



# Diocese of Westminster

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## St Michael's Catholic High School

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DFE Number: 919/5417

URN Number: 7944160

Headteacher: Mr E Conway

Chair of Governors: Mr K Rylett

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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

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Date of inspection: 9–10 May 2013

Date of previous inspection: 26–27 November 2007

Reporting Inspector: Mr D Scott

Associate Inspectors: Mrs P Williams & Mr S Horsman

## Introduction

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, students and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspectors spent two days in school, visited 10 lessons, attended three Masses and one assembly, and conducted 21 interviews with school staff, students and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, discussion with local clergy, scrutiny of a sample of students' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons, examination of school documents, and attendance at religious services where possible.

The Inspection of St Michael's Catholic High School 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 six form entry in the local authority of Hertfordshire and the locality of Watford. The school serves the Watford Deanery in the Archdiocese of Westminster. The proportion of students who are baptised Catholic is 94.3%. The proportion of students who are from other Christian denominations is 5% and from other Faiths 0.7%.

There are 1114 students on roll, with five students with statements of Special Educational Need. The proportion of students from ethnic minority groups is just above average. The number of students speaking English as an additional language is average. The proportion of families claiming free school meals is well below average. Just under two thirds of the staff members are Catholics and 9% hold the CCRS or other Catholic qualifications. Religious Education lessons are taught by eight specialist staff.

### Key for inspection grades:

*Grade 1\*: Outstanding;*  
*Grade 1: Very Good;*  
*Grade 2: Good;*  
*Grade 3: Requires improvement;*  
*Grade 4: Causing Concern.*

## **A. Classroom 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?*

### **What is the overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy?**

**Overall Grade: I\***

Classroom religious education is excellent and develops students' religious literacy exceptionally well. This is clearly evidenced by the outstanding achievement at GCSE and A level, and the increasingly high numbers of students opting to study Theology and Philosophy at University. The Curriculum Directory is seamlessly woven into classroom practice and provision at all Key Stages. As a result, students have a very good knowledge and understanding of the religious education curriculum and demonstrate very positive attitudes to their Catholic faith and are encouraged to reflect on what they believe and why they believe. The leadership of the department is outstanding. The head of department communicates high expectations to both staff and students. The department's contribution to supporting the school's mission is exemplary and permeates all aspects of school.

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

At the last inspection, the school was asked to consolidate the provision of RE in the sixth form and improve the monitoring at Key Stage 3. Both aspects have improved significantly as evidenced by the outstanding examination success at all key stages.

In order to sustain and improve on this achievement the school has agreed the following area for improvement in curriculum religious education:

- increase still further the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring greater consistency in marking by providing more opportunities for students to act on teachers' feedback and to evidence such actions.

### **How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?**

**Grade I\***

The content of curriculum Religious Education meets all the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. The content provides for a deep and systematic study of God and the teachings of the Church, the life of Jesus, central beliefs of the Catholic Church and how these relate to faith and life. There are many opportunities for students across all key stages to be able to relate Church teaching and the Gospel to their lives today. The schemes of work, through a code system, give clear links to relevant parts of the Curriculum Directory. The RE department acknowledges that a clearer key to explain the codes used, would aid easier identification, particularly for new members of staff.

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

**Grade I\***

Overall, RE is the highest performing subject in the school. Students typically achieve exceedingly well in religious education at each Key Stage. Students enter the school with knowledge and skills that are broadly average make rapid progress, with almost a third making exceptional progress between Years 7 and 11. In 2012, 85% of students gained a grade A\*-C in GCSE examinations with almost half achieving A\*/A, a proportion which is much higher when compared with their peers

nationally. Those post-16 students following Level 3 courses in Religious Studies do well in both A2 and AS examinations. The recently introduced general course for post-16 students involves them well in the liturgical life of the Church as well as in extensive service for others in the local community and beyond. An extensive programme of internal moderation is undertaken at all Key Stages and is verified by external agencies to ensure high levels of consistency. Over the past four years 13 students have gone on to study Theology or Philosophy at university with one former student entering the seminary.

### **The quality of teaching**

**Grade 1\***

Teaching is consistently very good and often outstanding, and as a result, students make excellent progress. The eight highly qualified specialist teachers have a very secure intellectual knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith. High expectations, stimulating activities which challenge students to think independently, particularly the more able, ensure that classrooms are vibrant and that students have extremely positive attitudes to learning. As a result, relationships between students themselves and students and staff are excellent.

Classrooms are delightful, with imaginative activities and vibrant displays to capture and respond to students' interests and enthusiasms. Teachers plan lessons exceptionally well using a variety of strategies and media to capture and maintain students' interest. For example, a Year 7 student commented, 'RE lessons are made fun because teachers' plan exciting activities using role-play, internet clips and debates'.

Teachers' skill is demonstrated through a strong commitment to teaching Catholic belief and religious literacy. Students' books are marked thoroughly and regularly, and in the best examples, receive helpful and precise advice on how to improve their work. However, this good practice is not consistency applied in all lessons and as a result students are not always afforded the opportunity to act on their teachers' comments.

In the best lessons seen during the inspection students were encouraged to think spiritually, ethically and theologically and to become aware of the challenges of being a Christian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, in their study of Luke's Gospel, Year 13 students were assessing the extent to which Pilate was responsible for the death of Jesus. Using examination criteria they acted as examiners in deciding the grade it would achieve, and which points needed further improvement. Here the teachers' skilful craft was able to draw upon students' strong prior learning so that they were able to demonstrate their religious literacy and make excellent progress.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education**

**Grade 1\***

The subject leader has an excellent understanding of and appreciation for the educational mission of the Church and the centrality of curriculum Religious Education in that mission. There is a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and the subject leader is a highly-skilled and enthusiastic practitioner who by precept and example models outstanding classroom practice. All members of the religious education department are practising Catholics who bear witness to their faith through their work and provide good role-models to students. A culture of sharing good practice has been established within the department and extends outwards by members leading whole school and diocesan training events, and in the case of two, being senior leaders. Despite being the highest performing subject the RE department is anything but complacent and actively seeks to continue to improve standards and seek ways in which to accelerate progress still further.

