



Diocese of Westminster

Our Lady's Convent High School

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

Date of inspection: 25 April 2012

Date of previous inspection: 4 February 2009

Reporting Inspector: Mrs S Nolan

Introduction

The inspector would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspector spent a day in school, visited six lessons, joined the school in the celebration of Mass and carried out several interviews with school staff, governors and chaplains as well as talking to pupils. Other evidence was gathered from scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and the examination of school documents. The school regularly canvases parents' views and these provide a very positive evaluation of the school.

The Inspection of Our Lady's Convent High School, Hackney, was carried out under the requirements of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Framework and Schedule for Section 48 Inspections approved by the Archbishop of Westminster. The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the school is in providing Catholic education. This process begins with the school's own self evaluation.

Description of School

The school is a four-form entry in the Local Authority of Hackney and temporarily occupies two sites, one at Amhurst Park and the other at Mount Pleasant Lane, Clapton. The school serves a large number of parishes but the largest groups of pupils come from St Ignatius, Haringey and St Francis de Sales, Tottenham. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 89%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 9% and from other Faiths 2%.

There are 704 pupils on roll, with three pupils with statements of Special Educational Need. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is well above average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is also well above average. There is a well -above average proportion of families claiming free school meals. Approximately half of the staff members are Catholics and 9% hold the CCRS or other Catholic qualification. Religious Education lessons are taught by six specialist staff. The school is in the throes of a major building project that will result in all pupils being accommodated on one site from this September.

Key for inspection grades.

Grade 1: Outstanding;*

Grade 1: Very Good;

Grade 2: Good;

Grade 3: Satisfactory;

Grade 4: Inadequate.

A. Curriculum Religious Education

How religiously literate are pupils in the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith and how well do they know, understand and appreciate the importance of religious faith and practice in everyday life?

How well does the content of curriculum religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?

Grade 1*

Religious Education is at the heart of the school and is particularly well supported by the senior team. Other staff also greatly value the positive impact of the ethos generated on the spiritual, moral, cultural and social development of the students. A dynamic approach to the curriculum allows for new and developing themes to be readily incorporated. There are recent and innovative approaches, for example, to work on social justice that includes Rwanda and Burma. A creative, broad and ever expanding resource base integrates exceptionally well new materials into established programmes. There is a vast range of visual and interactive resources as well as a large library collection of books on current and historical themes relevant to Catholic life. The delivery of curriculum Religious Education meets all of the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. The programmes of study and schemes of work for all three Key Stages illustrate clearly how and when the curriculum directory content is taught and assessed.

Meticulous attention to detailed cross-referencing of the objectives from the Curriculum Directory with diocesan attainment targets provides excellent guidance for staff as to common assessment tasks for Years 7 to 9. A similarly rigorous approach characterises the school's work at GCSE and in the general religious education programme for Years 12 and 13. Lesson planning consistently focuses specific areas of the Curriculum Directory. For example, Revelation, Church, Celebration, Life in Christ, are all carefully highlighted in the resources files for year groups. There are very good links to other faiths and stimulating opportunities for dialogue are carefully mapped and developed. The department strives assiduously to promote students' deep understanding of the nature of the religious quest and to encourage their awareness of common elements with other faiths. Although the department fulfils all requirements with regard to content in Religious Education, it recognises that it could further develop Church History within its curriculum.

Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education

Grade 1*

From broadly average starting points, students typically achieve highly in Religious Education at each Key Stage. Students' attainment in Religious Education compares very favourably with their performance in English and is regularly above average. In GCSE examinations, a higher proportion of students gained A*/A grades in Religious Education than their peers nationally. Students also exceed their performance in other subject areas. Students make excellent progress throughout their time in the school. Their attainment in lessons, in discussion and in their written work, far outstrips that required by GCSE courses by Year 11. Those post-16 students following Level 3 courses in Religious Studies, do well in A2 examinations and at least satisfactorily in AS accreditation. The general course for other post-16 students involves them well in the liturgical life of the Church as well as in extensive service for others. The latter efforts are recognised by a number of external agencies. Common assessment tasks at Key Stage 3, carefully linked to, and tracked against diocesan attainment targets, demonstrate outstanding progress over time. Work is carefully moderated against levelled exemplars. The school takes seriously its target setting and tracking of Religious Education and monitors progress as rigorously as in other key curricular areas.

The quality of teaching

Grade I*

The specialist fully qualified staff have a very good intellectual understanding of the Catholic faith. This deep knowledge supports their common vision to advance the students' grasp of the curriculum and their commitment to the school's Catholic life. Team teaching, mutual support and robust monitoring and evaluation all contribute to sustaining teaching that is consistently outstanding. This was clearly evident in a Year 10 lesson on the nature of evil. Both staff involved, interacted seamlessly with the students in their discussions following their experience of a high-powered Oxford debate from Channel 4.

High expectations, challenging tasks, including those for the most able, encourage students to reflect independently on their faith and to think critically about the Church's global mission.

