

Diocese of Hallam

**Section 23
Inspection Report**

**St Helen's Catholic Primary School
West Street
Hoyland
Barnsley
S74 9DL**

Headteacher: Mr Phil Harrison

Chair of Governors: Mr John Kril

Reporting Inspector: Mrs Gillian Foster assisted by Mrs Ellen Baker

Date of Inspection: 29th, 30th November 2004

Introduction

The Inspection of St Helen's Catholic Primary School was carried out at the request of the Governors of the school in fulfilment of their obligations under the requirements and according to the directives of the Education (Schools Act) 1996. The school was inspected within the Framework for Section 23 Inspections of Maintained Schools approved by the Bishop of Hallam. The Inspection was carried out over a period of two days by one inspector and one assistant inspector and the conclusions drawn are based on: five lesson observations, attendance at three acts of collective worship and five classroom liturgies, scrutiny of most of the school policy documentation, school booklet, scrutiny of pupils' work books and folders, teachers' planning and evaluations, written and photographic records of work previously done by pupils, scrutiny of assessment records, scrutiny of samples of annual reports to parents, analysis of 31 completed parental questionnaires, interviews and conversations with the Headteacher, the Religious Education Co-ordinators, all staff, the Chairman of Governors and other Governors, the Parish Priest, the pastoral care worker, a number of parents and members of the parish, members of the School Council and pupils in all classes.

Information about the school.

St Helen's Catholic Primary School has 143 pupils on roll between the ages of 4 and 11. There will be a new intake of Reception children in January 2005. The school is situated next to the parish church of Sacred Heart & St Helen's Hoyland, Barnsley in the Dearne Valley. Pupils come largely from the parish and local community with a few children attending from the parish of Our Lady and St James, Worsbrough. The school serves an area of major regeneration in the Dearne Valley but there are still pockets of high unemployment and considerable deprivation. Very few pupils are of minority ethnic heritage and none speak English as an additional language. The proportion of children with special educational needs or for whom statements of special need are maintained is below the national average. The school is held in very high regard by the community and is always over-subscribed. The recent OFSTED report, (June 2004), found the overall effectiveness of the school to be good.

The 143 pupils on roll are grouped as follows:

Class 1	Reception	7
	Year 1	15
Class 2	Year 1	6
	Year 2	22
Class 3	Year 3	24
	Year 4	9
Class 4	Year 4	11
	Year 5	18
Class 5	Year 5	3
	Year 6	28

The Planned Admission Number is 20

54 pupils (38%) are baptised Catholics, 66 (46%) belong to other Christian Churches, and the remaining 23 (16%) pupils are unaffiliated to any religion. There are 5 full time teachers including the headteacher and 2 part-time teachers. All but one part time member of the teaching staff belong to the Catholic Faith.

How well the school is doing as a Catholic school.

The school is a very good Catholic school with many significant strengths. Excellent leadership and very good management within the very high quality school environment which constantly surrounds children in the nurturing, caring ethos of Gospel values, ensures that children achieve well and are given many opportunities to fulfil their potential as unique children of God.

What the school does well as a Catholic school.

- The Mission Statement of the school is a lived reality. It is re-created each day and it is well understood by all members of the school community that the Gospel values expressed in the Mission Statement are the foundation for all that is done in school.

- The headteacher provides excellent, inspirational leadership underpinned by his own deep faith; this has a most positive impact on school. The headteacher is most ably supported by the deputy head, the RE co-ordinators and staff who all share the vision of the Mission Statement and work tirelessly for the children and the community.
- The school benefits greatly from very good governance by well-informed, pro-active governors who have a realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses, an understanding of the explicit nature of Catholic education and who work in close partnership with the headteacher to retain all that is good in the school and move the school forward.
- The excellent relationships that exist between staff, between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves is a major strength of the school.
- There are excellent links between the school, parents the parish and the wider community which add greatly to the children's enjoyment of school life and their understanding of their own and the wider community.
- The school cares for its pupils very well; arrangements for pastoral support and guidance are excellent.
- The quality of collective worship is very high and this contributes to the very good spiritual development of the children.
- There is a strong culture of respect and high expectations in school which leads to the pupils behaving very well and having very good attitudes to learning. The school provides many opportunities for the moral development of the children, which is very good.
- RE is given a high priority in school. The RE curriculum is treated with rigour and there are the same expectations in terms of planning, teaching and learning and standards as in other curriculum areas. The result is that pupils reach standards commensurate with those in other curriculum areas and make good or very good progress.
- The school building and the outdoor areas have been developed to offer pupils a stimulating and uplifting environment; this is appreciated by children, staff and parents.
- The school is constantly exploring and implementing new initiatives both in school and beyond, which will add breadth and enjoyment to the curriculum and activities already offered to its pupils.

