



INSPECTION REPORT

Holy Rood R.C. Junior School

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D/ES Number: 866 5211

Headteacher: Mr Tony McAteer

Chair of Governors: Mgr Canon Richard Twomey

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Clifton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: 1-2nd February 2010
Date of previous inspection: 23-24th April 2007

Reporting Inspector: Mr Joseph Skivington

Description of School

An above average size junior school which is oversubscribed, Holy Rood has 271 pupils on roll of whom 92.5% are Catholic. The majority of children are drawn from three Catholic parishes of Swindon. The head teacher was confirmed in post in September 2009. The school has strong and fruitful links with the Holy Rood parish. Around 63% of the staff are Catholic. There has been a marked increase in recent years of Catholic Goan families moving into the area and the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Holy Rood provides an outstanding Catholic education for all its pupils. It is a fully inclusive community where all are welcome and accepted as individuals made in the image of God, and its ethos is characterised by openness to, and clear links with the parents, the parish, and the wider community. Pupils participate enthusiastically in and respond well to the excellent faith enriching provision for prayer life and liturgy. Although the parish church lies some distance away pupils take advantage of the many opportunities to be involved in parish life, and this demonstrates the sense of the mission of the school being part of the wider mission of the Church.

Outcomes from the religious education programme are outstanding. This is the result of good teaching throughout the school but particularly excellent teaching in Year 6. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as the others because of extra support in lessons and when they have tasks suited to their learning needs. The religious education programme makes an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

Grade 1

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

The school's capacity to sustain the high quality of care and education it provides is excellent. The new leadership has taken over a school which was improving year on year, having successfully tackled the areas for development highlighted in the last inspection. The governors, staff, pupils and parents, have been involved in a recent reflection and re-appraisal of the mission statement, and this has reinvigorated and re energised the whole school community. There is a proven effectiveness in using resources to tackle areas needing development and a restlessness, which constantly seeks ways to overcome any and all barriers to improvement. Leadership communicates an ambitious vision for the Catholic dimension of the school, and high expectation, very effectively.

Grade 1

What the school should do to improve further

- To ensure lesson objectives consistently take account of the learning needs of the more able pupils
- To bring any weaker teaching up to the level of the best, particularly by providing more enriched schemes of work and supporting resources

How good are outcomes for pupils, taking account of variations between different groups?

Students are fully involved in the Catholic life of the school and make an excellent contribution to it. They are remarkably articulate and mature, and proud to explain their significant contribution to the beautifully displayed mission statement. They feel their voice is heard through the school council and they take responsibility for their own lives and the care of the younger children. They absorb easily the shared values lived out in the Catholic ethos of the school and have a sound awareness of spiritual and moral matters which they are able to articulate well. They take full ownership in planning and preparing assemblies and Masses in school, and are loyal and enthusiastic servers at the altar in the parish Masses. They respond generously to the needs of others beyond the school, and this makes a valuable contribution to the welcoming openness and inclusivity of the school. Many are involved in fundraising for a variety of charities both home and overseas. There are plans to strengthen links with a local centre and residential homes.

Their response to and participation in the prayer life of the school is outstanding. They play an active part in liturgies, sing joyously, and compose very beautiful and heartfelt prayers which are collected, kept in the reflective corner of the classroom, and are said daily. A prayer tree is in constant use, where pupils can hang their prayers for private intentions. Their demeanour and reverence at prayer demonstrates a maturity beyond their years.

Achievement and progress in religious education is good throughout the school. Learning outcomes for the older pupils are excellent, particularly in learning from religion. They can discuss the topics they cover easily and relate them to their own lives. They have a very good grasp of the main tenets of the Faith, for instance the significance of the Last Supper, or the divinity of Jesus, as well as understanding the message of Jesus through His miracles and parables. They are developing critical thinking skills and this is evident in group and paired discussion in class. On occasion in some classes more able pupils are not always given sufficiently challenging tasks to match their abilities, often because the lesson objectives do not match or meet their learning needs. The rate of progress of the less able pupils and those with special educational needs, including those with English as an additional language, is similar to the other pupils. In lessons pupils work hard and enjoy the subject, particularly when they are challenged and engaged by effective teaching strategies which involve them in their own learning.

