

Holy Rood Catholic Primary School

Greenbank Road, Watford. WD17 4FS

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 10 November 2016



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is outstanding

- The religious education curriculum is highly successful in helping pupils understand their Catholic faith.
- Pupils make rapid progress over time, and achieve well above average standards, because they are taught extremely well.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge of scripture which has helped pupils gain high levels of religious literacy.
- Nevertheless, sometimes teachers' questioning does not always probe pupils' knowledge sufficiently, to ensure that they make as much progress as possible.
- The religious education leadership team, including governors are committed to providing high quality religious education. Leaders are highly-skilled practitioners who have high aspirations for all pupils.
- Regular training opportunities ensure that both staff and governors are up-to-date with the latest strategies for the effective teaching of religious education.
- Leaders acknowledge that information on pupils' performance in religious education needs to include an analysis of the performance of the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils.
- Governors visit the school often so that they can challenge and hold leaders to account for the school's performance.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- Religious education and prayer life is at the heart of the school's vision and ethos.
- The school meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales regarding the teaching time allocated to religious education.
- Senior leaders and governors are totally committed to developing, reviewing and improving all aspects of Catholic life. Nevertheless, they acknowledge that pupils could be more involved in monitoring the Catholic life of the school.
- Daily worship and prayer form a central part of school life for staff, pupils and parents.
- Overall, the seasons of the liturgical year are well observed. Nevertheless, there is scope for some seasons, such as the months of Mary, to be marked more explicitly.
- The school works very effectively to ensure that the rich and diverse cultural backgrounds of all pupils are celebrated regularly, and that people of different backgrounds, characteristics and beliefs, are treated with respect.
- The programme of liturgies and assemblies provide excellent opportunities for pupils to put into action the Gospel values.
- The school enjoys close and very positive relationships with parents, the two local parishes, other Catholic schools and the diocese.
- The religious education leadership team and governors have demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring that the pupils in their care develop a strong moral compass and embrace a rich prayer life, invigorated by the Gospel values.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

The last Diocesan inspection report identified one improvement point in relation to classroom religious education:

- Continue with the school's ongoing review of the new Religious Education Programme: 'The Way, the Truth and The Life' to ensure it meets pupils' religious literacy needs and high teacher expectation.

Since that time, the school has introduced a new commercial scheme for religious education. In addition, there have been several changes in the leadership of religious education (RE). The current RE subject leader has been in post since September 2015 and has been very well supported by the executive headteacher and assistant headteacher. The leadership of RE has been further strengthened by the introduction of curriculum faculty teams where new or less experienced staff can work alongside and collaborate with more experienced leaders.

The content of classroom religious education is outstanding

The school's commercially published RE scheme meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. Over the past two years staff have worked very effectively to map the new scheme of work against the Curriculum Directory for Religious Education and levels of attainment. This has ensured that all staff are fully aware of what they have to do to ensure that they fulfil the Curriculum Directory requirements. Through effective training and development, the RE leadership team has ensured that lesson planning is carefully cross-referenced to the Curriculum Directory. The RE leadership team have disseminated the agreed understandings of levels of attainment for RE to all staff and this now forms the basis of the school's on-going RE assessment and tracking procedures. High quality learning resources, such as video clips and PowerPoint presentations further enhance lessons to stimulate pupils' learning and enthusiasm for RE. Lesson planning is carefully organised to support pupils' learning as they move through the school. Each year all pupils learn about Judaism and Islam and one further World faith on a rotational basis. These are carefully woven into the scheme of work and further supported through visits to places of worship.

Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding

Pupils' achievement is outstanding. Pupils enter the school with broadly average levels of skill. By the time they leave the school at the end of Year 6, pupils' attainment in religious education compares very favourably with other core subjects, which are well above national averages. Over the last three years the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels has risen by 10 percentage points. This was mainly due to teachers having received excellent training from the diocese which ensured they had a very clear understanding of the requirements of ATI (Learning about Religion). In 2014/15, leaders noticed that Key Stage 2 boys were not achieving as well as girls and took swift action to rectify the situation. Measures have included more rigorous training of teaching assistants and the successful recruitment of more male role models into the school. As a result, the previous gap between boys and girls has now diminished significantly. Every half term pupil progress meetings are held between the class teacher and member of the senior team, to discuss each pupils' progress in detail. Twice a year staff join with their colleagues from the partner school to check the accuracy of their assessments of pupils' work, and to share resources and good ideas. In addition, staff also attend deanery and diocesan moderation sessions so that end of unit assessments are levelled in line with the agreed understanding of diocesan attainment levels.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

