



INSPECTION REPORT

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

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URN: 109244

Head teacher: Mrs Jo Kingston

Chair of Governors: Mr Chris Fayers

**Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Clifton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005**

Date of inspection: 29-30th March 2017

Date of previous inspection: January 2012

Reporting Inspector: Mr Joseph Skivington

Additional Inspector: Mrs Ann Fowler

Description of the school

Holy Cross School is a single form entry Catholic primary school with 192 pupils on roll, 33% of whom are Catholic. The school serves the parish of the Holy Cross. Pupils come from mixed socio-economic backgrounds. The percentage of White British (45%) is well below the national average, and the main ethnic minority group is Eastern European. Approximately 30% of pupils have English as a second language. There is a recent growth in the number of pupil premium children. The level of prior attainment on entry to the school broadly matches national expectation.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

Grade 2

This is a good school because:

- It is an open and welcoming school where pupils and their families, from all faiths and none, are warmly invited and integrated. The school has strong, good leadership which is securing rapid and sustained improvements in Catholic life, although it needs to take further steps to improve provision and outcomes for RE;
- The pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. They demonstrate care and respect for each other and have a positive attitude to learning;
- The pupils, particularly in the chaplaincy team, make a good contribution towards Catholic life and pupils' response to the prayer life of the school is also good.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop is good

- The governors and senior leadership are committed to developing and improving the Catholic life of the school.
- The school is receiving support from another Catholic school and this is helping drive improvement.
- The school is aware that the quality of teaching and learning in RE requires improvement, in order that the pupils can make better progress towards good achievement over time. It has already identified its strengths and weaknesses and has drawn up plans to improve practice and outcomes. These have resulted in significant improvements in a very short time following recent turbulence caused by unavoidable illness and absence, affecting the role of RE coordinator in particular. The school has now selected a candidate for that post to secure stability and renewed effectiveness.
- The head teacher and governors have successfully introduced more robust and dependable processes of monitoring and accountability through the Ethos Committee, which reports back regularly to the full governing body.
- There are thoughtful short pieces of work in the Catholicity Book, and the school is developing examples of extended reflective writing.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the lesson learning objectives reflect more clearly the level descriptors so that tasks engage and challenge, and meet pupils' abilities and learning needs more accurately.
- Develop the role of the new RE subject leader through appropriate training and support from the school, the diocese, and the Aquinas partnership.
- Build on the good modelling of the chaplaincy team, by giving them even more ownership of Catholic life and collective worship, so that they initiate, organise and present prayer services themselves with confidence, and encourage other pupils to follow their example.

How good are outcomes for pupils, taking account of variations between different groups?

Grade 2

a) The extent to which pupils understand, contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school

- Catholic life and the pupils' contribution to it are becoming a real strength of the school. Pupils can articulate the distinctive nature of the school. The beautifully presented Catholicity Books, the Floor Books in every class, speak eloquently and colourfully of their Catholic values and what it means to them. Phrases such as the following abound: 'Make me strong to stand up for what is right' or 'Be kind to those who have empty souls and fill them up' or again in Wishes for the World 'To take only what we need, and let wars get 'extincted' (sic) instead of animals'.
- The chaplaincy team, representing every year group, are beginning to take the lead in promoting the prayer life of the school, and are developing the skills of planning and organising their own liturgies. They have set up striking prayer stations around the school inviting interaction from all the pupils to write a prayer or take a prayer card.
- The pupils can articulate the impact that the prayer life of the school has on their view of life and their relationship with others, understanding the links between faith and action, reflected also in British values. Their own composed prayers are relevant and heartfelt. They accept and flourish in an atmosphere of faith and spirituality.
- Older pupils increasingly take on a range of responsibilities. They look after the younger children, and they are alert to the needs of others. They were also involved in the recent Vision review of the school's mission and their feedback helps the school to make improvements. They play an important role in raising money for charities both locally and globally.
- Pupils have a genuine respect for those from different backgrounds. This is due to a growing understanding of different faiths, which they have studied and reflected on in RE. There is a real sense of belonging and respect for others, regardless of faith or none, and this is an outstanding aspect of this warm, inclusive school.
- The links with the parish are strong. The Sunday Mass is at present celebrated in the school hall. Pupils are involved in parish liturgies and the sacramental preparation programme is led from the parish with the school.

b) How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

- The quality of pupils' learning and achievement requires improvement in order to be good. Pupils come from a variety of faith backgrounds and practice. Most enter the school with levels of knowledge and understanding broadly in line with expectation. They make good progress in KS1, especially in the Early Years where the children have an excellent introduction to RE through story, prayer and reflection. They could explain what a 'disciple' was, and all echoed the phrase 'I was blind but now I see' with great delight. By the end of Key Stage 1 they have made steady progress and acquired basic religious literacy.

