



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Denominational (S48) Inspection Report

Name of School: St Helen's Catholic Primary School
Local Authority: Newham – URN 141925
Inspection Date: 4th February 2020
Reporting Inspector: Mr Stephen Beck

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

Type of School:	Primary	School Address:
School Category:	Academy	Chargeable Lane
Age range of pupils:	2 – 11	London,
Gender of pupils:	Mixed	E13 8DW
Number on roll:	493	
Appropriate Authority:	The Governing Body	Tel. No. 020 7476 1785
Date of previous inspection:	February 2015	Headteacher: Mrs Gael Hicks
		Chair of Governors: Ms Sarah Alexander

Information about the school

St Helen's Primary School is a larger than average two form entry Catholic academy school within the Our Lady of Grace Catholic Academy Trust. It is located in Canning Town, in the London Borough of Newham and is 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 493 pupils aged 2 - 11 on roll which includes nursery and pre-school provision. The proportion of Catholic pupils is 87.5%. There is an above average number of pupils from minority ethnic groups and 59.5% of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs at 13% is below the national average but the range of needs are broad. The school is recognised as a centre of excellence in this regard having been awarded the Inclusion Quality Mark with Flagship Status. The percentage of families who are refugees or asylum seekers is 27% against a local authority average of 17% and 22.5% of pupils are in receipt of pupil premium. The school has benefitted from strong leadership from long serving members of staff most notably the Headteacher.

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Helen's has been through a period of transition that saw it convert to academy status in 2015 and become part of the Our Lady of Grace Catholic Academy Trust and it is operating in a rapidly developing part of East London. These changes have been managed exceptionally well by the school's visionary and inspirational Headteacher and sight has never been lost of the school's nature and purpose as a Catholic school. It is commendable that having been rated as outstanding in its previous two religious inspections the school continues to be outstanding. This reflects the team ethos that pervades a school that is built on service to the community and a determination not to be complacent, but to constantly strive for improvement. There is a very strong vision for continuous development from the Headteacher and other leaders. All stakeholders are united in their commitment to the pupils and dedicate themselves to ensure that there is a distinct Catholic learning environment that nurtures everyone to develop their 'talents to the full'.

Genuine care and love for the pupils is the highest priority, with welfare being demonstrated daily through excellent pastoral provision, which is a strength of the school. Pupils feel safe and enjoy coming to school and parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the caring environment and provision made for their children; St Helen's embodies a Catholic family where all are loved. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education are fully embedded across all areas of the curriculum. The Governors stated that policies reflected the aims of the school which were to ensure pupils were 'safe, happy and well looked after'. The school's development plan is coherent and ambitious for the community. It is a welcoming and inclusive Catholic school offering pupils a rich faith experience, appreciated by the community and referred to by those interviewed as '*being at the heart of the school*'. Its outstanding Catholic Life and Religious Education is firmly centred on the School Mission, '*United by its Catholic faith, St Helen's is a multicultural school, committed to developing the spiritual, academic and social potential of each child*', ensuring that its ethos remains true to the Catholic Church's mission in education. It strives to provide the very best outcomes for all pupils. This vision is shared by the strong school leadership, governors and dedicated staff team, who place the spiritual and moral development of pupils as their highest priority. The school fosters positive relationships with families with a strong sense of belonging as stated by one parent on their questionnaire return, '*The school provides my child with an excellent education and they are so happy at school*'. Another wrote, '*My daughter always comes home saying, "Mum I learnt something new at school today", which she then shares with me*'.

High expectations of pupils' behaviour ensures pupils are happy and visibly enjoy their learning and time at school. They are caring towards one another and reach out to those in need through a variety of charitable acts. They are rightly proud of the school they attend. All areas for development since the last inspection have been fully met. School self-evaluation is a strength with embedded procedures helping leaders know their school well and plan for future school developments and improvements.

