

INSPECTION REPORT

HOLYROOD CATHOLIC INFANT SCHOOL

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URN:

D/ES Number:

Headteacher: Mrs D Slaght
Chair of Governors: Dr P Gilvin

Date of inspection: 26-27 March 2008
Date of previous inspection: 27 March 2003

Reporting Inspector: Mr T Smith

Description of School

Holyrood Catholic Infant School serves the parishes of Holyrood Swindon, St Peter's West Swindon, St Joseph's Wroughton and Sacred Heart Wootton Bassett. Almost all (94%) of the pupils are Catholics. The school is significantly oversubscribed. The school's Admission Number is 60, and there are 180 pupils on roll accommodated in 6 classes. Families within the school's catchment area come from a range of traditions and socio-economic backgrounds.

Since the last inspection, the number of pupils from diverse ethnic backgrounds has increased significantly and the proportion of those for whom English is an additional language has risen to 40% overall. This is high compared to the national average. In the current foundation year the figure is 50% including children from Goa, Kerala, Sri Lanka, Brazil and from various African and European communities. The school is held in high regard in the Swindon Local Authority and is recognised as a model for successful work with English as an additional language.

The school has been awarded the following quality marks: Active Mark, Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark, Healthy Schools Award, "Trident" award for student placements.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

This is an outstanding Catholic school. The good work over the whole range of school life is recognised and appreciated within the local and wider communities. The governors, staff and volunteer assistants provide an environment of welcome and care in well-maintained and comfortable surroundings, which are still being improved within a century old building. The pupils are very well behaved, friendly and secure. They are happy to talk about their activities, relationships, and expectations, and indicate their pride in achievements and describe many opportunities for fun as they learn and play. Parents' comments are very complimentary and enthusiastic; typical among them are: "...such a warm atmosphere...a wonderful Catholic ethos...I couldn't ask the staff to care more for my child...social events help our family feel part of the whole community" "...cultural/spiritual beliefs are high on the agenda as well as the appreciation of others and their situations...I would recommend this school to others". "...the way they treat and teach the pupils is fantastic and my son has come on leaps and bounds since joining".

Standards achieved in core subjects by the end of Year 2 are well above the national average and the standard in Religious Education (RE) matches this. The RE programme meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference in terms of time and breadth of content. All pupils make good progress. Personal and spiritual development is

outstanding. Provision for pupils with special needs, including the high proportion with English as an additional language (EAL), is thorough and very effective right through from the foundation year. The school caters well for the more able pupils. The headteacher leads with vision and flair, sets and models high standards of management and encourages colleagues to develop their roles and skills with confidence in an explicit Catholic setting. Links with the parish, community groups and agencies are strong as are the inter-school partnerships, including teacher exchanges.

Grade 1

Improvement since the last inspection

These issues for action identified in the last inspection (2003) have been thoroughly addressed and evaluated with particular regard to the school's increased ethnic diversity.

- Consider providing occasional opportunities for pupils to experience more intimate celebrations of Mass and seek ways to make use of the Eucharistic Prayers approved for Children's Liturgies.
- Focus the learning objectives in teachers' lesson plans more tightly to ensure that lessons have a clear and measurable outcome.

Grade 1

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

The school is very well placed to make further progress by drawing upon the clear vision, sound judgement and energy of the management team and the evident support of the staff, governors, parents and the wider community. Information in the RE Self Evaluation form was thorough, the judgements perceptive and accurate, and the items identified for further improvements, in the scrutiny of work for example, appear appropriate and realistic. Following this inspection these will be reviewed and refined, and added to the School Improvement Plan (SIP).

Leadership and management in RE is already most effective and should ensure that all staff continue to teach the subject well and with increasing confidence. RE is given a high priority in the SIP, which includes support for the subject leader and teachers through training and extra resources. The quality of the RE curriculum and Catholic life in the school is monitored through a whole school performance management objective.

The introduction of "In the beginning", a course for personal, health and sex education, is planned for September 2008 with training from diocesan advisors and with close links with colleagues in Holy Rood Junior School. The current budget for RE materials will support this course.

Grade 1

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop the use of assessment level descriptors in planning and in some marking of children's work.
- Review the provision for Sex and Relationships Education to ensure that it meets the diocesan and statutory requirements.
- Explore and consider ways of improving communications with all communities.

