

Archdiocese of Cardiff



St Margaret's Catholic Primary School Aberdare

Inspection dates	23 – 25 November 2016
Reporting Inspector Accompanying Inspector	Mrs Jacqueline Phillips Mrs Sheelagh McCool
Type of school	Primary
Age range of pupils	3 - 11
Number on roll	128
Local Authority	Rhondda Cynon Taff
Chair of Governors	Mrs Kathleen Phelan
School Address	Ty Fry Aberdare CF44 7PP
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Parishes served	Parish of Mary Immaculate St Joseph's (Aberdare) St Thérèse of Lisieux (Hirwaun)
Date of previous inspection Headteacher	June 2009 Mrs Joanna Taylor

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Archdiocese of Cardiff and Inspection of denominational education under Section 50 of the Education Act 2005

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on prospects for improvement.

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector leading practice or practise that is both consistent and highly effective.
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The table below shows the terms that Archdiocesan inspectors use and a broad idea of their meaning. It is for guidance only.

Proportion	Description
With very few exceptions	Nearly all
90% or more	Most
70% or more	Many
60% or more	A majority
Close to 50%	Half/around half
Below 40%	A minority
Below 20%	Few
Less than 10%	Very few

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Archdiocesan website: www.rcadcschools.org

Context

St Margaret's is a voluntary aided Catholic primary school situated in a semi-rural area on the outskirts of Aberdare bordering Merthyr Unitary Authority.

St Margaret's Catholic Primary School serves the communities of St Joseph's Aberdare and St Thérèse of Lisieux, Hirwaun which are both in the parish of Mary Immaculate. The school functions under the trusteeship of the Archdiocese of Cardiff and is maintained by Rhondda Cynon Taff Education Authority.

The school population has grown since the last inspection. At present there are 128 pupils, aged 3 to 11 years representing the full range of ability. There are 45% Catholic pupils at St Margaret's and around 4% of pupils from other Christian denominations. 51% of pupils come from homes who have no religious affiliation, parents/carers of these pupils choose the school for its values and mission and fully support the Catholicity of the school.

The school is a modern, well-designed open-plan building set in attractive and spacious grounds. All classes in the Foundation Phase have access to the outdoors. There are 5 mixed age classes and a Nursery class which pre-nursery and nursery-age pupils attend.

Approximately 29% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above the local and national averages. The school identifies around 46% per cent of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is above the national average. Around 85% of pupils are of white British ethnic origin, with 15% from other ethnic backgrounds which is again much higher than the local authority. Around 12% of pupils have English as an additional language. No pupils speak Welsh as their first language.

In addition to the headteacher, who was appointed in October 2016 following a lengthy period as acting headteacher, there are four full-time Catholic teachers of whom one is the acting deputy headteacher. There are three teaching assistants and one higher level teaching assistant. Three teachers and two teaching assistants hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies. The school was last inspected in June 2009.

School achievements include five 'Healthy Schools' Awards and the school has recently won 2 'recycling' competitions.

Summary

How effective is the school in providing Catholic education?

Adequate

Catholic education at St Margaret's Catholic Primary school is adequate because:

- the headteacher has a clear vision for the development of the school and has begun to raise expectations to tackle underachievement.
- prayer and worship are an integral and valued part of school life.
- most pupils make adequate progress, given their capability and starting point, and gain knowledge skills and understanding at a satisfactory rate.
- it is a welcoming, inclusive community and partnership with parents, the parish and the wider world are valued by all.

However:

The Religious Education co-ordinator's role and responsibilities need to be clearly defined and implemented to raise standards of achievement, and teaching and learning throughout the school.

Recent whole-school systems and procedures introduced by the newly appointed headteacher are beginning to make an impact on pupil standards, and need to be further developed and fully embedded.

What are the school's prospects for improvement?

Adequate

The school's prospects for improvement are adequate because:

- the headteacher is committed to improving standards in Religious Education. However, the school needs to build capacity to ensure the responsibility is distributed at all levels to advance Religious Education and the Catholic life of the school
- recent developments in monitoring are beginning to make an impact on outcomes for pupils.
- the quality of prayer and worship provided by the school good
- the Catholic life of the school is good

However

- The quality of teaching and learning is adequate.
- There is currently no substantive deputy head or Senior Leadership Team.
- the role of Religious Education co-ordinator is under-developed.