Areas where the school needs to develop as a Catholic school.

1. Work towards developing parish involvement with sacramental preparation.
2. Continue to support the newly appointed RE co-ordinator to include in her role, the monitoring and evaluation of planning and teaching and learning.
3. Build on the good practice already in place to consolidate and further develop whole school assessment procedures.

4. Ensure that through appropriately differentiated tasks and activities, all pupils are challenged in line with their abilities.

The following matter should also be considered as an area for further development by the school:

- Ensure that all staff share learning objectives with children at the start of each lesson and revisit the objectives at the end of the lesson, to consolidate learning and enable staff to evaluate progress.

How has the school improved since the last inspection?

The last inspection took place in March 1998. Action has been taken and all four Key Issues have been successfully addressed. The issue relating to the development of the role of RE co-ordinator needs to be revisited as a new RE co-ordinator has recently been appointed. The issue of assessment has been addressed and now needs to be consolidated to include agreed new whole school procedures.

The accuracy of the school's self-evaluation.

The school provided the inspectors with an excellent analysis of its own evaluation as a Catholic school. The evaluation is detailed and evidence based. In each area of school life the evidence of how school is performing is clearly set out together with what developments are already underway and those still needed to be undertaken. There is a high degree of challenge in the developments and expected outcomes. Priorities identified in the self-evaluation document are included in the School Development Plan. This is excellent practice and ensures that the school has the desire and capacity to move forwards from an already high baseline.

How high are the standards in Religious Education?

Standards in Religious Education on entry into the Reception class are well below the national average. Attainment of boys and girls is broadly similar. As pupils progress through the school they make good to very good progress.

How effective are teaching and learning in Religious Education?

Foundation Stage

At the time of the inspection, there were only 7 children of Reception age. They are taught together with 15 Year One children in Class 1. In January 2005, 12 more children will enter the Reception class. The lesson observed was well planned; it began with the lighting of the Advent wreath and saying an Advent prayer. The content and pace of the lesson was good and appropriate to the age group. During the introductory session on the carpet the teacher motivated and stimulated the children's interest through well targeted questions; the children responded confidently to questions and were encouraged to express their own views. The introductory session included a short Scripture reading which the children listened to with interest and concentration. The tasks which followed were differentiated to suit the needs of each age group. This is good practice. The children settled well to the tasks and obviously enjoyed what they were asked to do. The children were very well supported by well informed, capable teaching assistants who make a valuable contribution to children's learning and

well-being. The teacher brought the children together at the end of the session to sing a new Advent hymn. The lesson was lively and enjoyable for the children and advanced their knowledge and understanding.

Key Stage 1

The inspectors observed lessons in two of the classes in this Key Stage. The quality of teaching observed ranged from good to very good. In the better lesson observed, learning objectives were shared with the children and a plenary session was planned and carried out where the learning objectives were revisited. This is very good practice and should be shared with colleagues. This lesson was very well paced and the children remained motivated and interested throughout. Through their good questioning skills, teachers are able to draw answers from the children and take them on to higher levels of knowledge and understanding. In the case where teachers offer tasks differentiated to suit the abilities of each pupil and challenge them to higher levels of knowledge and understanding and attainment, pupils make very good progress. A consistent approach to differentiated tasks and activities now needs to be established throughout the school, to ensure that all children are presented with work that matches their abilities and challenges them at appropriate levels. Both lessons included Gospel readings at levels appropriate to the ages of the pupils and very good discussions followed. Both lessons ended in prayerful reflection around the Advent wreath. The standards and expectations of staff in RE are commensurate with those in other subjects.

Key Stage 2

Teaching in Key Stage 2 is at least satisfactory and shows many good features. Lesson objectives are shared or established with the children at the start of the lesson, although they are not always revisited in plenary sessions. This practice should now be developed and included in teachers' planning. Teachers have very good questioning skills, and through their questions lead children to a higher level of understanding and enable them to explore issues at a mature level. Very good use is made of the technique of 'Talking Partners'. The children work with each other in collaborative and productive ways and are able to express ideas generated confidently and fluently. The written tasks following the introductions rely too much upon differentiation by outcome and lack challenge for many of the pupils. Appropriate differentiation of tasks and activities now needs to be included in teachers' planning to ensure that tasks are matched to pupils' abilities and that they contain appropriate levels of challenge. In all lessons observed, prior learning was built upon and consolidated and applied to the next stage. This is very good practice. The good use of teaching assistants ensures that those children with special educational needs are always involved and contribute to discussions.

