



## ARCHDIOCESE OF LIVERPOOL

### INSPECTION REPORT

## ST. MARY'S COLLEGE CATHOLIC PREPARATORY SCHOOL

BLUNDELLSANDS

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Tuesday 13 October 2009

Inspectors Mrs. Marie Connolly Mrs. Susan Bannister

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Type of School	Catholic Preparatory
Age range of pupils	4-11
Number on roll	155
Chair of Governors	Mr. Harry Hitchen
School address	Blundellsands Road West, Blundellsands, Liverpool L23 6TF.
Telephone number	0151 924 6302
E-mail address	office@stmarysprep.liverpool.sch.uk
Date of last inspection	November 2004
Head teacher	Mr. Michael Collins

## Introduction

The report of the inspection is produced for the Archbishop of Liverpool (Code of Canon Law 804 and 806) and for the governors of the school.

The inspectors are members of the Christian Education Department and their associates approved by the Archbishop of Liverpool for this purpose.

## Description of the school

St. Mary's College Preparatory School (The Mount) is an independent Catholic Primary School. It is average in size. It is a separate part of St Mary's College, a Roman Catholic independent co-educational school, founded by the Christian Brothers in 1919. It has a separate headteacher who is line managed by the Principal of the college. The governing body is common to all sections of the college, but nominates governors to take day-to-day responsibility for The Mount and the Nursery respectively, who report back regularly to the main governing body. The school is nominally selective, with decisions being made after the pupils have spent a day in the school and have been interviewed by staff. The school is situated in Blundellsands, an area of some significant social and economic advantage. There are currently 155 children on roll. Ninety-nine children are baptised Catholics and 40 come from other Christian denominations. There are 4 children attending this school from other religious traditions and 12 who have no Faith Tradition. The ability profile of the school's pupils is above average overall. Of the 10 Catholic teachers in the school 9 teach Religious Education. Four have a Religious Education qualification. Since the last inspection, the accommodation has been improved considerably, with some major refurbishment and the addition of an excellent multi-purpose hall.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

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## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

St. Mary's is a good Catholic school with some outstanding features. It is a community underpinned by an exceptionally strong Catholic ethos, based on the essential elements of Edmund Rice, which establishes a positive climate for work. The gospel values of love, care and mutual respect very evidently underpin every aspect of school life. This is a school where the well being of every child is of paramount importance. As the Mission Statement states 'At The Mount we seek to show our faith by the way we live'. Displays and areas all around the school show how nurturing children's holistic development is at the heart of school activity. Excellent relationships exist at every level. All staff show through their care and concern both for the children and each other that the 'Catholic ethos' is a tangible, living thing. The welcome extended to all is a real strength of the school. Achievement and standards are good. Overall learners achieve well and make good progress. Overall, teaching and learning is good. Some teaching is outstanding some satisfactory. Good assessment procedures are providing guidance on learning. Curriculum planning needs to be more consistent across the school. Learners' behaviour is exemplary. The Religious Education curriculum meets the needs and interests of learners, enabling them to make meaningful connections between life and faith. The provision for learners' spiritual and moral development is outstanding. Collective Worship makes a significant contribution to this development, curriculum Religious Education less so. Creative and imaginative strategies have been employed to enable this to happen formally and informally. The Religious Education coordinator, supported by the headteacher is good in leading and managing Religious Education. She has an understanding of the areas where there is outstanding practice but is realistic in appreciating the collaborative hard work, effort and commitment that will enable such high achievement and standards to be developed further. The Collective Worship is outstanding and contains deeply reflective and uplifting elements. The school is outstanding in promoting community cohesion. This is most evident in the manner in which the school serves the local and wider communities.

**Grade: 2**

### **Improvement since the last inspection**

The school was previously judged as very good. Since then it has made progress in some areas and it has maintained others. This improvement is the result of the commitment of some staff and people sharing a common vision. The review and development of the Mission statement has developed its understanding. In service has been provided for all. This has significantly improved the planning and implementation of Collective Worship. Monitoring has started to take place. The school sets itself targets in order to meet fresh challenges. Any new initiatives introduced by the Archdiocese are acted upon promptly.

