



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Inspection Report



Name of School: St Helen's Primary School

LEA: Southend-On-Sea

Inspection Date: 9th December 2016

Reporting Inspector: Pamela Brannigan

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: 262
Appropriate Authority: The Governing Body
Date of previous inspection: 9th December 2011

School Address:
North Road
Westcliff-on-Sea
Essex
SS0 7AY

Tel. No. 01702 343823
Headteacher: Mrs E. Mouchel
Chair of Governors: Mr J. Upsher

Information about the school

St Helen's Catholic Primary School in Westcliff on Sea, Essex in the diocese of Brentwood is currently moving from one to two form entry. The school serves the parish of Our Lady Help of Christians and St Helen although a few pupils come from adjoining areas. There are currently 262 pupils aged 4-11 on roll. Pupils come from a range of ethnic backgrounds with an increasing number for whom English is a second language. 72% of pupils are Catholics as are 65% of teachers, five of whom have the CCRS qualification. The proportion of pupils with special needs is around the national average. The school is part of a well-established Deanery group where schools support each other.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Helen's is an outstanding Catholic school with many strong features. The Catholic ethos is evident in the daily life of the school with prayer and worship being central to its work. Pupils are given many opportunities for spiritual and moral development through the curriculum and the wider life of the school. The quality of pupils' learning and progress in religious education is good as are the standards of attainment. There is regular monitoring of teaching, learning, and assessment. Governors are proactive, know the school well and offer an excellent level of challenge and support. Pastoral care is very good and shared with the local parish priest who is also a governor, as well as all staff. Relationships within the school and with the local parish are very good and pupils feel well cared for and supported in their learning. Parents are very happy with religious education and the Catholic life of the school.

The school has an excellent capacity for sustained improvement. The last inspection in 2011 identified the school as outstanding with three areas for development linked to teaching and learning, pupil assessment guidance, and the continuation of outreach to parents. All three areas have been addressed and the headteacher continually reviews practice and has put in place initiatives to further enhance provision and opportunities for pupils. Together with the senior leader currently responsible for religious education she has produced a comprehensive action plan to sustain effectiveness and put in place further developments which include a new senior leadership team. All staff are well supported through in-service sessions and moderation when work is assessed and levelled. Regular, rigorous monitoring is ensuring that teaching is constantly improving and well differentiated.

The quality of self-evaluation is excellent. The school documentation is detailed, accurate and gives a comprehensive analysis of the Catholic life of the school and religious education. The curriculum which follows the 'Come and See' programme enables pupils to make connections between faith and their own lives. Staff are encouraged to improve their skills through training and embarking on the CCRS course. There are very good links with local deanery schools including the Catholic secondary schools to which most pupils transfer at the end of Key Stage 2.

The current leadership has an excellent capacity to maintain effectiveness. The headteacher shows outstanding leadership of a Catholic community and is well supported by her assistant headteachers and senior leader currently responsible for religious education. Members of the governing body have a wide range of expertise and a very good knowledge of the everyday life of the school. They visit frequently and liaise with senior leadership and subject leaders. Systems are in place to develop and strengthen initiatives which are leading to very good outcomes for all pupils.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to implement the current action plan especially the refinement of the assessment process.
- Continue to support families as the school expands to full two form entry.
- Increase the stock of bibles so upper Key Stage 2 classes have complete sets

Pupil achievement and progress in religious education are very good. All pupils spoken to said they enjoy religious education and the wide range of activities involved. All pupils observed during the inspection worked well together and were keen to achieve. They have a good knowledge of the Catholic faith appropriate to their age and abilities. All lessons observed were well planned with a range of interesting cross curricular activities. Pupils are given a good foundation in Early Years classes which is built upon as they progress through the school. By time pupils reach the end of Key Stage 2 they are working at a high level. On the day of the inspection the Year 6 class were studying St John's gospel and using bible references to understand the expectations of John the Baptist. They were able to work in groups to prepare a presentation on how the Word became a human being. The task required research skills and team work so that all pupils could contribute. Carefully differentiated support enabled all pupils to achieve well and make good progress. Across the school workbooks are well presented and show pupils' progress and coverage of the curriculum. Marking is positive with many examples of developmental and 'next steps' comments. Pupils are given an insight into other faiths which are taught well with a good range of resources.

Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic life of the school. They contributed to the mission statement which is based on 'Respect' and is prominently displayed in every classroom. All pupils were invited to submit a design for a St Helen's stained glass window for the new building. The winners, one from each class, had their designs built into the final product which is now in place and has been blessed by the parish priest. Pupils respond very well to opportunities to understand the needs of others in school and the wider community. They support parish charities including the Lourdes fund and support for orphans in Kenya. The school council also suggest charities pupils wish to support. This year Christmas collections will go to Great Ormond Street Hospital which has supported a child in the school. Pupils are able to link support for the needy with the life and teachings of Jesus. They are given responsibilities to support the life of the school as school council members, 'guardian angels' and 'peacemakers.' There are excellent links with the local parish with regular school Masses and liturgies. In addition, the parish priest who provides pastoral support for staff and pupils comes in frequently and acts as an extra teaching resource. Pupils show consideration and respect for adults and each other. Behaviour is very good and pupils value the sense of friendship and community created within the school. They are aware of the support available to them and feel safe, cared for and know where to go when they need help. A nurture group has a positive impact on pupils who are developing their social skills and a Brentwood Catholic Children's Society councillor is also available. Parents value the care given to their children and the good level of communication with staff. Responses to a questionnaire were positive with many appreciative comments including, 'We cannot speak highly enough of the school. The headteacher is always approachable and has the children's religious and academic progress and development at the heart of what she does.'

Prayer and collective worship are an integral part of school life. Pupils understand the importance of prayer and participate confidently in daily worship in class and assemblies. The cycle of celebrations reflects the Church's liturgical year and enables pupils to understand how faith links to everyday experiences. They respond positively to opportunities to develop their faith journey through reflective prayer. Pupils are involved in the preparation for Masses and have a good grasp of religious terminology appropriate to their ages. They are given regular opportunities to plan and prepare assemblies. A recent anti-bullying assembly was prepared and presented by the school council and pupils from Years 5 and 6 have led an assembly with the focus on Disability. Each year the mission statement is revisited and explored with the whole school. Pupils learn the traditional prayers of the Church as well as writing their own, many of which were seen during the inspection. There is a Rosary group in May and October led by a member of staff. There are plans to give pupils more opportunities to plan, lead, organise and evaluate their liturgies. Pupils are offered the sacrament of Reconciliation in Advent and Lent.

By the end of Key Stage 2 standards of attainment meet or exceed diocesan expectations and tracking indicates that all groups make good progress. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to the learning of individuals and groups of pupils. School leadership gives religious education the same importance as other core subjects and uses staff meeting time and in-service sessions to promote the continual development of the subject.

The headteacher and senior leadership demonstrate excellent leadership through the way they promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Catholic life. They communicate a clear Catholic vision to the whole community and are supported in this by staff and governors who are all committed to providing the best possible environment for the pupils. The Catholicity of the school is evident in displays around the school as well as in the classroom prayer areas. During the inspection a moving assembly led by the headteacher explored the journey through Advent and linked this with the school's work of feeding the hungry during the Year of Mercy. Pupils were attentive throughout and keen to contribute. Pupils led the singing and greetings in fifteen languages, including signing. Singing was excellent and all pupils participated with enthusiasm. A senior leader leads a gospel assembly at the beginning of each week which supports pupils' moral and spiritual development. Leaders ensure there are good links with Brentwood diocese through attendance at conference and deanery meetings.

