



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 101478

St Catherine's Catholic School
Watling Street
Bexleyheath
Kent DA5 7QJ

Inspection date: 11 - 12 February 2014

Chair of Governors:

Mr B Connell

Headteacher:

Mrs P Slonecki

Inspectors:

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EDUCATION COMMISSION

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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

St Catherine's is a Catholic comprehensive girls' school founded by the La Sainte Union Sisters and is situated in the Bexley deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It became an Academy in 2012. It is within a local authority which operates a selective system that impacts on the school's intake. The principal parishes which the school serves are St Mary of the Crays, Crayford; St John Fisher, Bexley; Our Lady of the Angels, Erith; Our Lady of the Rosary, Sidcup; St Lawrence's, Sidcup; St Patrick's, Plumstead and St Anslem's, Dartford. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 75%. The overall weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% - 9% in Key Stage 3 and 11% in Key Stage 4.

The school takes pupils from 11 – 16 years of age. The number of pupils currently on roll is 1064. Pupils come from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups (54.3%) is well above the national average. The main ethnic groups are White British (44.5%) and Black African (31.8%).

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is slightly below average, as is the proportion receiving extra support in class. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is 17%.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education

GRADE
1

St Catherine's school for girls is an outstanding Catholic school.

In the last inspection in March 2009 the inspectors judged the school to be an outstanding learning community and it continues to provide an excellent Catholic education for its girls.

The school benefits enormously from the inspirational leadership of the Headteacher, the dedication of the Chaplain and the chaplaincy team, the support of a committed board of well-informed governors and a hard-working and loyal staff. All share in and work to ensuring the school's Mission Statement is a reality.

The school is held in high regard in the local deanery and fully deserves its reputation as a high-achieving Catholic school of excellence.

Chaplaincy and pastoral care are excellent. Pupils feel safe and cared for. There are ample opportunities for them to contribute to the Catholic life of the school community. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the Headteacher and staff.

The quality of collective worship is outstanding with excellent opportunities for pupil participation.

Standards in Religious Education are outstanding as is the quality of teaching. The Religious Education curriculum fully meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory and the Bishops' Conference.

Leadership and management of the Religious Education department are outstanding.

The school has successfully addressed the issues raised in the last inspection and the inspectors believe that it has excellent capacity to maintain its high standards.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Ensure that students respond to and improve their work based on their teachers' formative comments.
- Develop further the programme of enrichment visits to places of religious interest or significance in order to further enhance pupils' experience.

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

There are excellent opportunities for pupils to contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of St Catherine's both within the school and beyond its gates. Pupils, supported by the Chaplain, play a leading role in preparing and leading Year and House assemblies, meditation exercises and Form prayers.

Chaplaincy and pastoral care are exceptional and pupils greatly appreciate and benefit from the support and guidance available to them. Pupils feel safe and valued in this school.

The Retreat programme is very well established. In Year 7 pupils have an in-house day of reflection early in September, which is led by the Chaplain. Year 8 spend a day, facilitated by the Chaplain and Religious Education staff, at Aylesford Priory while all of Year 9 pupils have the opportunity of a two-day residential Retreat at Kintbury. The Prayer Leaders in Year 10 go to Aylesford for a day of recollection while a similar group in Year 11 have a residential Retreat there, a choice which will be extended to the current Year 10 this school year.

The school is exceptionally successful at raising pupils' awareness of the needy and the marginalised, locally, nationally and globally. For example, pupils and staff have raised just under £3,800 for DePaul UK (an organisation supporting the homeless of London). In addition, the school supports the CAFOD 'Hungry for Change' project through Lenten fundraising activities, while also raising £10,000 over the last three years for the Trustees' school in Tanzania.

Pupils are very involved with the local community. For example, they collect goods for the local Manna Project and arrange tea parties for the elderly. The School Choir and the gospel choirs have sung carols for the Greenwich & Bexley hospice, while the school's Glee Club provide entertainment at fund-raising events for the hospice.

