



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Denominational (S48) Inspection Report

Name of School: St Helen's Catholic Junior Academy
Local Authority: Essex
Inspection Date: 6th November 2018
Reporting Inspector: Mr Stephen Beck

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005 and 2011.

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| Type of School: | Junior | School Address: |
| School Category: | Academy | Sawyers Hall Lane |
| Age range of pupils: | 7 – 11 | Brentwood |
| Gender of pupils: | Mixed | Essex |
| Number on roll: | 355 | CM15 9BY |
| Appropriate Authority: | The Governing Body | Tel. No. 01277 213962 |
| Date of previous inspection: | July 2013 | Headteacher: Mrs Bozena Laraway |
| | | Chair of Governors: Mr Kevin Dolby |

Information about the school

St Helen's Catholic Junior School is an Academy status Catholic school situated in Brentwood, in the County of Essex and in the Diocese of Brentwood. It is a larger than average Junior School. It admits pupils aged 7 to 11 years; 84% of pupils are baptised Catholics with the remainder being from other Christian denominations and other faith groups. The school serves the Catholic community of Brentwood, Doddinghurst, Ingatestone and Ongar. While many pupils come from St Helen's Catholic Infant School, others are from a variety of local schools or arrive new to this country. Information supplied from the school and inspection evidence indicates that pupils' attainment at the beginning of Year 3 is broadly in line with that expected nationally. The percentage of pupils receiving free school meals is low. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, as is the proportion with EHCP's for identified special educational needs. Most pupils are White British with a small number coming from a range of different cultural backgrounds. A few speak English as an additional language with some at the early stages of learning English.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding. It has successfully addressed the areas identified for improvement at the time of its last inspection through provision made to challenge more able pupils, the adoption of electronic assessment data collection and implementation of the 'Come and See' programme of study.

Central to this capacity to improve is the Headteacher's strong leadership, which she balances with providing opportunities for staff to grow and develop into leaders in their own right. Her clarity of vision underpins the school's continual drive for excellence. In this objective she is most ably supported by a dedicated, knowledgeable and hardworking staff team led by an astute and able Assistant Headteacher and proactive Year Group Leaders. The school benefits from a dedicated, supportive and challenging Governing Body.

The school, which is currently judged as good by Ofsted, has significant strengths in leadership and was judged as outstanding overall at the time of its last religious inspection. It is commendable how the school responds positively to external assessment. Its determination to not 'rest on its laurels' and to always strive to further improve is explicit in all that it does. It has responded positively to requests to support other schools, with the Headteacher taking on short term Executive Headteacher roles.

Subject leadership is outstanding in maintaining Religious Education as a true core subject with a philosophy to constantly build on the school's strengths and work on areas identified for development, about which staff and governors are fully au fait. They can articulate this as a result of regular review which would benefit from fuller documentation to support the monitoring of progress in these areas.

The overwhelming support of parents is witnessed by comments recorded at their meeting with the inspector and on the parental questionnaires such as, *"The relationship between the school and church is beyond my hopes and dreams. I cherish the religious education my children currently receive from school and also the religious education my older son received. I could not ask for more"*.

What the school should do to improve further:

There are no significant areas for improvement. The school should continue to work on the areas for development highlighted in its own Self Evaluation Form (SEF) which the inspector has been able to validate, by;

- Revisiting the self-evaluation document to provide greater clarity in regard to the targets set through ongoing review, by providing clear timescales and lines of accountability to facilitate the monitoring of progress in these areas.
- Progressing the plans in place to work with other Diocesan Catholic schools to jointly moderate religious education assessments in order to secure greater validity of assessments.

CATHOLIC LIFE

Grade 1

The Catholic Life of the school is outstanding because the well-being and personal and spiritual development of pupils and staff is at the heart of the school's vision and mission. The quality of Religious Education is outstanding because staff know their pupils well and consistently teach lessons which enthuse and engage thereby securing progress and achievement. Leaders and managers ensure that monitoring and evaluation are accurate, timely and embedded in the work of the school. The quality of Collective Worship is outstanding because it is central to the life of the school. Staff plan and lead high quality Acts of Worship and pupils act with the deepest reverence and respect. The school's Catholic mission is visible throughout: in displays, religious artefacts and the outstanding relationships evident in the classrooms and around the school. There is a real sense that the mission of the school is lived out in the everyday lives of the community.

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is significant. Pupils at St Helen's are proud of their religious identity and make an extensive contribution to the Catholic Life and mission of the school, which is given a very high priority. Pupils take full advantage of the opportunities offered to them and are happy to take a leading role in those activities which promote the school's ethos. Pupils are aware of the needs of others and seek justice, responding willingly to the needs of those beyond the school. They articulate their views with confidence, explaining that the purpose of fundraising for a broad range of charities is very important to the school community and demonstrates their understanding of a living faith. Pupils show an excellent understanding of the liturgical year and its key celebrations. They speak confidently of their Catholic identity and what this means. Pupils have a strong voice in the decision making process; they say that they are always listened to, highly valued and can therefore confidently express their views and feelings and this was seen clearly in a meeting with the school's large school council. Pupils are happy, confident and secure in their own stage of spiritual growth, demonstrating excellent behaviour towards adults and each other. Pupils are confident and articulate about the role of adults in the school when dealing with inappropriate behaviour. They are learning to know and understand a loving God and can demonstrate many qualities including empathy, a willingness to listen, celebration and forgiveness. There is a powerful sense of belonging and involvement from the pupils and some take responsibility for key roles.

