



## **INSPECTION REPORT**

### **Holy Rood Catholic Primary School**

Groundwell Road, Swindon, SN1 2LU

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DfE Number: 126426

Headteacher: Miss Naomi Fry

Chair of Governors: Mrs Anne Jones

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**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**

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Date of inspection: 13-14<sup>th</sup> October 2016

Date of previous inspection: October 2011

Reporting Inspector: Mr Joseph Skivington

Assisting Inspector: Mrs Sarah Wembridge

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## Description of the school

Holy Rood is a larger than average two form entry Catholic primary school, with 307 pupils on roll, 90% of whom are Catholic. Holy Rood Catholic Primary School is an Academy Primary school which serves the parishes of Holy Rood Swindon, St Peter's West Swindon, St Joseph's Wroughton and Sacred Heart Royal Wootton Bassett. The school has a wide catchment area, with the majority of pupils coming from minority ethnic groups, the largest being Indian, and some from other Asian or East European backgrounds. Pupils with special educational needs make up 17% of the number on roll. 70% of the pupils have English as an additional language. In 2015 Holy Rood, then an Infant school was granted permission to expand into a primary school. This process will take four years to complete. The head teacher and members of senior leadership team were appointed to their current roles within the last three years.

## Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

**Grade 2**

This is a good school because:

- The senior leadership led by the inspirational head teacher are fully determined in ensuring the highest quality of Catholic education;
- It is a fully inclusive school where pupils from all faiths and none are made welcome, and all show respect and genuine interest and care towards each other;
- The behaviour of pupils and their care for others is excellent. They are role models for each other and this contributes enormously to the spirituality and ethos of the school; their behaviour for learning is very positive, they enjoy their RE studies, and they make good progress over time;
- The overall quality of teaching is good.
- The governing body and all leaders are fully committed to the promotion and nurturing of the school's Catholic life and mission as their first priority, and have very successfully maintained its vibrant Catholic ethos through recent challenging times;
- Leadership provides effective guidance and support to staff, making fruitful use of outside resources, advice, and diocesan training in its drive to develop and improve provision and outcomes for the majority of pupils;
- Pupils are proud of their Catholic school, and willingly embrace the many opportunities to grow in their spiritual lives. They can articulate why their school is different from others, and they understand the impact that faith has in their daily lives. Their varied Catholic and cultural backgrounds bring a vibrant, fruitful addition to the school's own Catholic ethos.

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

- The rigorous and reliable procedures for self evaluation enable strengths and weaknesses to be highlighted and action taken to improve practice and outcomes. These measures are now well embedded. The school has successfully identified and prioritised what need to be done, then

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set out a detailed development plan with clear, measurable objectives which are constantly monitored and re shaped where necessary;

- The governing body meets regularly to monitor and evaluate the school's Catholic life and RE. The school asks parents, staff and pupils, through discussions and questionnaires, what their understanding of its mission is, with the result that it gains a realistic view of what has to be done to improve and grow, and has already amply demonstrated the capacity to follow through its objectives;
- There is a commitment from every member of the staff to work together to achieve the best for the pupils, as well as promoting Catholic values across all the subjects. Staff morale and their investment in the school is outstanding and they are excellent role models for their charges;
- The areas for development noted in the last inspection have been addressed, particularly the ongoing embedding of systematic assessment and evaluation of pupil progress. This has been facilitated through closer working with the other cluster schools in moderating teachers' assessments. The development of different forms of prayer and worship to support the many EAL pupils has been very successful, particularly the use of signing which involves every pupil, even the youngest;
- This school has the capacity to become outstanding, through already effective evaluative structures, transformational leadership, a stable highly motivated staff, and increasingly successful outcomes.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Embed more extended, reflective pieces of writing in KS2, so that staff and pupils consolidate on the quality and consistency of the already high standard of work found at Key Stage 1.
- Make greater use of assessment for learning by providing pupils with feedback that deepens their learning about religion and from religion and challenges them to take the next steps.
- Increase opportunities for all pupils to take more ownership in the planning and organising of their own liturgies and prayer life, and to increase their input and responsibility for the promotion of the Catholic life of the school.

