



INSPECTION REPORT

HOLY CROSS CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

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DfE Number: 866/5211

URN: 136981

Headteacher: Mrs S Dowdeswell

Chair of Governors: Mr P Kehoe

**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: 9th and 10th November 2022
Date of previous inspection: 19th and 20th November 2015

Reporting Inspector: Mrs B McLaughlin

Additional Inspector: Mrs A Fowler

Description of school

Holy Cross is a two-form entry primary school in Swindon. The school serves the designated parishes of Holy Rood and St Peter's in Swindon, St Joseph's in Wroughton and Sacred Heart in Royal Wootton Bassett. These designated parishes are shared with Holy Rood Catholic Primary School. In September 2021 the school completed its journey to becoming a two-form entry primary school, having hitherto been a junior school. At the time of the last inspection the school was located on two sites, with only 90 Reception and Year 1 pupils on the current site.

There are 399 children at the school. 76% of children are Catholic. Of the other children at the school, 16% are from other Christian denominations, 8% of other faiths and the remainder have not declared a faith. The proportion of children with Special Educational Needs is below the national average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups (89%) and those speaking English as an additional language (78%) are well above the national average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support from the pupil premium is below the national average.

The school has been through a period of change in recent years with the current headteacher, who took up post in June 2022, the fifth head since the last inspection.

The school is part of the Samuel Partnership of Catholic schools in Swindon.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Good

This is a good school.

- This is an inclusive and nurturing school with positive relationships amongst staff and pupils. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. They are supportive of each other and show kindness.
- The new headteacher has an accurate understanding of the priorities for the school and a strong vision for its future.
- The chaplaincy provision at the school is ambitious and strong, providing a variety of opportunities for pupils to participate in and lead activities.
- Prayer unites the school community and is central to the life of the school.
- Teaching in RE is consistently good with some outstanding practice. As a result of this outcomes in religious education are good. Pupils enjoy their learning and make good progress.
- The school is fully attentive to the needs of pupils and staff and provides high levels of pastoral care.

The capacity of the school to improve:

There are many indicators that the school has good capacity to improve in the future. The areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report have been fully addressed. The new headteacher has a good and accurate understanding of what the priorities for the school are and she has had considerable impact within a short period of time. Staff and pupils are fully committed to the school and the school enjoys strong support from families. The school is outward looking and engages well with the diocese and the Samuel Partnership.

However, significant changes to the staff of the school and the governing body have resulted in a period of instability and some turbulence in terms of leadership and governance. Ensuring there is stability and appropriate capacity within the governing body and the School Leadership Team, will be essential if the school is to realise future improvement.

What the school should do to improve further:

- The governing body to implement and maintain rigorous systems for ensuring compliance; and monitoring, evaluating and planning improvements in the Catholic life, religious education and the prayer life of the school.
- Leaders to develop planning within religious education to strengthen staff subject knowledge and consistency, so that staff can extend challenge and deepen pupil understanding and knowledge.
- Leaders to develop staff confidence and skills in promoting the prayer life of the school, so that staff can confidently empower pupils to take a more active and independent part in these areas of whole school life.

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

- There is a strong sense of the school being a welcoming and inclusive Catholic community. Children understand the school's mission statement "Learn, Grow, Love, Live" and confidently explain what it means to them and the life of the school.
- Pupils embrace the values of the school and the importance of "growing in faith, acting with kindness, generosity and love to themselves and others and living life to the full". Consequently, relationships are positive. Pupils speak of being part of one big family and looking after each other.
- Pupils participate enthusiastically in activities that support the Catholic life of the school and demonstrate their care for others. They support the Swindon Food Collective, raised money for the diocesan Ugandan Water Project and regularly support a variety of local and international initiatives.
- Pupils in Key Stage 2 have the opportunity to become school chaplains, and many do so. They attend chaplaincy club after school on Tuesdays to plan and prepare a range of activities, which they confidently lead at lunchtimes, and which are offered to pupils of all ages.
- Pupil chaplaincy leaders have a key role in leading activities which support the Catholic life of the school. They implement the chaplaincy plan but do not yet evaluate its impact.
- Pupils speak positively of the recent changes which visually enhance the school as a Catholic community. They valued being involved in the artwork in the reception area and contributing to displays around the school.
- Pupils value the care and support they receive from a range of staff. They respond well to the provision of the school for their physical, emotional and spiritual growth and feel happy and safe coming to school. They particularly value the diverse and inclusive cultural opportunities available to them.
- Pupils appreciate the strong links with the parish and the opportunities for the school to use Holy Rood church for whole school worship and celebrations. Parishioners in return are extremely positive about the attendance of pupils at the parish Mass and parish events.

b) The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school

- The school mission statement underpins the mission of the school as a Catholic community. It is given a high profile in each classroom and communal areas and referred to on a daily basis. As a result of this it is owned and lived by pupils and staff.
- The physical environment has been enhanced recently and clearly reflects the school's Catholic identity, with references to the liturgical calendar and gospel values. The school house system has been recently updated and each house is now named after a saint.
- Staff are committed to the Catholic life of the school. They promote high standards of behaviour and are positive role models of respect and forgiveness.

