

*Diocese of Hallam*

***INSPECTION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION  
(Section 23 of the 1996 School Inspections Act)***

Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Primary School  
Mere Lane  
Armthorpe  
Doncaster  
DN3 2DB

Inspection Date: 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> October 2000  
Diocesan Inspector: Mrs M. C. Johnson

The inspection of the denominational character of Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Primary School was carried out under the direction of the Governors of the school in fulfilment of their obligations under the requirements of Canon Law (ref. 804, 806), Section 23 of the 1996 School Inspection Act, Section 13 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992 and Sections 241 and 259 of the Education Act, 1993. This inspection was conducted according to the Handbook for the Inspection of Religious Education in the Diocese of Hallam.

The process of Inspection in the Diocese of Hallam has been developed to support and encourage each school community. It is hoped that this report will celebrate all that is positive and praiseworthy in Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Primary School and help promote sound development for the future.

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A copy of this report may be obtained from the Governors of Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Primary School, Mere Lane, Armthorpe, Doncaster DN3 2DB or the Diocese of Hallam Schools' Department, Hallam Pastoral Centre, St Charles Street, Sheffield S9 3WU.

## Introduction

### Basic Information about the School

Name of School	Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Primary
Type	Infant and Junior
Status	Voluntary Aided
Number on Roll	132
Age Range	4 – 11 years
Gender of Pupils	Mixed
Chair of Governors	Sister Christina Crowe
Headteacher	Mr J.P.McChrystal
Address	Mere Lane Armthorpe Doncaster DN3 2DB
Telephone Number	01302 300625
Date of Inspection	11 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> October 2000
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Our Lady of Sorrows Primary School is a well-established school which serves the parishes of Our Lady and St.Francis at Armthorpe and St Thomas of Canterbury at Kirk Sandall. Seventy-six percent of the children are baptised Catholics.

The children are organised into four mixed age classes: Reception and Year One, Years One and Two, Years Three, Four and Five and Years Five and Six.

There five full-time teachers including the headteacher, all of whom are Catholic, supported by a number of administrative and non-teaching staff. Parents also provide regular voluntary support, both in the classroom and on educational visits.

Class groupings are as follows:

Class One	: Reception /Year One	28
Class Two	: Year Two/Year Three	30
Class Three	: Year Three/Four/Five	36
Class Four	: Year Five/Six	38

## **PART ONE**

### **ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL AS A CATHOLIC COMMUNITY**

#### **1. THE MISSION OF THE SCHOOL**

1.1 The Mission Statement at Our Lady of Sorrows is an excellent model which gives a clear commitment that the children are to be “cared for in a strong Catholic, Christian environment where every child feels confident, secure and valued and the National Curriculum is effectively implemented without compromising the development of the children, through the maintenance of Gospel values.” “All of this is to be included within the framework of co-operation between home, school, parish and the wider community.” The heart of Our Lady’s school is rooted in prayer and this shines through in its daily life and practice which is the lived reality of its Mission Statement. The Mission Statement is displayed in the school, printed in the school prospectus and is the starting point for all other documentation.

1.2 Thirty-two questionnaires were returned by parents and these, together with the comments made by parents at their meeting with the inspector, were unanimous in their praise of the school. Parents stated that the atmosphere in school is even better than they could have wished for their children. Religious education is incorporated into all aspects of school life, all staff care for each other and constantly affirm the children. Older children care for the younger ones and parents feel themselves to be included and welcomed into all aspects of school life.

1.3 Parents are kept well informed about religious education through regular newsletters and information on religious education topics sent out by the school and this is much appreciated.

1.4 The school prospectus is a very good, comprehensive document, firmly rooted in the Christian values and ethos of the school.

1.5 Sacramental preparation is carried out on a shared basis between parish, home and school. This involves the parish priest, parish sisters, members of staff, children and parents working together. Parents from the previous year assist parents from the present year as they come together for talks, meditations and practical sessions. Parents of a child from another Christian faith stated that the school also made their child’s First Communion a cause for celebration and this was very much appreciated.