What the school should do to improve further:

With no significant areas for development the school should continue to work on the areas identified in its own self-evaluation giving a priority to;

- Utilising current strong cross curricular links to secure pupils' understanding of all of the vocabulary used in prayers.
- Broaden the age appropriate opportunities pupils experience to design and lead Collective Worship, initially at classroom level.

CATHOLIC LIFE

Grade 1

The leadership of the Headteacher and her leadership team in promoting the 'Catholic Life of the School' is outstanding. Some of the practice within the school such as its prayer life and teachings about Catholic Social Teaching is exemplary. The school has developed outstanding opportunities for pupils via for example; Mini Vinnies, about which pupils had a good knowledge of the links to St Vincent de Paul, focusing on the corporal acts of mercy and by looking to build awareness of these, supporting the local community through pupils visiting those in need in the convent and each year hosting a 'sleep out' to consider empathy with the homeless. Year 2 work with the parish in cleaning the Convent Chapel and the school choir perform for the parish each Christmas spreading the word of God through song. Pupils were very eager to discuss these areas and proudly spoke of the lead roles they are given, and there are opportunities to develop these roles and pupils' independence further.

The Mission Statement is clear and effectively drives the life and achievements of the school. The commitment to and success of the mission of the school, is driven by high quality leadership from leaders at all levels, who embrace the vision for the school and work together to achieve it. School development and self-evaluation documentation indicate the integration of the school's mission into all aspects of the school's work. Almost all pupils appreciate, value and actively participate in the Catholic Life and mission of the school. They respond positively and are often keen to lead those activities that promote the 'Catholic Life of the School', both within school and in the wider community. This is evident in students' attitudes, 'student voice' responses, community and charitable activities, prayer and worship, relationships and the whole approach to learning and achievement.

Pupils are not only proud to be part of their school family but demonstrate this by their consistent acceptance of the required standards of behaviour and work. Almost all pupils believe that they attend a very good school and appreciate the care and support offered by the staff at all levels. Pupils see the school as a family which is concerned with the development of the whole person. This view was also shared by staff and parents. Pupils show a deep respect for others and are often articulate in seeing this as an integral part of the Christian faith. Pupil behaviour in and around the school is exemplary. This makes the atmosphere conducive to learning and personal development. Pupils feel that St Helen's is a very special school because it helps them to recognise their duty to others in the world and to treat them as Jesus would want them to. They can articulate many ways in which they do this such as raising money for CAFOD throughout Lent. Pupils feel that they have a very active part in the development of the school because teachers trust them to make suggestions about ways in which to improve it.

Behaviour for learning is excellent. Pupils show a deep respect for themselves and others. They collaborate exceptionally well during lesson times, each giving others time to speak and share their opinions. Pupils' understanding of vocation is extremely well developed, particularly in key stage 2. They happily talked about the many ways in which they could help God to keep others safe, happy and well. They know that it is their duty to do so and enjoy the many opportunities the school gives them to fulfil this goal. They are very proud to be members of St Helen's School and express pride in their own identities and beliefs. Staff are active role models of mutual respect and forgiveness. This is seen in classes where staff encourage pupils to ask questions and staff then go to great lengths to answer them in a thoughtful manner.

The Headteacher is well supported by experienced and knowledgeable governors. The whole school aims to offer each child a strong knowledge of the faith and teaches them how to become the person that God wants them to be. As a result, the majority of pupils are able to grow in faith and personal strength to achieve this aim. Governors regularly visit and are kept up to date with the school's evaluation of Catholic Life.

