



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD



Inspection Report

Name of School: St. Helen's Catholic Primary School

LEA: Newham

Inspection Date: 24th February 2015

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: 2 - 11
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 495
Appropriate Authority: The Governing Body
Date of previous inspection: 14th April 2008

School Address:
Chargeable Lane
Canning Town
London
E13 8DW

Tel. No. 020 7476 1785
Headteacher: Mrs G. Hicks
Chair of Governors: Mrs. T. Fayemi

Information about the school

St Helen's Catholic Primary School is a voluntary aided two form entry school in Canning Town in the London Borough of Newham and part of the diocese of Brentwood. It serves the parish of St Margaret's Canning Town although a small number of pupils come from farther afield. There are currently 495 pupils aged 2-11 on roll and the school is over subscribed. In 2013 the school was OFSTED registered for 2 year olds with capacity for 12 children each session. The proportion of Catholic pupils is 99%. There is an above average number of pupils from minority ethnic groups and 69% of pupils speak English as an additional language. Over a quarter of pupils come from refugee or asylum seeker families. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is above the national average as is the number of pupils who receive the pupil premium.

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Helen's is an outstanding school where leaders are deeply committed to the Church's mission in education. Outcomes for pupils, the provision for Catholic education and the capacity for sustained improvement are excellent. Opportunities for spiritual and moral development are interwoven through religious education, prayer and an understanding of what it means to be part of a Catholic community. The headteacher and senior leaders are excellent role models and have a clear vision for the whole school community which includes the well being of parents and families as well as initiatives linked to the Catholic life of the school. Pastoral care is excellent and shared by all members of the school community. Relationships are very good and pupils feel safe and well cared for. Both pupils and parents greatly appreciate the very many opportunities offered to develop a wide range of interests through before and after school clubs and lunch time activities. Parents also welcome the high standard of care, the Catholicity of the school and the way their children's prayer life is supported and developed. Pupils' standards of attainment are in line with and often exceed diocesan expectations.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

The school has an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement. The last inspection in 2008 identified no major areas for development other than those already stated by the school in its self evaluation. Since then standards in religious education have risen due to the implementation of the agreed understanding of levels of attainment which have informed lesson planning and assessment. Moderation meetings are held each term in school and the deanery to share judgements with other Catholic schools. The school gives a high profile to religious education and has very good strategies to share good practice and support new teachers.

The headteacher, senior leadership team and governors have a clear vision for the Catholicity of the school and the central place of prayer, worship and religious education. The headteacher ensures that all staff are given opportunities to extend their knowledge and improve their skills through staff meetings and attendance at diocesan led training. Seven teachers hold the CCRS qualification and three more are currently undertaking the course. Two teachers are studying for the Catholic Leadership qualification.

The current leadership has an excellent capacity to maintain effectiveness. The experienced headteacher shows outstanding leadership of a Catholic community through her strength and commitment to all aspects of school life. She, together with the two assistant headteachers and the subject leaders for religious education have a clear focus on prayer and worship in which they are well supported by all staff and the local parish priest. Governors are dedicated, have a wide range of expertise and are fully involved in the life of the school. Robust systems are in place to develop and strengthen initiatives which lead to good outcomes for all pupils. The current religious education subject leader is well placed to support colleagues. Together with the assistant subject leader she has attended diocesan training linked to the religious education scheme 'Come and See' which she has disseminated to colleagues.

What the school should do to improve further

As identified in the School Improvement Plan

- Develop a greater understanding of our Catholic Faith across the whole school community beginning with a whole school mission in 2015.
- Ensure that Gospel and British values are explicitly linked to all areas of the curriculum.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 1

Pupils make an excellent contribution to the Catholic life of the school. The mission statement is reviewed regularly and the motto is part of the badge on the school uniform. Pupils 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 membership of the School Council and as prefects. Several local, national and international charities are supported throughout the year including Cafod, support for a local homeless hostel and Macmillan Cancer Care. Pupils are encouraged to see themselves as part of a global community with responsibilities for other people and the environment. Pupils show respect for adults and each other. Behaviour is excellent and pupils value the sense of community and belonging created within the school.

Prayer and worship are central to school life. Pupils respond very positively to opportunities to develop their faith journey. They are given many opportunities to plan and participate fully in assemblies, masses and class acts of worship. Music and singing are exceptionally good and play a major part in worship. The Church's liturgical year with its seasons and celebrations are leading to a good understanding of the links with the sacraments and life of Christ. Each class has an attractive prayer table which is used as a focus for worship. Pupils are developing the ability to pray in different ways and at different times. They use scripture, the traditional prayers of the church, meditation and their own prayers, many examples of which were seen during the inspection. Pupils' own prayers are used in masses and assemblies. Older pupils 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.

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. Pupils feel safe, well cared for and know that all members of staff are there to help if they need support. Pupils value their school and all it offers. They know they are respected, listened to and encouraged to help each other. Parents speak very highly of the school, the headteacher and the care given to their children. They appreciate the support the school gives to the whole family and the help offered through parent workshops and courses. They praise the excellent quality of education, the support given to their children's prayer life and the commitment and approachability of staff.