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## 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

- Pupils have a growing understanding of what it means to be in a Catholic school and how it differs from other schools. They internalise and live out the values promoted by the school, and flourish in an encouraging atmosphere of faith and spirituality. They can articulate for instance, the impact that the prayer life of the school has on their actions and their relationship with others. Many pupils were involved in rephrasing the school mission statement, presenting it in child friendly language. It is prominently displayed around the school and frequently referred to;
- In November 2014 and October 2015 new members of the chaplaincy team were commissioned by the Bishop, and in February 2016 they attended a cluster retreat day. A Tranquillity room has been set up and is well used, providing opportunities for children to develop their own relationship with God. The pupils' responses from the weekly Mass are recorded and displayed in the attractive RE focal point;
- Pupils contribute through their response to questionnaires, providing essential feedback which is built into improvement plans. This includes reviewing the impact of liturgies, and suggesting how they could be improved;
- Pupils increasingly take on a range of responsibilities which show they are alert to the needs of others. For instance, they play an important role in raising money for charities both locally and further afield such as Cafod, but also becoming carers and role models for the younger children;
- 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 here shared by all regardless of faith or none, which feeds into their understanding of British values and culture.
- The chaplaincy team takes the lead in promoting prayer life, and they, as well as others, such as the Year 3 pupils, are beginning to practise the skills of planning and organising their own liturgies. The school has already in place an evaluative sheet for those planning worship to reflect on their practice. Older pupils are helping younger pupils to become leaders. The school has already identified the need to continue and strengthen pupil ownership of prayer and worship. There are strong links with the parish, and pupils participate and lead both school and parish liturgies

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

- The Children come from diverse backgrounds many of whom have English as an additional language. The evidence in the EYFS children's 2015-16 work books showed a good grasp of the topics for example sequencing a parable; re tell of a story, and an understanding of the symbolism of a candle. Pupils make good progress within the EYFS

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so that by the end of Key Stage 1 most are meeting expectations and some exceeding them. The quality of work and the pace of progress over time are strong.

- Progress at Key Stage 2 is good. Extended and reflective pieces of work need to be embedded so that pupils have the opportunity to deepen their understanding and build on secure foundations. The internal moderation taking place within and between key stage groups should enable this to happen. Groups such as those with SEN and disadvantaged students, make similar good progress as the other pupils because of very effective planned interventions and the proactive support of learning assistants.
- Discussions with pupils and responses in their written work show clearly that as they move up the school, important literacy skills have been secured, especially for those with English as an Additional Language (EAL) so that they become more confident in using religious language in a meaningful way. Their ability to learn independently, and with others, is improving, as demonstrated in the quality of some research type homework and their paired discussions. The use of the 'respond booklets' encourage pupils to reflect on their learning however more opportunities could be provided.
- Pupils are proud of their achievements and demonstrate a positive interest in learning new things and ideas. They feel confident in expressing their own opinions. When asked pupils were very positive about their learning and enjoyment of RE but lacked an awareness of the formal levels of assessment. They believed they needed more specific guidance in further developing their work to the next level. Their conduct in lessons and around the school is outstanding, a reflection of the school's successful strategies to promote the highest standards of behaviour.

### **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, singing with great enthusiasm. The weekly Mass in the adjoining parish church was memorable for the reverent attitude and engagement of the pupils, their clear reading and enthusiastic singing, and the large number of parents and carers in attendance. The signing of the prayers and hymns is an invaluable aid to the younger and EAL pupils, engaging and helping them to understand what is going on.
- Pupils are becoming more involved in the planning and preparation of their liturgies and assemblies. However, this could be encouraged even further through the example and role modelling of the chaplaincy team. As teachers become more confident in letting pupils take the initiative, they will become confident in taking more ownership of the prayer life of the school. This is an area already identified by the school itself and is being successfully addressed.
- Pupils value the many prayer opportunities, be it at the beginning of every lesson or the end of the day. They compose their own heartfelt prayers and reflections, which are displayed on the pupil monitored prayer tables. The older pupils plan assemblies in their classes with the help of their teachers.
- The sacramental and liturgical life of the school is reflected in the assemblies, Masses, and the celebrations throughout the Church's liturgical year of the life of Jesus, and the saints. Pupils are increasingly involved in these liturgies through music, drama, and role play. They have also had many opportunities during the year to reflect on the Year of Mercy, and to

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demonstrate how they have been 'Merciful like the Father' in how they treat, forgive, and care for others.

## **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 very effectively promote, nurture and sustain the Catholic ethos of the school as their primary concern and care and which is the main focus of their strategic planning. Leaders attend all cluster and diocesan training and meetings to keep abreast of developments which are promptly disseminated to staff. The inspiring head teacher has been a transforming influence in ensuring rapid progress over a short period of time;
- The governing body is a challenging, knowledgeable and practical influence in the life of the school. They meet all statutory, canonical, and diocesan requirements fully, and strive to bring to reality the call to be a People of Hope. They ensure the school mission is relevant through regularly seeking feedback from parents, pupils, and staff;
- Robust and rigorous processes of self evaluation ensure that judgements are becoming more accurate and reliable. This is achieved mainly by constant monitoring through governors' school visits and learning walks, with findings reported back to the full governing body. There is a strong parent representation on the board, but more importantly governors frequently ask parents, staff and pupils their opinions as to what could be better. As a result of this feedback, the school leadership knows itself very well, can more accurately assess the impact of its actions, and can quickly re shape its improvement planning where necessary.
- The spiritual life of the staff has not been neglected. Staff prayers and Inset days on spirituality and RE are an integral timetable. This helps bind staff together in commitment and unity of purpose, sharing the same goals and values of the school's mission. There is at least one Inset day annually devoted specifically to Catholic life and spirituality. The handbook 'Working in a Catholic school' is given to everyone and is the basis for regular training and reflective discussion.

