



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD



Section 48 Inspection Report

Name of School: Holy Cross Catholic Primary School,

Inspection Date: 31st March 2014

Reporting Inspector: Mrs Pamela Brannigan

URN 115181

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of School: Primary
School Category: Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils: 4 - 11
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 310
Appropriate Authority: Thurrock
Date of previous inspection: -

School Address: Daiglen Drive, Sth Ockendon
Aveley Essex RM15 5RP

Tel. No. 01708 853000

Headteacher: Mrs Maria Shepherd

Information about the school

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School is a voluntary aided Catholic school with nursery in South Ockenden, north west of Thurrock in the county of Essex and part of the diocese of Brentwood. The trustees are La Sainte Union Order. The school serves the parish of Holy Cross Ockenden with a few pupils coming from Grays. There are currently 310 pupils aged 4-11 on roll of whom 47% are Catholics. The remaining pupils are mostly from other Christian backgrounds, mainly Pentecostal. There is an above average number of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is around the national average. The number of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding is average.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Satisfactory 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

Holy Cross is a good school with some outstanding features including a Catholic ethos which permeates all areas. Opportunities for pupils' spiritual and moral development and the capacity for sustained improvement are excellent. Outcomes for pupils, the quality of teaching and the provision for Catholic education are good. Senior leaders have put in place a number of new initiatives linked to teaching, learning, assessment and monitoring to move the school forward. Pastoral care is good and shared by all members of the school community. Relationships are excellent and pupils feel well cared for and supported in their learning. Parents welcome the religious education in the school, appreciate the good communication with staff and the way the school keeps them informed. Pupils' standards of attainment are in line with diocesan expectations.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

The school has an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement and has put in place systems which ensure self-evaluation is accurate and rigorous. Since the last inspection in 2012 the school has embedded the new religious education programme 'Come and See' which has led to significant improvements in teaching and learning. Rigorous monitoring of teaching, planning and workbooks has led to better outcomes for pupils. Tracking of pupil progress has ensured that groups who achieve less well are quickly identified and support strategies put in place. The school gives a high profile to religious education and has very good systems to share good practice and support new teachers.

The senior leadership team and governors have a clear vision for the Catholicity of the school and the central place of prayer, worship and religious education. Senior staff are very good role models and all staff are given opportunities to extend their knowledge and improve their skills through staff meetings and attendance at diocesan led training. Six teachers have the CCRS qualification and one is about to complete the course. The headteacher has almost completed an MA in Catholic Leadership which has had an impact on the life of the school.

The current leadership has an excellent capacity to maintain effectiveness. The headteacher shows outstanding leadership of a Catholic community through her focus on prayer and worship in which she is well supported by her staff. Governors have a wide range of expertise and many are involved in the life of the school. Systems are in place to develop and strengthen initiatives which lead to good outcomes for all pupils. The religious education subject leader is well placed to support colleagues and has attended diocesan training linked to the new religious education scheme.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further enhance the Catholic life of the school by the use of the new prayer garden and the meditation programme.
- Continue current good practice in monitoring and tracking to ensure all groups achieve their full potential in religious education.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 2

Pupils make a very good contribution to the Catholic life of the school. They respond very well to opportunities to understand the needs of others in school and the wider community. Pupils are involved in the annual consideration of the school's mission statement resulting in 'slogans' to summarise its meaning. They are keen to take on responsibilities including membership of the School Council and as prefects. Several local, national and international charities are supported throughout the year including the Catholic Children's Society, British Legion and Cafod as well as a local group which helps homeless people. Groups of pupils have been involved in entertaining elderly people in the local community as well as attending a conference where all religions were represented. Pupils show respect for adults and each other. Behaviour is excellent and pupils value the sense of community created within the school.

Prayer and worship are central to school life. Pupils respond positively to opportunities to develop their faith journey. There are daily assemblies which involve children as appropriate for their age and development. They understand prayer as a time of reflection and are learning the traditional prayers of the Church. Year 6 pupils have an annual retreat day which was the inspiration for the provision of the beautiful new prayer garden. Older pupils are able to apply aspects of Jesus' life and teaching to their own lives. Pupils know the importance of worship and are given opportunities to write their own prayers, many examples of which were seen during the inspection.

Pastoral care is very good and given a high priority by staff and governors who work closely together to promote the spiritual development of pupils and the Catholic life of the community. Pupils feel safe, well cared for and know where to go when they need support. A counsellor from Brentwood Childcare supports individual pupils and 'Share and Care' sessions deals with any concerns voiced by pupils. The 'Journey in Love' programme is used throughout the school and parents are invited to see the materials used. Pupils say they value being in a friendly environment where they are listened to and encouraged to help each other. Parents value the care given to their children, the quality of education and the approachability of staff.

