

CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

St. Mary's and St. Benedict's is located in Bamber Bridge and serves the parish of St Mary's. It is a larger than average-sized, one and a half form entry primary school with 294 pupils on roll. There are ten classes with the Reception class running as a Foundation Stage unit with two class teachers. There is almost an equal balance of boys and girls in school. The percentage of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium Grant is 20% which is below the national average. The percentage of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) is 14.2%. The number of pupils on the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) register is 19 (6%) and 3 children have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP). 87.8% of the pupils are White British heritage with 10.5% of children having English as an additional language. The school has undergone significant changes to staffing and to the physical condition of the school in the last 18 months. The school was last inspected by Ofsted in April 2013 and was graded 'Good'.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL IS GOOD

St Mary's and St Benedict's RC Primary School is a rapidly improving school. The effectiveness of the school's mission in Catholic education had become a concern, as had the school's outcomes in all Key Stages. Hence, when the new headteacher arrived in September 2015 a huge challenge lay ahead. With strong support from Governors, the newly appointed deputy headteacher and other key leaders an ambitious programme of school improvement began. This focussed especially on reviving the school's distinctive Catholic nature. The school soon found its identity again! The learning environment has been hugely improved. The school is now in far better shape and great care has been taken to clearly witness that this school is a guiding light for Catholic education in Bamber Bridge. The expectations of staff are growing. Now only the best is good enough for St Mary's and St Benedict's. Along with the children's outstanding attitudes and behaviour, the school has become a far more coherent place of learning. The teaching in RE is good, with outstanding elements when teachers plan imaginative lessons, set high expectations and ask searching thoughtful questions. It is right for this to be a consistent element across the whole school. This is a very welcoming school where the children's happy faces show how much they enjoy school. Each child is nurtured and supported and hence they readily reach out to others both in school and in the wider world. They devote time and energy raising money for numerous charities. Links with St Mary's parish are growing and the children often walk through the grounds to church. The parish priest ensures the children feel valued as part of the community as school and parish links strengthen. Parents speak highly of everything the school does for its families, knowing there is an open door and listening ears whenever needed. They particularly notice the visible presence of the headteacher around school. As one parent commented, 'Everyone is so approachable which means anything can be sorted out at once – we know we are listened to and valued'.

KEY STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL INCLUDE:

- The exceptional, determined leadership of the headteacher.
- The children's excellent behaviour and attitudes to learning, especially in Religious Education.
- The warm, caring atmosphere that permeates the entire school.
- The supportive relationships and team ethic that unites everyone to move the school forward so positively.

THE QUALITY OF CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

Upon her appointment the headteacher immediately set about establishing a new vision for St Mary's and St Benedict's. She identified that the school had lost impetus and that the Catholic nature of the school needed to be significantly raised in status. The impact of her drive and energy has had an enormous impact on the school. Her unflinching determination and cheerful disposition has ensured every day is a step forward in these challenging times. She has been very well supported by other skilled leaders and governors, who walk hand in hand on the school's impressive journey of improvement. Staffing issues have been tackled

courageously, expectations have been raised and a new sense of urgency has emerged. The team are now devoted to the school's mission and all that is special at St Mary's and St Benedict's. The headteacher has assumed the responsibility for leading Religious Education in order to raise the status of the Catholic life of the school and this has been very successful. It is now for the school to increase the capacity of the leadership team so that responsibilities are not overly demanding and so that other leaders have the time to employ their undoubted skills without being overwhelmed. This will help to maintain momentum as the school continues to establish itself as an excellent local beacon of Catholic education.

