



## INSPECTION REPORT

### **Holy Family Catholic Primary School**

Marlowe Avenue, Park North, Swindon, Wilts SN3 2PT

Telephone: 01793 521933

e-mail address: [admin@holyfamily.swindon.sch.uk](mailto:admin@holyfamily.swindon.sch.uk)

DfE Number: 8663001

Headteacher: Miss Karen Bathe

Chair of Governors: Mr David Dawson

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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

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Date of inspection: 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> December 2011  
Date of previous inspection: 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> July 2007

Reporting Inspector: Mrs M Foster

## **Description of School**

Holy Family Catholic Primary School serves the parish of Holy Family with the school site adjacent to the parish church. The links with the parish are strong and a number of staff members are parishioners. The school is above average in size with 271 pupils on roll at the time of inspection. A high percentage, 90% of pupils, are baptised Catholics. Pupils come from mixed socio-economically backgrounds with some families facing challenging circumstances. The school community reflects wide cultural diversity. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) is higher than is seen nationally, as is the number of children with special educational needs (SEN) and the number of those entitled to free school meals (FSM). Attendance is above average and improving.

The school is popular with parents and currently oversubscribed. It has recently experienced a change in leadership with the retirement of the previous headteacher and the appointment of a new Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher.

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 new leadership team is building with great efficacy on the dedication, hard work and achievement of the previous Headteacher. The school has benefited from the joint handover period where the previous and current Headteachers worked together with vision, commitment and endeavour to ensure as seamless a transition as possible. The Headteacher has a clear understanding of the future development of the school with the capacity to lead her very able and hard-working Senior Leadership Team (SLT) with purpose. Morale is high with ambitious expectations for the pupils. Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding and as a consequence all pupils make good and, in some cases, outstanding progress. The ethos of high expectation and the desire to provide the best possible learning experience for pupils create a climate for continuous improvement. Relationships at all levels are outstanding so that staff and pupils feel supported and confident in all aspects of their work. The strong leadership, talent and commitment of the staff are allied to effective strategies to develop further the quality of teaching and assessment.

Governors know and understand the school and its work very well. They have effective systems in place for monitoring and evaluation supported by clear lines of accountability. Parents and carers are wholeheartedly supportive of the school; its care and valuing of their children, and the education it works hard to provide. Parish links are strong, supported and fostered by the close involvement of the parish priest who is also the highly effective link governor for Religious Education (RE).

**Grade 1**

## **The capacity of the school community to improve and develop**

The new leaders of the school are blessed in having excellent foundations laid down by the previous headteacher upon which they are already building in the pursuit of excellence. Roles and responsibilities are being developed at a fast pace within the new leadership structure and

improvement is evident in existing systems. The accurate self-evaluation by leaders and managers leads to areas identified for development being addressed effectively and swiftly. For example, professional training on assessment is being undertaken by two of the senior leadership team as part of the leadership programme offered by the Diocese. The high expectations of leaders and managers alongside the rigorous analysis of data and systematic reviews combine to inform effective decision-making. The far-sighted and inspirational leadership of the Headteacher, strongly supported by committed and talented staff means that the school is in an excellent place to develop and improve further.

## Grade 1

### What the school should do to improve further

As the school has accurately identified it should:

- embed the new RE programme '*God Matters*'
- continue to develop the current assessment systems to track the progress of individuals and groups of pupils, and
- continue to develop the areas of prayer and reflection throughout the school to further the spirituality of the whole community.

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

Pupils can explain clearly their understanding of the ethos of the school and its mission. They know that they are about the shared purpose of loving God and caring for each other and that this impacts on their lives and behaviour. They express their views with confidence and are respectful of the views of others. Pupils benefit from the excellent role models of the adults around them of what it is to be a follower of Christ. They are shown exceptional care and respect by the adults in their daily interactions, exemplifying the values of Christian life. This helps pupils to reflect on their own behaviour and its effects on those around them. Pupils feel trusted and valued as individuals; confident in the knowledge that there is always someone they can go to if they feel troubled. Parents recognise this caring quality which is so evident in the excellent relationships within the school community and comment favourably on the nurturing from which their children benefit.