In the lessons observed during the inspection, excellent relationships between staff and students, and between students, gave students confidence to express ideas, appropriately challenge others and communicate understanding well, both orally and in writing. Teachers plan exceptionally well to use a wide range of strategies and resources that capture the students' interest in the Church's teaching, ethics, charity activities, liturgy and traditions. Again, this was very well demonstrated in a Year 11 lesson on reconciliation. Students were very well informed on the Sacrament of Reconciliation and what the concept means in life.

Central to the students very good progress is the increasing involvement of the students in assessing their own progress. Teachers also mark and assess students' work regularly, thoroughly and constructively, identifying clear targets for improvement. As a result, students mostly know clearly how to improve their work. However, the scholarly ethos generated in many classrooms also contributes much to the students' development. In a number of lessons during the inspection, students were very actively engaged in drawing on wider reading and reflection to support the work in hand.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade I*

The religious education department is exceptionally well led and managed. The department has a shared, clear vision of its role within the school. Senior leaders are highly supportive of its work in striving to uphold Gospel values as exemplified in the school's mission statement. There is a relentless focus on improving teaching and learning through a range of professional development activities. The department works collaboratively with diocesan personnel, with the Chaplain and members of the governing body. Within the school, there is excellent cooperation with other departments and particularly with the music department. The impact of this close collaboration is reflected in the carefully planned liturgical celebrations. Close links with English support the grouping of the students in Religious Education. The subject leader does much to generate an academic as well as a spiritual ethos within the school.

What has improved in curriculum religious education since the last inspection and what should the school do to further improve in curriculum religious education?

At the last inspection, the school was asked to improve the uptake of sixth form courses, improve assessment practice, and provide more opportunities for students to work independently through greater use of information and communication technology. There have been significant improvements in departmental assessment practice. Effective tracking systems are now in place across all phases. Marking much more consistently provides students with opportunities to reflect on their work and extend their understanding of concepts and ideas. The uptake for post-16 Level 3

courses is gradually increasing and all sixth-form students spend 8% of their time in school in religious studies.

Besides this, the scheme of work has been developed to increase opportunities for dialogue with other faiths. The department has also striven successfully to make more explicit the school's Servite heritage and find ways to communicate this to the students of all ages. In order to ensure that the students have opportunities to become scripturally literate, the study of the Gospels has been re-introduced into the religious education curriculum.

The school has agreed the following areas for improvement in curriculum Religious Education:

- develop even further the scheme of work so that it builds in explicitly a historical perspective on the development of the Church's teaching and traditions and so extend the understanding of staff and students of their place and role as Catholics in today's world.

What is the overall effectiveness of curriculum religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy?

Overall Grade: I*

Curriculum Religious Education is excellent overall in developing students' religious literacy. The implementation of the Curriculum Directory is excellent and supports very well all provision at each Key Stage. Students have a very good knowledge of the religious education curriculum and understand well how it must be witnessed in daily life. They are encouraged to reflect on what they believe and why they believe. Students achieve highly and are well versed in the Levels of Attainment and in how to make progress. There are robust structures in place to sustain outstanding teaching. The leadership of the department has high expectations and communicates these very well to the staff, developing a shared vision and a desire to be even better professionals. Self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate. The department's contribution to supporting the school's mission is exemplary and increasingly permeates all aspects of the school.

B. The school as a Catholic Community

How well do pupils experience the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing through all areas of school life?

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum - time, resources, budget

Grade I*

The school fully meets the requirements of time of the Curriculum Directory. At Key Stage 3 and 4, students spend 10% of the available curricular time in Religious Education. At post-16, the school exceeds the 5% requirement with 8% of the time devoted to Religious Education. The department rejoices in a fully specialist staff and two part-time chaplains. It also benefits from a generous budget that exceeds that of other core areas. The priority previously given to good quality accommodation has been eroded because of the building and split site. This is likely to be addressed fully in the new building. The leadership team, very well supported by governors, offers outstanding support and guidance to the department in promoting the religious life of the school and the religious education of the students. Staff, whatever their backgrounds, receive thorough induction and training on the Catholic practice of the school. As a result, support for liturgical events is strong and all staff appreciate the spiritual opportunities within the school.

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community.

Grade I*

Prayer and worship are central to the life of the school. This is summed up in the school's summary mission statement of 'Shaping tomorrow, Inspired by Faith'. Liturgical events and daily prayers reflect the rhythm of the Church's calendar and Servite values are embedded in the school's ethos. Year masses follow a regular rota. Students are fully involved in planning such occasions both in the school and in the nearby church of St Ignatius. Year 13 students lead the retreat for Year 7 based on Servite values and Catholic social teaching. There is a high participation rate in the liturgy as ushers, readers, altar servers and Eucharistic ministers. Regular training by the school chaplains ensure that these roles are carried out solemnly and with a very high degree of commitment. Parishoners in the local parish bear witness to the high expectations of the students in these roles. The chaplaincy team, together with post-16 liturgy and form prefects coordinate whole school masses and liturgies. Thrice weekly assemblies, led by the headteacher, emphasise the importance of the Catholic life of the school and focus on worship and reflection around liturgical themes. The whole-school mass during the inspection demonstrated clearly the students' respectful active participation throughout. Students have regular opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation highlighted in both Advent and Lent. The school provides outstanding opportunities to promote the students' spiritual development through reflection and meditation, discussion and shared understanding of what it means to be a practising Catholic. Students' responses to a recent survey indicate that over three quarters of the students consider that the school helps them effectively to develop their Catholic faith. There is also sensitive and well-considered provision for those students of other Christian and non-Christian staff and students, none of whom opt out of any religious lesson or activity.

