

School Review: Christ the King RC/CE School
Fir Grove, Macclesfield SK11 7SF Tel: 01625 466833
Dates of review: 16/17 May 2022

The context of the review

The purpose of the review is to evaluate the achievements that have been made over the four years from May 2018, when the school had its last full inspection by Ofsted, to the present day, coincident with the school joining the Holy Family of Nazareth Catholic Academy Trust.

The four years includes the period of the global coronavirus pandemic from March 2020 and the review examines its impact on the school.

What has been achieved in the last four years

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Despite facing many challenges, including the pandemic, the school is a better school now than at any time in the past four years.• Christ the King emerges as a nurturing, inclusive school. Children are happy, safe, cared for, and learning well.• The introduction of the new National Curriculum has been managed exceptionally well.• The staff have welded into an impressively strong, cohesive team.• Teachers make learning interesting and fun. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Behaviour and ethos have been transformed by the adoption of a new approach to managing the behaviour of children with social and emotional difficulties.• Bringing the Nursery under school control along with improvements throughout Early Years means the youngest children get a wonderful start to school life.• Communication with parents during Covid was very good and the increasingly effective partnership with parents is creating a strong community school. |
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This review

The review was carried out over two days by Brian Padgett and Patricia Walker

Evidence

Reviewers observed all aspects of the school day, including the start of the school day, worship, 11 lessons, breaks and lunchtimes. Children, staff and parents were interviewed formally and informally.

The context of the school

The school serves the Moss Rose Estate to the south of Macclesfield town centre. It is a joint church school, formed by the amalgamation of St Edward's RC Primary and St Barnabas' CE Primary and opened in 2011. The community is socially and economically disadvantaged, within the 10% most disadvantaged in England (Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2019) and the highest within Macclesfield. The numbers of pupils have fallen. In 2018, there were 176 pupils, now there are 88, aged 4 -11years, taught in four classes and a Nursery with 16 children on roll. The demographic nature of the school has changed over the four years. The school is more multi-cultural. Children of Polish heritage form 23% a third of pupils, with a growing number of children from minority-ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of children receiving free school meals has risen during lockdown to 44% and the number of children with identified special educational needs to 30 (34%), including 5 children with Education Health and Care Plans. These proportions are significantly higher than seen in most primary schools and higher than they were four years ago.

School details

Headteacher: Claire Gurden
Chair of the local governing body: Steve James
Number of pupils on roll: 88
School website: www.christtheking.cheshire.sch.uk
School email address: admin@christtheking.cheshire.sch.uk

Commentary

Quality of Education

The Curriculum

The primary school curriculum and the importance given to it by the government were major changes during the period of this review. The curriculum in the Early Years also went through significant change. The school has responded exceptionally well to the changes. It has complied fully with the more demanding knowledge requirements and adapted them successfully for mixed-age classes and for children with differing levels of understanding, including those with special educational needs. Lessons are fully inclusive; all children are introduced to the same material with bespoke arrangements made to match individual needs through the effective deployment of support staff (including student teachers during the review). Good planning by teachers ensures teaching material and resources secure children's interests and their enjoyment of lessons, such as the visual aids used in an English lesson on personification in Year 5/6, and the live webcam footage of cities around the world in a Year 3/4 geography lesson on time zones. Teachers use interactive whiteboards connected to the internet very effectively during lessons. Staff used their subject expertise to develop the work programmes. In those subjects where none of the staff had subject expertise, various outside sources of information, including that from consultants, subject associations and from the national college, were utilised to provide fresh ideas and ensure the children have access to the broad and balanced curriculum. After completing two cycles of implementing the new curriculum, staff feel sufficiently confident to introduce more creative aspects into the curriculum in the future.

Outside of the core and foundation subjects, the school has implemented a thorough personal, social, and health education programme to meet the social and emotional needs of children recovering from the effects of the pandemic. More recently, as restrictions are removed, the school is broadening its curriculum to provide children with more opportunities for learning outside. Educational visits have been re-instated, most recently to the town's silk museum. Improved use is being made of the school environment, with children actively engaged in planting trees, growing vegetables and restoring the school pond. Local charitable sources of funding are being exploited and the project is involving parents, staff and the whole community.

Teaching and learning

Lessons and children's learning have been heavily disrupted over the two years of the pandemic. During the lockdown year the school invested in home learning. The links between home and school were strengthened during this period, as parents appreciated the efforts staff were making to communicate with them and maintain children's interest and knowledge. The last year, 2021/22, once restrictions were lifted in schools, was more difficult still for teaching and learning, as staff and children succumbed to the rapid rate of virus transmission, leading to attendance issues for children and high levels of staff absence that made it difficult to retain continuity of learning. This phase has hardly finished at the time of the review but the rate at which learning and standards are being re-established suggests that the school is emerging in a better shape than most. For example, the quality of presentation in the children's workbooks is of an exceptional standard, particularly in Year 5/6, and in children's sketch books in art in Year1/2. This at a time when many schools are finding standards of handwriting, for example, have fallen during the pandemic. Rapid progress is also being made in Early Years, where assessments indicate as much as 18 months of progress has been made in the last six months.