Pupils contribute to the Catholic life of the school by taking responsibility for each other in many ways. As one Year 6 pupils expressed it, '*That's what our school is about: we help each other*'. The older pupils care for younger ones in a very supportive Buddy system. In the same way they act as play leaders in the playground, helping to ensure that all pupils are included in playtimes. Pupils learn accountability from these small but significant every-day tasks which they appreciate are their responsibility and contribute to the ethic of putting others first.

From their first entry into school children are encouraged to pray the traditional prayers of the Church alongside their own spontaneous prayers so that praying becomes a familiar activity. Prayer is an integral part of school life and central to its being as a Catholic community. Prayer life is inclusive: all pupils are invited and involved. They pray with great reverence and respect.

Prayer is also encouraged through opportunities to be still and reflect. Pupils share their own prayers, act out what they have learned and plan Collective Worship. Through such activities they nurture their own spirituality and increase their understanding of their own faith journey. The strong tradition of prayer planned and built up over time by the previous headteacher is obvious in the ease with which children pray attentively, with dignity and utter trust that they will be heard. A Year 6 pupil researching pilgrimages talked about the power of prayer and asserted: *"It's amazing what faith can do."*

Responsibility for leading Collective Worship and liturgies strengthens pupils' personal, moral and spiritual development. The school's creative approach ensures that Collective Worship is enhanced through singing, music, appropriate images and drama. This makes it a powerful tool for engaging the whole person in a significant way and strengthens the relevance of their learning to their own lives. For example, in one class Collective Worship when asked by the teacher what might we do when difficult things happen in our lives, a Year 4 pupil responded: *"Pray about it and hope that something good will come out of it."*

Collective Worship is well-planned and resourced. It is rooted in the Gospel, the liturgical year or linked to the RE programme so that pupils' knowledge and understanding are deepened. Pupils' involvement in the celebration of Mass by preparing Readings and Bidding Prayers extends their Biblical knowledge while giving them further opportunities to pray for the needs of their own community and those of the wider world. They work collaboratively and learn to listen to each other and make decisions. Pupils understand that religious belief and spiritual values are important to many people, not only Christians. As one Year 6 pupil pointed out: *"Different people have different ways of showing their religion but we are all trying to do the same thing – to love God."*

Pupils enjoy their active involvement in the prayer life of the school and use the knowledge, understanding and skills learned in RE to extend and enhance their learning in other subjects. They use their good literacy skills to write haiku about Creation and play scripts from Gospel stories, reinforcing their Biblical knowledge and extending their understanding of the Church's liturgy. The creative approach to RE reinforces learning through engaging pupils in art, drama and ICT presentations, helping them to learn in different ways and increasing their motivation and enjoyment. As a Year 5 pupil explained, *'I enjoy acting out the story and then I understand it better. It helps you to know how the people felt - then you remember it.'*

Pupils join the school with lower than nationally expected levels of knowledge and understanding. By the end of KS2 they achieve higher levels than that expected nationally in the core subjects. Some pupils make outstanding progress and all pupils make at least good progress, including those who have English as an additional language (EAL) and pupils identified as having special educational needs (SEN). There is no underachievement in the school, though there are still areas for development, for example in assessment, which affect pupil progress.

Pupils' excellent behaviour is a result of well-established and useful strategies for behaviour management which the staff have developed over time. It leads to very effective learning as little time is spent on managing behaviour and the focus is on teaching and learning. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning, developing as religiously literate people, confident to quote the Scriptures and to share their deeper thoughts and feelings in a safe environment.

**Grade 1**

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

Leaders and managers know the school well and have a clear vision for its mission as a faith school. They foster a community with God at its centre and this informs all its policies and practice. As one Governor confirmed:

*"God is in everything we have and do as a school."* The spiritual and moral development of all pupils is a real imperative, prioritised in the school improvement plan. The Chair of Governors is rightly proud of the school's ethos, so manifest in every area of the school's activity and of the strong leadership which characterised the school's previous headteacher, her successor and the new staff appointees. The school leadership has good systems for effective self-evaluation and accurate and comprehensive documentation to support these procedures.

Governors are very clear about their roles and responsibilities and their need to challenge the school as well as support its development. Formal and informal systems of monitoring, review and planning followed by appropriate action ensure that the Catholic life of the school is thriving.

