

INSPECTION REPORT

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**Inspection carried out Under Canon 806
and in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005**

Name of School – Holy Souls RC Primary School, Wilworth Crescent, Blackburn, Lancashire, BB1 8QN.

Inspection date 23rd April 2018

Reporting Inspectors Damian Harrison, Pam Macro

Type of school	Primary
URN	119517
Age range of pupils	5-11
Number on roll	210
Appropriate authority	The Governing Board
Chair of Governors	Margaret Wells
Headteacher	Danielle Ellison
Religious Education Subject Leader	Sara Akehurst
Date of previous inspection	16 th July 2013

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades
Overall effectiveness of the school	2	1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3=Requires Improvement 4 = Inadequate
The quality of Catholic Leadership	2	
The Catholic Life of the school (incorporating Welcome, Welfare and Witness)	1	
The quality of Religious Education (incorporating Word)	2	
The quality of Worship	1	
The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements		

CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

Holy Souls school is an average-sized primary school with 210 pupils on roll. It serves the parish of St Alban's, based at Holy Souls church, and is situated in the Pleckgate area of north Blackburn.

The percentage of children who are baptised Roman Catholic is falling, now at 50% and the school is working hard to increase the number of Catholic children for admission in 2018 and beyond. The school has an increasing number of children from minority ethnic backgrounds (39%), bringing a rich cultural dimension to the school. 8% are recorded as not having English as their first language. The number of children in receipt of free school meals is 11%, with those receiving pupil premium grant at 18%. These are below the national average, but increasing significantly in the last year. 13% of the children have SEND provision. Mobility is low in the school, although a number of children have recently been admitted through the fair access protocol. There are 5 teachers who are Catholic and 5 who are non-Catholic.

The headteacher has been in post since September 2014. There has been some unavoidable staff absence in recent months and a degree of staff turnover.

THE KEY STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL INCLUDE:

- **This is a highly inclusive school where all members of the school community have a deep sense of belonging**
- **The very highly regarded headteacher provides outstanding leadership - featuring energy, compassion and dedication to the whole school community**
- **The nurturing care offered to the children and their families, and the staff team, ensures that everyone may grow and develop, even through their difficult times**
- **The exceptional behaviour of the children who conduct themselves with confidence, respect and compassion in their relationships**
- **The high quality of relationships which exist across the school, forming into a cohesive, happy and caring community**

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL IS GOOD

Holy Souls is a good Catholic school with many outstanding features. Under the exceptional leadership of the headteacher, it is a rapidly improving school. She is well supported by an effective leadership team and a committed Governing Board. The Catholic life of Holy Souls is exceptional, with its Mission brought to life at the heart of everything. It is a welcoming school where all members of its diverse community feel included. Everyone has a say and they feel listened to. Alongside this welcome is the outstanding care provided to all, ensuring their welfare is fully catered for. The headteacher leads the way in ensuring the Catholic climate of the school lives up to the Word of Jesus Christ 'love one another as I have loved you'. As a result, the children are happy with smiles on their faces. They know how well they are cared for and they understand the contribution they make to ensure that their school is a special place to be. The staff feel valued too, and share the headteacher's vision for improvement.

The children achieve well. Teaching and learning are good and so the children make progress. Outcomes are good too, including those in Religious Education. The curriculum offers rich and varied experiences. This is responded to well by the children, whose behaviour and attitudes to learning are exceptional. Staff have appropriate training opportunities, some provided by Salford Diocese, which is enhancing the drive for improvement which exists.

There is a need for greater rigour and clarity in the planning for improvements which relate to the development of Religious Education and the school improvement planning. The school is exploring ways in which the best standards of work in the school apply consistently in Religious Education as well.

The quality of Worship in the school is outstanding with a high level of ownership and engagement. Parents, parishioners and members of the Governing Board regularly take part and witness this strength. It provides wonderful support for the children in their own spiritual development, regardless of their individual faith background. The range

of experience is broad and includes references to Sacred Scripture, contemplative prayer, assemblies, Masses and class-based worship. Plans to introduce prayer stations will further enhance the quality of worship in the school. Holy Souls, with its strong leadership and cohesive staff team, the exceptionally capable children and deeply supportive community is well placed to continue towards excellence in all areas of school life.

THE QUALITY OF CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP IS GOOD.

Holy Souls is an improving school in every way because leadership is effective in steering the school forward.

The headteacher's outstanding leadership has been critical in sustaining improvements in recent years. She is deeply committed, focussed and energetic. She has established a real sense of teamwork and togetherness across the school and everyone buys into her vision. She is held in the highest regard. The headteacher, whilst remaining strategic and determined at all times, has been able to simultaneously provide high levels of care and support for her staff team. She is ably supported by senior leaders.

