



INSPECTION REPORT

Holy Cross Catholic Primary
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DfE Number: 8665211

Headteacher: Mr A McAteer
Chair of Governors: Mrs M Hryb

**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: 19-20th November 2015
Date of previous inspection: 1-2nd February 2010

Lead Inspector: Mrs A Barrett
Additional Inspector: Mrs A Fowler

Description of School

Holy Cross Catholic Primary is a larger than average school with 294 on roll. The school serves the parishes of Holy Rood, St Peter's (West Swindon), St Joseph's (Wroughton) and the Sacred Heart (Royal Wootton Bassett). The school is currently situated on two sites close to the town centre in Swindon. The Upham Road site has 204 on roll. The site on Queen's Drive was opened in September 2015 and currently consists of 90 pupils in Reception and Year 1. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is higher than average and they come from a range of ethnic groups, with the largest group being Goan Indian (48%). The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding (those eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care) is lower than average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is also lower than average. The proportion of pupils who have a first language other than English is higher than average.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

This is an outstanding Catholic school because:

- The school is an inclusive and welcoming community which recognises the uniqueness of the individual and actively promotes Gospel values
- The governing body remains deeply committed to sustaining the high standards of its Catholic life and RE
- The headteacher, supported by other leaders, has been highly effective in creating and sustaining an inclusive and open culture across the school where all are valued and every voice heard
- The commitment of the RE coordinator to improving teaching and achievement in RE and providing support for staff
- The school benefits from strong support from its parents who place a high value on the school's Catholic life and teaching of RE
- The behaviour of pupils and their attitudes to learning in RE is exemplary
- Teachers are strongly committed, enthusiastic and highly effective in promoting purposeful learning, engagement and enjoyment of RE across the board, enabling all to make good progress in relation to their starting points
- The exceptionally strong links with the local parish and the regular support provided by the parish priest is effective in developing pupils' understanding of the sacramental life of the Church and complementing the school's RE curriculum.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

- The headteacher and governors are unreserved in their commitment to maintain and strive for improvement in its Catholic life and RE.
- The school has made excellent progress in addressing all the issues highlighted in the previous inspection.
- Parents, staff and pupils are highly supportive of the school.

- The governing body is highly effective and works closely with the headteacher and subject leader to ensure that the catholicity of the school is at the heart of all that it does.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards further in RE by providing pupils with opportunities to write in more depth in order to demonstrate their high levels of religious literacy which were clearly evident in their oral work.
- Strengthen the excellent work already being done by the chaplaincy by providing pupil chaplains with the skills and opportunities to design a 'Chaplaincy Development Plan' which will outline their approaches to 'Deepening prayer, Enabling communion and Strengthening mission'.

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

Grade 1

Pupils are proud of belonging to this vibrant inclusive Catholic community. There is a clear sense that they are steeped in a strong faith tradition brought about by a clear fusion between school and parish. Pupils have a real sense of ownership of their mission statement which was originally created by them and translated into many languages. It is sung at every assembly and regularly referred to. Pupils speak enthusiastically about their involvement in school Masses and assemblies and value the opportunities to help others through becoming peer mediators, prefects, members of the school council and travel ambassadors. They have a strong sense of being alert to the needs of others and work actively for different charities such as CAFOD, Operation Christmas Child and the local food bank. This concern is also extended to the local community, with opportunities to perform in local residential homes for the elderly and adults with learning difficulties. This commitment to others is further promoted by every child completing a Citizenship Award which encourages them to develop skills which will enable them to become better global citizens in the spirit of *Laudato Si*. The school's planned promotion of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its children is fundamental to its work and is highly effective in enabling all to make connections between faith and life. Pupils demonstrate, through their behaviour and attitudes, high levels of respect for one another. They are proud of the diverse ethnic community they are part of, valuing and respecting the different traditions and cultures which links them to the wider global community. They enjoy opportunities to understand other faiths and are highly responsive to the school's rich programme of international days and weeks devoted to other faiths such as Islam and Hinduism. The school's committed chaplaincy team were recently commissioned by Bishop Declan in November 2015. The next stage should be for them to develop a chaplaincy development plan in order to further develop the excellent work already being done to deepen prayer, enable communion and strengthen mission.

Overall, taking account of their different starting points, the proportion of pupils making and exceeding expected progress is at least good and often outstanding across the school. In particular, pupils' oral responses to religious questions and their ability to engage in critical and empathetic reflection can reach high levels as evidenced in lessons. Consequently, they are demonstrating high levels of religious knowledge and understanding for their age and are confident in connecting faith to life and reflecting on other faith traditions such as Islam and Hinduism. The two weeks in each year devoted to studying two different faiths is highly effective in enabling children to gain an increased understanding and respect for people from different faith backgrounds.