Foundation Governors are well aware of their responsibilities as representatives of the Bishop. Leaders and managers attend meetings and courses to ensure they are updated with legislation and that statutory and canonical responsibilities are met.

An exceptional parish priest, as the RE link governor, supports and monitors the Catholic life of the school. He is a regular and frequent visitor to classes helping him to have a close knowledge of the central dimension of the school's provision. He effectively supports planning and celebration of liturgies such as the penitential rites in Advent and Lent. As a governor he is involved in the school's action plan to ensure that RE is at the centre of school improvement. Through meetings with teachers and scheduled meetings with the headteacher he ensures that he is well-informed and contributing to the strategies for improvement. He shares the vision of Catholic education as *'promoting a living relationship with Christ through the Gospel.'*

The School Improvement Plan accurately identifies the areas for improvement and sets out priorities clearly. This ensures that governors and staff are united in working towards the same objectives with the maximum effort and expertise. Governors are closely involved in the school community: visible at liturgies, Collective Worship, the celebration of Mass, social events and formal and informal visits. They know their school well, are proud of it and its pupils and are committed to the pursuit of excellence.

The school is outstanding in its welcome and inclusion for all pupils, confirming their Mission statement. Excellent relationships are fostered in its community, making overt the values of the Gospel in action. Parents describe the school as a welcoming place where the headteacher and staff are very approachable and happy to help and where communication with parents is *"exceptionally good"*. The subject leader for RE has devised a newsletter informing parents what their child/ren will be learning in the new RE programme, and how they can help, which the Diocese has taken as a model of good practice.

Diverse backgrounds are positively acknowledged and other faiths taught and celebrated. Visitors of other faiths and cultures, such as a Sikh leader and events like a day on Hinduism and International Week expand pupils' knowledge and understanding of how different people in our world live. The tolerance and respect which pupils develop is obvious in the caring relationships pupils from different backgrounds have for each other. Children play and work happily together, being witnesses to the second commandment on a daily basis.

Images of famous people from ethnic minority groups are prominent throughout the school, from Mother Teresa of Calcutta to Kelly Holmes and Nelson Mandela providing positive role models of a global kind. Thanks to the total commitment of the staff and some key appointments made by the previous headteacher, systems are in place to ensure that when children start school their needs are identified and strategies established to meet them. The school works hard to establish a climate of trust with parents and carers and this close liaison includes the valuable services of an exceptional Parent Support Adviser who acts on behalf of all vulnerable families. It also has excellent relationships with external agencies to ensure maximum support where needed.

The strength of the school-parish links is apparent in the number and range of joint activities. For example, twice yearly the school and parish share a fundraising activity, strengthening the relationship through a common purpose. The preparation for the celebration of Masses is supported by the parish priest working with class teachers and with the involvement of parishioners and governors. The leading of Mass by the school three times a year in the parish church reinforces visibly the relationship between church and school as a worshipping community. Parents and parishioners are welcomed into the school. Some accept the invitation to have lunch at the school once a month, thus seeing the school in action and benefitting from the considerable skills of the kitchen staff. A number of parishioners work as volunteers in the school including teaching assistants who are also catechists. Part of their work involves sacramental preparation which includes Catholic children from non-Catholic schools being invited to join the programme.

The involvement of parents in a range of voluntary roles builds community and shows pupils an example of service. Parents give valuable support in and out of class, attend Masses and community worship. Pupils feel an integral part of the community. Liaison with other schools promotes good community links. The talented subject leader for RE and the Headteacher are sharing the work they have done on *God Matters* with other Catholic schools, developing positive relationships and opportunities to exchange ideas and good practice. The Diocese has adopted the RE newsletter devised by the subject leader as a good model for Catholic schools teaching the same programme. An effective partnership with the Catholic Secondary school offers pupils a variety of ways to work collaboratively with peers from other schools and extend their learning opportunities; for example, workshops for more able pupils. The wide range of extra-curricular activities ensures that all pupils are offered good opportunities across cultural, faith, social and economic boundaries. There is no discrimination. Pupils raise funds for those in need locally, nationally and globally, learning empathy for the different needs and circumstances of others.