How well do pupils respond to Religious Education?

The attitude of pupils to Religious Education is very good. Children listen with interest and concentration in their lessons, they are confident to answer questions and voice opinions. They value and respect the views of their classmates. The good pace of most lessons, the variety of teaching strategies used and the skilful questioning of the teachers, ensures that the children remain motivated and enthusiastic in particular during the introductory parts of lessons. All teachers have high expectations of behaviour, which the children respect, and good class management skills; this results in classrooms being very good, stimulating, environments for learning. Teachers use positive praise and affirmation which is effective in encouraging children to lively participation in lessons.

Are the staffing, financial and material resources sufficient for the teaching of Religious Education?

There are 5 full time teachers, including the headteacher and deputy headteacher, and 2 part time teachers on the staff. All but one part time member of staff belong to the Catholic Faith and many are active members of the parish. Their own enthusiasm for the Faith has a most positive impact on deepening the Catholic ethos of the school.

There are 7 teaching assistants who work extremely well with the teaching staff and make a very good contribution to the harmonious ethos that pervades the school. Currently, one member of staff - a teacher who completed her NQT year this year - is 'shadowing' the RE co-ordinator and will take over the role completely by the end of the school year. This induction of the new co-ordinator is very good practice, it provides on-going professional development for the new co-ordinator and ensures a smooth transition in this very important area of school life. The RE co-ordinators attend the diocesan meetings and disseminate information and ideas in staff meetings. All colleagues are very well supported by the RE co-ordinators.

On-going staff formation is given a high priority and many opportunities, ranging from shared INSET days with other Catholic schools in the Dearne Valley with a retreat dimension, to staff sharing prayer times together are planned for. Careful maintenance and planned purchases over the past years has ensured that the school is very well resourced to deliver the RE curriculum. Following the last Section 23 Inspection, resources for the multi-faith and multi-cultural element of the 'Here I Am' programme were reviewed and many books and artefacts purchased to enhance the delivery of that part of the curriculum. The RE co-ordinators maintain a good overview of resources and are allocated money from the school budget on a par with other subjects, to purchase resources that have been identified as priorities.

The interior and exterior areas of school have been developed and decorated to provide the children with a bright, stimulating and uplifting environment. Many of the walls in the main corridor are decorated with excellent examples of the children's work, including a tile plaque. The entrance area always has displays reflecting the Church's liturgical season. These displays are of a very high standard and are both interesting and informative for children, parents and all visitors to the school. They are a powerful visible sign of the school's commitment to providing pupils with an explicit, Catholic education.

How good are the quality and range of the curriculum and assessment in Religious Education ?

The quality and range of the R.E. curriculum and assessment procedures are good. Religious Education is given a high priority in school. The school provides a broad curriculum, which meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory by using the "Here I Am" scheme of work. All staff use the planning sheets provided by the Diocese. Staff collaborate when planning, especially for mixed aged classes, to ensure work is not repeated. In the lessons observed, staff used a variety of teaching strategies and motivated children by the use of music and excellent resources, such as music tapes, Advent wreaths, the Jesse tree and model of Noah. During the lessons observed, the children demonstrated good knowledge of the Bible, the life of Jesus, the birth of John the Baptist, the story of Noah and meaning of the Advent wreath.

In the best lessons, interesting and differentiated activities were planned which engaged the children and the lesson objective was referred to in the plenary session.

There are strong links between R.E. and other areas of the curriculum, especially in literacy, I.C.T. and geography. The school has seven teaching assistants who support children in class to ensure equality of access and opportunities for all children to make progress. The school provides a stimulating learning environment with high quality displays of children's work including the excellent outdoor murals which all promote the children's self worth. The school has a programme of educational visits including residential visits, which help to broaden the curriculum and bring it alive. At present there are no links with ministers of any other Christian Church. This is an area which may be considered in the future.

Teachers assess children well using a good marking policy, which ensures comments on written work show children how they can improve their work. In lessons teachers praise and encourage children orally. The R.E. co-ordinator has recently introduced individual assessment books. These contain one piece of work from each topic studied. In the future, the assessment books should prove to be a useful tool to give an overview of work covered and how children are progressing.