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- The school is inclusive and is committed to the social teachings of the Church. The language of Catholic Social Teaching has been skilfully introduced and is well understood by pupils. Making links to animals at Key Stage 1 and seeing the aspects of Catholic Social Teaching as 'keys' in Key Stage 2 enables pupils to understand the principles and act in support of them.
 - The curriculum provides many opportunities for pupils to make links between their faith and everyday life. During the inspection this was seen when pupils linked their learning in geography and religious education to care for the environment.
 - The chaplaincy provision, led by committed and proactive staff, effectively supports and promotes the Catholic life of the school. Throughout the Covid pandemic and periods of change in the school, this provision has been maintained at a high level.
 - The school is extremely attentive to the pastoral needs of all staff, taking great care to ensure the pastoral needs of staff are understood and catered for.
 - The school has reviewed and updated its Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) programmes in line with DfE and diocesan guidelines. Details of the programme are included on the school website.
 - The school's website has a section on religious education and catholicity and includes some information and photographs. Leaders are seeking to improve the content and accessibility of the website.

c) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school

- Leaders and governors articulate a commitment to the Catholic life and character of the school. However, systems and structures for whole school improvement planning and evaluation do not yet reflect this commitment.
- Leaders and governors are fully supportive of the Catholic life of the school. The Catholic life of the school is being included as a priority on the new school improvement plan, but developments are in their early stages. The Governing body does not yet have ownership of the plan and is not involved in monitoring it.
- The RE link governor, who is a member of staff, is deeply committed and proactive in her role. She has established regular systems for monitoring some aspects of the Catholic life of the school and has sought feedback from pupils. Leaders and governors would benefit from being clearer about the purpose and findings of her monitoring, and the capacity in which she undertakes it.
- Leaders and governors do not currently have a schedule or format for evaluating the Catholic life of the school.
- The induction and training provided to staff is good and the school makes use of diocesan training opportunities and resources. The RE lead provides formal and informal training and support, which is valued by staff.
- The school has effective strategies for engaging with parents and following the Covid pandemic has invested in strengthening contact and creating additional opportunities for

parents to engage with the school. The recent Harvest Festival at the local church was attended by large numbers of families.

- The school responds well to diocesan initiatives and is involved in the work of the Samuel Partnership.

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

- Overall, most children, from their varied starting points, make good progress in each key stage. Pupils with English as an additional language are effectively supported.
- The religious literacy of pupils across the key stages is strong and plays a key part in enabling them to grow in their understanding of faith. This was evident in all year groups, where children confidently used key words in response to teacher questioning.
- Pupils effectively make appropriate links in their learning and are aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life. Year 6 pupils confidently discussed a letter by Pope Francis, identifying how it called them to action in their daily life.
- Most pupils are actively engaged in lessons and enjoy their learning in religious education. Behaviour is excellent.
- Pupils respond well to opportunities to engage with a variety of learning approaches and activities in religious education. They particularly enjoy group work, drama and art, saying they would like to do more of these.
- Pupils respond well to the high expectations of staff and the opportunities to extend their learning. Many pupils display curiosity. They respond well to teacher questioning but also feel confident to share their ideas and ask their own questions, as seen in a Year 1 lesson on forgiveness.
- Pupils work hard and want to please their teachers. They have a good understanding of how teachers assess their learning and articulate a desire to improve their work. They regularly respond to teacher comments, which help them move their learning further forward.

b) The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education

- The religious education (RE) lead provides effective and focused leadership in religious education. He gives staff ongoing support on the teaching of religious education.
- Teachers communicate high expectations about learning in religious education and establish positive classroom routines for learning. These start in the Reception class and Key Stage 1 and are maintained as pupils progress through the school.
- Teachers know their pupils well and adapt activities for them. The use of hand signs to help those for whom English is not their first language is particularly effective. They create a positive and respectful environment for learning, using praise and affirmation to encourage and celebrate pupils' achievements.
- Teachers plan lessons linked to the assessment schemes and use a variety of resources to enhance learning. Paired discussion, Scripture, music and film are all used to support learning. Teachers and support staff are effective in using focused classroom displays, which reinforce key vocabulary, to support learning.

