



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Inspection Report



Name of School: Holy Cross Primary School

LEA: Essex

Inspection Date: 4th July 2017

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: 371
Appropriate Authority: The Governing Body
Date of previous inspection: March 2012

School Address:
Traceys Road
Harlow
Essex
CM18 6JJ

Tel. No. 01279 424452
Headteacher: Miss S McGuiggan
Chair of Governors: Mr Nigel Long

Information about the school

Holy Cross Catholic Primary Academy is a two form entry school in Harlow, Essex and part of the diocese of Brentwood. The school serves the parish of St Luke's and Holy Cross and the Church of the Assumption, Mulberry Green. There are currently 371 pupils aged 4-11 on roll. The proportion of Catholic pupils is 71% and rising, with the remaining pupils coming from other Christian denominations or other faiths. Pupils come from a range of ethnic backgrounds, the largest being White British or African heritage. A large number of pupils have English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is around the national average. There are close links with other Catholic schools in Harlow and schools from a wider geographical area including the secondary school to which most pupils transfer at the end of Key Stage 2.

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

Holy Cross is an outstanding Catholic School. Strong and effective leadership at all levels gives a clear sense of purpose and direction to the Catholic life of the school. Pupils benefit from excellent opportunities for spiritual and moral development which are part of the provision for religious education, prayer and collective worship. The Catholicity of the school is evident in all aspects of its work. There is a clear focus on reviewing provision as well as putting in place robust systems for teaching, learning, assessment and monitoring. Pastoral care is very good and shared by all members of the school community. Pupils enjoy school and appreciate opportunities given to be involved in all aspects of its life. Parents praise the good standard of education and way the school communicates with them. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils' standards of attainment meet or exceed diocesan expectations.

The school has an excellent capacity for sustained improvement. The last inspection in 2012 identified the need to embed cross-curricular links in religious education planning and to ensure that lessons provide outstanding opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning. These areas have been very well addressed and are evident in teachers' planning. Improved assessment and careful tracking have led to higher standards of attainment in religious education. The school's mission statement, 'Christ is the centre of our lives, our learning and friendships, in a safe, happy and caring community where all are welcome,' has been reviewed by pupils, staff and governors and is well known by the whole community. There is a subject team for religious education which includes staff from across the school. Members of the team have an excellent understanding of their role and are well placed to support colleagues. The school gives a high profile to religious education and has effective strategies to share good practice with new staff.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to implement the areas for development identified in the religious education action plan especially those linked to assessment for learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 1

Attainment and progress in religious education are very good. Pupils work with interest and commitment and say they enjoy their religious education lessons and appreciate the wide range of tasks involved. Behaviour for learning is very good and pupils work well together whether in groups or pairs. Pupils are given an excellent start in Early Years which is built upon as they progress through the school. Older pupils can work independently and use research skills to extend their understanding. In an excellent Year 6 lesson pupils studied part of Luke's gospel to explore Jesus' mission to bring the good news to everyone. In the discussion which followed, pupils were able to reflect on scripture from many angles and refer to the prophets including Micah and Isaiah. They were able to identify sources of religious belief and link them to their lives today. The school has made an investment in teaching assistants which is ensuring all groups of pupils are well supported and make good progress. As a result, pupils have a good knowledge of the Catholic faith appropriate to their ages. Workbooks are very well presented, show coverage of the curriculum and indicate good progress made by all groups. Standards of attainment are in line with and often exceed diocesan expectations.

Pupils make an outstanding 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. They are keen to take on responsibilities including 'Mini Vinnies,' peer mediators, play leaders and school council members. All Year 6 pupils are given responsibilities to support the life of the school. The newly established 'Mini Vinnie' group have organised a Community 'clear up' day and led fund raising efforts to support the school's twin parish, Regina Coeli, in South Africa. Many local, national and international charities are supported throughout the year including 'Upwards With Downs', Cafod, British Heart Foundation and Save the Children. Pupils understand that the teachings of Jesus underpin their response to the needs of others. The school also enables pupils to reach out to the local community through taking part in events including carol singing and entertaining older parishioners. Links with the Catholic secondary school to which most pupils transfer are very good. Pupils are thoughtful, courteous, care for their school and each other. They are able to apply aspects of Jesus' life and teaching to their own lives and understand that a sense of service is part of being a member of a Catholic community. They also value the sense of friendship and belonging created within the school.

Pupils respond positively to opportunities to lead and participate in the school's collective worship. They are eager to take part in class assemblies which are held each week in the parish church. During the inspection, morning worship in Year 3 was led by two girls who prepared a scripture reading, explored it with fellow pupils and read prayers they had written as well as leading excellent singing. Pupils are able to pray in different ways and at different times. They use scripture, the traditional prayers of the church, reflection and their own prayers, examples of which were seen during the inspection. They experience traditional Catholic devotions including The Rosary, Stations of the Cross, The Angelus and a May procession. There are regular whole school Masses to which parents and parishioners are invited as well as Reconciliation services in Advent and Lent. A member of staff works with the parish priest and runs an 'altar servers' club to train pupils in the requirements of the post. The parish Holy Saturday Vigil is part of the school's preparation for Easter and many pupils participate in Masses as servers, readers, offertory and choir.

