



SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the
Archbishop of Southwark and Inspection of
Denominational Education under Section 48
of the Education Act 2005

URN 100858

**St Michael's Catholic College
Llewellyn Street
Bermondsey
SE16 4UN**

**Inspection date: 14th & 15th June
2016**

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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

St Michael's Catholic College is a mixed 11-18 voluntary academy in the Trusteeship of the Archdiocese of Southwark, and is funded by the Education Funding Agency. It is located in the Cathedral Deanery of the Archdiocese and its principal parishes are: The Most Holy Trinity, Dockhead; Our Lady of La Salette, Bermondsey; St Gertrude's, Bermondsey; English Martyrs, Walworth and St Peter and the Archangels, Rotherhithe. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic has risen since the last inspection (March 2011) to 99.5%. The school is increasingly oversubscribed. This is as a result of the excellent academic performance of the school as well as its reputation for pastoral care and pupil welfare. The school is planning for an increase in pupil numbers and, at the time of the inspection, was embarking on a building programme in order to increase and improve its accommodation.

The number of pupils currently on role is 812, including 159 in the sixth-form, which was formed since the last inspection. The schools' expansion to include post-16 courses has met the demand for 11-18 education at the school which is rated by Ofsted's Section 5 inspection process to be outstanding. In recent years the attainment of pupils entering the school has increased to just above the national average. Pupils attend the school mainly from across the South East London region and are from a wide range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. 52.5% of pupils receive free school meals, 34.4% of pupils have English as an additional language and 2.8% of pupils have statements or E.H.C plans.

Date of previous inspection:

30th & 31st March 2011

Overall Grade:

1

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1 Outstanding
Grade 2 Good

Grade 3 Requires improvement
Grade 4 Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education

GRADE
1

St Michael's Catholic College is an outstanding school, providing its pupils with excellent opportunities to develop their spirituality and religious literacy. The Headteacher and other leaders successfully promote a very clear direction for the Catholic life of the school and its place in the local community. They ensure that the school's mission statement, *'Developing a love of learning, a love of Christ and a love of each other,'* is reflected in all aspects of school life. The contributions of the Chaplain and the Religious Education department to the Catholic life of the school are excellent. The department, which has outstanding leadership and dedicated staff, ensures that pupils make excellent progress throughout their school career and are enthusiastic learners. Governors work closely and very effectively with senior leaders to support the department, ensuring that its work makes a significant contribution to the success of the whole school.

The school provides its pupils and staff with a wide range of opportunities to develop their faith, through weekly Masses, liturgies and retreats, alongside prayer and reflection in form time and in Religious Education lessons. It is well supported by the local clergy, who visit the school regularly. Due to the nature of the buildings, it is not possible to celebrate large scale liturgies, however the school ensures that as many opportunities for worship and spiritual reflection are held throughout each term.

St Michael's provides a warm and welcoming environment. Pupils respond very well to the expectations and standards which the school has developed regarding behaviour in and around the school site and, as a result, there is a calm atmosphere throughout. Pupils spoke highly of the sense of community spirit, recognising the importance of care for one another.

The school has developed a robust system of evaluation and improvement planning and has identified key priorities for the school and the Religious Education department. These processes ensure that the whole community is dedicated to excellence, not only academically but also across all aspects of school life. It is evident that since the last outstanding inspection, the school has continued to develop a culture of success and sustained improvement.

The inspectors received over 300 responses from parents to the pre-inspection questionnaire. The overwhelming majority of responses to the various questions were positive with the majority agreeing or agreeing strongly with the various statements about what the school offers and how it helps pupils to progress. One parent wrote: *"Every teacher cares deeply about my children and their future aspirations and dreams. My children have developed a clear sense of right and wrong from the positive Religious Education they receive at St Michael's."* In meetings with both pupils and parents this sentiment was echoed repeatedly. Sixth-formers who had returned to St Michael's for their education were able to identify the distinctive ethos at this school where care for the individual and high expectations was at the heart of the school's approach.

The school has successfully addressed the two areas for development identified in the last inspection. The Key Stage 3 provision has undergone a comprehensive review and is entirely in line with the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. The quality of prayer in form time is now seen to be consistent and a real strength of the school's spiritual provision. The inspectors believe that the school has excellent capacity to maintain and build on its already outstanding provision.

The inspectors spent two days at St Michael's Catholic College, observed lessons, tutor groups and an assembly, and carried out several discussions with school staff, pupils, parents, Governors and the Parish Priest. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons, examination of school and department documents, and learning walks across the school.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Ensure that the GCSE Religious Education examination outcomes match the outstanding results achieved in other core subjects, in particular English
- Review the structure and processes of the sixth-form general Religious Education provision

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school

Pupils are given a range of opportunities to support their spiritual development. In tutor time, and across the wide range of lessons, pupils are encouraged to contribute and then reflect on special daily intentions which form the focus for prayer and discussion. Form tutors deliver the school's PSHE programme which focuses on social, moral, spiritual and cultural development which pupils identified as a means of developing their awareness of key moral issues.