### **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**

- Leaders and governors use data and monitoring information intelligently and effectively, exercising careful oversight of the curriculum and learning outcomes. They receive termly reports form the RE leader and take part in learning walks around the school.

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Where necessary they challenge, question, and hold senior leaders and staff to account, as is evident in a scrutiny of the minutes of governor's meetings.

- There is an effective team of three RE coordinators to cover EYFS, Key Stage 1, and Key Stage 2. The head teacher has the overall responsibility for the subject, its provision and its outcomes.
- Subject development plans are drawn up and used as working documents, which are added to or amended during the course of each term. They do not remain as general aims or wishes, but instead are measurable objectives to be achieved over a stated time.
- The provision for staff induction and in service training is particularly supportive for the teaching of RE. This has resulted in teachers becoming, for instance, more confident in assessment and in setting learning objectives. The RE development plan has highlighted the need to further develop these areas to ensure increasingly high standards.
- Subject coordinators are able to support teachers with advice and training, modelling the implementation of the syllabus, and the schemes of work. Likewise, the regular lesson observations and work scrutinies by senior leaders and governors monitor the impact of both teaching quality and pupils' progress over time, as well as planning at all levels.

## **How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?**

**Grade 2**

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

- Teaching is effective in promoting purposeful learning, the engagement of the pupils, their enjoyment, and their overall good results. The pupils' excellent attitudes to learning have a strong impact on their progress and achievement. Teachers have established excellent rapport with their charges. Learning assistants are involved in planning lessons with the teacher, so that interventions clearly have a positive effect.
- Teaching is generally good with some outstanding practice. 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.
- The expectation of teachers and their challenge are not, however, always consistently high, which results in missed opportunities to stretch pupils even further, either through written comments on their work, or through close questioning, checking that they really do understand before moving on.
- The assessment and marking policies are becoming embedded, but the scrutiny of pupils' written work reveals some discrepancy on occasion between the over generous levels given by an individual teacher, and the quality of the actual work in their books. However, in conversation, most pupils expressed their appreciation for the help given by teachers in their comments and marking, but would like further clarity to help them develop next steps.

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

- The RE curriculum meets all Bishops' Conference requirements. It is broad and balanced so that students can explore and develop their own values and beliefs. They explore themes such as prejudice, fairness, compassion and injustice, which they then link to the objects of their charity fundraising, and outreach to others in society who are more in need of help. Consistency in progression is still work in progress.
- The study of other world faiths is a strength of this inclusive school because it promotes tolerance, understanding, and respect for others' beliefs, rather than ignorance and suspicion. It also inculcates an appreciation of the diversity and richness of other cultures. Provision for sex and relationship education is in place and approved by the governors adhering to diocesan guidelines. There are plans to move from the 'In the Beginning' syllabus to 'Journey in Love'.
- Improvement to the curriculum design will promote continuity and progress in time, and lead to more effective teaching and learning. The wider curriculum successfully promotes spiritual, moral and vocational, and is taught through the lens of the Faith.

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

- The prayer life of the school is 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, following the excellent example of the chaplaincy team.
- The parish priests make an important and valued contribution to the spiritual life of the school, supporting its role in the wider mission of the parish and the universal Church. Both teachers and pupils have created colourful and thought provoking displays around the school, which remind the whole community of the liturgical cycle, and the topics the pupils are currently studying which are supportive of the school's vibrant Catholic life.
- Parents and carers are invited to attend Mass and assemblies. During the inspection there was an impressive number at Mass, which is a typical feature of the strong links between parents, school and parish.

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## Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 144 parental questionnaires returned. All were extremely positive about the school and the quality of their children's education. Some typical responses included:

*'Holy Rood is distinctive because it is a Catholic school with a distinctive religious character, and offers a philosophy which is based on faith.'*

*'The team who run the school are fantastic. The head teacher Miss Fry is kind and caring to all the children, and always has time for parents' views and concerns.'*

*'I cannot praise enough the 'can do' and 'positive' attitude towards the children, the knowledge of Jesus and the Catholic religion, weekly visits to school Mass...a very fostering and productive relationship, with parents informed and given updates on their child's progress.'*

*'The provision for children with special needs is outstanding.'*

*'I chose for my child to attend this school because of the leadership from Miss Fry, the excellent committed staff, the nurturing attitude towards the children, and its strong values. It is very multicultural, it has strong connections with the church, and it is very welcoming.'*