



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST JOHN WALL CATHOLIC SCHOOL BIRMINGHAM

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| Inspection dates | 3 rd - 4 th October 2012 |
| Reporting Inspector | Janet Mellor |
| Assistant Inspector | Rachel Waugh |

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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| Type of School | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 11-16 years |
| Number on roll | 609 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governors | Rose Mason |
| School address | Oxhill Road Handsworth Birmingham B21 8HH |
| Telephone number | 0121 554 1825 |
| E-mail address | enquiry@sjw.bham.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | October 2008 |
| DFE number | 330/4625 |
| Unique Reference Number | 103534 |

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| Headteacher | Andrew Hyatt |
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors. The focus of the inspection was on the effectiveness and use of the school's self evaluation of Catholic life and religious education (RE). To validate the school's self-evaluation of teaching and learning, the inspectors observed 11 part or whole RE lessons. In addition the inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils from a range of years in order to evaluate the impact both of teaching on their learning over time and of the provision for spiritual and moral development on their lives. They held meetings with governors, senior staff and other staff who work together to develop the Catholic life of the school, the lay chaplain and the priest chaplain. They observed 2 assemblies and form prayers. They looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self evaluation together with RAISEonline, the school and department improvement plans, and teachers' planning for the RE curriculum and for individual lessons. Alongside the validation of school self evaluation, the inspectors gathered evidence in order to focus on teaching RE with a multi-faith intake, evidence which will be shared with other diocesan schools.

Information about the school

St John Wall Catholic School is a smaller than average sized 11-16 Catholic secondary school serving an area of wide cultural and ethnic diversity, some of which has significant social and economic deprivation. By far most of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Since the last inspection there has been a significant rise in the number of those pupils with English as a second language, from under half in 2008 to around two-thirds. There are significantly fewer girls than boys in the school. The numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals and of those with special needs are well above national average. Prior attainment on entry is below the national expectation. The school population is below national average in terms of stability. Since the last inspection there has been a small increase in the percentage of pupils who are baptised Catholics and this is now 32%. Of the staff 35% are Catholics. There is now a more stable religious education department and staffing overall is stable.

Main Finding

In its self evaluation the school judges that both its Catholic life and religious education are good. The school's judgements about the quality of Catholic life, collective worship, pupils' spiritual, moral, and vocational development and the quality and outcomes in religious education are reliable. Since the last inspection in 2008 the school has made very good progress in teaching and learning in religious education. This has come about through improvements in the stability of staffing, together with curriculum planning which engages the interest of pupils, and an explicit determination to address their learning needs. Outcomes for those entered for GCSE indicate that pupils make significant progress at the school. The wide-ranging provision for Catholic life is a recognised whole school priority. This is fully in line with its frequently articulated mission to educate each unique pupil to hear and respond to what God calls them to be. This essentially vocational aspect to the school's Catholic purpose is embedded in its everyday life and is fully inclusive. Pupils have an experience of the love of God for them through being a member of a harmonious, well ordered and mutually supporting community. They develop a clear sense of right and wrong, and a respect for the importance of faith in their own lives and in that of others.

School Self Evaluation

Self evaluation at St John Wall is extensive and regarded by the school justifiably as good. The school analyses its performance through rigorous processes which have clear lines of responsibility. Self evaluation from the religious education department feeds into whole school planning, and the realistic target setting in religious education reflects whole school priorities. Monitoring of teaching

and tracking of the progress of each pupil is very thorough. Careful thought is given to evaluating existing strategies and to how they need to be adjusted or developed for the future. This process has enabled the school to make improvements since the last inspection, both in terms of outcomes for pupils in GCSE and in provision for the Catholic life of the school. The self evaluation documentation gives an account of developments and although this is to some extent descriptive, there is also a clear indication of the areas for further improvement and of how they will be achieved. The school's motto 'Forte in Fides' underpins the robust process of self evaluation.

The school judges leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school to be good, and this is valid. A team composed of senior colleagues, the lay chaplain and the head of religious education meets on a weekly basis to monitor and review Catholic life. The pupils are regularly asked to feed back their views as a valued contribution to planning. As a result whole school targets have been developed to provide further opportunities for the celebration of Mass, develop links with the local parish and primary schools, and visits to the places of worship of other faiths represented in the school. There is a firm process in place to ensure that targets are met. The lay chaplain plays an important role in developing and implementing initiatives, for example in setting up the Rainbows project. Teachers of subjects other than religious education make a significant contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils, notably art and music. Governors are fully committed to the Catholic life of the school and to teaching and learning in religious education. The chair of governors has a longstanding association with the school and expertise which is shared with present colleagues. Governors are thorough and firm in their role as critical friends to the school and realistic in their vision for its future.

