Inspectors for East Anglia