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- By the end of Key Stage 2 however, many pupils have not made sufficient progress relative to their starting points. Attainment data is not sufficiently reliable to make dependable and accurate measures of progress. They have a substantial amount of written work in their books, but because the pieces are short with little challenge or opportunity to make any real intellectual effort, it is difficult for teachers to make a reliable judgement on progress over time. The low level of tasks they are given, and the low expectation in the learning objectives, effectively block any progress or improvement.
 - Other groups such as those with SEN and disadvantaged pupils, make similar, sometimes better, progress because of planned interventions and the pro-active support of learning assistants. Not all tasks, however, are differentiated to meet their learning needs.
 - Their ability to learn independently, and with others in RE is not yet embedded because they are not encouraged sufficiently to actively seek to improve their knowledge. Their ability to think spiritually, morally and theologically is developing, and most can make the connection between what we believe and how we think and act.
 - Their ability to understand and critically reflect on our faith story, and that of others also needs to be further developed. They do enjoy learning about other faiths, but become disengaged when there is repetitive teaching, too much re telling of stories, and too much time spent on the same task.

c) How well pupils lead, respond to and participate in the Prayer Life of the School

- All pupils irrespective of faith background participate fully, and feel included, in the prayer life of the school. They show reverence, attentiveness, and willingness to play their part. They are ready and eager to be more involved in the initiation, organising, and presentation of their liturgies and assemblies, not just being willing participants in adult- led collective worship.
- Pupils already have the examples and role modelling of the chaplaincy team, with their high profile around the school. They are articulate, role models but need to be given the freedom to fly. Teachers themselves need to become more confident in letting them take the initiative, so they, the pupils, will become more confident in taking more ownership of the prayer life of the school.
- The pupils value the many prayer opportunities during the school day. They have a good, progressive knowledge of the traditional prayers and have some understanding of the ritual and prayer different from their own through their study of Islam and Judaism. They compose their own heartfelt prayers and reflections, displayed on the prayer tables in the Floor and Catholicity books.
- The sacramental and liturgical life of the school is reflected in the assemblies, the class and whole school Masses, and the celebrations throughout the Church's liturgical year of the life of Jesus, and the saints.
- There are plans to introduce the Leaders in Faith challenge, which will involve every single pupil in contributing to the Catholic and prayer life of the school. The chaplaincy group are leading the way with a good start in January of this year.

How effective are leaders and governors in developing the Catholic Life of the school?

Grade 2

a) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils

- Leaders and governors effectively promote, nurture and sustain the Catholic ethos of the school as their primary concern and care, and are able to articulate it and share this with the staff and parents.
- The governing body is an increasingly challenging, knowledgeable and practical influence in the life of the school. They meet all the statutory, canonical, and diocesan requirements fully. They are acquainted with and have reflected on the People of Hope document, how it can influence the school and this has been successfully carried through.
- More robust and reliable processes of self evaluation are ensuring that judgements are becoming more accurate. There is frequent detailed monitoring by the Ethos Committee, who, together with the head teacher, report to the full governing body. The school also asks parents, staff and pupils, through discussions and questionnaires, their views and suggestions for improvement. Consequently, governors have a realistic view of what has to be done to improve and grow. Accountability is rapidly taking the place of assumptions about the quality of provision and outcomes, but the full impact of these structures is yet to be embedded and seen.
- The chaplaincy team benefits significantly from weekly adult guidance and support in their early steps to becoming real animators in the life of the school. This is much appreciated and followed through with growing impact and success.
- Provision for staff induction and in service training in order to develop staff understanding and commitment to the Church's mission is good. Staff spirituality is well supported with staff taking time to pray together regularly. Links with the parish are strong and the recently appointed parish priest is a supportive and welcome presence in the school. There is at least one Inset day annually devoted specifically to Catholic life and spirituality.
- Leaders are open to advice from outside agencies, including the diocese, and share a renewed determination to move the school forward in close and fruitful collaboration with Christ the King school, and others in the Aquinas partnership. They must also provide more opportunities for the pupils to monitor and evaluate the Catholic life of the school.

b) How well leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the curriculum for Religious Education and relationship education, and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils

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- Leaders and governors have not yet used the existing data and monitoring information fully and effectively to evaluate the school's performance in order to plan future improvements. This is an area which requires improvement and which the school recognises as a priority.
 - Governors receive regular RE reports through the head teacher, but recognise that the role of RE coordinator must become discrete, especially in relation to the day-to-day organising and monitoring of the subject. A new RE subject leader will be appointed in the very near future.
 - Learning walks around the school, lesson observations, and book scrutinies have successfully identified the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning, and these are being fed into provision for staff induction and in service training. There is some evidence of impact on teachers becoming more confident in assessment and in setting learning objectives, but there is still work to be done in eliminating inconsistencies across the school.
 - Where necessary governors challenge and hold staff to account. This is evident in a scrutiny of the minutes of governor's meetings, where there are examples of specific questions, and answers expected, regarding the quality and impact of the RE provision. There is a new air of accountability but also close support for a committed and hardworking staff.
 - A subject development plan has been drawn up and used as an annotated working document, which is added to or otherwise amended during the course of each term. The pace of progress is constantly scrutinised and obstacles removed.