The school has compiled a very good portfolio of R.E. work, which shows the range of work covered in each topic. Some teachers have trialled the level descriptors from the Diocese to level some of the work samples. Next term, the school has plans to introduce the end of topic assessment tasks and use level descriptors as a whole school initiative.

There is a programme for monitoring planning and delivery of the R.E. curriculum. The R.E. co-ordinator collects plans and observes one R.E. lesson per member of staff, each term. Following lesson observations, feedback is always given. The headteacher also takes every class for R.E. once per term. Reports indicate to parents topics covered by the children during the year and progress made. The celebration assembly at the end of each topic gives all staff the opportunity to see the work covered by every class and the progression made throughout school. The school needs to consolidate and further develop whole school assessment procedures.

How effective is leadership and management in Religious Education?

The headteacher has been in post for 14 years and he has made the provision of high quality Catholic education for his pupils a priority. His inspirational leadership, experience and positive commitment to RE is a great asset to the school. He is an excellent role model for all staff. He has a clear vision of where he wants to take the school and the organisational skills, enthusiasm and determination to succeed in this.

As previously stated, a new RE co-ordinator is 'shadowing' the current co-ordinator and will take over the role at the end of the year. This is very good practice and through her hard work, enthusiasm and dedication, will ensure a continuation of very strong subject leadership traditional in the school.

Whole school agreement and practice ensures that the 'Here I Am' programme is planned for and followed by all staff ensuring that all elements of the Curriculum Directory are covered and the correct amount of curriculum time is devoted to teaching RE.

Excellent relationships exist between all staff and there is a shared commitment to the aims and values of the school. Staff are very ready to share their faith with the children and this has a significant impact on the pupils.

The governing body, which includes the parish priest, are well informed and pro-active and they have a sound understanding of the explicit nature of the distinctive Catholic education the school offers its pupils. One governor has responsibility for RE and is kept very well informed by reports and visits to school. This is very good practice. The school follows diocesan guidelines and uses appropriate documentation when undertaking self-evaluation procedures. This evaluation is detailed and honest and is effective in identifying areas for further development and the means to achieve these targets. Many of the targets set are challenging and innovative.

How good is the quality of collective worship and liturgy, and how effective is chaplaincy provision ?

The quality of collective worship is very good. Each day starts and ends with an act of collective worship. Most days begin with a whole school gathering where the children listen attentively and join in enthusiastically with the singing. Children are encouraged to share any out of school achievements and be congratulated. Worship on Fridays takes place at the end of the day, in church, and is based on the readings for the following Sunday Mass. There are also regular prayer assemblies, led by the deputy head, where staff contribute their own prayers. At the end of each topic, a celebration assembly takes place where each class shares their work on that topic. This is very good practice as it fosters appreciation of the work of others and the children can learn from each other.

During the inspection, in a Christingle Service, the children showed a sense of wonder, awe and reverence, especially when the Christingles they had made in class the day before, were carefully lit. The response of the children and those parents who were present, to the readings, prayers and singing was very good.

A children's Sunday Mass in church is organised every month. The parish priest comes into school to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Following the departure of the chaplain appointed to serve the schools of the Dearne Valley, there is currently no formal chaplaincy provision beyond the parish priest. The school has plans to link with the newly appointed chaplaincy at Pope Pius X High School.

How well does the school care for its pupils?

The school takes very good care of the individual needs of each person in the school community; this is greatly enhanced by the personal knowledge staff have of the pupils and their families through their own involvement with the community. Measures are taken to ensure that the children feel ownership and responsibility for the school through opportunities such as the School Council and the many assemblies and acts of collective worship which always emphasise the sense of the school as part of a worshipping, Eucharistic, caring community. This culture of care and respect is evident in lessons, lunch times and in the playground. The school is blest in having available the services of a social worker from the Hallam Caring Services who is able to work with and support children and their families who are experiencing difficulties. The school has a 'Rainbows' group whose facilitators work sensitively to support children who have suffered bereavement, separation or trauma. Parents whose children have been involved with 'Rainbows', speak with great appreciation of the help they have given to their children.

How effective is the school's provision for the spiritual and moral development of its pupils and how well do they respond to it?

