



Archdiocese of Birmingham

Section 48 Inspection Report

ST AMBROSE BARLOW CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

841 Shirley Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, B28 9JJ

Inspection dates:

13th and 14th June 2018

Lead Inspector:

Rose Brookes

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS:

Outstanding

Catholic Life:

Outstanding

Religious Education:

Outstanding

Collective Worship:

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection:

Outstanding

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

This is an Outstanding Catholic school because:

- The headteacher and Religious Education subject leader, who is also the deputy headteacher, are deeply committed to the school's mission. They provide support and challenge in all aspects of Catholic Life.
- St Ambrose Barlow school has a very high proportion of experienced Catholic staff and governors who practise their faith. This has a profound and visible effect on the spiritual and moral development of all pupils and it is reflected in the respectful way in which pupils lead and take part in prayer and liturgy.
- This is a happy school where staff are continually developed spiritually, morally and emotionally by senior leaders and the parish priest. The loyal and committed staff develop exceptionally well at St Ambrose Barlow.
- Senior leaders and dedicated governors are very well supported by the parish priest (who is the Religious Education link governor). He is assisted very well by a Columban Father.
- There is excellent pastoral care of pupils and good role modelling from staff. As a result, pupils are very respectful and proud of their faith and their school community. They understand and can clearly articulate the mission of the school.
- Teaching about discipleship and vocation is outstanding in all year groups. The school has an annual vocations day for Years 5 & 6. Pupils also complete a vocations project in the summer term. During the inspection, all pupils consistently demonstrated a deep understanding of what vocation means in their lives.

- The school has an annual day of recollection for all staff. This gives staff the opportunity to continue their life-long formation of faith. The parish priest, supported by an assistant priest, has been instrumental in enabling all staff to renew their relationship with God. As a result, staff continually speak about their vocation and openly share their personal faith journeys with pupils.
- The sacraments have a very high profile in the Catholic Life of the school. The parish priest, headteacher and Religious Education subject leader plan a programme of catechesis for pupils and their parents. This gives parents the opportunity to deepen their own faith. It is shared by all and has the appropriate level of depth, enhancing the pupils' and parents' relationships with God and one another.
- Upper key stage 2 pupils voluntarily lead Collective Worship to teach younger pupils how to pray.

FULL REPORT

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To share its outstanding practice across the local Catholic cluster of schools.
- Ensure that all the regular and extensive monitoring and evaluation of Catholic Life, Religious Education and Collective Worship is formally recorded by Governors.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

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

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

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

- The quality of the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.
- Pupils are very respectful and proud of their faith and their Catholic school community. They understand and can clearly articulate the mission of the school.
- The headteacher and Religious Education subject leader constantly strive for improvement and demand high standards in every area of school life. All staff are deeply committed to the school's mission within the context of the Church's broader mission.
- The senior leadership team provide a range of valuable support and challenge in all aspects of Catholic Life. As a result, the whole community is involved in the development of the Catholic Life of the school.
- Pupils play an active part in the evaluation of the Catholic Life of the school. For example, liturgical leaders monitor and evaluate prayer focus areas within each classroom. Pupils take their role seriously and teachers respond to the suggestions for improvement.
- Pupils' behaviour and conduct reflects the Catholic character of the school. Pupils treat each other with great kindness and are quick to applaud success.
- The pupils play an important role in leading the Catholic Life of the school. They are sensitive to the emotional and spiritual needs of everyone in the school community.

This empathy inspires the prayers that they share and influences their actions as members of the various leadership groups that they are part of.