THE QUALITY OF THE WORD IS GOOD

Overall the quality of Word is good. There are areas of provision in Religious Education where outstanding practice is in place and where, over time, impressive progress has been made. This practice needs to be shared across the school so that expectations are consistently at the highest level and so that lulls in the progress that the children make can be eradicated. For example in a Key Stage 1 class where the children were studying the Easter story, skilful questioning and clear success criteria allowed the children to be totally focussed and fully engaged. Behaviour for learning was outstanding and, hence, the outcomes of the children's work were very impressive. The use of prayer partners aided the quality of discussion and ensured every child had a voice. In an upper Key Stage 2 class, where relationships and attitudes were of the highest order, children demonstrated an outstanding knowledge of Sacred Scripture and asked deep questions of one another that showed a maturity beyond their years. They thoughtfully considered different versions of the Passion of Christ within the Bible and, with the excellent subject knowledge of the teacher, they were set free to completely engage in thoughtful reflection. The children put their hearts and souls into their prayerful lesson! Book scrutiny shows that good teaching and learning is generally evident in most classes. The recent review of the school's mission statement has certainly been most beneficial for clearly establishing the school's core purpose. Standards in Literacy and Religious Education are closely matched. Where the strongest teaching and clearest planning is in place, then impressive progress is very visible. Leaders are right to encourage the dissemination of the school's outstanding practice and to prioritise the modelling of high expectations and excellent teaching. Parents and children feel strongly that the overall curriculum has become much more interesting and stimulating. This is portrayed by the excellent attitudes to learning and the outstanding behaviour witnessed during the inspection.

THE QUALITY OF WELCOME IS OUTSTANDING

St Mary's and St Benedict's offers an exceptionally warm welcome and totally inclusive environment for all who attend the school. This includes children, their families, staff and visitors. One regular visitor to school commented that this is her favourite school to visit due to the very warm welcome she experiences and the care she witnesses. A strong commitment to safeguarding in no way compromises the genuinely warm welcome given. On entering the school visitors are immediately aware of its mission and its atmosphere of purposeful calmness. The school is bright, clean and enhanced throughout by attractive and varied displays. On the day of the inspection inspectors were warmly greeted by both staff and children when they entered individual classrooms and also when walking around the school. The polite and well-mannered children are rightly proud of their school. They enjoy coming to school, feel safe and secure and treat each other with respectful care. Parents too spoke very warmly about the school; many families have been associated with it for generations. They are welcomed to and enjoy attending Masses, celebration assemblies, parents' evenings, information evenings, PTA meetings and events and many other activities which all contribute to the continuing sense of belonging. They were keen to express how they felt included and how any concerns they might have are quickly and sensitively dealt with by the very caring staff. Parents particularly appreciated the headteacher, who is a very visible presence both around school and in the playground on a daily basis. They feel they can approach her and will be listened to. Procedures are in place to ensure that children new to the school feel welcome and settle in quickly. One parent commented that you can feel the ethos of the school as soon as you enter.

THE QUALITY OF WELFARE IS OUTSTANDING

The staff and children of St Mary's and St Benedict's demonstrate a very high level of care and respect for others. This was witnessed throughout the day of the inspection in the manner in which the staff supported

the children and their colleagues. The structures and procedures in school ensure that everyone feels safe and that they are treated with respect and dignity. Children care for one another and spoke enthusiastically about the buddy system and prefect roles in place which help to ensure all are happy and secure. Children were very definite that they feel safe in school and when asked about bullying they said it was not an issue as everyone knew exactly what to do if there were any problems and were confident staff would deal with them. The children particularly value the drop-in sessions held by the Caritas social worker who visits school one day each week, giving all an opportunity to discuss personal issues in confidence. This school's appointed social worker enhances the work of teachers and teaching assistants in their support and nurturing of the children and their families. She offers support for emotional issues, parenting problems, bereavement and family mediation. She also delivers the NSPCC PANTS programme to years one to four and the Relax Kids programme to year six. School successfully uses the Caritas in Action programme and its statements to live by to support and develop the children's sense of responsibility and service and their understanding of how they can help those in need. Consequently school has an excellent sense of outreach and undertakes local and international charity work including CAFOD, Saint Joseph's Penny and food collection for the local community.