Recommendations and Required Actions

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- R1: Develop the quality of teaching and learning so that all lessons have pace, challenge and engage all groups of learners to raise standards.
- R2: Develop the role of the Religious Education co-ordinator and Senior Leadership Team to ensure that a systematic and rigorous approach to monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the Religious Education curriculum effectively achieves priorities
- R3: Develop extended writing in Religious Education throughout the school.
- R4: Ensure the identified good practice is shared throughout the school.

What happens next?

The school will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations.

Progress in addressing the recommendations will be monitored by the Archdiocese.

Main Findings

KQ1. How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Outcomes for pupils are adequate and most pupils make the progress expected given their starting points. Pupil attainment on entry to school is generally below local authority averages. From this low starting point, many pupils make sufficient progress to reach acceptable standards by the end of the Foundation Phase and by the end of Key Stage 2 are broadly achieving expected standards.

In their oral and written responses, most pupils are starting to use language that reflects the themes and expectations of the 'Come and See' Religious Education programme. At the top end of the school many pupils are able to relate their learning to their own lives.

Some of the teacher/adult led activities did not provide enough challenge or differentiation to engage pupils to ensure their progress and enable them to reach their potential. A minority of pupils were unable to work effectively without direction from an adult and gave up without completing the task. However, when provided with appropriate tasks and challenge pupils worked competently, showing high levels of enthusiasm and interest, and made good progress.

The quality and presentation of pupils' work in Religious Education is variable across the school and there is little evidence of extended writing. Coverage of all Come and See topics and of another faith, Judaism was evident in pupil books. The book scrutiny additionally highlighted significant improvements in presentation and Assessment for Learning compared to pupil books from the previous year, notably the implementation of a whole school approach to recording work and the use of assessment for learning ladders. This needs to continue and develop in order to promote next step progress for pupils and to impact on standards.

All pupils are keen to participate in the Catholic life of the school and they benefit from it. They are developing an understanding of Catholic teaching and the teachings of other faiths through the 'Come and See' programme. Pupils know about the key celebrations in the Church's liturgical year. They have a sense of belonging to the school community of St. Margaret's, know its mission statement and can explain how it guides their behaviour. Pupils take on responsibilities through the School 'Senedd' and specifically the 'Army of God'. Care and concern for others is evident in their fundraising activities for various charities.

There are opportunities for pupils to participate in a range of extra-curricular activities which support their all-round development. Pupils are developing their responsiveness to the use of the Welsh language and celebrate St David's Day with a school Eisteddfod.

Pupils engage in and respect the Catholic mission and values of the school. Pupils spoke proudly about the 'Vision Week' held at the school and how the

vision statement 'Believe and Achieve' is an aspiration for all pupils. Nearly all pupils develop positive attitudes to healthy living. The school has achieved their fifth 'Healthy Schools' award.

The 'Senedd' and 'Eco Gladiators' enable pupils to express their views and make improvements to the school. Visits to St Joseph's Church help to enhance the Religious Education curriculum. The mission statement 'Our Catholic Family Learns to Love and Loves to Learn' encompasses strong links between parish, home and school. The school uses 'Journey in Love' to teach the social and emotional curriculum and moral guidance through Religious Education. Parents reported that they had attended a meeting to view the programme and had a clear understanding that delivery of the programme throughout the school was age-appropriate.

The Catholic life of the school helps to develop a sense of belonging for pupils. The school provides a range of opportunities for pupils to understand the need to give witness to the Catholic faith in the wider community. These include the school's support for the work of the St Vincent de Paul Society, the local Food bank, CAFOD, Macmillan Nurses and a Rainbow Day in aid of Tŷ Hafan. The 'Senedd' articulated a plan to establish a 'Mini Vinnies' in the school in the near future. These activities offer real opportunities for pupils to understand ways in which they can show support for others, be considerate and make a positive difference in both the local community and the wider world.