Pupils benefit greatly from the many and varied opportunities they are given to take part in lunchtime and after school clubs and activities. This was exemplified in pupils undertaking the preparing and cooking of a lunch for themselves and some invited adults, which they do regularly. They demonstrated sociability and confidence in sitting and dining together. The school also has a strong programme of annual residential visit opportunities that see a significant number of pupils given the experience of visiting Italy and in England the John Bosco camp. These are real learning experiences due, in part, to visit preparation undertaken with pupils, thereby maximising the value of the journeys and activities. The school works hard to ensure all pupils have access to these opportunities and pupils spoke effusively about these experiences, most notably seeing the Pope on their visit to Rome.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Grade 1

The quality of Religious Education is outstanding. The inspector agrees with the school's judgement that the high quality of provision made for Religious Education means that almost all of the pupils make excellent progress through all key stages and achieve standards that are above or at least in line with expectations. The school uses the 'Come and See' scheme, with teachers using their professional judgements to supplement it as appropriate. They use a variety of teaching styles and strategies, which ensures that learning and progress of pupils from different groups is very good. The school provides additional excellent support for pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, thereby securing their progress. Teachers and other adults are very aware of their pupils' capabilities and of their prior learning and understanding and plan very effectively to build on these. Pupils talk confidently about their work and say that they enjoy school and feel that they are successful learners in Religious Education. Pupils' attitudes to Religious Education are very good and they enjoy the variety of activities, which maintain their interest and encourage them to learn. Learners are gaining knowledge, skills and understanding at an excellent rate across all key stages. Pupils achieve well in the Foundation Stage in all areas of learning. On entry, their knowledge and understanding of Religious Education is generally below average, but due to the excellent Early Years provision they quickly progress and are then well prepared for subsequent challenges as they progress through the school.

The school's strong Catholic ethos, high expectations and good behaviour management means that nearly all pupils demonstrate excellent concentration. Pupils enjoy Religious Education. They take great pleasure in the stories, prayers, religious imagery, the themes of the liturgical seasons and the many celebrations of faith. One of St Helen's School's special strengths is the very high standard of literacy within Religious Education. Every opportunity is used to ensure that Religious Education is supported through strong cross curricular links. Pupils' Religious Education books contain an excellent variety of work. This work is consistently well presented with appropriate activities for the different age groups and abilities. All teachers use a variety of questioning techniques to ensure that pupils can reflect on their faith and how they can apply it to their lives and regularly provide examples from their own lives to support this. Observations and interviews show pupils are keen to learn, can work collaboratively or independently, and enjoy debating and discussing key messages within their lessons. Teaching in Religious Education brings clarity to the relationship between faith and life and between faith and culture. Pupils are inquisitive learners and keen to ask questions and find solutions to problems. Teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge, which is consistently used to challenge and inspire pupils, who are challenged to respond to questions about their own and others' feelings. Pupils are consistently challenged to think at every point of the lesson.

Pupils are morally aware of the requirements of living out their faith in their everyday life. Pupils reflect and have a good awareness of the faith and traditions of other religious communities. Each year group

studies a different faith and visits are made to appropriate places of worship. As a result, pupils have a good understanding and respect for other cultures and faiths. Parents expressed, in discussions with them, how much they valued this part of their children's' Religious Education. They also complemented the school and teachers for the Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) programme run by the school, how well they were informed about it and how well it prepared their children for secondary school. Teachers' high expectations of pupils are reflected in the marking of pupils' work. Teachers' feedback enables pupils to respond fully to questions of faith in their own lives. Pupils are continually encouraged to celebrate their achievements and efforts. This builds up their self-confidence and encourages them to be good role models. Parents were of the view that this is a considerable strength of the school and enabled their children to maximise their opportunities.

Religious Education is led by a highly committed and able subject leader. She has continued to implement the school's thorough monitoring and evaluation procedures utilising diocesan guidance. This has been done speedily and effectively and provides an exemplar that could usefully be shared with other schools. She is to be commended for linking these changes to the school's electronic system thereby bringing assessment in Religious Education in line with that of other core subjects. Consequently, all staff are robustly supported so that teaching can be continually developed. Classroom Support Staff are skilled and well planned for and as a result provide excellent discreet targeted support that has a measurable impact on pupil progress. The Subject Leader and Governors ensure that the Religious Education curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference throughout the school. They do this through continual monitoring and self-evaluation procedures which are well established and increasingly involve leaders at all levels. As a result of this self-evaluation, teachers challenge all pupils to consistently reflect on the deeper meaning of faith in their lives. Religious Education has a high priority on the timetable and it receives above the required minimum 10% of taught curriculum time.