The school's provision for spiritual development and the children's response to it, is very good. This is a strength of the school. Prayer forms a central role in the life of the school. The school provides a variety of opportunities for reflection, spontaneous and formal prayer. Children behave very well in collective worship and R.E. lessons. They listen attentively and show their understanding by responding well. Key Stage Two children have their own prayer journals. Key Stage One children are given opportunities to respond with prayer during lessons. Year six children have the opportunity to take part in a retreat with children from other Catholic schools. This is very good practice. Each class has a high quality R.E. prayer corner. In lessons, good use is made of music, artefacts, candles and Advent wreaths to create a prayerful atmosphere, which the children respond to very well. As part of the "Here I Am" programme, the children study Judaism and Islam. Adults provide very good examples to the children, especially by their personal involvement in prayer assemblies.

Provision for moral development of children and their response is also very good. This too is a strength of the school. St Helen's provides a secure community in which Gospel values permeate every aspect of school life. The mission statement is re-created every day, referred to in assemblies, displayed on classroom doors and seen in the attitudes and behaviour of staff and children. The children display a well developed sense of right and wrong. Throughout school, there is a strong culture of respect and affirmation.

During lessons children are given opportunities to question, discuss, reflect and respond to what they have heard. Through a broad curriculum, with many cross-curricular links, children find out about many third world countries. At the time of the inspection, the children were raising funds to help a community in Africa. They were selling a wide variety of items they had made themselves. The children showed great empathy with those in other poorer countries.

How good are relationships between the school, parents, parish and community?

Relationships between the school, parents, parish and community are excellent. The school acknowledges parents to be the first and foremost educators of their children and work in partnership with them to achieve the best education possible for each child. The school has an 'open-door' policy where any parent with a concern or worry can come to school to discuss it. Parents are frequently invited and accept the invitation, to share celebrations and liturgies in school and church. They are encouraged to come into school and work as volunteers. Those parents choosing to do so, are supported and guided in their roles. Parents are kept well informed of school issues through regular newsletters. Parents also receive end-of-year reports on their child's' progress which are detailed and informative.

The proximity of the parish church to school enables the children to visit church frequently for Masses or liturgical celebrations. Many of these occasions are shared with parishioners. There is a children's Mass each month which is planned and attended by many of the children. Parishioners are invited to liturgies and celebrations in school and attend in large numbers.

Following recommendations made by the Diocesan Review Team in 2001 and 2004, the school has developed much closer links with the two other diocesan primary schools in the Dearne Valley. Some

INSET days are shared, staff meetings for staff of all three schools are held once a term in each school and the Year 6 children from each school enjoy a retreat experience together. This is very good practice and works to develop and foster a growing sense of partnership and shared vision by the three schools. The school gives generous support to parish events such as Summer and Christmas fairs. Children are made to feel an important part of parish life. Several boys are committed altar servers. Currently, the school takes responsibility for preparing the children for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion during school time. There now needs to be discussion between school, priest and parish about how preparation for this important milestone in the faith journey of the children can be shared between school and parish.

Excellent use is made of expertise from outside school. A recent initiative working with 'creative partners' enabled the school to make an animated CD to which each pupil contributed. The CD includes stories the children have written and animated and an exploration of Hoyland. The work is of high quality and provides the children with opportunities to get to know their immediate neighbourhood better and give them great creative satisfaction. The school also has connections with local sports clubs and colleges. The children are encouraged to support local, national and overseas charities, they respond most generously. During the Inspection, Class 3 guided by their teacher held a sale of paintings they had done and hairbands they had made to support a family in Africa which had lost the means of supporting themselves. Their work, enthusiasm and success in raising a large amount of money was very impressive. This and other charitable giving helps the children to understand and engage with the wider world beyond their own community.

The parents' views of the school.

Thirty-one completed questionnaires were returned by parents and the inspectors spoke informally to many parents during the inspection. All parents are very supportive of the school, they appreciate the warm, caring Catholic ethos of the school which nurtures each of their children and offers support to themselves. They value the very good behaviour of the children and the good standards and progress they make in RE. They value the many invitations they receive to attend celebrations and liturgies although a small minority would appreciate invitations to class assemblies. Parents are appreciative of the regular information they receive on what their children are learning and how they, as parents can support this learning. They express pride in the school and the very high regard it is held in by the community.

Conclusion

The Diocesan inspectors wish to place on record their thanks for the kindness and co-operation shown by governors, parish priest, headteacher and staff, social worker, parishioners, parents and children during the inspection.

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Summary

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Copies of the full report may be obtained from St Helen's Catholic Primary School, West Street, Hoyland, Barnsley S72 9DL or The Diocese of Hallam Schools' Department, Hallam Pastoral Centre, St Charles Street, Sheffield S9 3WU. Tel 0114 2566440.