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding.

The leadership offered by the headteacher and senior team is visionary and bold, and the process of management is corporate, energetic and effective right down to the involvement of the very young school councillors. (Their sympathetic and practical views were impressive). Underpinned by effective systems for identifying needs, for providing resources and for evaluating achievements, the school's development has been dynamic and successfully responsive to its multi-ethnic constituency.

Unified by the well publicised, and often recited, Mission Statement, the school community has a distinctive and strong Catholic ethos in which the pupils develop well as learners and friends. Governors and staff work hard to fulfil the school's vision for a Catholic community, not least by providing an environment which is attractive, safe and enjoyable, and by projecting themselves as excellent role models. Many parents have commented most appreciatively on these attributes and are generous in their praise of the qualities of the headteacher and her staff.

Grade 1

Collective Worship

The quality of collective worship is outstanding.

The school day includes special times for prayer, there are regular worship assemblies and there is weekly attendance at Mass in the parish church next door. Parents and parishioners come in force to celebrate with the pupils to the extent that classes may repeat their assemblies for even more visitors. A selection of simple paraliturgies has also been used for assemblies. This has resulted in the pupils having a greater understanding of the Mass; for which the pupils help to prepare. There is a school Mass in church every fortnight, which is also attended by many parishioners. The liturgy is planned with the needs of the children in mind for example, by using the version of the Eucharistic Prayer approved for use with young children. The priest makes every effort to include the children in the liturgy. Also, special Masses and events relating to particular communities are celebrated at the school and in the parish.

The assembly observed – the first presented by one of the reception classes – developed the Easter story. It was planned with care and imagination, included pupils' own contributions and reflected some of the essential features of Catholic prayer. The

worship was accompanied by joyful singing, lots of appropriate action and words confidently delivered with time for reflection; a most uplifting experience.

The prayer life of the school is well established as a regular and engaging feature in the classes, staff meetings, assemblies and liturgies. It is enhanced by well-displayed and appropriate symbols, by pictures and artefacts around the school, at the classroom "prayer tables" and at the circle-time focus arrangement. As well as learning and reciting formal prayers, the pupils have many opportunities to compose and say their own and to volunteer spontaneous prayers. Teachers carefully encourage and model the importance of quiet and composure at prayer times, so that even the youngest respond with a commendable degree of reverence. Classes have several collections of the children's prayers in illustrated folders.

Grade 1

Community Cohesion

This school is highly regarded by the parish and by the wider local community. The headteacher, staff, governors and children have been successful in engaging with many organisations and groupings in Swindon and beyond to promote mutual respect and valued relationships. There is a broad approach to promoting community cohesion that encompasses the curriculum, ethos and activities. There are clear aims to enhance current practises, to improve means of communication and to effect as much involvement as possible from everyone associated with the school.

The pupils are reminded, as they pray, of the school's Mission Statement: to care for God's world and to love and forgive others. They accept and celebrate the diversity of their own community and learn how they may actively reach out beyond the school and their immediate family. Their support for CAFOD and other charities is well documented and features in assembly presentations, displays and study links. What they learn from and about each other already contributes to community cohesion by giving an impetus to undertake various projects and improve their existing work.

The sense of inclusion and equal opportunity is strong within the school's ethos. There is considerable support for the high proportion of pupils (and family members) for whom English is an additional language. High standards of teaching, with good role modelling and a curriculum, which promotes common values and builds the children's understanding of their diverse world, underpin the progress made by all the pupils in this aspect of school life. The school council members, elected by their peers following a "publicity campaign," have a voice in the organisation of the school and thereby a sense of how the world should work for "the common good". The school endeavours to maintain and improve means of communication and outreach to a diverse community. Providing translations of essential information and arranging more informal meetings for parents are being considered.

The school is a popular and valued place for formal and informal work experience, and it has significant inter-school links with Holy Rood Junior School and with The Drove Primary School, which accommodates several Catholic children unable to have places at Holy Rood Infants.

Swindon Parks Department has invited the school to share in the restoration of the local Queens Park, which the children use in school time for various lessons. Projects will be planned in collaboration with other community groups.

School masses and celebrations, both in the school and in church, are usually public events and well attended.