Prayer and acts of collective worship are now central to the life of the school and the legal requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship is fully met. Staff and pupils pray together. There are a range of formal and informal opportunities for daily prayer. Collective worship is a strength of the school. Pupils are given the opportunity to plan and lead worship within the school.

KQ2. How good is provision?	Adequate
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The quality of teaching is variable throughout the school. Where lessons were judged to have elements of good practice, teachers maintain pupils' interest in Religious Education and use a range of resources and teaching strategies to promote good learning. In these lessons ICT was used as an interactive tool to support Religious Education and home school links. Some self- and peer-assessment was evident and teachers managed time well. This practice should be shared across the school and form part of the planned action for school improvement. Where lessons are judged adequate or less, there was little or no differentiation, lessons lacked challenge and pace and pupil behaviour inhibited progress. Most plenary sessions were insufficiently focussed on supporting pupil progress.

Teachers' subject knowledge and their understanding of the Religious Education programme, is such that progress made by pupils and groups of learners is at best in line with expectations. Care must be taken when planning for mixed-age groups to ensure every child makes good progress.

In some classes, teaching assistants are deployed appropriately to support more vulnerable pupils. However, in the Foundation Phase, the role of teaching assistants could be further developed to maximise learning opportunities.

The school has invested in 'Kett' and construction kits which were used to good effect in Religious Education lessons. The school outdoor provision enhances pupils' learning and provides a range of playground and prayer facilities. The newly established prayer garden was well used during inspection and provided an opportunity for children in Foundation Phase to learn and work together to produce an Advent wreath.

The Headteacher has detailed and accurate information on achievement in Religious Education and tracks pupil progress well, using the newly implemented tracking system. This should form part of the Religious Education Coordinators role in future years. The evidence provided highlighted that pupil tracking is at an early stage of development. It needs to be further embedded to provide useful data for target setting and used to identify and tackle areas of underachievement. This will ensure the tracking of Religious Education is in line with the school's tracking of English and Maths.

The school has a moderated portfolio of levelled work and is currently working as part of the cluster with other local Catholic schools. Assessment information is shared with parents through the annual reports and parent consultations and with the high school. In Religious Education topic target cards are used to assess pupils' attainment. This was evident in books but not evident in lessons observed by inspectors. The school recognises the need to involve pupils more in the assessment process.

The Religious Education curriculum provided meets pupils' needs and fulfils the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. 10% of taught time is dedicated to Religious Education. Teachers' planning ensures full coverage of the curriculum. This needs to be monitored by the Religious Education C-ordinator to ensure tasks are differentiated to meet the needs of all pupils. In Religious Education lessons observed there were some opportunities for spiritual, moral and cultural development, when pupils linked work to their own lives and to those less fortunate than themselves.

Links with St Joseph's (Aberdare) and St Thérèse of Lisieux (Hirwaun) within the parish of Mary Immaculate have developed since the arrival of the parish priest, who is a regular visitor to the school. Staff support sacramental preparation programmes. Pupils regularly walk to the nearby church to participate in liturgies and prayer services. Attendance by parents/carers and others associated with the school is facilitated and encouraged through First Friday Mass and class assemblies. These are appreciated by the parents.

Prayer and acts of collective worship are now central to the life of the school and the legal requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship is fully met. Staff and pupils pray together. There are a range of formal and informal opportunities

for daily prayer. The school has introduced Christian meditation and many pupils were able to sit and quietly reflect.

During the inspection a whole school assembly led by the headteacher, a Foundation Phase worship led by the newly appointed Foundation Leader and KS2 collective worship planned and led by KS2 pupils was observed. The school needs to build on this practice and continue to provide more opportunities for pupils to plan, organise and lead worship throughout the school, so that they gain greater confidence with this aspect of Religious Education to enrich the spiritual life of the whole community.

Many attractive and engaging religious artefacts and images are to be found around the school. Every classroom includes a focal point for prayer and reflection.

Represented in the school 'Senedd' is the 'Army of God' who clearly articulated their role as one of fund raising for the disadvantaged, working within the local community especially the with old age pensioners to entertain them and last but not least to say a prayer for anyone who is in need of one.