Teaching in RE is typically outstanding. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge of scripture and as a result, pupils display high levels of religious literacy. Teachers keep a careful track of pupils' progress. The standard of presentation and content of pupils' books is extremely high. Pupils take great pride and care in their work which is beautifully presented. The sample of books examined by inspectors indicated that there are numerous opportunities for pupils to write at length which enables them to explore and deepen their knowledge of religious concepts. Feed-back to pupils on the quality of their work is regular. The hallmark of RE lessons is the positive relationships that exist between staff and pupils and between the pupils themselves. This contributes strongly to pupils' very positive attitudes to learning throughout the school, in both their academic studies and spiritual growth. Visits to all classes confirms that RE lessons are characterised by a calm and contemplative approach to the teaching of RE with many classes using suitable music to aid concentration and support pupils' learning. Teachers have high expectations of pupils both in behaviour and academic achievement. However, sometimes teachers' questioning did not always probe pupils' knowledge and understanding sufficiently or provide enough opportunities for pupils to share and articulate their learning with each other, to ensure that they make as much progress as possible.

The leadership and management of religious education are outstanding

The leadership and management of RE are outstanding. The RE leadership team, including governors can articulate a very clear vision for the promotion of RE throughout the school. This vision is understood by all staff who are committed to providing high quality curriculum RE. Leaders are highly-skilled practitioners who have high aspirations which focus on pupils' achievement, the deepening of their faith, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. One in three teachers are not Catholic and they are extremely well supported in the delivery of high quality religious education lessons by being paired-up with more experienced Catholic teachers for mutual support and joint lesson planning sessions. Very effective arrangements for tracking and assessing of pupils' progress are in place. The RE leadership team monitor these arrangements assiduously so that if any pupil shows any sign of falling behind, swift and appropriate action is taken to ensure that they are soon back on track. However, the RE leadership team acknowledge that information on pupils' performance in religious education needs to include an analysis of the performance of the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils. Regular and well considered training events, led by the school, the diocese and the deanery have ensured that both staff and governors are up-to-date with the latest strategies for the effective teaching of RE. Governors visit the school often and conduct focused learning walks, in order that they can rigorously challenge and hold leaders to account for the school's performance.

What should the school do to develop further in classroom religious education?

- Ensure that teachers' questioning deepens pupils' knowledge and understanding by providing more opportunities for pupils to share and articulate their learning with each other.
- Ensure that the school's information on pupils' performance in religious education includes analysis of the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

There were no recommendations made at the last inspection in respect of the Catholic life of the school. Since that time, the school has worked assiduously to promote the Catholic life of the school. It has strengthened the leadership of RE, and has developed new partnerships with other schools, faith groups, the parishes and with parents. This has required a strong commitment to continually develop and refresh the school community.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

Religious education and prayer life is at the heart of the school's vision and ethos and contributes strongly to the quality of Catholic education. The school meets the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales requirement in allocating 10% of curriculum time to the teaching of RE at all key stages. In 2015/16, the resources allocated to RE were above that of other core subjects. Since the last inspection, the accommodation has been greatly enhanced to include attractive prayer spaces and the consecration of the chapel, which is located centrally and is at the heart of the school. Stimulating classroom displays throughout the school are thought-provoking and are of high quality. Senior leaders and governors are totally committed to developing, reviewing and improving all aspects of Catholic life. They provide excellent support and guidance to the RE subject leader and the whole school community, in order to achieve the very best outcomes for pupils.

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community

is outstanding

Daily worship and prayer form a central part of school life for staff, pupils and parents. Regular opportunities for prayer, which include teacher and pupil-led class worship, form a rich experience which enables pupils to experience the living Catholic tradition every day. Overall, the rhythm and seasons of the liturgical year are well observed. Nevertheless, there is scope for some seasons such as the months of Mary, to be marked more explicitly. An abundance of opportunities is provided for the celebration of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, including the introduction of the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Traditional prayers and scripture form a regular part of worship but the school is also providing children with some wonderful creative prayer opportunities, such as the Year 6/7 transition day. Because of the many prayer opportunities, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Music plays an important part in the life of the school. Through regular hymn practices teachers have ensured that there is a good repertoire of liturgical music to enhance prayer and worship. Parents are actively encouraged and attend well the different prayer celebrations and leaders are actively engaged in improving this still further.