1.6 All staff in the school feel valued and work well together as a team, providing a very positive ethos for the children who are secure and happy.

1.7 The parish priest has responsibility for two parish communities and is very supportive of the school and feels that all staff provide a living spirituality which is reflected in the children and in the Sunday liturgies. He is highly regarded by staff, children and parents and assists in school whenever possible.

1.8 The school is involved in the “Rainbows” programme which supports children who have experienced the loss of a parent. It is co-ordinated by a member of staff and other staff are involved in its implementation. Children feel secure and cared for in a special way which emphasises once more the caring community. This benefits the whole life of the school.

1.9 The school demonstrates its commitment to the wider community, and its care for those less fortunate by prayer and giving through its Covenant with the Poor, the Hallam Caring Service, CAFOD, Mission Together and other, local charities. It also takes part in local youth initiatives such as ‘Lifestyle’ and ‘Crucial Crew’.

## **2. THE SCHOOL AS A WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY**

2.1 The whole life of Our Lady's school is rooted in prayer and there is an awareness of God's love and presence throughout the school community.

2.2 Acts of collective worship are held in school each day. Liturgies and assemblies in classes and Key Stages are excellent. They are very well prepared and conducted with understanding and reverence. Children participate fully in a calm yet joyful manner. Good use is made of Scripture, music, drama, silent reflection, formal prayer and the children's own prayers. All assemblies and liturgies observed were deeply spiritual experiences.

2.3 Children are encouraged from an early age to assist in the planning of their assemblies, which they do in a natural manner, expressing their own ideas and listening to those of others and taking care to include the shy or less able children in their discussions. During the inspection , the older children planned and led the Key Stage Two assembly themselves and this was of a very high standard.

2.4 From starting school until the end of Year Six, the personal prayer life of the children is developed and encouraged. Children speak naturally and without embarrassment to God as a loving father and friend, who cares for them at all times. This is a delight to witness both in the classroom and in the written work of the children. Good use is made of the psalms and reflective prayer in both Key Stages. The more formal prayers of the Church are also well taught throughout the school at the appropriate stages of the children's development.

2.5 Parents expressed their pleasure in the development of the prayer life of their children and in several instances said that this was a continuation of what they were doing at home. Others said that their children had initiated prayer sessions at home as a result of work done in school. A Key Stage One child had asked her mother for a scrap book in which to keep all the prayers she writes at home as a result of being encouraged to do so in school.

2.6 Parents are invited to many of the Masses, liturgies and assemblies in school as are parishioners and this is greatly appreciated. These are always very special occasions and deepen still further the school/home/parish relationship which is already very strong. Masses and assemblies are always very well attended, welcoming and well planned and the behaviour of the children very good. It was felt by many parents that the staff by their own good example and constant affirmation of the children help to create the excellent ethos of spirituality experienced on these occasions.

2.7 The school has a very good collective worship policy which is reviewed annually to consider progress and if it is meeting the needs of all pupils. Liturgy schedules are detailed and drawn up on a termly basis. Parents are notified well in advance of masses and liturgies which are to take place during the term, so that they can make special arrangements to attend. Parents and parishioners look forward to these special times, which they don't like to miss. A detailed record of all liturgies and assemblies is kept by the co-ordinator together with a good selection of photographs, which provides a useful resource for future use.

### **3. SPIRITUAL AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT**

#### **3.1 Spiritual Development**

3.1a The spiritual and moral development of the children is a priority at Our Lady's school and this is exemplified in the daily life of the school where an atmosphere of cheerful Christian calm, peace and consideration prevails.

3.1b All those who have any involvement with the life of the school speak of the sense of spirituality which they experience there. "It is almost tangible – a place where the seeds of sensitivity and faith are nurtured and grow." All are warmly welcomed. This was clearly evident during the inspection.

3.1c The children are encouraged to appreciate and develop an awareness of God in their own lives and of the beauty of his creation, through prayer, reflection, well planned assemblies, music, art, poetry and appropriate visits.