KQ3. How good are leadership and management?	Adequate
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The governing body fulfils its statutory and canonical responsibilities. Members are committed to reflecting the distinctive Catholic character of the school in decision making and policies. Governors engage with parents and address any concerns they may have.

The chair of governors is a regular visitor to the school and works closely with the headteacher to ensure that the governing body is fully involved in the life of the school. She carries out learning walks, lesson observations and listens to learners enabling her to recognise the strengths of the school and also identify areas for improvement. The link governor plays an active part in the life of the school acting as a critical friend. Governors work closely with the headteacher to promote and implement plans that are aimed at improving pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including where appropriate the Welsh dimension. Their shared vision 'Believe and Achieve" underpins all that they do.

The newly-appointed headteacher has established a strong and purposeful Catholic vision. Her prior experience within the school as deputy head and acting headteacher supports this clear vision and has enabled her to move the school forward. She is an excellent role model for staff and with her drive, ambition and guidance will move the school forward on its journey to provide a rich religious curriculum and a vibrant Catholic life for all stakeholders.

The recently formed interim senior leadership team relies heavily on the direction and guidance of the headteacher who has implemented effective systems and procedures to ensure whole school growth. A substantive senior leadership team with clear roles and responsibilities would fully support and enable the

headteacher in her vision and action for the development of Catholic education in this school.

The Religious Education Co-ordinator attends all Archdiocesan training initiatives and has introduced the new Archdiocesan initiative of Christian meditation into the school this year. The Religious Education Co-ordinator with the headteacher's support and direction has evaluated aspects of Religious Education e.g. class worship and book scrutiny and the school has next step marking as an area for development. The recommendation from the 2009 Religious Education inspection to improve teaching and learning has not been met and needs to continue to be a high priority for the school. The roles and responsibilities of the Religious Education Co-ordinator need to be developed if the school is to move forward.

Leaders and managers effectively promote community cohesion. Partnership activities contribute to pupils learning and well-being e.g. their charity and 'choir in the community' work. They respect difference and promote equality for all. Staff, pupils and governors worked together to formulate a new Vision Statement for the school this year. All children and parents are treated equally in terms of race and ability. Parents' newsletters and the IT apps keep parents informed about what is happening in school. Attendance at parent consultation meetings is good. The 'Friends of St. Margaret's' association supports the school throughout the year. The Religious Education curriculum raises awareness of other faiths and there is a common sense of belonging throughout the school.

Appendix 1

Responses to parent questionnaires

Questionnaires were returned by 29 parents. Nearly all parents state:

- that they are happy with the values and attitudes that the school fosters. They are made to feel welcome in school.
- that the school seeks the views of parents/carers and takes account of their suggestions and concerns.
- that they are happy with the help and guidance available to their child.
- and that the school enables their child to develop spiritually through prayer and worship.

Many parents state that the school:

- gives a clear understanding of what is taught in Religious Education.
- enables children to achieve a good standard of work in Religious Education.
- keeps them well-informed about child's progress in Religious Education.

Parents chose the school for its:

- Catholic education, good reputation, caring ethos and open-door policy.
- small school size and friendly atmosphere, with a good reputation built on years of service to the community.
- Catholic ethos at the centre that provides a foundation for life.

Distinctive features include:

- St Margaret's is a small school and a welcoming community where children are happy and is a very inclusive school that feels like a family environment.
- It is a school that has a distinctive ethos and a lovely sense of community.
- There are good relationships between parents and teachers so any problems are addressed straight away.

Appendix 2

Evidence Base

- Pre-inspection team consultation
- The school's self-evaluation reports and other relevant documentation
- Meetings with the headteacher
- Meetings with representatives of the governing body
- Discussions with the parish priest who is also the religious education link governor
- A meeting with parents
- Lesson observations
- Scrutiny of planning and assessment
- Scrutiny of pupils' work
- Scrutiny of prayer foci and displays
- Attendance at phase- and class-based acts of worship
- Discussions with the School Council, Eco Committee, Help Group
- Discussions with pupils
- Discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff
- Parent questionnaire returns
- Observation of daily routines