The commitment and contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice

are outstanding

Pupils have opportunities to develop and celebrate their gifts and talents in the weekly assemblies. The school works very effectively to ensure that the rich and diverse cultural backgrounds of all pupils are celebrated regularly in assemblies. Pupils learn how everyone is created uniquely by God, and that people of different backgrounds, characteristics and beliefs, are respected. Pupils are afforded many opportunities to take on leadership responsibilities that encourage them to develop their own individual talents, so that they can be of service to others. For example, pupils can actively engage in acts of service through initiatives such as the chaplaincy team and Rights Respecting School Ambassadors.

Pupils are proud of their community and understand the importance of working together. The programme of liturgies and assemblies provide excellent opportunities for pupils to put into action the Gospel values, such as compassion and mercy.

Enabling the authentic partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

are outstanding

The school enjoys close and very positive relationships with parents, the two local parishes, other Catholic schools and the diocese. Surveys of parents' views are overwhelmingly positive and reflect strongly how positive they feel about the Catholic life of the school and how caring and approachable they find staff. The school has strong links with its two feeder parishes, with both parish priests sitting on the governing body and parishes raise money to provide resources for the school such as rosaries. At the request of the Westminster Diocese Education Service, the school has developed a partnership with Divine Saviour Catholic Primary School, a local Catholic primary school with whom a 'soft federation' has been established. The school has forged strong links with other local schools through its moderation practices and an exciting transition project for Year 6 and 7 pupils with a local secondary school. The school engages well with the diocese through participating in a range of training events, attending diocesan Masses and through putting itself at the service of other schools as part of the federation partnership. Governors regularly participate in diocesan training to enable them to fulfil their roles in the school. They are thoroughly involved in the life of the school and parishes and have a very good understanding of parents' needs and views of the school.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school

are outstanding

The executive headteacher, ably supported by the RE leadership team and governors are all fully committed to the Church's education mission and is constantly striving for excellence in all areas of its work. In so doing, they have been particularly successful in creating a rich and dynamic experience of Catholic living for the whole school community. The school's mission statement aims to enable pupils 'to live, learn, grow and celebrate together, as friends, through the love of Christ,' where opportunities in abundance are given so that pupils and staff can flourish.

The school has in place excellent procedures in place to support all staff, especially those new to the school. The executive headteacher and the RE leadership team are the driving force in developing the vision and are extremely well supported by the governing body who provide excellent support and challenge for leaders. Nevertheless, leaders and governors acknowledge that pupils could be more involved in monitoring the Catholic life of the school. Since the last inspection, leaders and governors have worked hard to ensure that the school environment is more fully utilised to support teaching and learning with the RE curriculum for example by visiting the school's Blessed Sacrament Chapel and the development of outdoor spaces for prayer and reflection.

What should the school do to develop further the Catholic life of the school?

- Develop further opportunities for pupils to celebrate and study the significance of events and seasons in the liturgical year.
- Involve pupils more fully in the monitoring of the Catholic life of the school.

Information about this school

- The school is a two-form entry Catholic primary school in the locality of Watford.
- The school serves the parishes of St Helen's North Watford, and Holy Rood Watford.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 98.5%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 0.95 % and from other faiths is 0.55%.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 66.6 %.
- There are 5.98 % of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom four have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is above average.
- There is a below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- Thirty-two pupils receive the Pupil Premium (6.83 %).

Department for Education Number	919 3985
Unique Reference Number	127416
Local Authority	Hertfordshire

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	468
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Bob Aldous
Executive headteacher	Mr Stephen Wheatley
Telephone number	01923 481340
Website	www.holyroodcatholicprimaryschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@holyrood.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 July 2011
Grade from previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out (i) under the requirements of the Canon 806 and (ii) in accordance with the Framework for Diocesan Inspections 2015 approved by the Archbishop of Westminster and (iii) under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

- The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection.
- During the inspection 15 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended one assembly and several acts of worship.
- Meetings were held with school staff, pupils and governors.
- Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

Mr David Scott	Lead Inspector
Miss Liz Doonan	Associate Inspector
Mrs Carol Maguire	Associate Inspector

Diocesan inspection has four grades:

- outstanding
- good
- requires improvement
- causing concern

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