



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Denominational (S48) Inspection Report

Name of School: Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Local Authority: Thurrock

Inspection Date: 20th March 2019

Reporting Inspector: Pamela Brannigan

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005 and 2011.

Type of School: Voluntary Aided
School Category: Primary
Age range of pupils: 3 – 11
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 253
Appropriate Authority: The Governing Body
Date of previous inspection: March 2014

School Address:
Daiglen Drive
South Ockenden
Thurrock RM15 5RP
Tel. No. 01708 853000

Head of School: Ciara Manning
Executive Headteacher: Chris Birtles
Co- chairs of Governors: Rachel Thomas
Olivia Akueme

Information about the school

Holy Cross Catholic Primary school is situated in South Ockenden, Thurrock and is part of the Diocese of Brentwood. The school is owned by the La Sainte Union who are its trustees. It serves the Holy Cross Parish, South Ockenden with a small number of pupils coming from the parishes of St Thomas of Canterbury, Grays and Our Lady Star of the Sea, Tilbury. There are currently 253 pupils aged 3-11 on roll; this number will diminish as the school completes its move from 1.5 to one form entry. The majority of pupils are from Black African or Black Caribbean backgrounds with around 45% speaking English as an additional language. Almost 48% of pupils are Catholics with the remainder coming from other Christian denominations and other faiths. 79% of the teachers are Catholics and two have the CCRS qualification. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is higher than the national average. The school provides a very wide range of extra-curricular activities including before and after school clubs. There are very good links with other deanery schools and there are proposals for the school to join a Multi Academy Trust in the near future. Since the last inspection several senior members of staff including the Headteacher have left and an interim arrangement is currently in place. At present, there is an Executive Headteacher working with a Head of School and an Assistant Headteacher.

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. After a period of change, effective leadership at all levels gives a clear sense of purpose and direction to the Catholic Life of the School which is shared by Staff and Governors. Prayer and Collective Worship are central to the spiritual and moral development of pupils who have a sense of belonging to a community where helping and supporting others is part of their faith journey. Pupils are given frequent opportunities to attend Mass, where they take a leading role as altar servers and readers, as well as singing and composing bidding prayers. Outcomes for pupils are good and improving with provision for all abilities and needs. Members of the senior leadership team offer very good support to new and less experienced teachers. The Head of School, who is also the subject leader for Religious Education, monitors teaching and learning which is leading to very good standards of attainment. The parent body offers very good support through fund raising and involvement in the wider life of the school. Parents praise the standard of education and the catholicity of the school. They praise the way school leaders listen to their concerns and communicate with them. They are kept informed of the content of the curriculum through a termly newsletter which outlines the topics for the term including religious events and Holy Days of Obligation. A monthly newsletter includes a reflection linked to the Catholic Life of the School. Pupils say they enjoy school and appreciate the many opportunities given to be involved in its life.

The school has a very good capacity for sustained improvement. The last inspection in 2014 identified areas for development linked to shared moderation of pupils' work and providing additional places for prayer and meditation. These areas have been well addressed through links with other deanery schools and the provision of a beautiful prayer garden. The Head of School, supported by the Executive Headteacher, is deeply committed to the Church's mission in education and shares her vision with the whole community. As subject leader she has put in place a 'Religious Education Action Plan' which has a clear focus on staff development and raising standards. The school's Mission Statement Motto, 'Building relationships with God and each other, working hard in faith and hope to give our best in all things,' is well known by pupils and regularly reviewed with stakeholders.

What the school should do to improve further:

As identified in the 'Religious Education Action Plan':

- Provide staff with appropriate continual professional development to develop skills, knowledge and understanding in Religious Education.
- Raise standards of attainment and progress in Religious Education for all groups of pupils.

At Holy Cross, pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the School to a very great extent. They have an excellent understanding of the Mission Statement which is on display in every classroom. Each class is named after a saint which enables pupils to deepen their understanding of the qualities valued by the Church. Pupils are given many opportunities to take on responsibilities to develop the Catholic character of the school through membership of the school council, as house captains, assembly monitors and as prefects. Pupils spoken to have a very strong sense of belonging to a Catholic community and value the ethos of the school and the many opportunities they have to contribute to its Catholic life through service to the school. This includes support for each other, care for the environment and helping to run lunchtime activities. They understand that they share responsibility for the life of the school and have developed a strong sense of service to the wider world. Pupils are given opportunities to help local and national charities which have included Anchor House homeless charity, Brentwood Catholic Children's Society and Cafod. At harvest time the food collected is offered to the local Thurrock Foodbank.

Provision for the Catholic Life of the School is outstanding. The School's Mission Statement underpins the behaviour of all members of the community. The core values of 'Honesty, Respect, Forgiveness, Tolerance, Justice' are used as a reminder to the whole school of its vision. A wide range of assemblies and Collective Worship are part of the school's provision where key celebrations in the Church's Liturgical Year enable pupils to develop their faith journey. The whole school attends Mass at the parish church every Friday in Advent and Lent where pupils read, lead prayers, sing in the choir and act as altar servers. Parish links are excellent with school and parish coming together for celebrations and fund-raising activities. Pupils are given opportunities to broaden their understanding of global issues including climate change and the importance of recycling. All staff promote high standards of behaviour and are excellent role models for pupils. Pastoral care includes employing a Family Support Worker to offer practical help to parents with a range of issues linked to housing, benefits and immigration. A fitness club is helping families tackle the rise in obesity in pupils. Coffee mornings are held for parents three times a week to enable them to become involved in school life. Holy Cross is a flagship school for Dot.Com Children's Foundation whose family programme is followed throughout the school. It enables pupils to learn about positive behaviours and how to keep themselves safe. The presence of a counsellor from Brentwood Catholic Children's Society twice a week enables a quick response when the need arises. The Inclusion Leader is part of a team which prioritises pupils' emotional well-being as an essential part of provision.