**Grade: 2**

## **Capacity to improve**

The school's self-evaluation is good. The school has very clearly identified its strengths and areas for improvement. It has also a very clear understanding of the strategies that will enable this to happen. The judgements made in the document, however, overestimate the judgements made in this report. Parents and governors are aware of and greatly appreciate the work being undertaken and the dedicated leadership that directs and guides every aspect of school life. The Religious Education coordinator supported by the leadership has a clear vision of what and how to improve and openness to new challenges. All teachers need to support this improvement. There is good capacity for further improvement as shown by the commitment to Religious Education and related whole school issues.

## **Grade: 2**

### **What the school should do to improve further**

The school should ensure the areas identified in its own self-evaluation document are addressed. Whole staff inservice to support the planning and delivery of Religious Education needs to be undertaken. Time needs to be set aside to monitor planning, teaching and learning. The areas for development identified through rigorous monitoring need to be acted on promptly by those concerned in order to improve and raise standards and achievement further. Any minor issues contained in the body of the report, and any new initiatives introduced by the Archdiocese should be included when appropriate.

## **Achievement and standards**

Learners' attainment on entry to the school is generally above that expected. Learners make good progress in the school. Standards in Religious Education overall are good, with most learners meeting learning objectives and outcomes set, according to their age and stage of development. There is no difference in performance by learners of different gender. Learners with special needs make good progress in Religious Education. Support provided by the excellent teaching assistants and some differentiation of tasks helps meet their needs. The school checks on the progress made by all through assessment and some positive marking. The marking needs to be more thought provoking and challenging. It also needs to be undertaken consistently throughout the school. Children show a developing confidence in discussion and feedback, and a real knowledge and understanding of the subject and its relevance in their lives. Some children show enthusiasm and excitement for the subject when undertaking their work. Self-assessment is undertaken for each topic by some children and teachers. Standards will continue to rise and further progress be made by the ongoing use of the information gathered through assessment, monitoring of planning, teaching and learning, and the moderation of work that has recently been introduced. The behaviour of children throughout the school is outstanding. The school is outstanding in the manner in which it manages children, kindly, fairly and consistently. The children are enabled to make an outstanding contribution to

the school and wider community through initiatives such as the buddy system and Edmund Rice group, which allows the children's 'voice' to be taken into consideration, acted upon and values their contribution.

**Grade: 2**

## **Quality of Provision for Religious Education**

### **Teaching and learning**

Overall, the quality of provision for Religious Education is good. Some of the teaching observed and the planning provided by those teachers show some teaching and learning is outstanding. Most teachers show an enthusiasm for the subject. The learning needs of all children, including those with additional needs, are addressed. Where teaching and learning is outstanding the use of some creative and imaginative teaching and learning strategies, including ICT, are employed there is some differentiation of tasks and additional support is provided by the excellent teaching assistants. Children show a real enthusiasm for their work, enjoy undertaking the tasks set and are challenged appropriately. Sharing outstanding practice through the monitoring process will continue to enable teachers to share where excellence in practice has been identified and support the ongoing development of all. Some teaching is very creative. This helps learners engage with the material presented and thoroughly enjoy their lessons. Well prepared resources significantly enhanced the delivery of some lessons. In some lessons there was an over reliance on black and white worksheets, the tasks set were not differentiated to meet the needs of learners and there was insufficient challenge. Teachers and their assistants provide a most creative and stimulating environment in many classrooms and particularly around the school which supports and challenges all children. Planning and teachers' understanding of the Religious Education programme varies.

Ongoing monitoring of planning, workbooks and lesson observations will ensure greater consistency across the school. The majority of lessons observed had good pace and timing, which maintained the interest and concentration of learners and kept them on task and focussed. Work is provided that enables some children to work well independently and collaboratively. All teachers must ensure that learners understand the purpose of the lesson by sharing the learning objective at the start of the lesson and then re-visit it during the plenary session. Learners' religious literacy is enhanced by the identification and use of the key words for each topic particularly during the Relate stage of the process. Formal assessment procedures have been introduced that show progress is being made and that learners are meeting the expectations in Religious Education. This information needs to direct future planning. The school has begun moderation of children's work together. This will significantly enhance a common vision and consistency in the levelling of work. Use of the driver words for each level is helping focus teaching more clearly on the expected outcome.