- One of the school's greatest strengths is the witness of staff and governors to their faith and the school's Catholic values. All the governors and a high percentage of the staff are practising Catholics. Pupils benefit greatly from seeing the lived-out faith of the staff and governors.
- The school's link with the parish, partly through the staff and governors, is another key strength of the school. As a result, there is continual focus on the Catholic Life of the school by senior leaders, governors and the parish.
- The school is greatly supported by their parish priest and assistant priest. Their chaplaincy significantly adds to the Catholic Life of the school.
- Pupils benefit from excellent opportunities for religious visits and retreats. They respond with enthusiasm to visits to the parish church, St Chad's Cathedral, Year of Mercy pilgrimages and the Year 3 & Year 6 retreat to Alton Castle, to which parents were invited. These events enable pupils to have a deeper understanding of their faith and an involvement with their parish and aspects of the diocese.
- There is excellent pastoral care of pupils by staff. They do this through role-modelling expected behaviours, deep personal faith and continual care for all the pupils.
- Pupils are fully involved in the Catholic Life of the school. They learn to have an awareness of their responsibility towards each other. As a result, pupils willingly give their time to undertake volunteer roles within the school. For example, they act as peer mediators, prayer group leaders, liturgical leaders, energy savers, school councillors, altar servers and faith friends. All these roles are very effective and contribute to helping maintain excellent behaviour in a climate of mutual trust and respect throughout the school.
- Pupils lead fundraising for several different charities. They support local, national and global charities. During Lent, each class is responsible for choosing a charity and the fundraising activities to support that charity.
- Pupils also raise funds for charities outside of school with the support of parents. One Year 5 pupil initiated fundraising for a child in her class who was seriously ill in hospital. Another Year 6 pupil, in response to a visit from a religious sister from Sifa Fireside, held a cake sale at home and raised over £300. This charitable act was reported on local Radio and TV.
- The school has an annual vocations day for Year 5 & Year 6, when representatives from a variety of careers explain their route to their chosen vocation; these include clergy and religious. They also complete a vocations project in the summer term. During the inspection, all pupils consistently demonstrated a deep understanding of what vocation means in their lives.
- Pupils throughout the school have a very good understanding of discipleship and they can discuss how they are called to be disciples in their school and at home. They know how this relates to their vocation. Their understanding of both discipleship and vocation is outstanding.
- The school has an annual day of recollection for all staff. This year the theme was, 'Our Vocation'. This gives staff the opportunity to continue their life-long formation of faith. The parish priest and assistant priest have been instrumental in enabling all staff to renew their relationship with God. As a result, staff continually speak about their vocation and openly share their personal faith journeys with pupils.
- The sacraments have a very high profile in the Catholic Life of the school. Preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation is thorough. The parish priest, headteacher and Religious Education subject leader plan an excellent programme of catechesis for pupils and their parents. This gives parents the opportunity to deepen their own faith. It is shared

by all and has the appropriate level of depth, enhancing the pupils' and parents' relationships with God and one another.

- At the Reception parents' induction meeting, the headteacher and the early years leader are explicit about the Catholic nature, ethos and mission of St Ambrose Barlow School. This clearly helps parents understand the role of faith in the school community, where Christ is at the centre of everything.
- There is a constant drive to promote the Catholic Schools' Pupil Profile (CSPP) and this has been developed in line with diocesan expectations. Pupils of all ages can articulate the meaning of the virtues promoted in the CSPP and the implications they have for the way in which they live their lives. For example, following the half termly focus on generosity and gratefulness, the pupils provided a plentiful supply of food for a local foodbank in their community.
- Prayer focuses in each classroom are of high quality and reflect the liturgical year and class saints. Each class has made quality displays about the current Gospel values for this half term.
- Displays in the school entrance hall show that the Gospel values, the CSPP and the Catholic faith are clearly promoted in this school.
- Pupils have opportunities to reflect on a variety of moral and spiritual issues. They show a mature approach to world issues, demonstrating a willingness to stand up for what is right and morally acceptable in our society today. They show mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith.
- Provision for relationship and sex education is thorough and developed at an appropriate level for all pupils. It is consistent with the teaching of the Church. This enables pupils to explore feelings and emotions and how they impact on themselves and others. All year groups also do work about safe relationships.

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

- Leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction for the Catholic Life of the school.
- The promotion, monitoring and evaluation of the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.
- Staff are developed through dialogue, coaching, training, mentoring and support. Best practice is modelled with peer observations.
- All staff have a Catholic Life performance management objective. Staff complete professional development evaluations identifying strengths they can share and areas where they need support.
- Staff access a programme of whole school training opportunities as well as individual courses through the Birmingham Catholic Primary Partnership and the diocese to reflect personal professional development needs. Other providers are also used for training when it is relevant.
- The Religious Education subject leader has regular opportunities to meet with the Catholic cluster of schools and the diocesan primary advisor. She is also chair for the Religious Education leaders in the local cluster meetings.
- The school is constantly striving to improve Catholic Life through the involvement of parents. At the end of each year, parents and governors evaluate the sacramental programme. The senior leadership team and the link governor use this to ensure that the parents' and pupils' faith is enriched and developed.
- As a result of parent and governor evaluation, the school has implemented a new structure for the Year 3 sacramental preparation programme. Parents' feedback has been very positive.

