

DIOCESE OF PORTSMOUTH VALIDATION REPORT



Holy Cross Catholic Primary School

Millfield Avenue, East Cowes, Isle of Wight, PO32 6AS

URN: 118198
 Date of previous validation: May 2015
Date of this validation: 29th November 2021

Overall effectiveness	Previous validation: Good	This validation: Requires Improvement
The school community:	Requires Improvement	Attainment and progress in RE: Requires Improvement
The wider community:	Requires Improvement	Quality of teaching in RE: Requires Improvement
Spiritual development:	Requires Improvement	Leadership and management of RE: Requires Improvement
Moral development:	Requires Improvement	Leadership and management: Requires Improvement

This is school which requires improvement.

- Although all groups in the school talk about valuing the school’s Catholic ethos and Mission Statement, in reality not enough is done to actively promote and safeguard it, hence they have limited impact on the daily life of the school. A first step would be for staff to develop a common understanding of what it means to work in a faith school.
- The school’s improvement planning, particularly in relation to the Catholic life of the school, is not robust enough which makes it difficult for governors to monitor and evaluate the impact of actions taken.
- Since the 2015 validation there has been a decline in the standards pupils achieve in religious education (RE) and in activities that celebrate and promote the Catholic life of the school. School leaders, including governors, have not paid sufficient attention in monitoring and evaluating these fundamental elements of a Catholic school. Standards and quality of teaching in RE, although now improving, are still not providing sufficient challenge for all pupils.
- Although some parents and carers comment on the generally positive relationships they have with the school, others indicate communication is poor and leads to misunderstanding and frustrations.
- Whilst the school is grateful for the support it receives from the parish priest, the partnership with the local parish community is limited to the parish priest’s involvement in the life of the school rather than based upon a mutually beneficial relationship.

Inspectors recognised the following strengths:

- The link with other Catholic schools has increased the capacity in the school to develop teachers’ subject knowledge in RE.
- In the last few years, there has been significant staff turbulence. The RE leader, who was new to the role in January has provided timely support in helping teachers improve their teaching so that evidence in the pupils RE books shows that standards are improving. Further development is needed to ensure that there is consistency across the school.
- The outcomes in early years and key stage one show children in these phases receive good quality provision in RE.
- Pupils demonstrate a welcoming and inclusive attitude.
- The school has fostered charitable links with a range of worthwhile causes. The children particularly valued the links with the Mountbatten Hospice and the local food bank.
- The school site, including the plans for an outdoor prayer area, provides great opportunity for awe and wonder.
- The securing of the services of an interim headteacher who is committed to strengthening the Catholic ethos of the school and raising standards.
- The support of the parish priest in leading liturgies and developing teachers’ RE subject knowledge.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Review the mission statement and CARES values to ensure they are understood by all and explicit in all areas of school life.
- Ensure all staff actively promote the school's Catholic vision through;
 - Ensuring interactions actively promote and reflect the core values and ethos of the school.
 - Ensuring improvement planning includes measurable targets to promote and develop the Catholic life of the school, including RE (religious education), and identifies the key elements that staff and governors will be responsible for.
- Adopt robust and rigorous procedures which would enable governors to monitor and evaluate standards in RE and the Catholic life of the school and hold school leaders to account in these core areas of a Catholic school.
- Ensure the centrality of the Catholic life and mission of the school for all members of the school community, especially through the range and quality of the prayer life.
- Improve standards in RE by ensuring teaching challenges all groups of pupils.
- Continue to develop the use of assessment in RE to ensure teaching builds on the pupils' prior knowledge and skills.
- Review communication with parents and how the school responds to any complaints or issues raised by parents or others, in order to improve relationships and rebuild trust.
- Consider how the school can improve and extend its links with the local parish and with the local Catholic cluster of schools so all benefit from a closer and mutually supportive partnership.

Full Report

The school as a Catholic community

The school community:

Requires Improvement

The wider community:

Requires Improvement

- Members of the school need to develop a clear understanding of the distinctive nature of the Catholic school so that Gospel values have a strong influence on the work of the school.
- Although some parents and carers recognise the positive relationship they have with the school *"Holy Cross is a warm and nurturing school that makes children and parents feel welcome and safe"* and feel they are adequately informed; others feel communication is poor and leads to misunderstandings and frustrations.
- The school's newsletter and website mention the Catholic life of the school but could also be a tool to keep parents better informed of the RE curriculum and how the school's mission is lived out.
- Induction procedures enable staff to gain some understanding of the distinctive nature of a Catholic school, but this is an area that needs further development for all members of the school community.
- The school benefits from good support from the local parish priest, who supports RE and the liturgical life of the school. The contribution of the school to the life of the parish is an area which should be further explored and developed. More explicit and cohesive links between parish and school would be enhanced through a greater visible presence at both churches in Cowes and cementing of the mutually supportive relationship.
- Where staff do interact with other local Catholic schools it is proving beneficial, for example the training sessions provided by a neighbouring headteacher that have developed subject knowledge in RE.
- Although few responses to the parental survey were received, a majority (at least 55%) of those responding either agreed or strongly agreed with the given statement, although comments cited that communication could be improved.
- The governing body is committed to embedding the Catholic life and mission of the school into all aspects of its development and monitoring.
- Members of the school community have demonstrated their commitment to charities through support of local, national and international initiatives, including a local hospice, foodbanks and CAFOD.