The evidence from the review points to three main reasons for the current strengths in teaching and learning. The first is consistently high expectations of children from teaching and support staff that can be seen throughout the school. For example, in an early years outdoor session staff constantly encouraged and engaged children to develop their language and speech during play. The second is the very high level of teamwork between staff at all levels and throughout the school. In all situations, the complex arrangements required to ensure children's varied needs necessitated everyone involved being fully briefed and in the right place at the right time and this is exactly what happens. This position is a very great improvement on the situation existing four years ago. The third strength is the quality of relationships between staff and children. Relationships could hardly be bettered and this makes Christ the King a very positive place for children to learn within.

Outcomes

External testing of the standards children achieve at the end of key stage 2 last took place in 2019 and have only just been re-instated (2022). Therefore, we cannot report definitively on standards and progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Rigorous internal systems of assessment and tracking of children's progress continue in the core subjects and in the foundation subjects in all classes. Children's work is examined in subject monitoring exercises for strengths and weaknesses. The progress of every child and group are reviewed regularly, especially for those with special educational needs, where parents are closely involved.

In the absence of objective external data, subjective and qualitative information from a study of children's books shows that children are proud of their work and achievements and keen to talk about what they are learning. Children with SEN are flourishing. Achievements are celebrated widely, during worship, for example, and in

displays around the school. Subjectively, children appear to be making a rapid recovery in standards as we emerge from the pandemic.

Behaviour and attitudes

Four years ago, behaviour was a pressing issue for the school. Learning in many classrooms was disrupted by the behaviour of a relatively small number of children with marked social and emotional difficulties that staff found difficult to manage. A turnaround has been achieved. The school has researched and adopted a 'trauma informed' approach, one that recognises that some children have suffered adverse experiences in childhood that manifest and persist in what appears as bizarre and often anti-social behaviours. The emphasis of the school is now on providing nurture (it has developed a dedicated room and staffing for this) and counselling for such children, aimed at working through their fears and anxieties. Children are encouraged to develop strategies to recognise mood swings and self-regulate their behaviour with the help of staff. Over time, such behaviours have been addressed. The result is an extraordinarily calm school. Neither staff nor children react adversely when children with social and emotional difficulties are having an 'episode' – they know the child has an issue that he/she is being helped with and everyone can play a part in the support process by dealing with crises calmly.

In the recovery period from the pandemic, increased curriculum time is being given to children's social and emotional needs through the work of the pastoral team. Before the pandemic, the team estimated that 40% or so of children and families needed support and that, post-pandemic, this was now closer to 70%.

More generally, in lessons, attitudes to learning throughout the school are very good.

Pupils' personal development

The review did not evaluate any aspect of the school's denominational nature but did evaluate children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The changes over the four years have been very positive. The school's teaching of values is bearing fruit and being internalised by children as important social and moral guidance to live by. These moral messages are reinforced in displays around the school, as well as in lessons from worship, such as that of 'perseverance' observed on the first day. The day begins with worship which makes a significant contribution to the school's ethos at the start of the day. There is mutual respect between staff and children and clear routines ensure a calm atmosphere for learning. There are many ways in which children can express their 'voices' and they know they are listened to and acted on.

Children's cultural development is promoted well. The curriculum provides opportunities to acquire important cultural capital, as in a Year 1/2 art lesson based on the work of Anthony Gormley. However, the school is equally successful in providing children with opportunities for children to appreciate the extent of their

local cultural heritage, for example, in studying the Macclesfield Canal and the town's silk manufacturing heritage.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the school, its children and the community throughout very trying times over these past four years. Each difficulty faced has been overcome and a unified and cohesive staff team has emerged. She has received good support on the way but she, the leaders she has encouraged, and her staff, deserve every credit for achieving the quality of education the school now provides.

The reputation the school holds in the community is growing. Parents value its strengths and its nurturing and inclusive approach. For example, the good work being established in the early years is recognised by other agencies and professionals working in the community. The 'meet and greet' strategy developed during the pandemic for staff to keep in touch with families in the mornings has been extended – providing easy, informal contact between school leaders and families. Parents interviewed found senior staff and staff in general to be welcoming and approachable. Numbers are beginning to rise through word of mouth.

Leadership at all levels is improved. Every member of staff plays a leadership role in some form or other. However, special mention should be made of the subject leaders responsible for developing and the oversight of the curriculum. In a small school, teachers must take on more than one subject. This aspect of leadership has been managed in an exemplary way.

There is a strong team approach to safeguarding and pastoral support for children and families. This is an area that requires keen oversight from governors, and this has been provided.

The school is outward-looking in many respects. It enlists the support of local community groups and charities in moving projects forward. It reaches out to parents through excellent communications and by providing opportunities such as school open days and the gardening club to bring parents into school. It continues to work with Manchester University Institute of Education into research on ameliorating the impact of disadvantage on a local basis. Looking forward, school leaders have developed comprehensive plans for further school improvement to take forward as partners within the Holy Family of Nazareth Catholic Academy Trust and with the support of the newly-appointed local governing body.

Postscript

In summary, the headteacher and senior staff have overseen a very positive cultural change in the school and have maintained quality provision in a high state of readiness awaiting external verification. Unfortunately, a reappraisal of the strengths of the school did not take place before it became a member of its new Academy

Trust. In its absence, this review sets out to evaluate the changes that have taken place since the inspection of 2018.