3.1d The Year Six children last year visited Durham and Lindisfarne for a residential retreat, which was said to be a great success. They were able to experience something of Celtic spirituality and the wonder of God in the beauty of the landscape. The children produced some very good written work expressing their own thoughts, prayers and reflections on the week. The present Year Six are eagerly looking forward to their visit. The Year Five children are taken on a shorter residential visit to Hazelhead Outdoor Centre, enjoying the experience and learning to respect the environment. The parish priest accompanied the school on these visits. His presence was appreciated and it also provided a special opportunity for liturgies.

3.1e A great asset to the school is the recently created Peace Garden which gives all the children the opportunity to appreciate the beauty of God's creation. It is one of the school's millennium projects, together with the Covenant with the Poor. The garden has been created in a central courtyard in the school and is very well designed. There are areas for the children to sit and reflect or read quietly and this undoubtedly gives opportunities for spiritual development.

## **3.2 Moral Development**

3.2a The moral development of the children is of a very high standard. The school has a good Behaviour Policy which aims to create a Christian community where there is respect for all, concern for the environment and where good relationships can flourish. It also aims to develop self-discipline in the children. The behaviour of the children demonstrates the success of these aims. Relationships throughout the school are excellent. Children are affirmed and valued by staff who also support one another. This enables the children to build up a good self image and creates an atmosphere where they affirm one another.

3.2b The 'Journey in Faith' project greatly adds to the positive behaviour in school. In the autumn term a special assembly is held at which each Reception child is given a 'special friend' in Year Six and this older child becomes a special person who watches over the younger one at playtime, lunchtime and other times. The older children take this responsibility very seriously. Parents said that this project has a great impact on the younger children and they themselves are happy to know that their children have this extra care. This encourages good moral development in the older children and sets a good example.

## **PART TWO**

### **CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

#### **4. STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

##### **4.1 Attainment and Progress**

4.1a Children enjoy religious education lessons and look forward to them. All children are expected to achieve the highest standards of which they are capable and are encouraged to do so.

4.1b Written work is usually done in religious education books and sometimes in class books. The work is of a very high standard in both Key Stages and is differentiated to suit the needs and abilities of the children.

##### **4.2 Attitudes to Learning**

4.2a Attitudes to learning are very good throughout the school . The children enjoy their lessons and want to achieve. They listen well, include others in their group discussions and listen to what they have to say. They enjoy the input from the teacher and are confident in raising questions.

4.2b They participate well in class and Key Stage assemblies and periods of quiet reflection. They help to prepare these and show care and concern for the needs of others, particularly the younger or less able who are included at all times.

4.2c In classroom lessons the children remain on task and work with enthusiasm, on their own, in pairs or as part of a group. Several children said how much they enjoy their religious education lessons and this was evident in all lessons observed.

## **5. QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROVIDED**

### **5.1 Teaching**

5.1a The teaching is of a very high standard throughout the school and several excellent lessons and liturgies were observed at each Key Stage.

5.1b All teachers said that they love teaching religious education and this is evident from the joy and enthusiasm which they bring to their lessons.

5.1c The school is using the new 'Here I Am' religious education programme which staff praise for its content and depth. They appreciate the multi-cultural aspects of the programme which are said to be enjoyed by the children.

5.1d Both long and short term planning throughout the school is excellent. All aspects of the topics are covered in a balanced way and good use is made of Scripture. Individual lesson plans have clear objectives which are shared with the children and referred to during the lessons.

5.1e Lessons have a good balance of content, pace and rigour. They have excellent teacher input, with opportunities for discussion, reflection, a range of activities and music where appropriate. The teachers are sensitive to the needs of the children and ensure that all are fully involved in the lessons. Differentiation, which is well planned, is usually by task rather than outcome, which enables all children to achieve.

5.1f The children's books and work are well marked in a positive and affirming way and all are encouraged to give of their best. Reports to parents are well thought out, with clear and constructive comments on the children's progress in knowledge and understanding of religious education and of their spiritual and moral development.