## Grade 1

### How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Prayer is central to the life of the school. There are many opportunities, both planned and spontaneous for pupils and staff to pray. On starting school pupils are invited to join class and whole school Collective Worship, Masses, and liturgies so that they rapidly become familiar in an age-appropriate way with the liturgical life of the school. The younger pupils are supported by pupils in Year 5 who act as guides or mentors in their roles within the Chaplaincy Team. For example they support prayer, as one child put it, *'We help the little children understand about God. We read them stories or prayer cards if they can't read very well. If they are upset we listen and try to help.'*



The thoughtful preparation which is given to displays, particularly in the public parts of the school, gives increased status to the importance of prayer and reflection. Imaginative approaches such as the Advent Walk offer opportunities for pupils to empathise and reflect; to be supported in their prayers while engaging in well resourced and thought-provoking spiritual experiences. It encourages them to think beyond themselves.

A range of approaches to prayer contributes to the spiritual development of both adults and children. It is progressive because it is planned in order to extend understanding so that as pupils progress in maturity they are taught prayers appropriate to their age and ability. The RE Link Governor and staff review rigorously the provision for prayer and support pupils in leading prayer themselves, appropriate to their age and ability.

Vibrant Acts of Collective Worship engage pupils, involving them actively in developing their relationships with God and each other. The provision of Bibles in Key stage 2 has enabled pupils to become more focussed on the study of Scripture. They help each other find references, research independently and enjoy opportunities to further their own learning in the Bible Club.

The Sanctuary provides a haven which gives quiet and calm, especially to those who may be facing challenges in their young lives. One Year 6 pupil confided:  
*"I like the Sanctuary because it's a good place to reflect on God and have some peace and quiet when you're troubled."*

Older pupils are challenged in their thinking and enjoy the debates which stimulate their capacity to analyse and consider questions of the meaning and purpose of life. They do so with complete trust in the adults who teach and support them as they strive to become closer to God. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is used effectively to support research, provide visual resources and to help pupils produce published writing which can extend the knowledge of the writer and also be shared with peers.

The new RE programme was trialled by the previous headteacher and has been adopted by governors and staff after considered thought and thorough evaluation. The decision to use it centred on its spirituality, its creative approach and its high levels of expectation and challenge. The regular and rigorous monitoring of planning ensures that the strengths of the curriculum are identified and weaknesses addressed. Where practice is best, teachers evaluate what they have taught in terms of the progress made by individual and groups of pupils. This assessment of pupils' learning then informs the next stage of planning so that pupils' precise learning needs are identified and met. This process is being developed to become consistent across the school and is identified as a target in the school improvement plan. Teachers are still familiarising themselves with the new programme and the good practice for assessment for learning in the school is being shared as part of professional development. Marking is positive and some excellent examples, particularly at Key stage 2, provide good models for wider dissemination to promote consistency throughout the school.

Teaching and learning are good and in some cases outstanding. Training is targeted to ensure that teachers have increasingly good, and in some cases excellent subject knowledge. Pace in lessons is brisk to keep expectations and challenge high. Skilled and knowledgeable teaching assistants are used effectively to support pupils where necessary and to work with the more able pupils. Imaginative approaches especially the creative use of ICT; the skilful use of images; and music and drama engage pupils' interest and provide opportunities for powerful reflection and contemplation. Where teaching is most effective, searching questions challenge pupils' thinking while acting as a tool for teachers to assess immediately what it is pupils know,

understand and can do. Pupils' excellent behaviour and the skill of teachers in keeping pupils motivated means that no learning time is lost in managing negative behaviour.

Rigorous monitoring reveals a picture of developing but not yet consistent practice which is being addressed through the school improvement plan. The Early Years Foundation Stage profile has been extended by the deputy headteacher to include the assessment of RE. This counts as trail-blazing! Good systems for tracking pupils' progress are built on previous procedures and are being developed and refined by the new leadership. Pupils' progress is monitored through analysis of data and targets which are shared with pupils and recorded for them to check their own progress. These are validated by teachers and are part of a dialogue being developed as part of the on-going work to develop consistent assessment practice through the school. Interviewing pupils to assess their understanding in a process known as Pupil Conferencing allows the subject leader to judge the impact of teaching on learning. The issues identified are fed back to individual teachers and if appropriate to the whole school. Governors are informed through the effective systems of communication already established and continuing to develop. This enables the school to have an accurate assessment of its progress and plan for further development.

**Grade 1**