Parents and carers involvement in the children's Religious Education is outstanding. Parents and carers are enabled to become involved in their children's Religious Education by the provision of regular detailed newsletters which are provided for each year group. Parents also benefit from being invited to school for child reviews. Displays and focus areas in the school related to the children's work in Religious Education are another way of sharing children's achievement with parents and visitors. Parents are consulted regularly and benefit from being informed by 'parent-mail'.

## **Grade: 2**

### **Curriculum**

The Religious Education curriculum is good in meeting the needs and interests of learners. The school, using the *Here I Am* programme recommended by the Archdiocese, meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory for Religious Education. A whole school approach is used and appropriate levels of the programme are being followed in different classes. This ensures complete Religious Education entitlement for each child and meets national and diocesan requirements. Of the total curriculum time 10% is allocated to Religious Education. This fulfils the requirements of the Bishops of England and Wales. The leadership of the school ensures suitable positioning of Religious Education on timetables. Curriculum outlines are provided for parents. Parents are consulted on different issues depending on the topic being covered.

Catholic beliefs and values are at the heart of learners' outstanding spiritual and moral development. There is evidence of this in classrooms and all around the school. It is very evident in the care that has been shown in creating the whole learning environment. Some beautiful displays, quiet areas for prayer and reflection, posters and photographs provide evidence of this excellent practice. Overall the Religious Education curriculum makes a good contribution to learners' spiritual and moral development. Children have a good sense of right and wrong. The school is constantly introducing pro-active initiatives to encourage the positive behaviour and moral development of all e.g. star of the week, pebbles in a jar and positive quotations displayed on walls.

The school also provides outstanding opportunities for spiritual development. Teachers make the curriculum challenging and relevant by creating some stimulating resources. Children have a good understanding of the life and teaching of Jesus, Edmund Rice and other significant Christians. Some creative strategies, including those using information communication technology are used to enable them apply this teaching to their own lives. e.g. drama, role play, and other cross-curricular links with music, art, dance, technology etc. Some work has been undertaken on *Other Faiths*. This has helped the children understand how others make sense of the world in which we live and also promotes tolerance and respect for those whose views differ from our own. Inviting visitors from other religious traditions to share their different beliefs will enable children make greater sense of the diversity

experienced in living in a multi faith society. Visits to other religious places of worship will also support this development.

**Grade: 2**

## **Leadership and Management**

### **Religious Education**

Leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners in Religious Education are good. There is a clear vision for the subject within the mission of the school with a focus on raising standards further. The Religious Education coordinator, supported by the headteacher provides good leadership and support to all staff. They share enthusiasm and commitment. Some good documentation guides and directs all staff in their delivery of the subject. There is also some evidence of the quality of practice and achievement in Religious Education and associated whole school issues. Documentation needs to make greater use of photographic evidence and samples of the most creative work displayed around the school. Coordinators' meetings are attended regularly and information is disseminated to all staff during staff meetings or in-service time. A rolling programme enabling all teaching staff to attend Archdiocesan in-service supports them further in their planning and delivery of the subject and has deepened their understanding of the underlying theology. Performance in Religious Education has started to be monitored. A rolling programme is in place to ensure all staff have their planning and work observed. Feedback and support is provided. This ongoing scrutiny of planning, workbooks and teaching and learning and effective use of the findings will enable even greater consistency and raise standards even further.

The Mount is socially inclusive by providing equality of access and of opportunity for all learners to make progress. Pastoral care is a real strength of the school. Excellent support is provided by the chaplaincy team. Of the 10 staff, 9 teach Religious Education, 10 are Catholic and 4 have a suitable qualification in Religious Education. The school should encourage those without qualification to enrol for the *Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies*. Priorities for the subject are identified and targets set.

Funding for Religious Education is very good. Resources have been purchased or created by members of staff and are deployed to achieve some high standards. The school is making some good use of interactive white boards, and other technology in Religious Education and Collective Worship e.g. powerpoint presentations. Greater use of this and other technology will further enhance provision e.g. recording with the flip video or digital cameras. Some excellent use is made of display and photographic evidence. It would be good to reintroduce portfolios of photographs and children's annotated work. The headteacher keeps the governors informed on matters relating to Religious Education.

The governors have an excellent involvement in the life and work of the school. They discharge their responsibilities effectively and are greatly involved in decision making.