### **5.2 Religious Education Curriculum and Assessment**

5.2a The school has a gifted, committed and hard working religious education co-ordinator. Staff value her help and support. Information from diocesan meetings is passed on to staff at weekly staff meetings, planning is discussed and co-ordinated and assessment procedures are evaluated. The co-ordinator and headteacher meet each half term to monitor the work being planned and carried out in religious education so as to discern areas for assessment. This is very good practice.

5.2b The school has a good religious education policy which incorporates the 'Here I Am' programme.

5.2c The religious education co-ordinator keeps files of teachers' plans, liturgies, masses and assemblies, including photographs and videos, all of which show progression.

5.2d There is a good assessment policy and a file has been built up of assessed children's work. Each child also has a book into which one piece of work per term is mounted. This book is taken through the school to ensure progression. Collective Worship is evaluated by staff each year to consider whether it meets the needs of all pupils and whether pupils are making progress in acquiring skills and abilities in leading worship.

5.2e A full review of religious education is made at the end of the summer term when preparing for the new school year. This is good practice.

## **6. THE MANAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

### **6.1 Leadership and Management**

6.1a The school benefits from the leadership of a gifted and enthusiastic headteacher, who has a clear vision for the school, rooted in his own personal faith commitment and the Mission Statement of the school. He leads by example and is sensitive to the needs of all in the school community, where all are affirmed and respected.

6.1b Religious education is given a very high profile in the school. It is of a very high quality. This is evident in the warmth of the welcome to everyone in the true spirit of the Christian message, in the very good displays in the entrance area and around the school, in the quality of the religious education achieved in the classrooms and in the quality of the liturgies.

6.1c The religious education co-ordinator is excellent. She is very conscientious and supportive. She has built up a wide range of materials for assessment and also co-ordinates all resources. A resource bank is being developed of books and artefacts either within the school or from local sources.

6.1d The governors are very supportive, effective and rightly proud of their school. Many of them assist in the activities of the school. The Chair of Governors, who is one of the parish sisters, speaks very highly of the work being carried out in religious education and the spiritual and moral development of the children. She also praises the liturgies and masses which take place in school, which are highly valued by parents and parishioners. Another governor, a member of the non-teaching staff, assists with "Rainbows" and speaks highly of its value in supporting children who have experienced the loss of a parent.

6.1e Governors assist in school whenever they are available, helping teachers with groups, visits and activities. This is very much appreciated by staff who value their assistance and affirmation. Governors also attend training to further their own professional development.

## **6.2 Staffing, Accommodation and Resources**

6.2a The headteacher and staff at Our Lady's are an excellent team who value and care for one another and strive at all times to provide the best possible religious education for the children in their care. Teachers enjoy their religious education teaching and this is reflected in the work conducted in the classroom. Children feel secure and affirmed and parents say that this is due to the good example they receive from their teachers.

6.2b All ancillary staff and classroom assistants are highly valued and play an important part in the life of the school.

6.2c The school building has undergone some change in recent years. The entrance has been opened up to provide a resource area for the staff and children, and it can also be used for small group work. A special Peace Garden for prayer and reflection has been developed in a central courtyard and a toilet has been built for a disabled pupil. During the coming year, a computer suite is planned and this will be a great asset to the school.

6.2d The school and the surrounding area are clean and well maintained by a loyal and devoted caretaker and staff, despite some outside vandalism. The children and staff are proud of their school and respect their environment.

6.2e The classrooms are attractive and all have well presented religious education displays and focal points for prayer. Teachers use available space well and the religious education focal point is a very special place in the classroom, which is used for prayers, reflection times and class liturgies. This is good practice.

6.2f Resources for religious education are good and being steadily improved each year. The co-ordinator discusses the school's needs with the staff and headteacher. There is a detailed list of artefacts, books and drapes provided. During the school year 1999-2000 over £1000 has been spent on resources, which will include the new 'Here I Am' programme.

## **PART THREE**

### **MAIN FINDINGS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

#### **7. MAIN FINDINGS**

7.1 Our Lady of Sorrows is a very good Catholic school, rooted in prayer and Gospel values which shine through in its daily life.