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Grade 2

a) The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education

- Within RE there are examples of good and better teaching, but there is some teaching in RE which does not fully promote purposeful learning, engagement, enjoyment and the best progress that the pupils are capable of making.
- Learning assistants are closely involved in planning lessons with the teacher, so that interventions have a positive effect on progress. On occasion, the less able pupils have the same whole class tasks without the much needed differentiation.
- Teachers need to encourage more independent learning through challenging tasks, which better meet the pupil's individual abilities. The school is also aware of the constant need to encourage pupils to write more reflectively and at length. They could achieve this by looking at examples of levelled work to guide and inspire them.
- The school has identified weaker areas where there is insufficient challenge in terms of questioning or lower expectations of pupils' written work and presentation. Where teachers have high expectations of pupils' presentation of work and intellectual effort, the pupils rise to the challenge and are able to contribute their own arguments and opinions. This good practice needs to be shared across the school.

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- Where teaching is less effective, opportunities are sometimes missed to challenge the pupils to write more creatively and reflectively on what they are learning, rather than simply re telling stories or explanations.
 - More effective systems for the tracking and monitoring of pupil progress over time have still to be evolved and then embedded. The assessment and marking policies are in place, but the school's own scrutiny of pupils' written work reveals inconsistencies in both, and discrepancy between the over generous levels given by an individual teacher, and the quality of the actual work in their books. Teachers will benefit from the support of shared moderation with the other schools in the Aquinas partnership as well as diocesan training.
 - The marking of pupils' work is often helpful in showing them how to improve, but not consistent in all classes. The impact on progress over time would be enhanced enormously by more challenging teacher comments, which elicit a more extended, thoughtful response from the pupils and requires real intellectual effort.
 - Greater attention needs to be placed on the learning challenge inherent in the lesson objective.

b) The extent to which the Curriculum promotes pupils' learning

- The curriculum does not always provide continuity and progression between key stages to ensure that pupils whatever the starting points are able to make consistent progress. The syllabus needs more attention especially to learning objectives which engage and challenge all pupils in their learning.
- The RE curriculum meets all Bishops Conferences requirements. It is broad and balanced so that students can explore and develop their own values and beliefs. They explore themes such as fairness, compassion and injustice, which they then link to the objects of their charity fundraising, and outreach to others in society who are more needy.
- The study of other world faiths is given great importance in this inclusive school because it promotes tolerance, understanding, and respect for others, especially cultural and religious differences. Provision for sex and relationship education is in place and approved by the governors adhering to diocesan guidelines.
- The curriculum design promotes spiritual, moral and vocational development and is taught through the lens of the Faith.
- The sacramental preparation programme for First Holy Communion is run in the parish in close collaboration with the school.

c) The quality of the Prayer life provided by the School

- The prayer life of the school is good. It is fully inclusive and joyful. Prayer punctuates the school day and is part of every celebration. There is now a focus on encouraging more pupils to organise and lead collective worship, starting with the chaplaincy team.
- Pupils experience the regular Masses and the celebration of the feasts in the Church's calendar, as well as the special seasons of Advent, Lent, Easter and Pentecost. There are also opportunities to learn the traditional Catholic devotions such as the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross. The prayer methods and styles used by the school are age appropriate.

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- There are colourful and thought provoking displays around the school which remind the whole community of the liturgical cycle, the topics the pupils are currently studying, and are supportive of the school's vibrant Catholic life. They are attractive, and reinforce the mission and values of the school.
 - Parents and carers attend Mass and assemblies when they can, and the provision for the engagement of parents, local parishes and other faith communities is good.
 - The school's Prayer Life is closely monitored and evaluated and leads to action for improvement.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

All 26 returned parental questionnaires were very positive about the school and the quality of their children's education. Some typical responses included:

'We wanted a faith school for our children. Each child is known for who they are, and cherished for being them. There is a clear Catholic ethos and everyone is respected regardless of faith'.

'A school which has cultural awareness, diversity, and a small family feeling'.

'A warm welcome....the school teaches the children to treat others as they want to be treated. My children love school and are learning about respect and tolerance'.

'We chose Holy Cross because it is a Catholic school and because of its caring nature. It is a warm, friendly environment for children to learn, develop and be nurtured.....they learn great values, charity and love'.

'Children's kindness and tolerance are evident....they come home and discuss what they are learning in Religious education. This has definitely been more the case since the permanent head has been in place'.

'When we visited we were so impressed with the loving feel of the building, staff members and children. Every child matters and is unique. The staff from the reception desk all the way throughout the school go above and beyond. We are so happy with Holy Cross'.

'There is a sense of community, and multi cultural intake of the school, the caring and intimacy shown by all'.