The School Chaplain is available to pupils throughout the day and maintains the oratory style school chapel as a quiet area of prayer and reflection. The Chaplain also coordinates the retreat programme which is available to pupils in most year groups. Local priests visit the school on a regular basis for general weekly Masses, form group Masses, and many other celebratory liturgies. Of particular note is the pupil engagement in the sacrament of Reconciliation which is organised at key times in the school year when several priests will make themselves available for the pupils' spiritual needs.

Pupils' awareness of the needs of the international and local community is evident in fundraising which is a regular feature of the school's life. All pupils and staff are involved in a wide range of charities which in recent years have raised money and resources for the local 'Living Well' appeal for the vulnerable, 'Shoe Box' appeals for the Samaritans Purse, CAFOD, NSPCC, and a special 'Dragons' Den' activity which raised money to support the Nepal earthquake appeal. The school has also developed its work with local pensioner groups, through visits and parties as well as the collection of foodstuff during Advent. In addition, the school also makes use of a wide range of charities and speakers to raise awareness of the needs of others throughout the year.

Pupils also benefit from extra-curricular visits to places of religious significance, including Rome, as well as more local places of worship, promoting inter-faith understanding and dialogue. In raising awareness of the global community pupils have also visited New York, Paris, China and South Korea.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Outcomes for pupils in Religious Education are excellent overall. At Key Stage 3 the department has undertaken a thorough review of the curriculum which follows the structure of *'The Way, the Truth and the Life'* and has enhanced the programme with additional multi-faith studies. The department's tracking system shows that pupils make good, and in most cases excellent, progress. All pupils follow and are entered for the full GCSE course in Religious Education. GCSE results in Religious Education are in line with other foundation subjects but it is clear that the department and school leadership aims to increase them in line with those in English and Maths which are both outstanding. In 2015, 76% of Year 11

pupils gained A* to C grades in Religious Education, with a very impressive 30% of grades being A* to A's. It is evident that the department has worked hard in improving its results, making use of robust pupil tracking and target setting processes and includes the use of Saturday morning lessons.

A growing number of pupils follow the Philosophy and Ethic course at AS and A2 Level and results are outstanding overall.

Pupils at all key stages identified Religious Education lessons as both enjoyable, engaging and challenging. The lessons observed during this inspection concurred with the pupils' view of their lessons.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

Weekly year group assemblies are held throughout the term. Working alongside the School Chaplain and Leaders of Learning, pupils are actively involved in both the planning and delivery of the assemblies. An assembly observed during the inspection included pupils presenting prayers, reflections and music which looked at the theme of the 'Goodness in Everyone.' The pupils were then asked to consider how they might respond to various challenges ahead. This was an excellent experience at the start of the school day which certainly underpinned the school ethos which identifies Christ as being at the centre of all it does.

The School Chapel is located at the centre of the school and is unlocked throughout the school day allowing pupils and staff to make use of its space for prayer and quiet reflection. Mass is held each Friday morning in the School Chapel for pupils and staff. While numbers attending vary each week, the availability of this sacrament is seen as important for the entire community. In addition, during Advent and Lent prayer time is available in the School Chapel, as well as Rosary groups in May and October.

Despite the limitations on space, the school organises a number of celebratory Masses throughout the year. Of particular note is the Welcome Mass held in the first few days of the school year at which pupils and their parents play an active part in all aspects of the liturgy.

How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils

The Headteacher, senior leaders and governors ensure the Catholic Life of the school is at the heart of their work. They know the school well and monitor carefully the development and impact of the Catholic ethos of the school. The school's key documents of evaluation and improvement planning, as well as all its policies, have Catholicity as their starting point. Senior leaders ensure that one training day each year takes place off-site has a focus on Catholic education, and includes time for personal spiritual reflection.

Senior leaders provide a wide range of detailed information to governors, to ensure they can monitor the work of the school. Since the last inspection the school has established a Spirituality Group, which includes leaders and governors in order to monitor and develop the spiritual life of the school. It reports on activities such as retreats, acts of Collective Worship and various foci such as the Year of Mercy. It also informs governors of the various charities the school supports and other charitable activities the pupils are involved in on a regular basis.

Governors are highly effective and give their time generously. They visit the school on a regular basis, and have been involved in the school's TRIAD programme of monitoring and review. The Governors are fully aware of the challenges which St Michael's face in the future. With a significant increase in pupil numbers in the years ahead the Governors, Headteacher and senior leaders are determined that the Catholic ethos will not be diminished.

Of particular mention should be the significant strategic role which the Headteacher and leadership team of St Michael's Catholic College have played in the formation and development of the Catholic Teaching Alliance (CTA) alongside other Catholic schools in this region of the Archdiocese. Not only taking a strategic lead in the recruitment and development of those entering the teaching profession but also aspiring to raising of standards and the quality of teaching across the growing number of school involved in the partnership. There has been a considerable input of time and resources from staff at St Michael's College, which deserves recognition and praise.