Grade 1

How effective are leaders and managers in developing the Catholic Life of the school?

Outstanding leadership and management promote the Catholic life of the school very effectively, with frequent monitoring, reviews, appraisal, and focussed planning for future improvement. The Catholic ethos of the school colours all of its activities. Care is taken to revisit the mission of the school, with a re-energising exercise which involved everyone at the start of the year, as well as substantial Inset for staff and governors on spirituality and Catholic education. Training has been made available so that nearly all staff have completed the RE teaching course, including those who are not Catholic. Prayer life and liturgies are monitored and reviewed very effectively, with close liaison between governors and senior leadership. The head teacher reports to the governing body on the quality of Catholic life at every governors' meeting. The school development plan objectives are linked closely to performance management. The high calibre of leadership and management is seen in the high morale of the

staff, the pupil's good care for one another, and the very good relationships between staff and pupils.

The governing body is made up of knowledgeable and challenging members who are totally committed to sustaining the very high standards in every area of school life. They have regular training on spirituality and Catholic education. They were closely involved from the outset in drawing up the school's RE self evaluation document. The chair, who is also the parish priest, is a frequent visitor and brings tremendous support, wisdom and a wide experience of Catholic education. All statutory and canonical responsibilities are met.

There is a clear policy promoted by governors and senior staff to promote community cohesion with the result that the school has an openness to all, all are included in its life, and its generous outreach to the local and the global community is a real strength. The school collaborates well with other schools and participates in community undertakings, including local charities. The curriculum provides an exploration of the other faiths, and good use is made of local resources, for example, a very successful visit from a Rabbi, which brought the topic on Judaism to life. International Days have provided further opportunity to study World Faiths and arouse the interest of the pupils, dispelling ignorance and nurturing respect for the beliefs and cultures of others. Those of other denominations or faiths feel that they are able to express their own beliefs comfortably, and all feel included and welcomed into every aspect of school life.

Grade 1

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Provision for prayer life is outstanding, a real strength of the school, because it meets very effectively the spiritual needs of the pupils, be it through assemblies and liturgies, or the opportunities for retreat, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and support for the parish- run preparation programme for First Holy Communion. There are many occasions during the day for spiritual nourishment through prayer and moments of reflection. The liturgical year is well marked and celebrated, particularly Advent, Lent and Holy Week. All pupils participate with enthusiasm and willingness, and as they move up the school, with confidence and conviction.

The excellent curriculum successfully meets the needs of all groups of pupils, as well as meeting the Curriculum Directory for Religious Education requirements, such as the allocation of time. Relationship education is dealt with sensitively and clearly from a Catholic standpoint. The beliefs of other faiths are explored through topics in the schemes of work. Resources are well managed, and ICT, art and music particularly are used imaginatively to colour and enrich the learning experience. Feedback from staff suggests the desirability for more resources to support teaching, and to enliven and enrich the schemes of work.

The quality of teaching and purposeful learning is good throughout, with some outstanding practice observed particularly with the older children. Outstanding teaching enables the pupils to learn really well because it engages their interest and provides challenge, so that the pupils themselves do the work and make the intellectual effort. Group and paired work were especially effective strategies because they provided peer learning and assessment. Where teaching was less effective the pace was slower, teacher talked more, and the needs of the more able pupils were not specifically planned for with sufficient challenge built in. Proactive teaching assistants provide invaluable support especially in allowing the teacher to split children into smaller groups with differentiated tasks tailored to their learning needs. The scrutiny of written work shows that where marking is helpful it makes a real difference to presentation, length and quality of work. Pupils' work and behaviour in lessons is excellent and they are enthusiastic about the subject. Their enjoyment is clearly evident.

Excellent assessment procedures are well embedded and effective use is made of levels to monitor progress and achievement. Tracking of individual progress is well developed, and provides teachers with a clearer picture of each pupil's strengths and where support and guidance are needed. The school is well aware that this knowledge is not always translated into the lesson plan to meet the learning needs of all the pupils, and is supporting those teachers through very fruitful advice from lesson observations. The marking of written work is very effective, setting up a remarkably helpful dialogue between teacher and pupil, which is driving improvement and a better quality of work over time.

Grade 1