The Religious Education subject leader supports the headteacher in her vision for the school, and is dedicated to her role in improving the quality of Religious Education and the Catholic life of the school. Pupils also take a leadership role in the school and through their activities as School Councillors and the GIFT / Chaplaincy team, they are clear-minded and confident in their contribution to ensuring the school moves forward. The priest-in-charge provides highly valued support to the school as a governor, and makes a valued contribution to the Catholic Life of the school, worship opportunities and Masses.

Governors know their school well and are highly supportive. They witness much of the school's work first-hand and are extremely proud of the school and the achievements it makes. They challenge the school in its drive for improvement. Leadership can be improved by developing more strategic and systematic approaches, with greater clarity and measurability of intended outcomes. This will help leaders in their judgements about how successful improvements have been and assist them in deciding on next steps.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL (incorporating Welcome, Welfare and Witness) IS OUTSTANDING

The welcome provided by Holy Souls is outstanding and truly reflects the school mission to include all. There is a rich mix of cultural and faith backgrounds at the school and everyone feels fully part of this school family. They come together as a harmonious community. The role played by the headteacher and her staff team is critical in this. They genuinely reach out to all and this is deeply appreciated by parents and their children. They feel listened to, they are seen as important, and consequently have no hesitation in seeking information, advice and support. One parent typified this by saying 'I always feel part of what's going on, never excluded from anything, and always warmly welcomed – it's a real family!'

The headteacher leads the way in providing an exceptionally nurturing school in which the welfare provided is outstanding. The school's Mission Statement, which is underpinned by the Gospel words 'Love one another, as I have loved you', is brought to life in the quality of care provided throughout. The children are first to recognise how caring their school is and describe this with eloquence and confidence. They say their school is 'amazing, kind, loving and where everyone shares and cares'. Adults who work at the school feel that their pastoral and personal needs are extremely well supported. The school is always quick to respond to parental needs and enquiries. Children with SEND and other needs and vulnerabilities are embraced in this Catholic school which reaches out to all. A Rainbows group offers support to children with vulnerabilities and suffering from bereavement.

With the school's Mission Statement so alive in the school, outstanding witness is given to Gospel values, and this is evident throughout. Relationships throughout the school are of the highest order. In the broadest sense, the children want to do the best they can with their Mission at heart. They feel confident to suggest and support changes and know that they are listened to. They take ownership of future developments, such as the introduction of prayer stations. Support is enthusiastically given to charities, an example being the Blackburn Foodbank appeal.

THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (incorporating Word) IS GOOD

The Mission Statement of Holy Souls is known throughout the school and is the central pillar to school life. Children see it as an important part of helping them to be the best they can be. Sacred Scripture is prominent in the school through displays, assemblies and in the children's work. The school is committed to improving the quality of teaching and learning, which is good across the school. Some very effective teaching was seen by the inspection team, encouraging collaborative work from the children, which was particularly impressive. They work in teams and partnerships very well. The children's attitudes to

learning are strong and they are keen and eager. This provides the opportunity for lessons to be improved by designing activities which sustain learning over longer periods of time.

The quality of Religious Education as reflected in the children's books is good and the children are making progress. Contexts for learning are broad and varied. Occasionally, the quality of work seen in the Religious Education books is not as high as in other subjects. The school is exploring ways in which greater rigour in planning and expectations can resolve this.

The school's provision for Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural education is a significant strength and this leads to the admirable ability of the children to express themselves with confidence, particularly when exploring the 'Big Questions'.

The curriculum is planned appropriately and at least 10% is dedicated to Religious Education. 'Come and See' is used to provide the core to the curriculum and is supplemented by 'Caritas in Action'.

There has been some disruption to staffing recently which has led to unavoidable absences. However, this has been managed well to reduce disruption and maintain the good quality of education being provided.

Staff training includes some of the opportunities provided by Salford Diocese.

THE QUALITY OF WORSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

It is clear that worship is at the core of school life at Holy Souls. Indeed, the whole school community is involved in the various experiences provided, which include assemblies, Masses, class-based worship and child-led worship – with Sacred Scripture at the centre. These are highly inclusive and embrace all in the school. A parent of a child from a different faith background commented on how her child's own faith development had grown as a result of this. The children pray with respect and reverence. They enjoy meditation, mindfulness and times for stillness. They are eager to make a contribution and see their prayer life as highly relevant to their own lives. In one class-based worship the children beautifully brought together the Good News and how they could spread it in their own lives. Singing is a wonderful feature of Holy Souls and the children do this with exceptional talent. The prayer life of the school extends to and includes the parish, further strengthening the bonds which exist. Plans to introduce prayer stations, with the help and guidance from the children, will further enhance the provision in this area.

AGREED AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- **To improve the quality of monitoring standards in the school through a more strategic level of challenge, with greater clarity around measuring and evaluating the success of initiatives.**
- **To build on the high quality of provision already in place by further developing the children's confidence in planning, leading and taking ownership of a wider range of opportunity for prayer and worship.**
- **To ensure that teaching and learning in Religious Education is of the highest standard across the whole school by securing greater consistency in the quality of outcomes for the children.**