## **B. The Catholic life of the school**

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

### **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 the overwhelming majority of students. This is demonstrated in the priority given to the allocation of curriculum time, resources and staffing. 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.

### **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 and additional developments of its own.

As a result of rigorous self-evaluation, the school has agreed the following area for improvement:

- extend further the opportunities for students to participate more fully in liturgy and acts of worship.

### **The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, 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 of the time devoted to Religious Education. The department rejoices in a fully specialist staff, including the school Chaplain. It also benefits from a budget which is in line with that of other core areas. 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 in many different forms are central to the life of the school community. Students' liturgical formation is well planned and ensures a broad experience of the richness of the Catholic tradition of prayer and worship. There many prayer opportunities in which staff, students

and other stakeholders can take an active part. Year assemblies are developed and presented by the students with decreasing input from form tutors as students advance through the school. For example, in a Year 10 assembly students explained the meaning of talents, their relevance today, how they can be enabled to grow; students who had been to Lourdes spoke of how they used their talents and witnessed the talents of others who had disabilities. There was also time for quiet reflection and prayer. The Ascension Day Mass, as observed during the inspection, was a very prayerful and spiritual experience. The occasion was made even more special by the dedication of a newly installed Crucifix, by the Dean. The full-time Chaplain has devised a programme of retreats and liturgies throughout the liturgical year in which all are able to actively take part. He is also available for anyone whenever the need arises. The celebration of the Eucharist is offered at key times throughout the liturgical year and every day either before school or at lunchtime and tutor groups are invited to lead these occasions. The purpose-built St Dominic's Chapel is very much at the heart of the school and provides an oasis of calm and stillness for the school community. Students respond well to prayer and liturgy and appreciate time for quiet reflection. The Advent and Lent retreat programmes have been welcomed by students who speak very enthusiastically of their experiences.

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

#### **Grade 1\***

The schools' commitment to action for social justice is outstanding. The school's mission statement, 'Bringing Christ to all and all to Christ' places service at the heart of its work. There are many opportunities for students to engage in service, particularly for those in need. All sixth form students complete Community Service. Students display remarkable sensitivity to those less privileged than themselves and high levels of personal commitment to working together for the common good, for example by supporting a local hospice project by collecting food parcels for the homeless.

For the past eight years the school has supported the Sisters of 'Our Lady of Namur' in Rawanda in raising over £340,000 for a number of health-care projects, including the installation of solar panels to supply the local hospital with electricity. Year 10 students attend the annual pilgrimage to Lourdes volunteering to provide 24-hour care for people with disabilities and those who are disadvantaged. For many this has proved to be a life changing experience, as one student said, 'When I saw the faith of people with disabilities it strengthened my own faith and belief in God'. Sixth form pupils provide additional pastoral support for younger students and are involved in leading the liturgy group to promote student participation in whole school liturgies.

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. The underpinning value of respect for diversity ensures that very harmonious relationships exist across and among the ethnic groups within the school.

### **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 1\***

There is a very strong commitment among senior leaders and 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 the Chaplain are regularly involved in diocesan events and meetings. Excellent relationships are exemplified by the ecclesiastical/pastoral visit in 2011 by Cardinal Mazombwe of Zambia, Bishops Sherrington and Arnold from the diocese of Westminster. Students regularly participate in diocesan events, such as the Mass for the sick at Westminster Cathedral, the Good Shepherd Mass and the Flame conference at Wembley Arena.

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. As a result a highly successful induction programme excellent links exist between St Michael's and its Catholic feeder primary schools. Priests from the surrounding parishes regularly attend the school to say Mass.

Parents are very involved in the life of the school through a range of mechanisms and are invited to masses in the parish and their involvement in the students' education encouraged. Over 90% of parents regularly attend student review days to discuss their child's progress. Over a third of all parents and carers responded to the parental questionnaire. Their responses were overwhelmingly positive with the only real concern being to receive even more information relating to RE and worship.

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

#### **Grade 1\***

The headteacher, ably supported by the leadership team and governors, communicate a clear vision which ensures that Catholic life of the school is at the heart of all its work. They monitor, support and challenge all aspects of Religious Education and the school's Catholic life. Leaders at all levels encourage staff to participate fully in the religious life of the school by providing spiritual INSET and maintaining prayer as an integral part of school life. As a result, staff participation in the religious life of the school is willingly given. The Chaplain provides regular support and guidance to what it means to be a member of the Catholic community.

Governors are supportive and committed to the values and aspirations of the school. They use their considerable professional skills and talents to ensure that the school continues to thrive and flourish. The very clear, caring and considerate leadership of the headteacher serves to inspire others. Through his collaborative leadership style together with his personal warmth and enthusiasm he has the respect of staff and students alike. As a result, staff provide good role models for students and there is a tangible spiritual atmosphere and a purposeful learning environment around the school. 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.



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#### **A. Classroom Religious Education**

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**Overall Grade 1\***

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

Grade 1\*

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

Grade 1\*

The quality of teaching

Grade 1\*

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade 1\*

#### **B. The Catholic life of the school**

##### **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 1\***

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget

Grade 1\*

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

Grade 1\*

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

Grade 1\*

The 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

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

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