Leaders and Governors are most effective in promoting the Catholic Life of the School. This is demonstrated by the way self-evaluation and the school improvement plan are explicitly focused on Catholic life and aims to enhance current provision. Leaders monitor and evaluate outcomes in order to plan future improvements. Continuing professional development is offered to all staff and is engaging, well planned and effective. The Head of School as subject leader attends diocesan courses linked to the new Religious Education framework and assessment. She also provides a model of good practice by demonstration lessons for teachers new to Catholic education and also offers support in planning and assessment. She has plans to develop a pupils' 'Faith Council' which will be active in both school and parish to further strengthen links. Governors make a significant contribution to Catholic life by their commitment and involvement in school activities. They regularly attend Collective Worship and whole school services. The Parish Priest from Holy Cross demonstrates a high level of commitment to the school by frequent visits, involving pupils in Mass celebrations and acting as an additional teaching resource.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**Grade 2**

Religious Education at Holy Cross is good. Pupils generally achieve well and enjoy their lessons. They make good progress and behaviour for learning is very good. Pupils are given an effective foundation in Early Years which is built upon as they progress through the school. In lessons pupils are actively engaged and keen to contribute to discussions. They enjoy a range of activities including art, drama, music and discussions and say they like Religious Education. They can think ethically and theologically

through referring to Jesus' message when considering how they should act. They have an understanding of what it means to be a Christian, as well as a knowledge of other faiths. Workbooks are well presented and show coverage of the curriculum, good progress and a range of activities. By the end of Key Stage 2 standards in Religious Education meet diocesan expectations.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education is generally good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, high expectations and adapt their teaching style to meet the needs of their classes. This ensures all pupils are fully engaged. Lessons observed during the inspection were good, some with outstanding features. Tasks are differentiated to enable all pupils to achieve well and there are plans to further challenge the most able pupils. A new system of tracking of pupil progress has shown improvement from term to term. Good quality resources including class sets of bibles are used effectively to engage interest and enable pupils to become familiar with Scripture. Marking and constructive feedback points the way to further improvement and leads to a high level of engagement. Teachers new to Catholic education are well supported and encouraged to undertake further training. A day of reflection at Aylesford Priory is planned for all staff later this year. Teaching Assistants are used well to support individuals and groups of pupils. The Head of School as subject leader is currently revising the assessment process in line with diocesan guidelines. She is also engaged in developing moderation of pupils' work across the deanery to ensure consistency in judgements.

School Leaders and Governors are strongly committed to Religious Education and ensure the curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference with at least 10% of curriculum time devoted to the subject. The Religious Education curriculum is delivered through the 'Come and See' programme and is enhanced by the 'Journey in Love' scheme. The Head of School along with senior leadership ensure that Religious Education and the Catholic ethos of the school are central to self-evaluation. Religious Education has full parity with other core curriculum subjects and includes provision for professional development and resourcing. The system for monitoring and evaluation is leading to good outcomes for all groups of pupils. The action plan for Religious Education is shared with the Governing Body who visit the school frequently and are aware of current developments in the subject. New Governors have been supported by the Executive Headteacher and the Diocesan Adviser to enable them to fulfil their role as effectively as possible.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Grade 1

Pupils enjoy many opportunities to participate in Collective Worship at Holy Cross whether at Mass, in class or during assemblies. Collective Worship is carefully planned to allow all pupils to come together for prayer and spiritual development. Parents and families are invited to many liturgies and attendance is good. Assembly monitors are proactive in all whole school acts of worship by setting the environment and choosing hymns and readings. They show an understanding of how to plan and lead worship. At Mass, pupils act as welcomers, altar servers, readers, singing and as signers. The Church's Liturgical Year is celebrated through whole school acts of worship which includes the wider community in Advent, Lent, Holy Week and First Holy Communion. The school's nativity play is performed in the church for parishioners as well as families. Pupils across the school are eager to participate in Collective Worship and are familiar with the traditional prayers of the Church as well as meditation and spontaneous prayer. They are familiar with devotions including the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross. The use of prayer boxes enables pupils to share their intentions and lead classroom prayer.

Collective Worship at Holy Cross is central to the life of the school and prayer is included in every celebration. Staff have a good understanding of the Church's Liturgical Year which is reflected in classroom prayer tables and display boards. They are confident in leading morning prayer and key stage assemblies. Liturgies led by school leaders affirm Gospel values and enable pupils to make links with their own lives. During the inspection, the Head of School led an assembly on the theme of 'Water' which included the Gospel reading of 'Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well'. Pupils could identify the significance of water in the Bible including Jesus' baptism and miracles as well as Noah and Moses. Responses showed pupils had a clear understanding of the relevance to their own lives. They showed interest, concentration and sang very well. Services of Reconciliation are part of the provision for Collective Worship during Advent and Lent.

Leaders and Governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship as part of their self-evaluation process. They give a high priority to the planning of quality liturgies and assemblies. Leaders ensure all staff are given guidance on liturgical formation and the delivery of Collective Worship to enable them to lead a whole school assembly each term. Governors are active parishioners who hold key roles in the life of the Church and are known to pupils. Leaders are visible and committed role models for the whole school community and have an extensive understanding of the Church's Liturgical Year with its seasons and feasts. There is a strong sense of the traditions of the Church and the legacy of La Sainte Union.

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.