Grade 2

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

From their diverse starting-points on entry, most pupils rapidly progress in R.E. through the foundation year and they reach a commendable standard by the end of Year 2 which at least matches, and in some cases exceeds, the standards achieved in other core subjects. The generally high standard in R.E. is well supported by the standards achieved in Literacy. The scrutiny of work and teachers' records indicates that overall progress is consistent through the school, and that the standard achieved is above the average for comparative schools. A moderated and annotated portfolio of R.E. work samples from Year 2 is passed to Holy Rood Junior School as the pupils transfer.

Grade 1

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

The majority of teachers hold the Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies or an equivalent. They draw upon personal and family experiences to add a dimension of realism and to help the pupils understanding of the teaching points.

The choice of topics, selection of activities and use of resources is well planned and organised in year-group teams. The lessons seen were presented with skill and confidence, and had an appropriate balance of oral engagement, well-managed practical tasks (including preparations for assembly presentations), and time for reflection. There was sufficient challenge in the questioning and pupils' responses were carefully coaxed and encouraged with praise. There were instances of individual pupils responding with a lot of thought and obvious spirituality. Teaching points were made clearly and repeated in the plenary review. There was evident differentiation in the directed tasks and in the level of assistance given. If time ran-out before tasks were completed, teachers regarded that it was important to find additional time later.

Support given by the assisting staff and volunteer adults enhanced the pupils' level of engagement. The quality of marking and assessment of work is high and there was evidence that RE topics featured in cross-curricular planning. Peer assessment and adult/child discussions have contributed to raising standards of achievement and enhance the quality of work. The pupils' knowledge and understanding of bible stories,

events in the life of Jesus, the church's sacraments and of other faith traditions are developing well.

The diversity of the Catholic community brings an added dimension to teaching and learning about the church, traditions and celebrations, and the teachers include this when appropriate.

Very good use was made of ICT for group-work during lessons and for compiling pictorial records, display items, and class prayer books. Skills drawn from literacy lessons were used effectively, and the use of drama, singing, art and role-play all sustained the pupils' interest and enjoyment of RE lessons. There was a good atmosphere in lessons and behaviour was excellent. The pupils appeared comfortable in whole class and group settings. They learn and progress very well in RE.

Grade1

Quality of the Curriculum

Whilst "Here I Am" is the main resource for the RE programme, it is creatively supported by a range of recently added texts like "God's Story", by audiovisual materials and from internet sources. The time requirement is met in full in timetabled lessons and in the teaching elements of assemblies and liturgies. Provision for RE, both formally and informally, has a very high priority especially in prayer and worship and in supporting the pupils' personal development. The ethnic diversity of the parish lends a richness to the school which the teachers like to incorporate into the RE curriculum and into celebratory activities.

The level of preparation, effective assessment and imaginative use of resources has led to improvements in the curriculum since the last inspection.

Progression and differentiation are evident between year groups when the same topic is being explored. Pupils appear to have a positive attitude to RE lessons and are beginning to develop and express their awareness of Christian life and its practical consequences.

RE themes are always linked within science and health education topics, whilst the Chingola School and CAFOD projects help with the study of the church in the world. Literacy and ICT skills are practised through RE activities.

Grade 1

Leadership and management of Religious Education

The leadership and management of RE is excellent. The present subject leader, who was appointed assistant headteacher in January 2008, has developed her leadership skilfully and successfully; and she is also subject-leader for music. She has confidently worked towards further improving the provision for RE, particularly in the areas of assessment for learning, and marking and moderation of work. Also, by attending, and then leading, training courses for RE, she has contributed to the raising of competence and

confidence among her colleagues. Comprehensive and up-to-date monitoring systems, recording of pupil's progress with samples of work and critical comments, and regular opportunities to review and plan are strengths of the provision of RE. The monitoring systems are shared and discussed with colleagues in the junior school.

The subject leader sets herself high standards in fulfilling her role and is alert to every aspect of RE teaching to support individual learning and personal development. Staff morale is good and each member offers others their support professionally and personally, and the pupils benefit accordingly.

Areas for development, noted in the action plan following the last RE inspection (2003), have been successfully addressed. Parents and governors receive regular reports, information and invitations to join with teachers to discuss sacramental preparation, for example. The assistant priest is a frequent visitor and is active in assisting with the RE programme and activities. He is also the link-governor for RE. There is a significant allocation within the school budget for new RE books and materials, which are well used.

Grade 1