THE QUALITY OF WORSHIP IS GOOD

St Mary's and St Benedict's has come a long way in a short time in re-establishing prayer and worship at the heart of the school's day to day life. Children are relaxed and comfortable in prayer individually and in groups. This could be seen in a whole school assembly where a prayerful reverence existed. The children were guided beautifully to grasp the 'statement to live by', contributed to the question and answers session and enjoyed the egg peeling competition! At all times the children behaved in an exemplary manner of which they can be truly proud. In an upper Key Stage 2 class the children gathered to pray about forgiveness based on the story of Zacchaeus. Thought provoking questioning enriched the activity in an atmosphere of calm reflectiveness. In a lower Key Stage 2 class the children produced a special worded commentary to a version of the Passion that used a judicious choice of music to provoke thoughtfulness and understanding. The school is in a very strong position to now fully explore how children can take responsibility for planning, delivering and evaluating worship across the school and how older children can model this as part of their responsibilities. Inspectors also feel that, along with the opportunities for traditional prayer, the benefits from mindful and meditative prayer can be extended to all ages to benefit the spiritual development of the children. This can be enhanced by appropriate use of the school's wonderful grounds and environment. New opportunities are being created for the children to attend Mass and to pray with their parish community under the guidance of the new parish priest.

THE QUALITY OF WITNESS IS GOOD

There are many significant features at St Mary's and St Benedict's that indicate that the school is on a very positive journey as its reputation grows within its local community. Parents have far more confidence in the school experiencing first-hand the greater welcome to all and how the values and beliefs of Catholic education are promoted day by day. The centrality of the RE curriculum is becoming more clearly understood. This is testament to key leaders who have seen what needed to be addressed and have led the school, along with governors, with pace. Inspectors agree that this provision is not yet outstanding because the school's plans for children's special responsibilities in faith leadership are still to fully unfold. It is right not to rush this as its relevancy and success will need time to embed. The school is fully committed to appointing staff who are committed to the direction of the school and, after a time of considerable upheaval, staffing difficulties are starting to calm down. The children are thoroughly enjoying everything the school offers and love the new found sense of purpose over recent times. There is a buzz around the school and the gospel values underpin how children are cared for, how reconciliation is sought and how the school reaches out to those less fortunate, both within the school community and further afield. The children feel safe and well cared for because the staff, under strong leadership, are now pulling together to make St Mary's and St Benedict's an outstanding Catholic school in every way.

AGREED AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT:

- To increase the capacity of the leadership team in order to maintain the momentum of school improvement and the growing centrality of the school's mission in education.

- Ensure the provision in Word is developed by modelling the best teaching, learning and high expectations across all ages.
- To further develop the school's monitoring and assessment systems for Religious Education.
- To continue to further embed the 5Ws into the school's mission.

14th April 2017

Dear Pupils,

We enjoyed a lovely day visiting you at the end of last term. What a joy it was to see you behave so beautifully in class, on the playground and during assembly! You should be very proud of yourselves, especially in the way you pray together, support one another and how lovely you are to teach.

We saw some great lessons and we are asking that all the teachers and the children share good ideas about what makes these lessons so interesting. This way everyone shares the best ideas in every age group. We have seen your work and lots of it is really impressive! So why not do the same and make sure the best work is always shared and celebrated! We loved the way you pray so reverently and were hugely impressed with so many qualities like the kind welcome you give and how you reach out to help anyone who needs you.

We think you have a very special headteacher who works so hard to make St Mary's and St Benedict's a very special place. We know she wants your school to be the best of the best! With your help and smiles you are well on the way! It is good to know you have a team who want you to be happy and safe as you continue your journey as children of God!

Many thanks and God Bless

Mr Harrison and Mrs Macro

(Section 48 inspectors)

Summary Report to Parents

On the 4th April 2017 St Mary's and St Benedict's RC Primary School was inspected in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

The full report has been made available to the school and can also be accessed via both the school website and the Education section on the website of the Diocese of Salford.

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