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. The school employs a learning mentor and inclusion manager who provide extra support for pupils and families. Pupils spoken to said they feel safe, well cared for and know where to go when they need support. They value being in a friendly environment where they are listened to and encouraged to help each other. Parents spoken to said they value the care given to their children, good communication with staff and the quality of education.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

School leaders and governors are deeply committed to the Church's mission in education. The headteacher supported by senior staff demonstrates excellent leadership of the school through the way she promotes the provision for its Catholic life. She has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development which she shares with the whole school community. Governors support her in this and are committed to providing the best possible environment for the pupils. The development of Catholic life is seen as central to all that happens and there is a strong commitment both to improve in all aspects of education and to provide high quality care for pupils. Together the headteacher and subject leadership team have a very good knowledge of areas for development in religious education and are well placed to support colleagues. All staff are given opportunities to extend their knowledge and improve their skills through meetings and attendance at diocesan led training.

The subject leadership team along with the headteacher monitors religious education by means of lesson observations, work scrutiny and joint planning which is followed by feedback to individual teachers. They are supported in this by the parish priest who helps to assess and moderate pupils' work. They also work closely with other deanery schools and schools from other deaneries to share good practice. The team produces an annual religious education action plan which is reviewed termly by staff and governors leading to a clear understanding of current developments. Members of the team attend governors' meetings to give a full picture of religious education throughout the school. There are regular sessions for staff development to ensure teachers are secure and confident in their delivery of the 'Come and See' religious education programme. Planning includes teaching assistants who play a key role in

the school. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and six of them have the CCRS or equivalent qualification.

The experienced Chair of Governors who is also link governor for religious education works closely with senior leadership. He has a very good understanding of strengths and areas for development. He ensures all governors are well informed about the life of the school through the headteacher's report, meetings with subject leaders and frequent visits. The parish priest also plays a key role in the life of the school, visits frequently and is familiar with all aspects of the school's religious life. Governors have an excellent understanding of their role and are well placed to challenge and support. A 'governor buddy' scheme where each governor has a link to a class is sustained as pupils move from Year 1 to Year 6. This ensures that governors have very good knowledge of the day to day life of the school. They are present and available for parents on Open Evenings and often have lunch with the pupils. A 'Governors' Day' with the focus on Catholic life and a retreat day for governors and staff all go to ensure the commitment of all leaders to the Church's mission in education.

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. Leaders ensure pupils have a good understanding of the diversity of belief in modern life linked to British values. One parent spoken to commented that the school's 'International Day' and multi-cultural week enabled her children to celebrate their Buddhist faith. Pupils are given very good opportunities to develop a sense of service and show compassion for others through charitable fund raising and involvement in the local community. Opportunities for spiritual development ensure that pupils are able to reflect on their own lives and experiences and link them to the life and teachings of Jesus. Parents are invited to many school events and are kept well informed about their children's welfare and progress through regular meetings and reports. Curriculum information letters include religious education which enables parents to support their children's faith journey.

Provision

Grade 1

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is very good. During the inspection lessons observed were good or outstanding. Lessons are planned with clear learning intentions and an interesting range of activities. High quality resources including class sets of bibles are used effectively to ensure pupils are familiar with scripture. In all classes observed pupils worked with interest and made good progress. Teachers respond very well to pupils' comments and take opportunities to develop understanding. Higher order questioning was a feature of lessons observed. The good use of teaching assistants is a strength of the school. Marking is positive, interactive and includes suggestions of ways to improve. Assessment, planning and tracking support the learning and progress of all groups of pupils. Slight underachievement among a small group of boys has been addressed by including a wider range of activities to engage their interest. These include drama, role play, 'hot seating' and debate. The school has identified the need for further development of assessment for learning which it is currently addressing.

The quality of the religious education curriculum is excellent. At least 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education. This is demonstrated by the budget devoted to it and the current level of resources. Each class has its own saint and the four house saints of the British Isles are enabling pupils to increase their knowledge of qualities valued by the Church. Vibrant religious education displays around the school emphasise the centrality of faith to the work of the community. The 'Come and See' programme is enhanced by 'Journey in Love,' cross curricular links and use of Cafod resources. Links with a school in South Africa assists in developing understanding of other cultures. 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. Music also contributes very well to the religious education curriculum and Catholic life of the school. Singing is excellent and the school choir has been included in the official Commonwealth Children's choir this year. The support given to families through a breakfast club and other extra-curricular activities gives a strong sense of community to the school. There is every indication that current very good standards are likely to be maintained or improved.

Collective worship at Holy Cross is outstanding and central to the life of the school. Assemblies and liturgies contribute greatly to the spiritual development of pupils. They often 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. They welcome opportunities to plan and lead collective worship. Each classroom has a prayer focus with religious artefacts and display boards which include key religious vocabulary and children's work. Masses and age appropriate liturgies are celebrated in school and church throughout the year. Parents, families and parishioners are invited to many celebrations. The parish priest visits frequently and supports the school through Masses and liturgies as well as offering pastoral care on an informal basis. There are also very strong parish links through sacramental programmes and pupils' involvement in Sunday Mass.

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.