The behaviour of pupils is exemplary; there is a common understanding that the moral education they are receiving at the school will influence their behaviour both now and beyond their time in school. They show respect and tolerance for one another, their teachers, support staff and visitors to the school. In proportion to their years', they listen attentively, congratulate others, are able to forgive and be forgiven. They understand that everyone is unique and made in God's image and as such, must use their talents, skills and qualities for the good of others. They show respect for the different convictions of others however, and at the same time are proud of their own Catholic identity. This has led to a happy, secure and inclusive environment in which to learn and where pupils thrive.

Teaching and learning throughout the school is highly effective. Teacher subject knowledge, is consistently good and in the cases of the more experienced staff, outstanding. Teacher assessment is accurate and timely. They promote pupils' evaluation of their learning in terms of what they can do, what they did well and the target(s) that they want to improve through the use of success criteria for each topic called 'I Can' statements. Teachers have a high level of expertise in intervening and giving incisive feedback, both oral and written, throughout the lesson. Teachers work collaboratively and as a result there is a consistent approach across the school and this is exceptionally strong in marking. Teachers set high expectations for all pupils. The pace of lessons is consistently good and learning time is maximised across all year groups. Lessons are well planned and activities are carefully matched and differentiated to meet the learning needs of all groups of pupils. Lessons are planned to embed and build upon previous learning whilst moving pupils on to new learning.

The extent to which leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is developing well. The school goes beyond the expectation of 10% of the timetable being devoted to Religious Education. The subject is interwoven into the curriculum and intervention is provided for underachieving pupils who are quickly identified and planned for to address their learning needs. Governors' skills and knowledge are such that they are able to quality assure the accuracy of Religious Education data and challenge from a secure knowledge base.

The subject leader for Religious Education is highly effective in carrying out her role. She is an excellent role model and sets high expectations for staff and pupils. She provides ongoing professional development through in-service opportunities and meetings as appropriate. She is relatively new in post but has already established herself in the role, building successfully on her predecessors' work. This has seen the establishment of an increasingly well used Prayer Garden and a very successful, well attended, weekly prayer group in which pupils take a leading role.

The school's SEF is a useful document and would benefit from being developed into more of a working document through regular updating and sharing with staff and governors.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Grade 1

Pupils' achievement and enjoyment in Religious Education is outstanding. The school has embraced the 'Come and See' programme and the needs of all the pupils are being met. In a majority of classes, the range of activities provided for the pupils is very effective in engaging and enthusing pupils. This excellent practice would benefit from being more widely shared across the school to ensure all pupils are enabled to further develop their independence and resilience.

Technology is used highly effectively to motivate and support the pupils in their Religious Education lessons. Pupils' attainment in Religious Education is at least good with many exceeding expectations as seen through assessments undertaken to date and scrutiny of workbooks. They make good progress in relation to their starting points on entry to the school from the infants. There is no difference in performance between pupils of different gender and outcomes for pupils with additional or special needs are outstanding, in part due to their support being so highly effective. This reflects the excellent work done by the school's SENCO to ensure appropriate identification and provision for these pupils.

Pupils are becoming increasingly more religiously literate as they move through the school and become familiar with key words from the topics, which are used routinely in some lessons, although this could be further developed. Their knowledge, understanding and skills are developing at least appropriately to their age or capacity. They are developing the skills that enable them to reflect spiritually, think ethically and theologically and are becoming more aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life. Pupils' engagement in and enjoyment of their learning is outstanding as shown by their interest and exemplary behaviour. This is a real strength of the school. Pupils work extremely well independently, in pairs and collaboratively in small groups.

The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is consistently good and often outstanding. It is highly effective in ensuring that pupils are interested, engaged and making progress. Teachers display excellent subject knowledge and deploy a wide range of teaching styles and strategies to motivate and inspire pupils. They provide welcoming, vibrant classroom environments to stimulate learning. Each classroom had a display of pupils' work from their latest topic. There is rigour in planning, monitoring and assessment and detailed lesson plans were produced for the day of inspection indicating teachers' outstanding commitment to their pupils and to the school.

Teaching encourages pupils' enjoyment of and enthusiasm for Religious Education. At their interview, pupils spoke about how they found their lessons fun and how they "*learned a lot*" in them. All agreed that they had to work hard. Teachers take into account pupils' prior learning and consistently work to ensure tasks are differentiated when planning so that the work consolidates, builds and extends their knowledge and understanding. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils in terms of work, attitude and behaviour. Key words from the topics are displayed and re-iterated and this enables pupils to assimilate these into their religious vocabulary. Time is regularly devoted during plenary sessions for pupils to reflect on their learning. Lessons are generally well-paced so as to maintain pupils' interest and move learning on. It was obvious to the inspector that additional adults are well-planned for and play a significant role in pupils' learning. They work closely together with their teachers in meeting the needs of all pupils and are good role models. Relationships within classes between adults and pupils are outstanding.