- The parish priest regularly monitors and evaluates Catholic Life through ethos walks. He has also led staff training. As a result, he has a very good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.
- The monitoring and evaluation of Catholic Life is done through observation, learning walks, book scrutiny and professional conversations with staff and pupils. Parents have also evaluated Catholic Life. Although governors regularly attend events promoting the Catholic Life and they discuss it at governor meetings, they have not formally recorded evaluations of Catholic Life.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.

- The quality of Religious Education is outstanding.
- Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that the high quality of provision made for Religious Education means that almost all of pupils make excellent progress through all key stages and achieve standards that are above or at least in line with diocesan expectations.
- Teachers use a variety of teaching styles and strategies which ensure that learning and progress of pupils from different groups is very good.
- The school ensures that pupils with special educational needs and pupils with English as an additional language are very well supported. Teachers and other adults are very aware of their pupils' capabilities and of their prior learning and understanding and plan very effectively to build on these. This means that all pupils, irrespective of ability, can make good or better progress in their Religious Education skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils talk confidently about their work and say that they enjoy school and feel that they are successful learners in Religious Education.
- Pupil progress over the past five years is consistently very good.
- Pupils' attitudes to Religious Education are very good and they enjoy the variety of activities, which maintain their interest and encourage them to learn. Learners are gaining knowledge, skills and understanding at an excellent rate across all key stages.
- Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that standards in Religious Education are very good. Almost all pupils, including higher attaining pupils and pupils who have special educational needs, make excellent progress in their knowledge and understanding of their faith.
- Children achieve well in the foundation stage in all areas of learning. On entry, their knowledge and understanding of Religious Education is usually very poor compared to most other skills and concepts expected at this stage of their development.
- Teacher assessment evidence shows that most foundation stage children could not make the sign of the cross and were unaware of significant people and events within

the liturgical year. However, these pupils make at least good progress with many making outstanding progress in the Reception year.

- The school's strong Catholic ethos, high expectations and good behaviour management means that nearly all pupils demonstrate excellent concentration.
- Pupils enjoy Religious Education. They take great pleasure in the stories, prayers, religious imagery, the themes of the liturgical seasons and the many celebrations of faith.
- One of St Ambrose Barlow School's special strengths is the very high standard of literacy within Religious Education. Every opportunity is used to ensure that the two subjects enhance each other. Pupils are given opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings in extended writing within Religious Education lessons.
- Pupils' Religious Education books contain an excellent variety of work. This work is consistently and beautifully presented with appropriate activities for the different age groups and abilities.
- All teachers use a variety of questioning techniques to ensure that pupils can reflect on their faith and how they can apply it to their lives. Observations and interviews show pupils are keen to learn, can work collaboratively or independently, and enjoy debating and discussing key messages within their lessons.
- Teaching in Religious Education brings clarity to the relationship between faith and life, and between faith and culture. Pupils are inquisitive learners and keen to ask questions and find solutions to problems. They thrive when working independently and teachers' planning provides opportunities for such independence.
- All teachers have excellent subject knowledge, which is consistently used to challenge and inspire pupils.
- All teachers challenge pupils to respond to questions about their own and others' feelings. Pupils are morally aware of the requirements of living out their faith in their everyday life.
- Pupils reflect and have a good awareness of the faith and traditions of other religious communities. Each year group studies a different faith and visits the appropriate place of worship. As a result, pupils have a good understanding and respect for other cultures and faiths.
- All teachers have high expectations for all pupils. This is reflected in the marking of pupils' work. Teachers' feedback enables pupils to respond fully to questions of faith in their own lives.
- Pupils are continually encouraged to celebrate their achievement and effort. This builds up their confidence and encourages them to be good role models.

