

DIOCESE OF LANCASTER EDUCATION SERVICE

INSPECTION REPORT ON THE PROVISION OF DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION

School name: Alston Lane Catholic Primary School
 Address: Preston Road, Longridge, Lancashire, PR3 3BJ.
 URN Number: 119635
 Name of Headteacher: Mr Mark FitzGibbon
 Date of Inspection: 11th March 2008
 Name of Inspector: Mr Steve Thornton
 Type of school: Catholic Primary
 Age range of pupils: 4 - 11
 Number on roll: 180
 Appropriate authority: Governing Body
 Chair of Governors: Mrs Helen Hawkes
 Religious Education Co-ordinator: Mr Peter Cobb
 Date of previous inspection: March 2004

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the grades 1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3 = Satisfactory 4 = Inadequate
Overall effectiveness of the school	2	
Leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school	2	
The quality of Collective Worship	2	
Religious Education - Achievement and standards	3	
Religious Education - Quality of provision	2	
Religious Education - Pupils' needs and interest	2	
Religious Education – Curriculum leadership and management	2	
<i>The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements</i>		

Information about the school:

Alston Lane Voluntary Aided Catholic Primary School is situated between Grimsargh and Longridge and serves the parish of Our Lady and St Michael. There are currently 180 children on roll of whom 165 (92%) are baptised Catholics with 8% stating no faith or other Christian denominations. The majority of the children come from Our Lady and St Michael's parish (64%), St Maria Goretti's, Preston (11%), Blessed Sacrament, Preston (9%), with small numbers coming from other parishes between Preston and Ribchester.

The school is situated in a rural location but numbers are currently rising with the increase of residential building in the locality. Mr Fitzgibbon has assumed permanent full-time responsibility as headteacher since January 2008 following a period of shared leadership in conjunction with an acting headteacher.

Children start school with a range of skills, but overall their attainment is slightly higher than that which is typical for their age. At the end of Year 6 in July 2007, all pupils, with one exception, transferred to St Cecilia's Catholic High School in Longridge.

Overall Effectiveness of the school

Alston Lane is a **good** Catholic School driven by a Mission Statement that permeates all aspects of school life. The school is a welcoming Catholic Community. Pupils relate well to each other, respect staff and are keen to participate in the spiritual and community life of the school. Pupils' spiritual and moral development is given a high priority and effectively ensured. The school has strong links with the parish and the strong support of parents. The school also benefits from an active and supportive Governing Body and an energetic leadership team with a clear vision and improvement plan in place. The school's distinctive Catholic nature is apparent throughout school. High standards are evident in teaching and learning and in collective worship throughout Alston Lane School.

Improvement since the last inspection

The school has made **good** progress in developing Religious Education (RE) since the last inspection.

- Collective Worship is of a **good** standard throughout school and pupils in all classes aspire to be involved in planning and in leading acts of worship. Pupils willingly contribute their individual talents to enhance the quality of acts of worship.
- Teachers in all classes are aware of the need to raise standards by providing more challenging tasks for the more able pupils. This is happening more frequently due to the impact of staff training and improved materials in the new RE scheme.

Capacity to improve

The school demonstrates a **good** capacity to improve by maintaining its clear focus to raise standards of attainment through the commitment and support of staff and governors and the leadership of the management team, particularly the subject leader.

What the school should do to improve further:

- The governing body and leadership team should further develop the role of 'critical friend' by being involved in monitoring of:
 - a) Provision for and standards reached in RE and collective worship.
 - b) The school's response to the Bishop's document 'Fit for Mission? Schools'.
- The subject leader should effect improvements in the quality of teachers' planning in RE, linking this to the consistent use of clear learning objectives and focused assessment tasks to increase pupil progress.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

Inspection confirms the school's view that leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school at all levels are **good**.

Although there have been significant changes to the school's leadership in the last year, the new leadership team is working well together and there is an energy and commitment to raise the standards in school. The chair of governors has a clear vision for the school and leads a team of conscientious governors who have a good understanding of their role as 'critical friends'. They have assisted the school's new leadership team in a fundamental review of the Mission Statement and Aims, thus setting the framework for future improvements. It is important that governors now monitor the progress of these improvements to ensure their success.

The senior management team ensures that relationships with parents, the parish and with other schools are strengthened and that the School Improvement Plan features work related to the school's distinctive Catholic nature.

Leaders at all levels are keen to access Diocesan training and to ensure that the Mission Statement and Aims are fulfilled.

Staff are happy with the clear direction of the school, are inspired to contribute their expertise and to act as role models for the school's aims. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good and was rightly judged to be a strength of the school by OFSTED (December 2007).

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Inspection confirms the school's judgement that the quality of collective worship is **good** and finds that there are some outstanding features.

Prayer is central to the life of the school. The school provides a wide variety of Acts of Worship, and these are relevant and meaningful experiences for all. The parish priest enjoys his work with the school and plays an integral part in the partnership between school, home and parish. The church of Our Lady and St Michael is close enough to the school to be a wonderful resource for Acts of Worship with regular class Masses taking place and even the opportunity for older KS2 pupils to go voluntarily to Mass at certain times of the year such as during Lent.