How well leaders, governors and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education and plan and implement for improvement to outcomes for pupils

Senior leaders monitor and evaluate the work of the Religious Education Department through regular lesson observations, the scrutiny of exercise books and the careful monitoring of pupils' progress. The experienced Head of Religious Education provides excellent leadership to the department and has been instrumental in its development and success. Supported by the dedicated team of specialist teachers, many of whom also have additional senior and whole school responsibilities, the Head of Department has identified the key priorities for improvement, and these have been successfully implemented, giving pupils a stimulating and challenging range of courses and experiences. The department's documentation at all levels is impressive; ensuring that all those who teach the subject are well supported, but also aware of the areas for improvement. In particular, the evaluation and improvement plans are accurate, thorough and aspirational.

The department is held in high regard not only within the school but also in the wider community, with the Head of Department providing training to subject leaders in other schools on how to run an outstanding department. A member of the department is a Lead Practitioner within the Catholic Teaching Alliance, contributing to the wider development of Religious Education teaching across schools in the alliance.

Publication Date ... 15th July 2016

The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education

The quality of teaching in Religious Education at St Michael's is outstanding. Of the eight lessons observed six were judged to be outstanding and two were at least good. Lessons were inspirational and fully engaged pupils in a range of challenging activities, allowing pupils of all levels of ability to develop their knowledge and understanding. Questioning was of a high order which enabled pupils to develop and expand their responses. In many lessons, group work and peer assessment was a strong feature which promoted shared learning and understanding. As a result the behaviour and engagement of pupils in all lessons observed was excellent.

Teachers in this department have outstanding subject knowledge and are confident in delivering the full curriculum at every Key Stage. They are skilled in providing diagnostic and constructive feedback to pupils on how to improve their work. Pupils' work is regularly marked in accordance with the school wide assessment policy, and makes effective use of pupil self-review.

Pupils identified in interviews and surveys that their teachers knew them well and cared deeply how each individual was doing. This was clearly identified during the inspection where the atmosphere in each lesson demonstrated a shared love of learning and engagement. The relationships between pupils and their teachers are a real strength of the school.

It is clear that the teachers in this department see their role as a vocation, not just concerned with the immediacy of routine tasks and assessments, but as the development of the whole child through each phase of their education. In one lesson observed, a Year 7 class was set team challenges to tackle GCSE standard questions which they embarked on with great enthusiasm and vigour. In a Year 12 class, students were introduced to the philosophical arguments around miracles. The teacher skilfully introduced a range of challenging tasks and scenarios which were designed to stretch their understanding. The responses were of a very high order, thought provoking and reflective.

The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning

The Religious Education curriculum at this school has undergone considerable review and development since the last inspection, both as a result of internal review as well as considerable changes to the forthcoming national GCSE syllabus and assessment development.

At Key Stage 3 the curriculum has seen considerable review and the increased emphasis placed on Other Faiths will prepare pupils for the new GCSE course requirement to study a second faith in detail. The Head of Department and staff have been proactive in ensuring that they are well prepared for the challenges ahead, that they have received training and that the new courses are resourced appropriately, especially at GCSE level.

The Religious Education department is well resourced, receiving comparable budget to other core subjects. It is located primarily in specialist accommodation where the displays are stimulating and interesting. The allocation of teaching to the subject at all key stages meets the requirements of the Bishops Conference of England and Wales. In addition, the PSHE programme supports the spiritual and moral development of pupils by the inclusion of many topics which are taught well and in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The evidence provided to the inspectors shows that the department is very well organised and managed. Care is taken to ensure that all programmes of study and activities are reviewed regularly and thoroughly. This ensures that the teaching in the department remains fresh and dynamic.

At Post-16, in addition to the Advanced Level course in Philosophy & Ethic, students attend weekly General Religious Education lessons that largely follow the NOCN programme. Pupils' work is assessed but does not have formal recognition. The inspectors felt that the course structure should be reviewed to ensure that it received appropriate recognition, particularly by pupils, and that it remains relevant and stimulating.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school is excellent. There are many opportunities for pupils to participate in Collective Worship, which is of a high quality. Mass is offered weekly in the School Chapel, as well as tutor group and year Masses. Parents were aware of the range of opportunities available for worship at the school though many stated in both the questionnaire and interviews that they would like to have more opportunities for parents to be more actively involved in worship and liturgies as well as other school activities.

In a year group assembly observed by the inspectors, all pupils entered the hall in a highly respectful and reverent manner. Pupils took a leading role in the assembly, including readings, bidding prayers and reciting poetry. During the assembly all pupils behaved impeccably and the responses to various prayers and reflections was excellent.

Most forms of Collective Worship seen offered pupils the opportunity for silent and personal reflection. Several tutor groups were visited during the inspection and it is evident that both pupils and staff value the opportunity to pray together, especially where pupils ask for special intentions to be included.

It is evident that the school has prayer at its heart and that the community is entirely comfortable in joining together for reflection and worship. The Headteacher leads by example, ensuring that prayers are the starting point of every staff briefing. The Chaplain is available to support staff, especially those new to the school, in being confident in leading prayer and reflection with their various teaching and tutor groups. Support is also offered to those new to the profession through the NQT programme in understanding what is distinctive about working in a Catholic school. In addition, during Advent and Lent, prayer time is available in the School Chapel, as well as Rosary groups in May and October.

Publication Date ... 15th July 2016