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

- Religious education is led by the highly committed and able deputy headteacher. She has continued to implement the school's thorough monitoring and evaluation procedures. Consequently, all staff are robustly supported so that teaching can be continually developed.
- The headteacher, Religious Education subject leader and governors ensure that the Religious Education curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference throughout the school. They do this through continual monitoring and self-evaluation procedures which are well established and increasingly involve leaders at all levels. As a result of this self-evaluation, teachers challenge all pupils to consistently reflect on the deeper meaning of their faith in their lives.
- Religious Education has a high priority on the timetable and it receives above the required minimum 10% of taught curriculum time.

- There is frequent scrutinising by staff, governors and pupils of the quality of displays and prayer focuses in classrooms and around the school. This has resulted in a very high standard of Religious Education displays which enhances the spiritual environment of the school.
- Pupil progress meetings and data analysis all inform ongoing school improvement planning and staff development. This continually leads to improved standards in Religious Education.
- Pupil liturgical leaders' evaluation reports, pupil questionnaires, interviews and informal discussions are used to gain pupils' views. These are shared with staff to celebrate and, where necessary, to develop good practice.
- Religious Education lesson planning and pupils' work are monitored by senior leaders, and outcomes from observations are shared with staff in order to identify strengths and areas for development.
- Although governors take an active part in the monitoring of Religious Education and they frequently look at pupils' books, they do not usually formally record and review their findings.
- The Religious Education link governor takes part in regular learning walks with the headteacher. These are formally recorded, acted upon and the impact of actions is measured.
- Collection of performance data is embedded and begins with an annual scrutiny of the baseline assessment in Early Years. This enables the school to review provision in line with the growing needs of the pupils, as they enter school with very limited knowledge of religious artefacts or prayers.
- Analysis of assessment by the Religious Education leader and the headteacher regularly takes place. They look at groups to ensure all are making good progress and gaps can be identified and closed. As a result, pupils make substantial and sustained progress developing excellent knowledge, skills and understanding in Religious Education.
- Views of parents are collected in a variety of ways such as questionnaires and parent evaluations of Inspire workshops. Parents are very happy with the way their children enjoy Religious Education and the school provides many opportunities for them to be involved in their child's Religious Education.
- The focus on learning from religion has been embedded in the school over the past three years. Staff have participated in book scrutinies to specifically look for evidence of this aspect of learning. As a result, in planning, staff ensure that pupils can investigate and engage with the deepest questions of life, explain their thinking and engage in enquiry within Religious Education. During the inspection, all classes were taught about learning from religion very well and in the majority of classes this teaching was excellent.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

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

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

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school.

- The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school is outstanding.
- Staff have confidence and expertise to pray with pupils in a variety of ways. For example, during the inspection some classes used meditation to reflect on the Gospels.
- Pupils participate enthusiastically in Collective Worship, displaying reverence and respect. They contribute using their skills in a variety of ways as musicians, servers, readers, taking the offertory and as technicians. They sing with enthusiasm.
- The staff support and develop pupils' skills in planning and leading worship. Pupils' experiences of meaningful, well prepared worship enables them to understand what it should feel and look like. As a result, pupils are then able to organise and lead meaningful acts of worship with enthusiasm themselves. Pupils' skills in planning worship develop as they move through the school.
- Pupils in all year groups lead class prayer and reflection services. As pupils progress through key stage 2, they plan, prepare and lead prayer services for their peers. During the inspection, a group of Year 6 pupils voluntarily led a prayer service for a group of younger pupils. This happens on a weekly basis.
- Pupils display confidence when using a variety of prayer styles and traditions. They are enthusiastic about how they are involved in the planning, preparation and delivery of Collective Worship. As a result, most pupils are confident in presenting and sharing their faith through prayer.
- A particular strength of the school is the way that pupils know age appropriate traditional prayers. For example, upper key stage 2 pupils could recite the Memorare.
- Most pupils have an excellent understanding of the liturgical year. They know that it is celebrated not only with special Masses, liturgies and assemblies but also with colourful displays. The standard of the liturgical displays and pupils' written work about the liturgical year around the school is consistently outstanding.
- During the inspection, pupils of all ages could speak about the meaning of the different colours and symbols that are used in the liturgical year.
- St Ambrose Barlow school has a very high proportion of experienced Catholic staff and governors who practise their faith. This has a profound and visible effect on the spiritual and moral development of all pupils and it is reflected in the respectful way in which pupils lead and take part in prayer and liturgy.
- The parish priest is pro-active in questioning how the pupils can be encouraged to sing the Mass responses. He is currently working in partnership with staff and governors to facilitate this.
- Masses are personalised to the needs of the school or class. During the inspection, the class Mass was on the theme of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Pupils read beautifully, prepared their own bidding prayers, prayed spontaneously and sang reflectively. Pupils worshipped reverently at all times.
- Collective Worship is given the highest priority in the school and prayer is central to the life of this school.
- During the inspection, Year 5 pupils led an outstanding whole school assembly about being attentive and discerning. It was very well attended by parents. Pupils were reverent and very enthusiastic. The whole community celebrated wholeheartedly in this act of worship. The Year 5 pupils were able to teach other pupils about what it means to be attentive and discerning.
- All year groups have newly updated prayer bags and their value is acknowledged by many families. Pupils also take home the Wednesday Word. These prayer resources give families the opportunity to pray together at home.