**Grade: 2**

### **Catholic Life of the School**

The leadership and management in developing the Catholic life of the school through the Mission Statement are outstanding. It is a community that believes and lives its mission, seeking to 'show our faith by the way we live'. The Mount is a real community reaching out to the local and wider community. It aspires to achieve the best for all. The Mount is a community in which the gospel spirit of love, care and mutual respect permeates every aspect of its life and work. Excellent relationships are at the heart of every activity. The Mission Statement is displayed as you enter the school, in classrooms, documents and other places around the school. At the heart of the Mission Statement are the traditions of Edmund Rice. These continue to direct and guide every aspect of school life. The Mission Statement has been reviewed recently by all who form the school community. This enables it to be known and owned by all. The school needs to produce a short set of aims underpinned by practical objectives showing how the mission is lived out daily in this Catholic school. The parents are to be consulted in this. The children's successes are celebrated regularly at assemblies and through productions and the performing arts. Parents and governors greatly appreciate being invited to share in these celebrations.

**Grade: 1**

### **Collective Worship**

The quality of opportunities and experiences offered for Collective Worship are outstanding. The school has recently received in-service training to support the planning and delivery of Collective Worship by all. This has clearly impacted on the provision observed. The school provides Collective Worship in a variety of ways for each child daily, in class, and whole school gatherings. This fulfils government and Archdiocesan guidance. Guidelines that support the planning and delivery of Collective Worship wherever and whenever it takes place have been produced, including a simple format for planning. Collective Worship stimulates reflection on spiritual and moral issues and on personal beliefs. Creativity is used to support learners' ongoing spiritual and moral development during acts of Collective Worship e.g. use of different types of prayer, music and symbol. The manner in which ICT- video and power-point was used on the day of inspection was gentle and reverent whilst really enabling children's sense of awe and wonder. A focus for worship is provided in classrooms using suitable religious objects and artefacts. A simple focus for worship is set up in the hall when it takes place there. Recently a prayer room has been created and children are most enthusiastic in making use of it for quiet prayer and reflection. Other resources are stored centrally e.g. suitable materials, books and artefacts to

support teachers in their delivery of Collective Worship. Children are encouraged to participate in a meaningful manner both in class and larger gatherings through prayer, poetry, song, dance mime etc. The inclusion of all children regardless of ability enables them grow in confidence and also feel they are playing an active part. This was seen being undertaken with great confidence on the day of inspection. All teachers should ensure time is given to individual reflection during Collective Worship and help children to develop skills which enhance this. The prayer life of the school is excellent. Liturgical celebrations are planned and these take place throughout the year. Mass is sometimes celebrated. Parents, governors and friends of the school community are invited to a variety of assemblies and services. This is greatly appreciated. Collective Worship has begun to be monitored and evaluated. This will identify areas of excellence in practice. These need to be shared, and thus further help consistency in the standard of worship throughout the school.

**Grade: 1**

## **Community Cohesion**

The school is outstanding in promoting community cohesion. The leadership of the school is clearly dedicated and instrumental in enabling this to happen. There is a shared vision and commitment to serve the common good. Leadership at all levels respects difference, values diversity and ensures equal opportunities. The chaplaincy team works with the school to ensure the integration of families not from a Catholic faith tradition.

Parents, carers and children are involved in the decision making and life of the school e.g. the creation of Christmas cards, raising funds for charities and the Eco council. The school continues to identify and develop strategies for strengthening community links even further e.g. the Edmund Rice prayer group links with Namibia. Collective Worship celebrates, reflects and respects the diversity within the school.

The use of the Religious Education Programme, *Here I Am*, supports community cohesion. Good use is made of materials provided by CAFOD. Children have explored the beliefs and values of other faiths and cultures. This helps promote tolerance and respect for those who think differently. It would be good for the school to invite speakers from other religious backgrounds into school and also to arrange visits when possible to places of worship e.g. the synagogue, to enable children to further deepen their knowledge and understanding of these communities. The school has a clear sense of its mission in reaching out to those who are less fortunate supporting a variety of local, national and international charities both by becoming better informed and by raising funds and resources e.g. CAFOD, Nugent Care, the Shoe Box Appeal, Claire House to name but a few.

**Grade: 1**