Behaviour for learning in religious education is exemplary. Pupils collaborate well, are rarely off-task and demonstrate high levels of concentration and ability to work independently. They enjoy and are committed to their learning and view RE as an important subject in the curriculum. They tackle all tasks with enthusiasm and openness of mind. Pupils' good listening and respect for one another and the adults within the room are hallmarks of all lessons.

Pupils demonstrate a deep interest and enjoyment in the school's prayer life. This is due to the high priority given to this by staff who regularly encourage them to prepare and lead prayer and to do so with confidence and enthusiasm. This was especially evident in the weekly class

worship in which small groups of children take responsibility for its preparation and delivery, ensuring in turn, that all members of the class are actively involved in the process. Pupils also regularly contribute to whole school and year assemblies and Masses through drama and music, creating PowerPoints, writing bidding prayers, reading and as altar servers. Once a term, a 20 minute 'Gospel Assembly' is wholly produced, researched, prepared and delivered by a group of Year 6 children for the whole school. These opportunities have enabled them to develop a clear understanding of liturgy in a variety of forms and to make connections between the prayer life of the school and that of the church. In discussions with pupils they shared a genuine appreciation of the value of prayer and worship in their lives, explaining that 'Masses help us express ourselves and get closer to God'. Consequently, the centrality of prayer in the school not only supports pupils' spiritual and moral development but helps them to discuss their emotions, feel part of a wider community and develop their faith.

The rich opportunities provided by the school for worship throughout the year, combined with participation in the Harvest Festival, Advent Service and the Christmas Celebration in Holy Rood Church, ensures that the liturgical and sacramental life of the church is introduced to pupils in a way that develops their understanding and enables them to fully participate.

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

Grade 1

Leaders and governors are highly committed to maintaining and developing all aspects of the school's Catholic life and thereby ensure that all statutory, canonical and diocesan responsibilities are met. The governing body and leaders are united by a shared vision which is linked to its Catholic mission and ethos, and regularly reviewed. This ethos and promotion of Catholic values is shared with staff, pupils, and parents and enhanced by strong parish links. It is integral to everything that the school does, permeating all aspects of its work. The headteacher, supported by other leaders, has been highly effective in creating an inclusive and open culture where all are valued and every voice heard.

The school benefits from excellent support from its parents who are regularly informed about many aspects of its Catholic life and RE through the school newsletter.

The provision and outcomes of the school's Catholic life are monitored and evaluated through reports to governors, including the regular reports provided by the headteacher. The school's improvement plan has a strong focus on both its Catholic life and RE, with all aspects of provision and impact annually revisited in its self-evaluation document. This, combined with opportunities for parents to complete surveys and to express their views; monitoring visits by governors; regular staff meetings and development days dedicated to Catholic life and RE play an important part in planning future developments. This could be further strengthened by including a more formal pupil voice element, using the newly commissioned chaplaincy team to lead this as part of their role.

Governors maintain careful oversight of religious education with the link governor, in collaboration with the RE coordinator and headteacher, involved in a range of monitoring activities. They effectively challenge and support the school to ensure that improvements to outcomes for pupils in RE are put in place and, alongside its Catholic ethos, is central to everything that they do. The role of RE link governor is well established within the school and includes monitoring and reporting to governors on the teaching of RE.

Governors maintain careful oversight of religious education. They effectively challenge and support the school to ensure that improvements to outcomes for pupils in RE are implemented. The role of RE link governor is well established within the school and includes monitoring and reporting to governors on the teaching of RE. This is informed by lesson observations and work scrutinies conducted by leaders. RE lessons are observed annually and development points agreed for individual teachers in order to further strengthen and promote effective teaching. Although RE and Catholic life are regularly reported at governors' meetings, governors recognise that these should feature as a standing item for the Staffing, Pupils and Curriculum Committee and should implement this as soon as possible.

Teachers value the support provided by the RE coordinator and under his guidance they plan and use data to track progress for different groups of pupils. He regularly attends coordinators' and diocesan partnership meetings. This enables him to disseminate good practice and promote new initiatives, thereby contributing to improved practice in RE teaching and good outcomes for pupils. Links with the local Catholic secondary partner are strong.

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Grade 1

The majority of teaching is highly effective in promoting purposeful learning, engagement and enjoyment across the board, enabling all to make good progress in relation to their starting points. Consequently, pupils take great pride in their work and value RE as an important subject. Inspectors were impressed with pupils' clear understanding and articulation of the RE levels and the ease with which they applied these to their oral and written work. However, at times, the quality and length of written work did not always reflect the high levels demonstrated orally. Care should be taken to ensure that tasks are set at an appropriate level of challenge to match their abilities, especially the most able.