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

- Senior leaders and governors are very well supported by the parish priest and the assistant priest. The parish priest is continually questioning and evaluating how Collective Worship can be made even better.
- Governors frequently attend Collective Worship and verbally evaluate it. However, to be more effective, they need to formalise this process.
- Parents evaluate Collective Worship by filling in questionnaires. Their evaluations are very positive and show how they strongly agree that prayer and liturgy are central to the life of the school.
- Parental feedback about the use of prayer bags is very positive. Parents feel that the bags benefit the whole family because they enable more time to be available for family prayer.
- The senior leadership team and class teachers formally observe and evaluate Collective Worship. Their findings are included in the school development plan and acted upon. Consequently, pupils experience a good variety of prayer styles and traditions.
- The planning of Masses and liturgies is very well organised to support the liturgical year. Collective Worship is also carefully planned to support the virtues included in the CSPP. It is continually evaluated by the parish priest, the senior leadership team and the teachers. As a result, pupils consistently lead prayer and liturgies to support the virtues that are the focus for the current half term.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Unique reference number	103465
Local authority	Birmingham
<i>This inspection was carried out under canon 806 of Canon Law and under Section 48 of the 2005 Education Act.</i>	
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Bernard O'Driscoll
Headteacher	Mrs Maria Winters
Telephone number	0121 464 2791
Website address	www.sab.bham.sch.uk
Email address	enquiry@sab.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 th June 2013

INFORMATION ABOUT THIS SCHOOL

- St Ambrose Barlow is a one-form entry, over-subscribed Catholic primary school serving the parish of St Ambrose Barlow in Hall Green, Birmingham.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils is currently 96%.
- The percentage of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average.
- The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic origins is above the national average.
- The percentage of pupils with English as an additional language is below the national average.
- Attainment on entry is below the national average.
- There have been some significant changes since the last inspection: a new deputy head teacher was appointed in September 2017; a new parish priest came to the parish in September 2016 and a new chair of governors was elected in 2016.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION

- The inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors, Rose Brookes and Bernadette Corbett.
- The focus of the inspection was on the impact, quality and leadership of the school's provision of Catholic Life, Religious Education and Collective Worship.
- The inspectors observed teaching across seven Religious Education lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. All of these lesson observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils to evaluate their understanding of Catholic Life, the impact of Religious Education teaching on their learning over time and their experience of Collective Worship.
- Meetings were held with the Catholic Life link governor who is the parish priest, a foundation governor who is a member of the ethos committee, the headteacher and the Religious Education subject leader, who is also the deputy headteacher.
- The inspectors attended a class Mass and a whole school, Year 5 led Collective Worship assembly and undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of learning and teaching in Religious Education, the presentation of the Catholic Life of the school and pupils' behaviour.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation, data about pupils' attainment and progress, Analyse School Performance (ASP) data, the school development plan, the Religious Education action plan, teachers' planning and Catholic Life Folders.