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- All teachers have the essential subject knowledge needed to deliver the religious education curriculum. However, there are differences in deeper understanding, which result in some classes having access to more reflective and evaluative tasks which lead to better pupil progress.
 - Teacher questioning is strong and consistently effective in assessing prior learning. In the best examples teachers use this assessment to adapt their lessons to ensure maximum progress for pupils; as seen in a Year 2 lesson on the Eucharist. More able pupils would benefit from a range of more complex questions to ensure a greater depth of response.
 - Teachers manage lesson time well and are supported by committed teaching assistants. Teaching assistants are a valuable support to learning in religious education and by sharing lesson plans with them, their impact in this area could be maximised.
 - Teachers provide pupils with regular, constructive feedback on their progress in religious education. In the best cases pupils respond to additional questions from staff and extend their understanding. Progress tracking sheets are well used by staff and pupils. Older pupils have the opportunity to link their work to these, thus gaining a better understanding of their progress and the attainment targets.
 - Teachers celebrate pupils' participation in lessons and the work they produce. Pupils enjoy sharing their work and respond enthusiastically to the house points awarded by staff.

c) How well leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education

- The religious education curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference, and the required amount of curriculum time is given to religious education. Leaders and governors need to ensure they have a full understanding of the curriculum requirements for religious education and that this is appropriately reflected in school policies.
- The RE lead has a clear view of what constitutes effective teaching in religious education and provides examples of expected levels of work. He undertakes lesson observations, work and data scrutinies, and surveys. He addresses the identified issues and there is evidence of his actions bringing about positive change.
- The headteacher scrutinises pupil progress data for religious education and shares this with the governing body. Greater scrutiny of progress by subgroups of pupils could enhance the targeting of support and interventions.
- The link governor for RE has established some monitoring of the provision in RE and is conscientious in her undertakings. The governing body does not routinely scrutinise this monitoring.
- The school development plan includes a priority which includes the teaching of religious education. This section is underdeveloped and does not include all the priorities identified by the school.
- Leaders ensure that staff receive professional development and ongoing support related to the teaching of religious education. Links with the diocese are strong and diocesan training is regularly attended.

a) How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's prayer life

- Pupils show reverence and respect during prayer, and they participate willingly. During the inspection this was seen in class worship, grace before lunch, Year 5 attendance at a parish Mass and whole school hymn practice.
- Pupils enjoy praying and understand its importance. They are familiar with traditional Catholic prayers, the use of scripture in prayer and a variety of prayer styles. They particularly enjoy singing prayers and hymns and do so with great enthusiasm, as evidenced by the sung grace before lunch.
- Pupils confidently participate in prayer and worship. Every child has the opportunity to lead collective worship in their class and older pupils take full responsibility for the planning and delivery of this prayer.
- Pupils contribute to a class prayer and worship book, in which they reflect on the theme of the weekly Gospel assembly. They are invited to write their own prayers and place them on the class prayer tree and make use of the class worry box which is on the prayer table.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of the liturgical year, which is consistently referenced across the school. This is reflected in classroom prayer tables and displays in communal areas.
- Pupils value being part of a prayerful community and understand the importance of prayer for themselves as well as for those of other faiths. They are aware of similarities and differences in prayer and during the inspection gave the example of Diwali.

b) The quality of the prayer life provided by the school

- Prayer is a key feature of daily life at the school and included in all school gatherings and celebrations. Staff have a consistent approach which is evident across the school, with some adaptations made for the age and aptitude of pupils. Prayer and collective worship are relevant and have a clear purpose and message.
- Prayer and worship reflect the liturgical calendar and the values of the school. The weekly Gospel assembly unites the whole school and provides a focus for subsequent worship throughout the week.
- Staff are effectively inducted into the prayer life of the school, and they value the support provided by the headteacher, RE lead and staff chaplaincy leaders.
- Staff model ways of praying to pupils. Class-based collective worship is led by pupils and follows a standard format. Teachers would benefit from observing and experiencing a variety of approaches to prayer to widen their own experience and confidence in supporting pupils to plan and lead prayer.
- The physical environment supports the prayer life of the school, with prayer trees and tables in each classroom and communal areas. The recent creation of a prayer room

has been enthusiastically received by pupils. Pupil chaplaincy leaders relish looking after it and welcoming pupils of all ages. They are keen to develop additional prayer spaces, especially outdoors.

- Links with the parish are strong and the parish priest provides valued support to the school.

c) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the prayer life of the school.

- Leaders and governors understand the importance and centrality of the prayer life of the school. The headteacher, RE lead and chaplaincy staff ensure regular opportunities for prayer and collective worship are in place.
- Chaplaincy leaders enthusiastically promote pupils' planning and leading of prayer and collective worship. They also involve pupils in the evaluation of some collective worship.
- Systems for strategic planning, monitoring and the evaluation of the prayer life of the school are not yet in place. However, monitoring activities are being independently undertaken by staff chaplaincy leaders and the RE link governor.
- The governing body understands the importance of giving priority to the monitoring and evaluation of prayer and collective worship but are yet to implement systems to do so.

Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 116 parental questionnaires received, with respondents being very positive about the school.

Some typical responses included:

“This school promotes quality learning and teaching which is Christ centred. This can be seen in my child’s behaviour and their knowledge about Catholic education.”

“Teachers care and have my child’s education at heart.”

“The school is friendly and welcoming; there is encouragement for all pupils.”

“Very good school and has good communication between school management and parents.”

“I chose this school as it develops the child in all aspects i.e., social, moral and in religious faith.”

“My daughter loves to go to school, she enjoys learning and she is very happy.”

“I believe in having a good start on life and when you include the Catholic values followed at the school, it is the best start for my child.”