



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Inspection Report



Name of School: St Philomena's School

LEA: Essex

Inspection Date: 2nd December 2015

Reporting Inspector: Pamela Brannigan

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

Type of School: Primary
School Category: Independent
Age range of pupils: 3 - 11
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 104
Appropriate Authority: The Governing Body
Date of previous inspection: 2nd March 2007

School Address:
53 Hadleigh Road
Frinton On Sea
Essex
CO13 9HQ

Tel. No. 01255 674492
Headteacher: Mrs B. McKeown
Chair of Governors: Mrs J. Geldard

Information about the school

St Philomena's Catholic School is a small, independent day school for pupils aged 3-11 in Frinton on Sea Essex and part of the diocese of Brentwood. It is now a charitable trust run by a board of parent governors although there are strong links with the Sisters of Mercy who founded the school. There are 104 pupils on roll, 35% of whom are Catholics, 28% from other Christian denominations and a small minority from other faith backgrounds. Pupils come from the Tendring peninsula which includes the parishes of Sacred Heart and St Francis, Frinton on Sea and Our Lady of Light and St Osyth, Clacton on Sea. The school has a stable staff; however the headteacher is the only Catholic teacher. The school has good links with the local parish although most pupils come from a wider area. The Sisters of Mercy are represented on the governing body.

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

St Philomena's is a good Catholic school with some outstanding features. The headteacher is effective in promoting the Catholic dimension of the school and the well-being and pastoral care of pupils is at the heart of the school's vision. Staff are excellent role models for the pupils. Prayer is an integral part of the school's daily life and is central to spiritual and moral development. Behaviour is very good and pupils work hard and thrive within a strong Christian community where they feel valued, well supported and safe. Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. During the course of their time in the school, pupils make good progress.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

The school has a good capacity for sustained improvement. The headteacher who is also subject leader has put in place a number of initiatives linked to teaching and learning in recent years including the 'Come and See' religious education programme. There is a strong commitment to self-evaluation and school improvement. The Catholic dimension of the school is strengthened through the very good pastoral care, parish links and the excellent level of support from the governing body. The head teacher, ably supported by all members of staff, ensures the Catholic values of the school are understood by the entire school community.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to address those areas currently identified in the school development plan.
- Review resources for religious education to ensure classes in Key Stage 2 have full sets of bibles
- Ensure pupils have additional opportunities to lead and plan worship

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 2

The quality of pupils' learning and progress in religious education is good. Pupils' behaviour for learning is excellent. They enjoy their lessons, demonstrating engagement and interest. They co-operate and work well individually and in pairs. Pupils' knowledge and skills are developing well and they enjoy a wide range of activities including discussions, drama, role play and art. They are gaining religious literacy at a good rate throughout the school.

Workbooks are well presented and demonstrate a range of written tasks. Overall pupils make good progress and achieve diocesan expectations by the end of Key Stage 2.

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school is also good. They have a strong sense of belonging and are keen to take on responsibilities through the school council and as prefects. Pupils express their own views with confidence and are eager to participate in all aspects of school life. Their achievements in and out of school are valued and recognised. Pupils respect the Catholic traditions of the school and are able to refer to the teachings of Jesus. Pupils are aware of the needs within their own community and the wider world. Charities supported include Cafod and the Christmas Shoebox appeal.

Prayer and worship form an important part of the life of the school. Pupils know some traditional prayers of the Church appropriate for their age group and are also given opportunities for reflection and spontaneous prayer. They are encouraged to compose their own prayers and examples were seen during the inspection. During collective worship they are attentive and responsive. An example of this was a year 5 liturgy on 'Thankfulness' which included a reflection, a hymn and prayers as well as a period for silent worship. However, older pupils would benefit from being given further opportunities to plan and lead worship. All classrooms have a prayer table with a bible and other religious artefacts which provide a focal point for reflection. Pupils attend Mass in the parish church on feast days as well as visiting as part of their religious education lessons. There are plans to develop further these links with the parish. The Church's liturgical year is celebrated through assemblies and masses in which pupils play a role.