Collective worship is thoughtfully and carefully planned, making full use of a range of pupils' talents. For example, older pupils played as an orchestra at a Y1 assembly on a theme of Lent, which was presented for other pupils and parents. The Y5 class produced an excellent and thought provoking act of worship on 'The Raising of Lazarus' using music, prayer, drama and power point. Children from Reception class upwards are being encouraged to contribute to the planning of collective worship and the subject leader is monitoring developments across the school to provide appropriate feedback.

The subject leader is ensuring that music becomes a growing feature of school worship. Pupils are reflective, sing joyfully and pray with enthusiasm. Pupils know and use traditional prayers appropriately and are enabled to write their own prayers.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION - ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

In line with the school's own self-evaluation and moderation, achievement and standards are judged to be **satisfactory**. Inspection did, however, identify examples of good standards being achieved in the written recordings of several classes.

All pupils show written standards in RE that are satisfactory given their capability and starting-point. Children enter Foundation Stage with a basic knowledge about 'God' and 'Church' which appears consistent with pupils in other schools. In Reception class they learn about religious stories and the place of 'Church' in the life of a Catholic family. In addition to visiting Our Lady and St Michael's Church, the role-play area had been set up as a church during Lent and some religious words and symbols were introduced. This is helping to ensure that good progress is made across the Foundation Stage.

Most pupils in key stages 1 and 2 make acceptable progress and gain knowledge, understanding and skills in RE (AT1) and gain some ability to reflect on meaning (AT2). Achievement across the strands of each attainment target varies, however, and some good work was seen in AT1 in Year 2 (related to the story of Creation); in AT1 in Year 5, where pupils prepared information booklets on the Sacrament of Reconciliation for Year 3 pupils; and in AT2 where Year 6 pupils debated whether or not miracles were a sign that Jesus was the Son of God.

However, standards of written work did not necessarily reflect the pupils' true ability particularly in the work of the more able pupils. Year 6 pupils for example, displayed a level of maturity in oral work in RE that exceeded much of the evidence in their books.

The headteacher and subject leader need to clearly establish the links between planning in RE, learning objectives shared with the children at the start of each activity and focused, differentiated assessment tasks. This will produce the information required in order to raise the standards in teaching and learning.

Pupils are proud of their school and behave well. They respond to opportunities to take responsibility around the school and work hard within the community, good examples of this being the Harvest Festival, which provides a great deal of food for the Homeless Shelter in Preston, and the fundraising for Catholic Caring Services.

The school council works effectively to raise pupils' concerns about school life. Pupils are considerate and caring towards younger children and to others in need. They show a clear understanding of right and wrong.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION - QUALITY OF PROVISION

In line with the school's self-evaluation, the quality of provision is judged by inspection to be **good**.

The teachers are almost exclusively Catholic and four teachers hold the Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies (CCRS) qualification. They are confident about their RE teaching ability and, together with the non-Catholic teacher, are appreciative of the support received from the subject leader and the opportunities they have for in-service training.

The school curriculum follows the liturgical calendar, as well as introducing appropriate topical issues. Teachers use many different teaching strategies such as oral work, drama and ICT. They profess to great enjoyment in teaching RE. Governors allocate a good level of resources to support RE and collective worship and the new scheme, 'The Way, The Truth and The Life', is fostering a more creative approach to teaching in RE lessons.

Scrutiny of pupils' books revealed improvements in teachers' provision for differentiation. In Year 6 for example, the teacher had attempted to 'tease out' levels 3 – 5 by careful, open-ended questions about well-known Gospel Stories and their meaning. There was, however, inconsistent practice with regard to the use of learning objectives in pupils' books in other classes. Marking was generally reflective and thorough, a feature of teachers' work that was much appreciated by the pupils who welcomed the suggestions for future improvement.

Although recently appointed, the subject leader is already using book scrutiny and observations of lessons and Act of Worship effectively to set objectives for future improvement. He is aware of some inconsistency regarding the inclusion of 'lesson objectives' in RE books. He has also identified the need to ensure greater consistency in marking and to improve the quality of assessment tasks in order to allow pupils the chance to demonstrate achievement and progress particularly in key stage 2.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION - PUPILS' NEEDS AND INTEREST

The inspection judgement confirms the school's judgement that provision for the pupils' needs and interests is **good**.

Pupils are enthusiastic and positive about their learning in RE and their participation in collective worship. Pupils at all levels are proud of their achievements, understand why a particular piece of work is 'good' and appreciate the helpful feedback they receive in their teacher's marking. The school meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference with regard to timetabling in RE and much extra time is given at lunchtime to practices for the choir and orchestra and to supporting children's liturgy or parish-based sacramental preparation at the weekend. The school is also most conscientious in ensuring that pupils of all abilities and backgrounds play a full part in the Catholic life of the school.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION – CURRICULUM LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Inspection confirms the school's judgement that standards of curriculum leadership and management are **good**.

The subject leader is enthusiastic and knowledgeable about his role. He has a clear sense of direction and a strong desire to raise standards further in the near future. There are effective plans in place to manage improvement; with the scrutiny of teachers' plans and pupils' work at the heart. A new system of recording pupil achievement has been introduced and this will give a clear picture of progress across each key stage. The subject leader is an excellent source of help at all times and is referred to warmly by other teachers.

The subject leader works within a supportive system, with governors and headteacher sharing the same priorities for RE. In particular, the work to improve the nature of formative assessment tasks for pupils at all levels should have a positive impact on raising standards in the future.