



St Philomena's Catholic Primary School History

c.1856 – The beginnings of Catholic education in St Mary Cray

A Catholic school was established at Lawrence's Yard, St Mary Cray, by Dr Todd, formerly President of the Royal Irish Society and a respected writer on St Patrick and the early Irish Church.

This was a private Catholic school, founded before the Education Act of 1870, and represents the earliest known roots of Catholic education in the area and the beginnings of what later became St Joseph's Catholic School. Mass was celebrated in the school.

1895 – St Joseph's Catholic Church

Three cottages were purchased on the High Street, and a contract for £1,330 was agreed in January to build a church next to the school. It was named St Joseph's Catholic Church.

1934 – Arrival of the Sisters of Charity

The Sisters of Charity of Our Lady, Mother of Mercy, a religious community originating in Holland, came to St Mary Cray.

Marion Bailey's family moved with them. Her parents helped support the convent, with her father working as a handyman and maintenance manager and her mother assisting in the convent kitchen. Marion later became one of the school's longest-serving teachers, teaching for around 40 years.

1935 – St Philomena's Convent School opens

St Philomena's Convent School opened on the site of the present school.

It was a private Catholic school, run and taught by the Sisters of Charity, who educated generations of children in the parish.

1936 – Expansion of St Joseph's Catholic School

Sister Clare McHugh became Headmistress of St Joseph's RC School. She began fundraising and expanding the school buildings before the outbreak of the Second World War.

1941 – Wartime bombing and temporary relocation

During the bombing of London and the South East, the St Joseph's school building and church were destroyed.

The pupils temporarily moved to St Philomena's Convent Hall, where lessons continued and Mass was also celebrated until new parish facilities became available.

1942 – Rowlands Manor becomes a school site

Rowlands Manor, formerly the home of the Heckstall-Smith family near Reynolds Cross, was made available to the parish.

It was used as a school site, particularly for the older pupils.

1940s – Evacuation during the Second World War

As bombing intensified, many St Joseph's children were evacuated to Porthmadog, Wales, where they were billeted with Catholic families until the end of the war.

Sister Clare and other nuns continued teaching pupils in temporary accommodation, including a prefabricated hall transferred from another Diocesan school in Dartford.

1945 – Sister Veronica becomes Headmistress

Sister Veronica took over as Headmistress and continued developing St Joseph's, which remained an all-age school for children aged 5 to 14.

1949 – New Church Hall (Frawley Centre)

The Church Hall was completed, providing an important meeting place for parish and school life.

1958 – Temporary classrooms

The Diocese of Southwark rented huts from the London Borough of Bromley at Rectory Paddock, Main Road, St Paul's Cray, as temporary classrooms.

1959 – New St Joseph's Church

St Joseph's Church was built as a replacement for the original church, which had been destroyed by bombing.

1960s – Changes to Catholic education

With the introduction of secondary schools in the London Borough of Bromley, St Joseph's gradually became a primary school, with older pupils transferring to Catholic secondary schools.

1965 – Appointment of New Leadership

Sister Veronica retired. She was followed by Head Teachers George Parker and later Roger Gilchrist Kelly.

1970 – Appointment of New Leadership

Veronica Shelley-Pearce (née McCullagh) became Headmistress.

At this time, St Joseph's was housed in sixteen Nissen huts at Riverside, St Mary Cray.

1971 – St Philomena's Convent School closes

After 36 years as a private Catholic school, St Philomena's Convent School closed in July 1971.

1972 – The move to the present site

During the October half-term, St Joseph's RC Primary School moved to the former grounds of St Philomena's High School.

The school was renamed **St Philomena's Roman Catholic Primary School**.

This brought together the traditions and memories of both St Joseph's and St Philomena's.

c.1972 –Governance

Jim Lovell was appointed Chair of Governors.

1980 – The convent building closes

The old convent building was demolished. The Sisters of Charity moved to two houses in Southborough Lane, Petts Wood, continuing their community life.

1998 – Change in Governance

Jim Lovell resigned as Chair of Governors. Anne Greenidge was appointed as Chair of Governors.

c.2000 – Appointment of New Leadership

Mary Riley succeeded Veronica Shelley-Pearce as Head Teacher.

2002 – Change in Governance

Anne Greenidge resigned as Chair of Governors. Phillip O'Halloran was appointed as Chair of Governors.

2006 – Formation of the Cray Valley Parish

The Archbishop, in consultation with his bishops and priests, agreed to dissolve the parishes of St Mary Cray and St Peter and St Paul and create the Cray Valley Parish, bringing the two former parishes together.

A new church was built to replace St Joseph's and was named Our Lady of the Crays. The tower of St Joseph's was retained. Father Bill became Parish Priest.

2011 – Father Sharju becomes Parish Priest

2012 – Appointment of New Leadership

Veronica Maher became Head Teacher following Mary Riley's retirement.

2014 – Becoming an Academy

St Philomena's Roman Catholic Primary School converted to academy status on 1 October 2014, becoming a single-academy trust.

The school's official name changed to St Philomena's Catholic Primary School, while continuing its Roman Catholic identity and connection with the Archdiocese of Southwark.

2014 – Fr Cyriacus Okafor becomes Parish Priest

In 2014, Fr Cyriacus Okafor joined Our Lady of the Crays, St Mary Cray, beginning his ministry with the parish and strengthening the close relationship between the parish and St Philomena's Catholic Primary School.

2016 – Change in Governance

Mags Fairhall was appointed Chair of Governors. Phillip O'Halloran stepped down to Vice-Chair.

2020 – COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning

During the COVID-19 pandemic, St Philomena's moved to remote learning during lockdown before reopening with safety measures in place, including support for key workers' children.

2022 – 50th Anniversary

In 2022, St Philomena's marked 50 years since moving to its present site, following the relocation of St Joseph's RC Primary School in 1972 and the creation of St Philomena's RC Primary School.

2025 – Joining the St Oscar Romero Catholic Academy Trust

Directed by the Diocese of Southwark to join a Catholic Multi-Academy Trust, St Philomena's became part of the St Oscar Romero Catholic Academy Trust.

2025 – Change in Governance

Phillip O'Halloran was appointed Chair of Governors. Mags Fairhall stepped down to Vice-Chair.

2026 – Completion of Governors' Terms

The Diocese concluded that Phillip O'Halloran and Mags Fairhall had reached the end of their terms as Governors, following many years of valued contribution.

2026 – Appointment of New Leadership

After many years of dedicated leadership, Veronica Maher retired as Head Teacher of St Philomena's Catholic Primary School. Stacey Anderson was appointed as the new Head Teacher.

Today

St Philomena's Catholic Primary School continues a long and proud tradition of Catholic education in St Mary Cray, bringing together the legacy of St Joseph's and St Philomena's and providing a strong foundation in faith and education.