



In good voice:  
a pupil from Holy  
Rosary and St  
Anne's Catholic  
Primary.  
Inset: the Pope

Paul Floyd/Blake/Reuters

# 'I nearly fell off my chair when my children were invited to perform for the Pope'

Delight as Chapel Town school is only primary invited to perform during historic four-day visit

David Marley

Schools from inner-city Leeds do not usually have much reason to be excited by a state visit. But that will change next week when a choir from Holy Rosary and St Anne's Catholic Primary sing for the Pope – and a potential television audience of millions.

The Chapel Town school is the only primary invited to perform for the Pope during his four days in the UK, the first papal visit for almost 30 years.

The school's 50-strong choir will sing in a mixture of Latin and medieval Spanish for their three minutes in the spotlight at the Big Assembly, a gathering of 3,000 children at a Catholic teacher training college in Twickenham, southwest London.

"When I was asked if our children would perform for the Pope, I nearly fell off my chair," said Kathy Carter, the school's former head, who retired at the end of last term.

"They are just so excited about it. It's a chance of a lifetime, something they will never forget."

The performance for the Pope marks a significant step for the school, which is hoping to become the first state primary to become a cathedral choir school (see box).

Since last year it has employed Sally Egan – a former pupil who went on to study music at Cam-

bridge and have an international singing career – to give music lessons to all pupils. But Ms Egan was not expecting to have to prepare her choir for such a big occasion so quickly. "It's a huge technical challenge," she said. "It's not just a case of hitting the right notes. It's three minutes, do or die. We are rehearsing to within an inch of its life."

The school, which was asked to perform in May, had only seven weeks to rehearse before the summer holidays, followed by just three more rehearsals since the new term began.

The mixed choir will sing *Jubilate Deo*, a Latin chant praising God, and

*Ave Maria*, a medieval Spanish piece, with pupils playing handbells and drums as well as singing.

Pupils from Maria Fidelis RC Convent School in north London, holders of the BBC *Songs of Praise* school choir of the year, will also perform at the event.

Holy Rosary has a diverse pupil intake, with more than 20 different first languages and significant numbers of children from refugee families. Just under half of the pupils are Catholic.

"Singing is something where they can all come together and participate," said Mrs Carter. "They have so many backgrounds, but they have one thing in common, which is their love of music."

Before starting her part-time position at Holy Rosary, Ms Egan spent 10 years working as the vocal coach at the fee-charging Westminster Cathedral Choir School, which selects the country's top choristers.

"At the abbey the pupils are essentially professional musicians in smaller bodies," she said. "I have had to be more creative about rehearsals here and have rewards in place. But we don't want different standards: we must be judged by the same criteria as the best."

"I remember so clearly my music teacher here who was fantastic and inspired me to this day. If I can do a fraction of that for these children, it would be amazing."

## CHOIR SCHOOLS

### Cathedral ambitions

Holy Rosary and St Anne's Primary is hoping to join an elite group of 44 choir schools attached to cathedrals.

It is attempting to raise £1.4m to establish a music department with a choral director. The idea came from Ben Saunders, Leeds Cathedral's director of music, who wanted to have a state-run choir school for children from deprived backgrounds.