Pastoral care is regarded as the shared responsibility of all staff. Pupils know where to go for help if they have a concern about themselves or other pupils. Older pupils take their responsibilities for younger children very seriously. In conversation pupils said they feel safe, well cared for and believe their views are valued and taken into account. They talked enthusiastically about their involvement in the wider life of the school.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

The leadership of the school's Catholic life is excellent. The experienced head teacher who is also subject leader for religious education has a clear vision for the school which is shared by all members of the community. All the staff promote the Catholic life of the school and are excellent role models for pupils. A strength of the school is the pastoral care of pupils which is the result of the dedicated commitment of the whole staff. The headteacher and her deputy regularly evaluate provision for Catholic life. The Catholic ethos of the school is stated through its mission statement and aims. There is a range of lovely religious education related displays in classes and around the school which are linked to topic themes, the liturgical year, particular events or specific prayers.

The headteacher as subject leader for religious education is highly motivated to keep abreast in current developments in the subject. She introduced the diocesan recommended 'Come and See' religious education programme which is currently being embedded. She attends diocesan conferences as well as 'cluster' meetings with other Catholic schools. She ensures religious education is regarded as a core subject throughout the school and acts as mentor for new teachers. She gives demonstration lessons to enable all teachers to see good practice. In-service sessions are used effectively to support and develop staff skills and subject knowledge. Regular monitoring of planning and assessments enables school leaders to have a good knowledge of where extra support is required.

The school governors are experienced, aware of their responsibilities and understand the strengths of the school. They are extremely knowledgeable about the school and have a

good understanding its day-to-day activities. There are regular monitoring visits from individual governors and reports prepared for the full governing body. The chair of governors visits twice a week and is kept well informed about new initiatives in religious education and how these are being monitored. Governors are fully involved in the Catholic life of the school.

The school is highly regarded by its parent body. The small size of the school means parents have regular easy access to school staff. In addition parents are well represented on the governing body. Communication is very good with curriculum information sent home every term. Parents appreciate the high standard of education, the care shown to pupils and the wide range of extra-curricular activities available. They are invited to school celebrations including masses and concerts.

Provision

Grade 2

During the inspection all teaching observed was good or outstanding. In an outstanding lesson in Year 6 careful planning, lively pace and open and challenging questioning enabled all pupils to achieve well and make rapid progress. References were made to the recent Papal encyclical 'Laudato Si' which demonstrated a source of revelation other than scripture and gave pupils the opportunity to achieve higher levels in religious education. Throughout Key Stage 2 pupils would benefit from using bibles rather than photocopied excerpts from scripture. This would give pupils opportunities to familiarise themselves with the layout of the bible and the full range of scripture. In Early Years and Key Stage 1 good teaching and practical cross curricular tasks engage pupils' interest and enjoyment. Differentiation by outcome and support offered enable all pupils to engage with the learning objective. Workbooks are well presented and reflect pupils' pride in their work. Marking is positive with the best including 'next steps' for pupils. All groups make good progress.

The school devotes 10% of teaching time to religious education and uses the scheme, 'Come and See,' supported by 'Journey in Love.' The curriculum is enhanced through good links with local clergy and Brentwood diocese. Drama, music and art are also incorporated into the curriculum. Other faiths are well taught through the religious education scheme as well as sharing experiences and research. There are good links with the local Anglican parish which hosts the annual Carol service which is also attended by parents and parishioners.

Worship and prayer are central to the school's life. Leadership ensures collective worship is well planned and there is a variety of formal and informal opportunities for daily prayer. Masses are celebrated in school and special assemblies are held which reflect the Church's liturgical year. Pupils from all backgrounds are included and benefit from opportunities to learn from each other. The school offers a variety of clubs and enrichment activities which provide opportunities for the development of skills and interests. The school encourages pupils to develop a sense of service and supports their faith journey.

The inspector would like to thank all members of the school community for the warm welcome and the hospitality extended during her visit.