The school's self evaluation in the area of collective worship centres on the increase in pupils' participation and the regularity of prayer during form time, and is judged to be good. Evidence indicates that this is the case, although prayer at the start of the day was seen to be brief and not always sufficiently developed through reflection. However, pupils are very respectful and they value opportunities for prayer. They use a prayer journal once a week throughout form time. They enjoy going to Mass especially for special events such as the annual Welcome Mass for Year 7, which has been celebrated regularly by a bishop. The school has developed a liturgical calendar for assemblies and Masses throughout the year, as well as opportunities for prayer during the day, including regular visits to the Chapel where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. There are also celebrations to mark key festivals in other religions.

Leadership of religious education is judged to be good. The rapid progress that has been made since the last inspection indicates that this is a sound evaluation. The school benefits from the expertise of the head of religious education who knows the school well, is realistic in her approach and works with determination and commitment. She is well supported by experienced specialist and non-specialist staff who give the department stability and by a teaching assistant designated to the department. GCSE outcomes have risen in terms of A*-C grades in 2012 and in the progress made by pupils from Year 7. This is seen to be a clear outcome of curriculum changes which ensure that the work is more appropriate for pupils whilst remaining within the requirements for a Catholic school. The extra staffing which has been made available for examination work has led to smaller group sizes enabling the possibility of more individualised approaches to teaching and learning strategies. Pupils are clear about their target grades and how they are progressing.

School leaders ensure that there is regular and effective monitoring of teaching with lesson observation, detailed feedback and target setting. Teachers have benefitted from opportunities for further training on an individual and whole school basis. Non-specialist teachers are supported although evidence shows that this is more effective where subjects have a similar approach. Teachers meet regularly to review evidence of the progress of pupils by examining data and written work. Marking is consistently in line with school policy, though pupils do not always add their own response to their teacher's comments or reflect in depth on their learning. It is clearly evident that pupils enjoy both being at the school and learning in religious education lessons. This corresponds to the school's judgement.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

In Key Stage 3 most pupils make good progress because the teaching takes account of their individual needs. Those who enter the school with English as a second language are accurately assessed and strategies are put into place to support them. The employment of Polish teachers helps the group of Polish pupils to access the curriculum. Lessons are consistently well structured with clear objectives and varied tasks, included use of ICT and the interactive whiteboard. Pupils work well in groups and pairs. Emphasis is given to literacy skills which help pupils to progress successfully in their writing and in answering questions in class. They are also encouraged to develop thinking skills, and this bears fruit in Key Stage 4 when they are challenged by, for example, reasons for belief in God and questions surrounding stewardship of the natural world. Pupils at this stage are able to develop arguments for and against views that are expressed around topics and engage in lively class debate. By far the majority of the teaching is good and there are some outstanding elements. Where teaching is satisfactory, it lacks pace and content. Pupils behave well in lessons and are focused on their work, and teachers give them confidence to contribute well in discussions. They are very respectful of faith and prayer, for example in recognising the atmosphere of reflection as they enter the classroom, and noting down their own prayer intentions.

Outcomes for pupils at GCSE level have shown a rise of over 23% in GCSE A*-C to 63% in 2012 following a change in the curriculum, and current performance confirms that pupils are working well with the new syllabus. This is still a little below the diocesan average but represents very good progress. Analysis shows the success of focused support for groups of pupils who had previously failed to achieve as expected. Pupils praise the opportunity to study non-Christian religions as well as Christianity and specifically the Catholic faith. They are able to learn from each other, for instance in considering moral teaching in Catholicism and Islam. For a small group of pupils an alternative course to GCSE is offered which responds to their needs. The religious education department has also prepared well for changes in the regulations for GCSE by beginning the course in Year 9. Recent results at GCSE show that over a fifth of pupils achieved the highest grades. This indicates a very positive rise in achievement. There is now clear potential for greater challenge for the more able in terms of specific tasks in lessons.

Pupils willingly make a very good contribution to the Catholic life of the school and to collective worship. They speak enthusiastically of their participation in assemblies and in Mass, when all pupils go forward at the time of communion, receiving a blessing if they are not communicants. The lay chaplain makes a very significant contribution through working with pupils in the preparation for liturgies, including singing. They value the opportunity to spend time for revision off-site at a nearby convent, as well as visits to Harvington Hall and retreats to Soli House and Alton Castle. They are proud of their school and value their education as a firm foundation for the rest of their lives. They value the harmonious community and a large number stay behind after school for activities including homework clubs and sport. They also appreciate the school environment with the wealth of displays and the unique statue of St John Wall. The newly relaunched house system has rapidly become a main feature of the school. Pupils chose the five house patrons who represent a wide spread of cultures, and include Blessed John Paul II and Martin Luther King. They show initiative in responding to the fund-raising attached to each house, as well as the school's summer fayre and inter-house competitions. They consider that their opinions are much valued and there is an active school council with four specific committees dealing with issues such as the school environment. They speak highly of the school's policy of listening to pupils and the spirit of reconciliation. The work of the St Francis Centre provides a highly effective environment for time out of lessons when appropriate and has a focus on the whole person.