Attainment in religious education is very good and progress is outstanding. The excellent start pupils are given in Early Years ensures that from a very low base pupils make good progress year on year so that by the time they reach Year 6 attainment reaches and sometimes exceeds diocesan expectations. All lessons observed during the inspection were good or outstanding and pupils worked with interest and commitment. Pupils spoken to said they enjoy their religious education lessons and like the wide range of tasks involved. They are eager to participate in activities and work well together whether in groups or pairs. They have a good knowledge of the Catholic faith appropriate to their age and are able to apply religious ideas to their own lives. Workbooks are very well presented, show coverage of the curriculum and indicate excellent progress made by all groups. Pupils are courteous and thoughtful to adults and each other.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

Leadership at all levels is outstanding. The dedicated headteacher is well supported by her assistant headteachers and subject leaders as she demonstrates excellent leadership of the school through the way she inspires and promotes the provision for Catholic life. She communicates a clear vision to the whole community which is affirmed by staff and governors who are all committed to providing the best possible environment for the pupils. A high priority is given to the partnership between school and

home and many families have been helped to access appropriate support for their needs. The leadership team give priority to Catholic Life and religious education in the school improvement plan and have developed a system of self-evaluation which is detailed and accurate. Together they have a very good knowledge of areas for development in religious education and are well placed to support colleagues.

Senior leaders monitor religious education by means of lesson observations, work scrutiny and joint planning which is followed by feedback to individual teachers. There is currently a very strong focus on planning and assessment as the school consolidates the implementation of the 'Come and See' religious education programme and the updated Curriculum Directory. The school has put in place strategies to give further challenge to all groups of pupils. Much emphasis is placed on staff development which includes teaching assistants who play a key role in the school.

Governors work closely with senior leadership and have a very good understanding of strengths and areas for development. They are very well informed about the life of the school through the headteacher's report and frequent visits. They are in a good position to challenge and support effectively. All governors and staff participate in an annual 'Away Day' when the mission statement is reviewed and the next steps for improvement are decided. There is a programme of close liaison with subject leaders which enable governors to have a detailed understanding of developments in religious education. Governors were appreciative of a recent presentation 'Promoting and Enhancing Prayer Life in our School Community' given by the religious education subject leaders. The local parish priest who is also link governor for religious education plays a major role in the life of the school. He visits every week for a planned programme of masses and liturgies. He also acts as an additional resource in classroom religious 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 which are well taught. During the inspection a lesson on Hinduism led to discussions on rules for living and respect for the environment. Pupils are given an opportunity to prepare a meal to which they invite members of staff and visitors. This experience enhances their social skills and self-esteem. There are very good links with other deanery schools, both denominational and local authority run through sporting and cultural events. Pupils are given exceptionally good opportunities to develop a sense of service and show compassion for others through charitable fund raising and involvement in the local and wider community. Opportunities for spiritual development ensure that pupils are able to reflect on their own lives and experiences. Parents are invited to many school events and are kept well informed about their children's welfare and progress. They appreciate the good level of contact with the school which includes curriculum information letters which enable them to support their children's education and faith journey.

Provision

Grade 1

Provision for prayer and worship at St Helen's is outstanding. Assemblies and liturgies are very well planned and contribute greatly to pupils' spiritual development. They often include visual presentations, bible readings drama, singing and music. During the inspection pupils were observed reading and writing their own bidding prayers, preparing for a class liturgy and reflecting on 'heroes' in their own lives., During a class mass pupils participated by acting as readers, leading the bidding prayers, reverent responses and excellent singing. Pupils are involved in collective worship in their classrooms and are given opportunities for meditation and personal reflection. Each classroom has a very attractive prayer focus with religious artefacts and display boards which include children's work. Masses and age appropriate liturgies are celebrated in school throughout the year. Parents, families and parishioners are invited to masses and many other celebrations. Pupils are given many opportunities to develop their knowledge of Catholic traditions. Links with the local parish are very good with many pupils acting as altar servers at Sunday mass.

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is excellent. During the inspection all lessons observed were outstanding. They are planned carefully with clear learning intentions and a varied range of activities. The school has made a major investment in resources including new sets of bibles for Key Stage 2 which has led to increased familiarity with scripture. Pupils benefit from the high profile given throughout the school to religious education lessons. In all classes observed pupils were

fully engaged and made very good progress. Teachers respond well to pupils' comments and take every opportunity to develop understanding. Higher order questioning was evident in lessons observed. Very good support by teaching assistants enables all groups of pupils to make progress. This was a feature of lessons especially in Early Years. Marking is positive, interactive and enables pupils to identify next steps in their learning. Very good monitoring, assessment, planning and tracking supports the attainment and progress of all groups of pupils.

The quality of the religious education curriculum is outstanding. At least 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education. The religious education programme 'Come and See' has been in place for two years and is now embedded. The headteacher gives religious education a central place in the life of the school and this is demonstrated by the budget devoted to it and the current level of resources. Vibrant religious education displays around the school emphasise the centrality of faith to the work of the community. 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. The school's programme of visits to Rome, Holland the Isle of Wight and France contribute to pupils' independence and sense of worth. The support given to families through a wide range of extra curricular activities gives a strong sense of community to the school. There is every indication that current high standards are likely to be maintained or improved.

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.