7.2 The school benefits from the very good leadership of an enthusiastic headteacher, who has a clear vision for the school, leads by example and is committed to offering the very best religious education for the children.

7.3 The school has an excellent Religious Education Co-ordinator who fulfils the role with great expertise and commitment.

- 7.4 The spiritual and moral development of the children and staff is a great strength of the school. All who have any involvement with the school speak of the sense of spirituality which they experience there, where a calm atmosphere of peace, respect, joy and consideration prevails.
- 7.5 The school Mission Statement is an excellent model which gives clear commitment that the children are to be cared for in a strong, Catholic, Christian environment where every child feels secure, confident and valued and the National Curriculum is effectively implemented without compromising the development of Gospel values.
- 7.6 Our Lady's school is well supported by the governors who visit and work in school whenever possible and also by the parish priest who is a regular visitor to the school. He is highly regarded by staff and children and assists in the school whenever possible.
- 7.7 The behaviour of the children is exemplary, both in and out of the classrooms. They are pleasant, courteous and sensitive to the needs of others, especially the younger children.
- 7.8 Relationships throughout the school are very good. There is a warm, welcoming atmosphere, where headteacher and staff provide a living spirituality which is reflected in the children who in turn affirm and care for one another.
- 7.9 Parents give strong support to the school in many ways and are very proud of it. They feel welcome at all times, as visitors or working alongside teachers in the classroom. Their assistance is much appreciated by the children and staff.
- 7.10 Collective worship is excellent in both Key Stages. It is well planned, appropriate for the ages and abilities of the children and promotes their spiritual and moral development to a high level. Assemblies and liturgies are greatly praised by parents who value the opportunities for involvement.
- 7.11 Teaching in religious education in both Key Stages is of a very high standard. All lessons observed were good, some were excellent. Lessons are well planned, with a good sense of pace, rigour and balance, challenge and joy. The children enjoy their religious education lessons and produce oral and written work which shows continuity and commendable depth of thought and understanding.
- 7.12 Policy documentation is all in place and of a high standard.
- 7.13 Since the last inspection all key issues have been well addressed.
- 7.14 A clear policy is in place for admissions and the specific needs of children who are not baptised Catholics are recognised and supported.
- 7.15 Time is given for in-service training, on-going formation and the spiritual development of staff.
- 7.16 The school is providing and further developing assessment in religious education.

## **AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

To develop further the improvements made since the last inspection, the governors and staff of Our Lady of Sorrows School should now:

1. Celebrate and consolidate the school's achievements in the very good leadership and teaching, which exists, the excellent spiritual and moral development of the children, the very high standards of religious education and collective worship and the very good support of the parents and Governors.
2. Further strengthen the already very good work in assessment procedures by involving the children in more self-evaluation of their own work.
3. Continue to retain records of the very good practice already taking place, in order to assist new teachers and supply staff and other schools in the diocese.

## **APPENDIX : EVIDENCE BASE**

The programme of inspection included a pre-inspection visit to the school a meeting with parents and two full days' inspection. One religious education lesson was observed in each class, two class assemblies, a Class One/Two assembly and a Class Three/Four assembly.

Interviews were held with the headteacher and religious education co-ordinator, the Chair of Governors, the parish priest, a Special Educational Needs non-teaching assistant and a senior midday supervisory assistant/ governor, who assists with 'Rainbows.'

There were informal discussions with teaching and ancillary staff, the parish sisters, parent helpers and children.

Parents were consulted through a meeting and questionnaire. Thirty-two replies were received, all of which expressed support and admiration for the way in which religious education is taught in the school and the ethos of care, support and spirituality experienced in the school.

A comprehensive range of documentation was provided by the headteacher and religious education co-ordinator, including the school Mission Statement, aims and development plan, School policies, prospectus and all other documentation requested on the diocesan list. A wide range of extra material in writings, photographs and videos of children's work was also provided.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Diocesan Inspector wishes to place on record her thanks for the kindness and co-operation shown by Governors, parish priest, headteacher and all staff, parents and children during this inspection.