Pupils are fiercely loyal to and supportive of the school. They identify with the distinctive nature of St Catherine's as a Catholic community, citing the school badge and motto, the religious icons around the school site and the beautiful chapel as evidence. Above all they cite the care the staff have for them and pupil-pupil relationships as identity marks of this Catholic learning family.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

The standards pupils achieve at both key stages are very high. In 2013 at Key Stage 3 97% of pupils reached level five or above, 51% got level six and 14% gained level seven. At Key Stage 4 93% achieved grades A*-C, of which 58% were awarded A*/A grades. Attainment at GCSE has been rising over the last three years. For example the percentage of A*-C grades has risen from 89% in 2011 while those gaining an A*/A grade has increased by an impressive 18% over the same period. These excellent results are due to the outstanding teaching by staff and the enthusiasm for and commitment to the subject by pupils.

The Religious Education department is a high achieving department in a high achieving school.

Standards of pupils' oral and written work are exceptionally high. All pupils achieve very well and pupils with educational needs do particularly well due to the supportive interventions they receive. Pupils' progress within lessons and over time is also outstanding. Pupils have a real liking for the subject and have a very high regard for their teachers. Behaviour in lessons is exemplary, where pupils are supportive of each other and show respect for each other's opinions.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

Pupils' participation in liturgical celebrations is excellent. They take part enthusiastically as readers, members of one of the many gospel and school choirs or as Prayer Leaders. Others help organise, prepare or lead assemblies, meditations or form tutor prayers. For example pupils organised and led the Christmas Carol service last year with minimum input from the chaplaincy team.

The gospel choir, heard during the inspection, is very impressive and a joy to listen to. It makes a significant contribution to the liturgical life of the school.

The Prayer Leaders are at ease with and confident in their prayer life. Pupils show a great appreciation for the chapel which they visit regularly and in particular in the early mornings, as a place for quiet reflection and private prayer.

Form tutor prayer time is, overall, good and often very good. The Chaplain provides an excellent termly prayer book, thematically based and following the Church's liturgical year, for use by the Form Tutors. Pupils respond with reverence and respect and generally there are opportunities for the girls to add their own intersession prayers.

The Chaplain and chaplaincy team is very supportive in guiding and supporting the staff, pupils and the visiting priests to ensure collective worship is relevant and meets the spiritual and moral needs of the girls. For example in a meditation exercise with Year 7 in the chapel the girls were made aware of Jesus' unconditional love for them and they in turn were challenged to show their love for the suffering in the world.

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

Leadership and management of this high achieving school is outstanding. The inspirational and exceptional leadership of the Headteacher injects enthusiasm for and commitment to ensuring that the mission of the Church in education is central at St Catherine's.

Governors are dedicated to and supportive of the Headteacher and her vision for Catholic education. They know their school very well through extensive and regular reports from the Headteacher and Chaplain, as well as attending liturgies and school events. The Chair of Governors visits the school weekly to meet with the Headteacher. Consequently the school's self-evaluation is comprehensive, thorough and accurate. In addition the school organises a 'governors' day' once a term during which governors spend time in the school visiting lessons and meeting pupils and staff.

Governors, senior managers and the Chaplain monitor regularly the provision for the Catholic and liturgical life of the school. This is achieved through learning walks, observations and discussions with staff and pupils. Pupils are also involved in evaluating the provision. As a result there is a well-planned and measurable Strategic Development Plan with five strands, one of which is devoted to developing and improving the Catholic life of the school, while all school policies are based on the school's Mission Statement.

In 2012 there was a very successful whole-school in-service day on the theme 'The school as a witnessing community' led by an external facilitator.

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 and managers monitor closely the work of the Religious Education department. This is done through regular lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work, analysis of pupils' questionnaires and discussions with pupil focus groups.

Tracking and monitoring pupils' progress is rigorous with the few under-achievers quickly identified and intervention strategies put in place. For example staff offer extra tuition after school, pupils are invited to attend on Saturday mornings or are given additional support in the Progress Centre.

Assessment data is well used to review target-setting while peer assessment and self-assessment are embedded across both key stages.

The quality of teaching is well monitored in accordance with the school's policy and in addition there is a culture of subject staff visiting and observing each other's lesson in order to share good practice. This practice encourages staff to continue to be self-reflective practitioners.