The system of oral feedback and marking is used consistently by staff. It is very effective in informing pupils of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. It helps to promote pupils' self-esteem. The assessment of pupils' work in Religious Education has developed well and is being further refined. The school has assessment strategies in place which provide accurate and detailed information on the achievement of all the pupils. These have become well-embedded over time. Teachers are able to identify how well pupils are achieving and tackle any underachievement. Effort and achievement are regularly celebrated.

The scheme for Religious Education, 'Come and See' is implemented effectively and is augmented and enriched with additional material. Other subjects are integrated seamlessly with Religious Education through now well-established cross curricular links which are fostered at every opportunity within lessons. Pupils have an age appropriate understanding of loving relationships and sexual development within a Christian context. The school uses 'A Journey in Love', a developmental programme for children in the primary years. The programme's content is used to educate all pupils in personal relationships and prepare them for the next stage of their physical, emotional and spiritual development. Parents were both supportive of and well informed about this part of the curriculum. They indicated however, that they would welcome more information regarding their children's Religious Education curriculum and the topics they are covering, perhaps termly via the school newsletter so that they can help them at home. Pupils take full advantage of the opportunities the school provides for their personal support and development. They embrace the holistic approach to education, taking every opportunity to participate in an unusually wide range of extracurricular opportunities offered by the school and they understand what it is to have a vocation and gifts which to share with others.

The Governing Body takes a passionate interest in St Helen's. Through meetings with the subject leader, reports from teaching and learning and target-setting reviews they can be confident in their knowledge and understanding of the teaching and learning in Religious Education and the progress of pupils. They are updated on new initiatives and are committed to ensuring that assessment maintains or improves the progress of pupils in Religious Education. The school is appropriately looking to undertake some cross school moderation in order to further validate their current judgements. They are extremely supportive but also confident and questioning in their approach.

The Religious Education Leader is an excellent role model for other teachers and has committed spiritual purpose. She is held in high esteem and her calm supportive manner has developed positive relationships with staff who respect and appreciate her advice.

She attends Diocesan training, meetings and conferences and liaises with other local Catholic schools to share best practice on, for example, moderation and marking. She gives feedback to staff and governors to improve the delivery and outcomes for Religious Education.

The parish clergy give generously of their time to the school both through informal visits and visits specifically designed to support the Religious Education curriculum. Their input and chaplaincy role is greatly valued by the school's staff, governors and parents. It serves to cement a very strong home, school parish partnership. One member of staff recently completed the RCIA course and was received into the Catholic church reflecting an implicit atmosphere of evangelisation.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Grade 1

St Helen's is a very prayerful and spiritual community where various forms of worship are regular and meaningful parts of the day. There is a calm and peaceful ethos which pervades the school and is reflected in the pupils' excellent behaviour and consideration for others. Pupils are inspired by, and enthusiastic in their response to Collective Worship. This is evidenced in their keen participation in a variety of forms of worship and prayerful reflection.

Pupils are confidently able to assist in preparing acts of Collective Worship. The school has already identified that pupils are ready to become more independent in both the preparation and leading of these celebrations and plans to develop more opportunities in this regard. Pupils conduct and attitudes clearly reflect the Catholic character of the school. Assemblies, Masses, reflection times and lessons involve all pupils taking leading roles through writing prayers, singing hymns and serving during Masses, which further promote the school's Catholic Life and also instil the mission statement in that all pupils gain a deeper understanding of the ways of Jesus

The school takes part in Parish and Diocesan celebrations (e.g. Diocesan Christmas Concerts and other events, "Flash Mob" Cathedral Parish Masses, visiting care homes) and are frequently asked to provide music support for Diocesan events, i.e. Catholic Citizenship Award Ceremony.

In a beautiful assembly attended on the theme of 'Light', pupils gathered reverently to singing. This was led by school choir members and supported by the school orchestra. It demonstrated the school's strong musical tradition and created a real sense of 'awe and wonder'.

Worship and prayer are at the heart of this school community. Praying together is part of the daily life of staff and pupils. Pupils know the school's Mission Statement, which is displayed in every classroom and around the school. The prayer tables are a focal point in every classroom. They are creative and provide a fitting focus for daily prayer. Pupils take pride in sharing a responsibility for looking after the prayer tables. All pupils know that they are made in the image and likeness of God. Pupils enjoy selecting from a range of religious artefacts to enhance their worship and they take pride in the way that they employ these resources.

Parents, parishioners and governors are invited to share in various acts of worship, when appropriate, and many attend events which are timetabled throughout the year. The school is keen to increase parental attendance at these celebrations and has this as a development point in their Religious Education development plan. Collective Worship is promoted throughout the school with displays in classrooms and corridors which help pupils understand the essential elements that are found in the Collective Worship they experience.