Pupils' impeccable conduct and extremely positive relationships between pupils and adults, reflects the school's effective strategies to promote high standards of behaviour across the board. All lessons are meticulously planned and well resourced, using technology effectively to optimise learning. High quality resources, including technology are used imaginatively, and together with the support provided by other adults, are effective in optimising learning. Teachers have consistently high expectations of what each pupil can achieve and check pupils' understanding systematically and effectively in lessons, offering clearly directed and timely support. The best marking was characterised by clear indications of how to improve, combined with time being set aside for pupils to respond to their teacher's comments in line with the school's policy. However, in some instances, written tasks were overly focused on literacy and did not provide opportunities for pupils to sufficiently express their strong knowledge of Church teaching and sacraments which was clearly evident in their oral work.

Where teaching was at its best there was a clear focus to the lesson with success criteria clearly linked to the levels of attainment and shared with pupils. Teachers are committed to their professional development in RE and are continually looking at how to improve their practice and subject knowledge. They value the ongoing support provided by the RE coordinator through regular inset and resource sharing. This, combined with the headteacher strongly encouraging staff to take ownership of the subject through being innovative and creative, has resulted in teachers thinking outside the box and encouraging their pupils to become curious, interested and independent learners.

Children in reception and year 1 have settled in quickly to their new school and are making excellent progress in RE due to high quality teaching which provides a stimulating, varied and imaginative experience which is highly responsive to children's needs.

RE is taught as a discrete subject across the school and follows the programme of study outlined in God Matters. The school needs to review the selection of material to make sure that all aspects of God Matters are fully included in the curriculum. The school's commitment to helping 'children to achieve knowledge, understanding and appreciation of what the Catholic Church teaches to be true' and 'instruct them in the ways of other religious traditions, so that they will respect the right of people to hold beliefs different from their own' is evident in both RE and other curriculum areas.

The curriculum includes the study of other faiths and is further enriched through its strong international links, well established international days and clear focus on global citizenship. Consequently, pupils demonstrate high levels of mutual respect for other cultures and beliefs. Sex and Relationship education is taught using *In the Beginning* and *A Journey in Love* and this links effectively with science and PSHCE (Personal, Social, Health, and Citizenship Education).

The school has made excellent progress in developing its RE provision in Reception and Year 1. Inspectors were impressed with the progress made and the clear focus on nurturing, engaging and motivating these children in their faith development. This bodes well for the future and should continue to remain a focus for the RE coordinator. This will provide continuity and progression within and between the key stages and ensure that pupils, whatever their starting points, are able to make appropriate progress.

The prayer life of the school is inclusive and joyful. Prayer is at the heart of everything which the school does and is an important part of every school celebration. This includes daily acts of worship as part of a whole school or class activity, with RE lessons also including an element of worship at the start. Pupils have created class prayer books and regularly use their class Prayer Tree, in both class and assemblies, to pray for personal, local, national and international issues. This is also very effective in enabling them to express their worries or concerns as well as praising and thanking God.

The school has a strong tradition of pupils leading and organising worship and benefit from having access to a wide range of resources to support them in this. The Church's seasons are focal points in the school's life with the themes chosen by pupils and staff reflect a clear understanding of the Church's mission. Plans are in hand to formally audit and monitor this provision.

Displays in and around the school are vibrant and supportive of the school's Catholic life and are child centred. Plans are in hand to formally monitor provision across the board.

There is a strong tradition within the school of parents attending class assemblies and Masses. The link between school, parish and home is further strengthened by the school providing parents with the *Wednesday Word*.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 171 parental questionnaires received. All were extremely positive about the school. A very small number of parents requested that more information be provided on RE and relationship education and being kept informed about their child's progress in RE.

Some typical responses to the question about why they chose the school included:

'I specifically chose this school for my child because it's a Catholic school and it will provide my child with a unique opportunity to grow in her faith whilst performing well in her learning'

'It provides excellent teaching and support for my children'

'Because of the Catholic ethos and strong sense of community'

'So that my child grows up and develops morally, spiritually and emotionally in the Catholic faith'

'Academic achievement is first rate and friendliness permeates every level'

'The values and attitudes, religious education.'

'A Christian faith school with a good reputation.'

Some typical responses to the question about what is distinctive about the school included:

'A very high level of holistic achievement, not only academically but all round.....one big family of God; children learn to share from early on and help others who are less fortunate in and around them, far and wide'

'Excellence in RE that is seen as an important part of the curriculum'

'Christian values that the children are constantly reminded about – sense of charity'

'Holy Cross promotes values like tolerance, tradition, discipline.... Respect for other cultures'

'The quality of the teaching staff, approachable, welcoming and outstanding care for the children'