Attainment and progress in religious education are good. Lessons observed during the inspection were good or better and pupils worked with interest. Pupils enjoy religious education and work very well together. They are eager to participate in activities and keen to achieve. Opportunities for pupils to self and peer assess are leading to increased understanding of religious concepts. They have a good knowledge of the Catholic faith appropriate to their age and abilities. Workbooks are very well presented, show coverage of the curriculum and indicate a varied range of tasks. Standards of attainment are in line with diocesan expectations.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

The headteacher supported by senior staff demonstrates excellent leadership of the school through the way she promotes the provision for the Catholic life of the school and brings about improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. She communicates a clear Catholic vision to the whole community which is affirmed by staff and governors who are all committed to providing the best possible environment for the pupils. She has developed a system of self-evaluation which is detailed, accurate and identifies areas for improvement. Along with the subject leader she has a very good knowledge of areas for development in religious education and is well placed to support colleagues.

Senior leaders monitor religious education by means of lesson observations, work scrutiny and joint planning which is followed by feedback to individual teachers. There is currently a very strong focus on planning and assessment as the school embeds the 'Come and See' religious education programme. The school is putting in place strategies to give further challenge to the ablest children. Staff development is very good and includes teaching assistants who play a key role in the school.

Governors work closely with senior leadership and have a very good understanding of strengths and areas for development. They are well informed about the life of the school through the headteacher's report, meetings with subject leaders and monitoring visits. The link governor is familiar with assessment in religious education and comes in frequently to visit to classrooms and attend assemblies, masses and liturgies. Governors are closely involved in all aspects of the religious life of

the school and are in a good position to challenge and support effectively. They have engaged in diocesan training which has enabled them to evaluate provision and contribute to improvement.

Leaders ensure that the school is a welcoming community where everyone is respected and valued. Diversity is celebrated and pupils are taught to respect other faiths. Pupils' ethnic backgrounds are celebrated in 'Black History Month and International Week leading them to value their place and importance in their school and wider community. Pupils are given opportunities to develop a sense of service and show compassion for others through charitable fund raising. Provision for spiritual development ensures that pupils are able to reflect on their own lives and experiences in the light of faith. There are good links with the local community including a school with pupils from a different cultural background. Parents are invited to many school events and are kept well informed about their children's welfare and progress. They appreciate the good level of contact with the school which enables them to support their children's learning.

Provision

Grade 2

Provision for prayer and worship at Holy Cross is outstanding. Assemblies and liturgies are very well planned and contribute to pupils' spiritual development. They often include visual presentations, bible readings drama, singing and music. During the inspection an assembly led by the headteacher and year 6 pupils followed the Stations of the Cross as part of the school's understanding of Holy Week. Pupils were engaged and prayerful throughout and singing was very good. Pupils are involved in collective worship in their classrooms and are given opportunities for personal reflection. The subject leader is currently introducing meditation as another dimension of prayer. Each classroom has an attractive prayer focus with religious artefacts and display boards which generally include children's work. Masses and age appropriate liturgies are celebrated in school throughout the year. Parents, families and parishioners are invited to many celebrations. The priest from Holy Cross parish is a frequent visitor and supports the school through masses, liturgies and acts as chaplain on an informal basis. Pupils visit the church every term for masses and links are very good. Many pupils are involved as altar servers at Holy Cross and a number of staff act as catechists.

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is good. During the inspection, lessons observed were good or outstanding. Lessons are planned with clear learning intentions and an interesting range of activities. The school has made an investment in new technology and pupils respond well and appreciate the new activities to which this has given rise. In all classes observed pupils work very well and make good progress. Teachers respond well to pupils' comments and take every opportunity to develop understanding. Higher order questioning was a feature of outstanding lessons observed. Good support by teaching assistants enables all groups of pupils to make progress. Marking is positive and often includes suggestions of ways to improve. Very good assessment, planning and tracking supports the learning and progress of all groups of pupils.

The quality of the religious education curriculum is good. At least 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education. The new religious education programme 'Come and See' has been in place for a year and has led to improvement in provision. The headteacher gives religious education a central place in the life of the school and this is demonstrated by the budget devoted to it and the current review of resources. Religious education displays around the school emphasise the centrality of faith to the work of the community. The curriculum enables pupils to become aware of their responsibility for each other and their environment. It contributes very well to their spiritual and moral development. The support given to families through a breakfast club and many extra-curricular activities gives a strong sense of community to the school. There is every indication that current high standards are likely to be maintained or improved.

The inspector would like to express her thanks and appreciation to all members of the school community for their welcome and openness during the inspection.