The commitment and contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice.
Grade I*

The school's commitment to action for social justice is outstanding. Charity initiatives, visiting speakers, citizenship programmes and the religious education curriculum all make a tremendous impact on students' knowledge and understanding of social justice issues. The school holds the London Citizens School of the Year award for 2011, reflecting the earnestness with which the students participate in local events. Opportunities to serve begin in Year 7 and develop throughout their school life. Many continue their early interests throughout their time in the school. For example, the Khanyen project in South Africa and the women's cooperative which makes the HIV aids badges. The school is the biggest promoter of their wares. The sixth-form hamper campaign involves all students in providing the contents for the Christmas appeal but also involves many in giving their time to visit and befriend members of the local parishes and care homes. Students give freely of their talents as well as goods. Nationally and internationally, the students are involved in a broad number of events from the CitySafe initiative to many CAFOD events. As a member of the international Servite School's Network, students benefit from links with others in Australia and America, learning about the differences in life style but also about their common bonds.

The underpinning Servite value of respect for diversity ensures that very harmonious relationships exist across and among the many ethnic groups within the school. Each individual is valued, talents recognised and those with special needs of any kind well supported and helped to participate fully in the life of the community. One student with a regressive illness, now preparing for university, commented particularly on how she would have given up without the help of the religious education department. Students are very aware of the moral and social issues within our society and are keen to share their views, listen to others and reflect on the impact of their actions and those of others.

Enabling the authentic partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf;

Grade I*

There is a very strong commitment among senior leaders and the overwhelming majority of staff to the school's mission as a Catholic institution within the Archdiocese of Westminster. Leaders and managers at all levels along with governors and chaplains are regularly involved in diocesan events and meetings. Excellent relationships are exemplified in the visit of the Archbishop to accompany the sixth formers on a CitySafe walk. The school trustees, working closely with the diocese over the Building Schools for the Future project, demonstrated their conscious decision to remain within the diocesan framework.

Students come to the school from over 20 different parishes. Weekly newsletters, meetings with parish clergy, attendance at deanery meetings, attendance at parish events and invitations to school events to the parishes all contribute to forming very good links between the school and its partner parishes. Liaison with up to ten Catholic feeder primary schools forms strong initial links with parents of future students. Older students make visits to some primary schools to work with pupils on a Reading Book project.

Parents are involved in the life of the schools through a range of mechanisms, not least of which is the weekly newsletter with a Catholic theme which also goes to the diocesan advisor. They are invited to masses in the parish and their involvement in the students' education much encouraged. Around 90% of parents regularly attend parents evening.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school.

Grade I*

Members of the governing body and senior leaders seek assiduously to ensure that Catholic life is central to the school. The pastoral and ethos committee monitors, supports and challenges all aspects of Religious Education and the school's Catholic life. At recruitment, the nature of the commitment required within a Catholic school is made clear to staff and the willingness to contribute actively to the ethos is an important consideration. As a result, staff participation in the religious life of the school is willingly given. Chaplains provide regular support and guidance to what it means to be a member of this Catholic and Servite community. Guided by the headteacher, school leaders have a clear understanding of their strategic role in sustaining and furthering its Catholic ethos, its place in the community, and its role in developing well-qualified Catholic young people.

What has improved since the last inspection and what should the school do to further develop the Catholic life of the school?

Since the last inspection, the school has made improvements in the areas highlighted in the previous report. Despite the split site and building works, a strong Catholic ethos has been sustained. Students' independence is growing with students increasingly able to bear credible witness to their Faith. For example, four Year 13 students have made a presentation to a conference at Harvard University this March.

As a result of departmental reviews and evaluation, the department has agreed that the following areas are a priority for improvement:

- widening the leadership opportunities for older students so that they are able to develop 'faith in action' more systematically, especially in the new school
- planning to increase the opportunities for voluntary masses, given the designated school chapel in the new building.

What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?

Overall Grade: I*

Religious Education is valued and recognised as the core of the curriculum both by adults and by many of the students. This is demonstrated in the priority given to the allocation of curriculum time, resources, staffing and accommodation. Worship and prayer are central to the life of the school and offer students a rich experience of Catholic tradition. Liturgical celebrations are well linked to the Church's calendar and students play a very active part in their preparation and planning. The school is committed to excellence in all facets of its provision. Governors are strong supporters of the Catholic ethos of the school and offer very good support to the leadership of the school as well as to the religious education department.