Senior leadership is united in its commitment to the Catholic nature of the school and governors are prominent in promoting the Catholic ethos. In this community of many ethnic groups and many religions there is a very strong sense of purpose in promoting a community in which all learn about the Catholic faith, grow in faith and experience the Catholic faith in action. There is an absence of

¹ As the quality of the school self evaluation has been affirmed, the judgements in this section of the report conform largely to those of the school.

tension and pupils move around the school purposefully and calmly. The school is rightly proud of its Gold Award for Cultural Diversity. It has benefitted from membership of the Birmingham Catholic Partnership for staff training and work with young leaders. Links with the primary schools are a particular strength and help to build up the Catholic community. Each week there are groups of pupils visiting St John Wall, working with the lay chaplain and the music department towards a united Christmas liturgy in St Chad's Cathedral. Senior leadership has also focused successfully on strengthening the confidence of staff to ensure daily form prayer using material provided by the lay chaplain. Leaders have recognised the need to develop this so that there can be more opportunity for response to local, national and international events. Prayers have been written for subject areas and these are used increasingly in lessons, including in Science and English. Pupils have learnt to say the 'Hail Mary' prayer in French and this is said at Mass. An analysis of how subjects across the curriculum contribute to pupils' spiritual and moral development has already been completed. The school has links with the local community and parishes. Some Year 7 pupils are accompanied to morning Mass at the local church on a weekly basis. The school chaplain has fulfilled the role over a long period and despite many other commitments assures the school of regular Masses and opportunities for the sacrament of reconciliation before Christmas and Easter.

Leadership of the religious education department also shows a clear sense of direction. There has been a focus on the development of skills particularly in the light of the change in examination syllabus. Teachers work together well and productively. They are aware of pupils' needs and are supported very well by a teaching assistant whose commitment extends to taking the GCSE examination herself alongside pupils. Teachers' support of pupils taking GCSE examinations shows a very high level of dedication to their work.

The curriculum in religious education is aligned to the requirements of the Bishops' Conference, and is well planned and reviewed. The school offers some flexibility in the choice of a religion for study alongside Christianity for the GCSE examination depending on the composition of the teaching group. Pupils learn to compare and evaluate opinions on religious and moral issues, always within a framework of respect for faith.

Recommendations

- Ensure a more explicit focus on the learning of the more able pupils whilst maintaining and strengthening the support for all groups of learners
- Build on the analysis of the Catholic aspects of the whole curriculum and that of the opportunities for spiritual and moral development to create a stronger cross-curricular approach to its Catholic life
- Revisit the provision for collective worship so that it is consistently a central feature of each school day and offers full opportunity for spiritual reflection



October 2012

Diocesan Education Service,
Don Bosco House,
Coventry Road,
Coleshill.
B46 3EA

Dear Parents and Carers

Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St John Wall Catholic School, October 2012

I am writing this letter to share with you the findings of the diocesan inspection of your children's school. Diocesan inspection now explores in detail the school's own view of itself as expressed in its self-evaluation. For this reason, much of the report is more technical than used to be the case. You are still entitled to have a copy of the full report should you want one and it will be available on the school website or by request from the school office.

The school has a good Catholic ethos which is described in its mission statement. It aims to educate pupils to hear and respond to what God calls them to be and regards every child in its care as unique. This is the basis of all that it does. It encourages pupils to grow in their spiritual and moral understanding and of their vocation in life by providing times for prayer and worship during school days, as well as other opportunities for visits and retreats. Pupils benefit equally from what the school offers irrespective of their background, faith or ethnicity. They appreciate greatly what the school provides for them and are proud of it. The school has a calm and purposeful atmosphere where individuals and faith are respected, and there are sound working relationships. Pupils grow in their sense of responsibility and are keen to participate in charity fund-raising activities through the house system. The headteacher, leadership team, governors and staff who have the responsibility for the Catholic life and religious education are constantly reviewing what is provided for the pupils and are keen to go the extra mile to support them. They plan well and work together very effectively.

Pupils enjoy religious education and GCSE examination results have greatly improved this summer. This is due to good teaching and to a revised programme for the examination course. Pupils particularly enjoy learning about moral issues and developing their opinions. They also enjoy learning about a range of religions within the framework of the programme for religious education in a Catholic school.

We have recommended that the school should review the provision for collective worship so that there is more opportunity for reflection and prayer which we know that pupils appreciate. We also consider that the school should bring together in a more focused way the various aspects of each subject which have a direct bearing on the Catholic life of the school. We know that the school works very hard to cater for individual needs in religious education but we also recommend that the RE department should challenge the more able further.

Pupils respond very well to being part of St John Wall School. It has been a pleasure to work with them and their teachers. We would like to thank the school community for the way in which we have worked together and especially pupils for their contribution to the inspection.

Yours sincerely

Janet Mellor (Mrs)
Diocesan Inspector