Pastoral care for learning is excellent. This is provided effectively through the Inclusion Manager, the Chaplain and the use of the Progress Centre. Subject teachers regularly liaise with the pastoral staff on personal or emotional issues which impact or are likely to impact on a pupil's learning.

The Headteacher is extremely successful at safeguarding the excellent delivery of Religious Education by consistently prioritising the recruitment and retention of excellent teachers.

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

The quality of teaching in Religious Education is outstanding overall. The very clear vision of the joint subject leaders – that lessons should be lively, creative, academically challenging and faithful to Church teaching – is being realised. In the lessons seen by the inspectors the vast majority (75%) were judged to be outstanding and none were less than good.

Lesson planning is thorough and meticulous, ensuring progression and providing challenge. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on the cost of discipleship, pupils were challenged to examine the role of Judas in the death of Jesus. This provided stimulating discussions on the conventional perception of Judas and led to consideration of the tensions between freewill/predestination, the role of Satan and God's ultimate plan.

Lessons contain a variety of activities, such as individual/paired/group work, which engages them fully and provides ample opportunities for them to be independent learners. For example, some engrossing group work was seen in a Year 8 lesson on the position of women in the major world religions.

Progress is checked continually during the lessons and pupils know their target grades as well as being aware of the current level they are working at.

Assessment is thorough and regular in both key stages. Teachers make copious comments on pupils' written work indicating what is good and what improvements are needed. However there is some inconsistency across the department with teachers not always following up and ensuring that pupils act on the directions given.

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

At Key Stage 3 the department is in the process of writing its own in-house curriculum and it is 'work-in-progress'. It is exciting and challenging and successfully addresses current issues in society, for example atheism, secularism, diversity of religious practice.

At Key Stage 4 pupils follow the AQA specification studying St Luke's gospel and Christian Ethics. Inspectors are pleased to note that pupils undertake a study of scripture as part of their GCSE course.

The Religious Education curriculum at both key stages meets the requirements of the new Curriculum Directory, fully engages the pupils and meets their needs.

The inspectors note that the curriculum time given to the subject is overall 10% which meets the recommendations of the Bishops' Conference and the Diocese.

The curriculum is very well resourced with a budget comparable to other core subjects and is supported by high quality technology. The accommodation is good where the rooms are attractive with stimulating displays of pupils' work, keywords and grade/level descriptors.

In order to enrich the experience of the pupils' the department should provide more opportunities for pupils to visit places of religious interest or significance.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

The quality of collective worship provided by the school is outstanding. Prayer and liturgy are central to school life. There is an excellent programme for Masses throughout the year. For example, Year 7 have a welcome Mass and Year 11 have a Leavers Mass. Mass is celebrated on Holy Days of Obligation that fall in term time, as well as Year 8 Masses, and a voluntary Mass on the first Friday of every month. Other sacramental celebrations include the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Advent and Lent when twelve local priests come into the school to hear confessions. The school is fortunate to be able to have the services of four local priests who visit regularly to celebrate the Eucharist with the pupils.

Similarly the provision for Year assemblies, Form tutor prayers, the recently introduced House assemblies and private prayer is excellent.

Assemblies are well planned with clear message and excellent pupil participation. In the assemblies observed during the inspection the gospel choir's singing was stunning and the pupils responded with reverence and respect. The moments for reflection were observed and the challenge and comfort of the gospel message was clearly evident.

The stunningly beautiful chapel is open all day for private prayer and is very well used by pupils and staff. Very many of the girls visit it before school for private prayer or for Ignatian meditation led by the Chaplain and/or the Prayer Leaders.

The recent refurbishment and redecorating of the chapel, together with the substantial budget for Retreats and chaplaincy is testimony to the importance placed on prayer and liturgies by the Headteacher and governors.

The exceptional provision for spiritual development and promotion of the Catholic ethos is skilfully brought together in the 'Faith and Spirituality Development Plan' by the Chaplain and subject leaders of Religious Education whose own witness to faith clearly has a strong impact on pupils and staff.