There is frequent scrutinising by staff, governors and pupils of the quality of displays and prayer focuses in classrooms and around the school. This has resulted in a very high standard of Religious Education displays which enhance the spiritual environment of the school. Pupil progress meetings and data analysis all inform ongoing school improvement planning and staff development. This continually leads to improved standards in Religious Education.

The teaching observed during the course of the inspection validated the school's own judgements regarding the consistently high quality delivery of lessons. No lessons seen were less than good with the majority being outstanding. Pupils are given an excellent start in Nursery where, for example, their vocabulary was well developed by the teacher who engaged them in a conversation about how God makes us all different which they were clear makes everyone special and which we should respect. Teachers provide pupils with learning opportunities that have a context to their own lives and challenge their thought processes. In a Key Stage 2 lesson on the theme of 'Mission' pupils were challenged to think about their Bishop's Mission. Good links were made with Catholic Social Teaching where pupils had to give their ideas on how they would address issues such as, Youth Crime, Child Hunger and Litter. Another lesson looked at the qualities of the Apostles which pupils had to rank in order of importance. They were then challenged to justify their choices to other groups in the class which prompted some excellent debates. In a Key Stage 1 lesson, pupils reflected on scripture passages and how these made them feel in their head and in their heart. This dealt very effectively with how emotions can affect decisions.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Grade 1

The quality of provision for Collective Worship is outstanding. All pupils participate with enthusiasm and respect in acts of Collective Worship. Pupils are at ease when praying in school. Their response in both large and small gatherings is reverent and spiritual. As one pupil said, *'I like praying here as we get to spend time with God, it makes me feel calmer inside'*.

In an assembly attended during the inspection, the topic of 'The Year of the Word' was explored reflecting how the school has fully engaged with this. Throughout the celebration pupils demonstrated a

good understanding of scripture. Pupils are at the early stage of taking the initiative in planning and leading acts of Collective Worship and it would be opportune now to provide more, age appropriate opportunities, for pupils to plan and lead, initially at classroom level. Adults are excellent role models, who significantly contribute to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Almost all pupils gain a good understanding of the Church's liturgical year, seasons and feasts, appropriate to their age and ability as they progress through the school. From the earliest stages pupils learn to recognise the special nature of prayer and show respect.

Collective Worship is central to the life of the school and is shared with parents and the wider community at key points throughout the year. Each class leads an act of Collective Worship each term to which parents are invited. Parents say these pupil led events are highly inclusive and '*help our children thrive*'. The hymn practice attended was in itself both a learning experience and a reflective celebration that saw pupils singing their hearts out, experiencing true joy in the words and music, due in part to the enthusiasm and choice of material by the session leader. Singing is an undoubted strength of the school.

The school day is punctuated by prayer and as a result pupils are confident in the common prayers of the Church. The school has identified the need to further develop pupils' understanding of some of the vocabulary of prayers used. Each class setting has a well-resourced focal area set aside and is clearly focused on the appropriate season of the Church.

The Headteacher and other staff display expert knowledge of how to plan and deliver high quality experiences of Collective Worship. They have a very clear understanding of the Church's liturgical year and use this to very good effect in leading the school. Leaders prioritise the liturgical development for all in school and ensure that time is devoted to it.

Collective Worship is promoted throughout the school with thoughtful and well used colourful displays in classrooms and shared spaces, which help pupils understand the essential elements of Collective Worship. Diocesan, cluster and in-house training has been accessed by all staff to support formation in the development of their spiritual and liturgical understanding and skills. The school's CPD provision is wide ranging and staff feel they are well provided for in this regard.

The Parish Priest is a regular visitor to the school and his contributions to school life and worship are greatly valued and appreciated. Leaders, Governors and the Parish Priest ensure that St Helen's is an inclusive worshipping community where they do not merely tolerate but embrace and welcome all into their school family. They are consistently updated and informed about the impact of worship across the school.