



DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION REPORT

incorporating Section 48 and Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on
behalf of the Archbishop of Southwark

URN 100623

St Helen's Catholic Primary School

Knowle Close

Brixton

London SW9 0QT

Inspection date: 2nd March 2023

Chair of Governors: Mrs Patricia Dafe

Headteacher: Mr Adrian Le Cuirot

**Inspectors: Mr Stephen Beck
Mrs Joanna Hawthorne**

EDUCATION COMMISSION

St Edward's House, St Paul's Wood Hill, Orpington, Kent BR5 2SR
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Interim Director of Education: Angela Cox



Key for inspection grades

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

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Helen's is a Voluntary Aided Catholic Primary School. It is situated in the Lambeth Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark, and is maintained by Lambeth local Authority. The principal parish the school serves is Our Lady of the Rosary, Brixton, but a few pupils also come from St Francis, Stockwell and St Philip and St James, Herne Hill. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 63% which is significantly lower than at the time of the last inspection. Overall, the weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in all key stages.

The school is an average-sized primary school that takes pupils from 4 to age 11, including a small number of part-time nursery pupils. The school operates preschool provision through a breakfast club, and there are numerous opportunities for pupils to participate in after-school club provision.

Currently, there are 271 pupils on the roll. In line with the other schools in the Local Authority and neighbouring boroughs, the school is managing falling pupil numbers and increased diversity of intake. The school is situated in an area of high social and economic deprivation, and the deprivation indicator places it in the third quartile of the national average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is significantly above average. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is below average. 29% of pupils are on the school's special educational needs register. There are 126 pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium grant. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is significantly above average and consists primarily of pupils of Black African or White groups other than British.

The school is part of the Lambeth Catholic Schools Partnership.



SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Helen's is a good Catholic school because:

- In an explicitly Catholic environment, St Helen's provides a welcoming environment from the point of first contact. All show care and attention to visitors in a calm, well-cared for, warm environment.
- The school provides effective pastoral care that allows every pupil to thrive in a safe, secure and harmonious Catholic community.
- Pupils work hard and follow the rules rising to the challenges they experience while having fun together.
- There is enough evidence of improved performance that suggests the school is on a trajectory of improvement that will successfully be built on through, clarity of vision, the strength of its leadership team and the leadership of religious education.
- Pupils are encouraged to accept others for who they are. Pupils listen carefully to each other and demonstrate respect for others' views and experiences, with teachers supporting them in learning about their own identities, interests and talents.
- Leaders make good use of the school's religious education scheme, 'The Way the Truth and the Life,' to identify the knowledge pupils should learn and are beginning to utilise this to enable pupils to build on their knowledge over time.
- Leaders are ambitious for all pupils and prepare them well for their next steps.
- Pupils are well cared for and have positive relationships with their teachers and other adults in the school.
- There is a strong belief that nothing but the best is good enough for the pupils, which ensures they flourish in the school where the Catholic ethos permeates every aspect of school life and where a range of collective worship is experienced.
- All aspects of improvement since the last inspection have been actioned.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to work outside of the core religious education scheme to widen their experiences and enrich their learning with a particular emphasis on the more able.
- Build further on the established firm foundations through the School Council and Faith Leader groups to provide opportunities for pupils to initiate, plan and deliver collective worship.



Overall Effectiveness

How effective the school is in providing Catholic Education.

2

Catholic Life

2

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

2

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

2

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

2

Religious Education

2

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

2

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.

2

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

2

Collective Worship

2

How well pupils respond to and participate in the schools' Collective Worship.

2

The quality of provision for Collective Worship.

2

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

2

CATHOLIC LIFE

2

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is good

- St Helen's is a good Catholic school, whose mission is summed up in the phrase, '*Belong, Believe, Achieve*,' articulated and understood by the school community.
- It is a thriving school in the heart of Brixton with a community where many travel long distances to be part of the school family. Its values and ethos are based on an aim to provide a high-quality education for all pupils rooted in Gospel values and its pride in its diverse community.
- This is further exemplified in the school's mantra, which outlines its distinctive nature through five key areas. *the search for excellence* as an integral part of the spiritual quest; *the uniqueness of the individual*, made in God's image and loved by Him; *the education of the whole person*, based on the belief that the human and the divine are inseparable; *the education of all*, with the particular duty of care for the poor and the disadvantaged; *moral principles*, put into practice within a Christian community.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning, enjoy coming to school and being 'part of a Catholic family'. They contribute to an enthusiastic and energetic community of learners and a nurturing and stimulating environment that supports pupils to thrive and develop their own unique God-given gifts and talents.
- They benefit from the opportunity to contribute to many aspects of the Catholic life of the school. For example, they hear the Word of God regularly, and are provided with a range of opportunities for prayer.
- Outcomes for pupils in curriculum religious education are good. Pupils' religious education workbooks reflect good subject coverage, their hard work and their thoughtful approach to lessons.
- Teaching is good across the whole school with some elements of outstanding practice, and pupils are religiously literate, reflecting numerous examples witnessed across the school of teachers developing pupils' vocabulary.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school, reflected in the high number of questionnaires received and through discussions with them. During the inspection, one parent told inspectors of the impact of the school's prayer life on her children at home, and another wrote, '*I am very proud of this Catholic school*'.
- Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the development of an outdoor prayer space which is currently under construction.