Curriculum religious education

Attainment and progress:

Requires Improvement

Quality of teaching:

Requires Improvement

Leadership and management of RE:

Requires Improvement

- Relationships in the classroom create a learning environment where pupils are confident to contribute and achievement in RE is improving.
- Although now clearly showing signs of improvement, standards and quality of teaching in RE are still not providing sufficient challenge for all pupils.
- Pupils make good progress in early years and key stage one given their starting points. Once the school's work on raising the challenge for all groups of pupils and deepening their thinking and understanding of scripture is fully embedded, it should lead to higher achievement.
- The school provides detailed information for parents about the RE curriculum. It would be helpful to parents in supporting their children, if the work begun on explaining some units was extended to all.
- Feedback in RE is inconsistent, where it is good it helps to further pupils' subject knowledge. All staff would benefit from adopting this good practice.
- RE lessons observed during the validation included the following strengths:
 - Engaging and enthusiastic pupils who were keen to share their learning.
 - Pupils questioning that encouraged their peers to reflect and explain their thinking.
 - Appropriate multimedia that engaged pupils' interests.
- The RE leader has worked hard to support staff to improve teaching and learning in RE. She is clear on the next steps needed to improve standards in the subject further.
- A range of monitoring activities have occurred this year, many involving governors, which have been used to accurately identify strengths and areas for development within RE, however, there is not yet clear evidence of appropriate actions to follow up on the outcomes of the evaluation undertaken.

Spiritual and moral development

Spiritual development:

Requires Improvement

Moral development:

Requires Improvement

- Pupils are proud of their school, commenting, *"everyone will respect you no matter what your beliefs or background."*
- The school provides a range of worship, which allows pupils to express their relationship with one another and with God, in a generally prayerful manner. Examples include:
 - The range of celebrations linked to the liturgical year.
 - Pupils' attitudes to prayer.
 - Pupil led prayers.
- Opportunities for pupils to lead aspects of worship are being developed in EYFS and key stage one. This approach now needs to be shared across the school appropriate to the age of the child with further responsibility given to the older children.
- Although present, the prayer tables and displays would benefit from a higher focus to ensure that they reflect the valuing of prayer and pupils' work.
- The parish priest works effectively with the school to provide liturgical celebrations and opportunities to teach the children about different forms of prayer.
- Pupils in the school demonstrate good behaviour and Christian attitudes in their relationships. Key factors promoting this include:
 - The relationship between teachers and pupils.
 - Opportunities to take responsibility in public forums such as the Osborne House take over.
- Pupils should be given a greater range of opportunities to play a constructive role in the life of the school by taking on further responsibilities and strengthening pupil voice.

Leadership and management:

Requires Improvement

- Although all groups in the school, including leaders, talk about valuing the school's Catholic ethos and Mission Statement, in reality not enough is done to actively promote and safeguard it, hence they have limited impact on the daily life of the school. A first step would be to ensure that all stakeholders are clear on the mission and vision of the school and how these are embedded and lived in every aspect of school life.
- Governors are very supportive of the school and have developed a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. In the past, they have not held senior staff sufficiently to account. This has led to a lack of challenge in addressing the decline in the living out of the core elements of being a Catholic school and standards in RE. Recently, they have developed a more strategic view of the work of the school and how to hold school leaders to account.
- Too little progress has been made on the areas for development identified in the previous validation (May 2015).
- School leaders, including governors, will benefit from learning from best practice in order to strengthen the Catholic life of the school.

School details

Name of school:	Holy Cross Catholic Primary School
Age range of pupils:	4-11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll:	157
Chair of Governors:	Samantha Matthias
Interim Headteacher:	Elizabeth Dyer

Holy Cross Catholic Primary School is a one form entry primary school situated in East Cowes. It principally serves the Catholic parishes of St David's in East Cowes and St Thomas of Canterbury in West Cowes. Currently 22% of the pupils are Catholic, a further 34% are from other Christian denominations. The vast majority of pupils are white British, with few pupils from ethnic minority groups. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals or with an Education and Healthcare Plan is below the national average.

Information about this validation

This report to the Bishop of the Diocese under Canon 806 of the Code of Canon Law is also the report to the governors of the school on religious education. For Catholic maintained schools, the report also fulfils the requirements of Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Validation Team

Lead Validator	Catherine Hobbs
Assistant Validator	Roxy Ashworth

Activities carried out as part of the inspection

- Discussion on the school's self-evaluation sheets.
- Discussions with various members of the school community, including parents, governors, pupils and staff.
- Scrutiny of evidence provided, including surveys and Governors' minutes.
- An observation of collective worship.
- Observations of teaching and learning in RE, including joint observations with members of the school leadership team.
- Pupil work scrutiny.
- Feedback of key findings.

Conclusion

The inspectors would like to thank the interim headteacher, assistant headteacher, staff, governors, parish priest, parents and pupils of Holy Cross Catholic Primary School for their preparatory work for the validation, which forms part of the school's regular self-review cycle. They would also like to express their appreciation for the welcome they received and the support given during the inspection process.