Governors demonstrate a high level of commitment to the Catholic life of the school. Recently they have put in place a 'Governors' Monitoring Day' when they track the progress of their area of the School Development Plan, undertake pupil interviews and join in a learning walk around the school. Many governors are of long standing and have a wide knowledge and understanding of the school. They are well informed about its life through the headteacher's report and visits to school events as well as meetings with senior leaders. Along with the headteacher they monitor the school's provision for prayer and worship as well as religious education. They participate in the compilation of the school development plan which is reviewed regularly at governors' meetings. Governors have accessed training provided by the diocese which has enabled them to evaluate aspects of the religious life of the school and to challenge and support effectively.

The senior leader currently responsible for religious education has worked with the headteacher to produce a targeted action plan and is well placed to support colleagues. Senior leaders monitor religious education through workbook scrutiny, observing teaching and evaluating outcomes. Feedback after lesson observations is resulting in improvements in teaching and learning. Assessment is enabling pupils to demonstrate their knowledge of the relevant concepts. A portfolio of assessed and levelled work assists teachers as they make judgements about pupil attainment.

School leaders ensure that St Helen's School is a welcoming community where everyone is respected and valued. The school offers a range of extra-curricular activities and participates in local community events. There is also a parenting class to help and support families. There are excellent links with other diocesan schools through the deanery group. In addition, the headteacher has shared her expertise with a headteacher new to the voluntary aided sector. Provision for spiritual development ensures that pupils are able to reflect on their own lives and experiences. Parents are kept well informed about their children's welfare and progress through regular meetings. They also receive information about religious education through curriculum information newsletters

Provision**Grade 1**

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is very good. During the inspection, lessons observed were good or better. Pupils are given a good start in Early Years which is built upon as they progress through the school. Lessons are planned with clear learning intentions and a wide range of engaging activities. All groups of pupils make very good progress and behaviour for learning is excellent. Teachers respond well to pupils' comments and take opportunities to extend knowledge and develop understanding. In all year groups well differentiated tasks enable pupils to work with enthusiasm and interest. Good support by teaching assistants is a feature of many lessons. Marking is positive with 'next steps' comments giving pupils suggestions of ways to improve. Dedicated improvement and reflection time tasks have recently been introduced in religious education and are having an impact on pupils' understanding. There is every indication that current very good standards are likely to be maintained.

The quality of the religious education curriculum is very good. At least 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education. The programme 'Come and See' has been implemented throughout the school and is now embedded. It is enhanced by 'Journey in Love' materials and very good parish links including

visits to the parish church. Information about the curriculum is shared with parents via the website and newsletters. There are good quality resources to support the curriculum although class sets of Bibles in upper Key Stage 2 would give pupils immediate access to scripture. Religious education displays around the school emphasise the importance of faith to the work of the school. 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.

Provision for prayer and worship at St Helen's is outstanding. Assemblies and liturgies are well planned and contribute to pupils' spiritual development. They include visual presentations, Bible readings, drama, singing and music. Pupils are involved in collective worship in their classrooms and are given opportunities for personal reflection. Each classroom has a prayer focus with religious artefacts and a display board which includes children's work. Feast day Masses are celebrated throughout the year and the traditions of the Church are explored with pupils. Two prayer areas give additional opportunities for reflection and worship and a grotto is being established in the school grounds. Year 6 pupils go on an annual retreat to support their faith journey and Year 6 girls participate in the Women's World Day of prayer. Parents and families are invited to assemblies and pupils visit the local church to lead a Carol Service at Christmas. The parish priest supports the school through Masses and classroom visits. Pupils also have the opportunity to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation at Advent and Easter.

The school is constantly seeking to develop practice to improve outcomes for pupils. The senior leader currently responsible for religious education is seeking to refine the assessment process to ensure the school's practice is best for pupils' attainment. Tracking is providing a clear picture of pupils' progress in all key stages. There is evidence that very good outcomes for pupils are likely to be maintained or improved as the school consolidates and builds on current very good practice in all areas.

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.