The quality of provision of the Catholic Life of the school is good

- Pastoral care is a strength of the school. All pupils and staff feel well supported. Pupils feel safe and appreciate the help they get from their teachers and support staff. Their mental health and well-being are a priority of the school.



- Staff also speak of how well they are supported with the teaching of religious education, which is reflected in the very good provision for continuing professional development of staff
- There is a team approach to the management of religious education and the Catholic life of the school. The team's vision and skill set provides an opportunity to facilitate the further development of religious education by giving the lead more ownership of her role as part of her ongoing professional development.
- Governors are integral to the success of very good provision for the Catholic life of the school. They are enthusiastic about their roles and work effectively in partnership, thereby securing strong home, school, and parish partnerships. These could be further developed through a parent association or forum, which the school confirmed was under consideration.
- Parents speak of the support they receive from the school and how well they have been supported in recent difficult times.

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

- The Catholic life of the school is both modelled and nurtured by the headteacher, with support from the governors, the senior leadership team and the religious education Leader.
- The School's Governing Body provide support and challenge in equal measure. Governors work closely with the headteacher and the senior leadership team to foster the school's ongoing development and commitment to the Church and ensuring it reflects and serves its community
- Regular half termly monitoring visits conducted by the curriculum governor focus on the Catholic life of the school, as well as reviewing the curriculum offer being made to the pupils.
- Links with the parish are strong. The parish priest, who is a governor, is supportive of the school and indicated his willingness to further develop school and parish links. He is a welcome visitor to the school.
- Increasingly robust and reliable processes of self-evaluation are ensuring that evaluation of Catholic life is becoming more accurate.
- Through discussions and questionnaires, the school also asks parents, staff and pupils for their views and suggestions for improvement.
- Leaders are open to advice from outside agencies, including the diocese, and share a renewed determination to move the school forward in close and fruitful collaboration with the other Catholic schools in their partnership.
- The school's website is inviting and easy to navigate. There is much information for parents and prospective parents. There are also many indicators of the Catholic mission of the school. For example, the site includes a values and ethos section pictures of the pupils in prayer, and crosses created of pictures.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

2

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is good

- Pupils generally enter the school with limited knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith. However, evidence shows that they make good progress as they move through the school and the number of pupils working at the expected level and above increases.
- Attainment and progress in religious education data have been refined recently and provide a good analysis of pupils' stages of religious development. This data is beginning to be used more consistently and compares well with data from other core subjects over time. This now needs to be shared with staff so that there is a more precise understanding across the school of the attainment and progress of significant groups, who can be targeted to secure more accelerated improvement for them.
- Most pupils, relative to their age, are religiously literate and engaged; they use their knowledge, understanding, and skills to reflect spiritually and think ethically and theologically.
- Pupils concentrate well, are engaged in lessons, and are committed to improving their knowledge, understanding and skills. They are confident in sharing their ideas and thoughts.
- When provided, pupils enjoy challenging activities and respond well to opportunities that extend their learning. However, some year groups need to have greater challenges through tasks and feedback.
- Behaviour in and out of lessons is exemplary due to strong classroom management, creating an environment where the behaviour for learning is a strength.
- The quality of pupils' current written work shows good coverage and is mainly of a very good standard.

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is good

- Relationships between staff and pupils observed during lessons are positive and demonstrate mutual respect. Classroom management is strong and creates an environment where the behaviour for learning is conducive to learning challenges for pupils.
- Teaching is good, particularly in Key Stage 2, where some outstanding elements were evidenced. The challenge for more able pupils to further extend their knowledge, skills, and understanding needs to be embedded. Some teachers are more confident in their subject expertise and have a good understanding of how pupils learn. Where this is the case, more pupils make good progress in individual lessons and over time. The school should continue to use this knowledge of where teaching is a strength.
- Good use is made of religious art. In one lesson, an image of Jesus washing the disciples' feet led pupils in groups to discuss the picture and consider God's love being unconditional. This led to a pupil summing up with the statement, '*Jesus was*



like the servant as he was always helping and making sure he gave others everything they needed as an example for us.'

- Teachers are skilled at filtering pupils' responses to maintain the lesson's purpose. They manage time well to secure good learning in lessons and across sequences of lessons. Teachers use questioning effectively during lessons, including open-ended questions to explain and discuss themes, thus improving learning for most pupils.
- Other adults in class are used very effectively to keep individuals and groups focused on the task and to optimise learning. Their input is discreet and productive.
- Teachers involve pupils in evaluating their achievements, but this is not yet targeted to provide opportunities for pupils to work outside of the core religious education scheme to widen their experiences and enrich their learning with a particular emphasis on the more able. Consequently, accelerated progress is sometimes inhibited.
- Achievement and effort are reinforced through positive praise and achievements, leading to good motivation levels for pupils.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is good

- The school self-evaluates its leadership and management of religious education as good, and inspectors were able to corroborate this judgement.
- Because leaders follow the 'The Way, the Truth and the Life' scheme of work and ensure the directed amount of time is allocated to the teaching of religious education, St Helen's Catholic Primary School meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales relating to religious education.
- The leaders and governors of the school ensured that the teaching of religious education remained a top priority throughout periods of lockdown caused by the pandemic.
- In their very accurate self-evaluation, the school states that teachers, to their credit, adapted planning to provide continuous remote learning for those pupils who worked from home.
- Leaders plan the monitoring of religious education on a termly basis. Consequently, areas for development are routinely identified and actioned. The subject leader checks to ensure actions have been implemented and assesses whether further action is then required.
- Leaders and governors use monitoring and evaluation to plan improvements to religious education, as evidenced in the school's religious education action plan.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

2

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship and Prayer Life is good

- St Helen's is a prayerful and spiritual school where worship is a regular and meaningful part of the day. From the earliest age, pupils act reverently and show respect when worshipping.
- Pupils respond positively and actively to worship, prayer and liturgy in various ways through singing, music, dance, drama and art. The school has been working with the Director of the Southwark Singing Programme. He currently provides singing lessons to Year 3 pupils and coordinates hymns being learnt with those played by the organist at the local parish.
- Pupils express their thoughts and feelings openly when worshipping within their school community; this positively impacts their spiritual and moral development.
- Pupils are encouraged to create an atmosphere conducive to prayer, reflecting in silence and confidently joining in community prayers.
- With support, pupils prepare and participate in collective worship. They know the elements to include but rely heavily on structures and formats provided by adults. They need to develop more independence and confidence in leading collective worship using a variety of approaches.
- Good use is made of 'The Wednesday Word' resource to provide a framework for pupil led worship and reflection. The link to the online version is sent to staff and parents weekly.
- Plans are in place to give pupils more ownership of the promotion of the school's Catholic life by further developing the roles of the School Council and Faith Leader groups to provide opportunities for pupils to initiate, plan and deliver collective worship.
- Pupils clearly articulated interest in and respect for other faiths. They understand that other religions have different traditions, and these are respected. Parents generally supported the programme of teaching about other faiths and supported proposals to provide pupils with opportunities to visit other places of worship.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is good

- The quality of collective worship provided by the school is good. It reflects the Catholic character of the school. Collective worship has a high profile and is central to the life of the school.
- Themes for collective worship are carefully thought out and include the key liturgical themes of the Church's year, gospel messages and statements by which to live.
- Parents and governors are regularly invited into school to attend collective worship and said they appreciate and enjoy the experiences. They are invited to join the school in worship, recognising that they are a vital part of the school community and that prayer and worship are part of all school celebrations. Effective use is made of



resources, including film clips, music and artefacts. Drama, dance and role play are occasionally used to illustrate the message, and this aspect could be further developed.

- In an assembly attended, pupils were very respectful and settled. They gathered quietly, and a peaceful atmosphere was created through the use of music and singing. The worship was well led with good questioning. Pupils read bidding prayers, and good use was made Sunday's gospel reading which was read by a pupil and projected on a screen with pupils leaving to take forward a linked message for the week to 'Take God's love forward', and which would be followed up in class.
- Each class has their own prayer ladder, which is used as a focal point in the classroom. Each prayer ladder has a range of different religious items to aid prayer, as well as multicultural images. Pupils should be given greater access to bibles and utilise them to enable them to source their own choices of scripture and learn how to navigate and compare scripture texts.
- An excellent example of a very reflective class-based act of worship was attended. The focal point of the lit candle to engage pupils in reflection about a scripture passage could be usefully shared across the school.
- Teachers relate their own faith experiences reflecting the school's strength in relating religious education to the daily life of everyone. It clearly resonated with the pupils.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is good

- The headteacher and religious education coordinator know how to plan and deliver good experiences of collective worship. They understand the church's liturgical year, its seasons and symbols and ensure that quality displays around the school reflect this.
- There is a good partnership with the local parish community. Good use of the nearby church for Masses and services and, where appropriate to illustrate the school's religious education scheme and key events in the liturgical year.
- Governors often attend services and Masses and review the provision made for collective worship led by pupils in the classroom.
- Through the school's monitoring and evaluation systems, leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for the development of collective worship.
- As a parent wrote on their questionnaire, *'I am happy with the way the school guides my child on religious beliefs. All staff teach respect and kindness, making my child a better person. I recommend the school to friends without hesitation, and my friend is likewise happy with the school, curriculum and education.'*