



DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP INSPECTION REPORT

incorporating Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the
Archbishop of Southwark

URN 140537

St Simon Stock Catholic School
Oakwood Park
Maidstone, Kent
ME16 0JP

Inspection date: 26 & 27 January 2015

Chair of Governors:	Mr Michael Powis
Headteacher:	Mr Brendan Wall
Inspectors:	Mr Damian Fox Mr Joseph Carvill

EDUCATION COMMISSION

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Introduction

Description of the school

St Simon Stock Catholic School is an above average size, co-educational, Catholic Comprehensive Academy. It is situated in the Maidstone Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is a La Sallian Associate School which uses the principles of the Patron Saint of Teachers.

The principal parishes the school serves are St Francis, Maidstone; St Thomas More, West Malling; Holy Family, Park Wood and St Simon Stock, Walderslade.

The school is part of a 20 school Catholic Multi-Academy Trust in the Kent local authority. The authority has an extensive Grammar school system which impacts on the Catholic intake of the school. This is 66%, slightly below average, whilst the 2014 Year 7 intake is 55%. The school average is down from 77% in the last inspection. The changes in the Admissions Code mean that the four neighbouring Grammar schools take the more able Catholic pupils, an opportunity which was not an option for parents in 2010. Pupils in Year 7 were recruited from 38 primary schools.

Attainment on entry across the school is in line with national averages.

Most students are White British heritage with an increasing number from a range of minority ethnic groups raising it in line with the national average. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is moving towards the national average. 133 students receive the Pupil Premium funding including 5 students in local authority care.

The school takes pupils from 11-18. The number currently on roll is 1,062. There are 235 in the Sixth Form.

Date of previous inspection:

21 & 22/01/2010

Overall Grade:

2

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 Simon Stock is an outstanding school at all levels. It has improved on the 'Good' grade given in the last inspection.

The governors of the school are active and effective in their support for Religious Education and the Catholic life of the school. They have restructured procedures to ensure that they are fully informed so that they can challenge and support the Headteacher and staff.

The leadership of the Headteacher is outstanding. His vision both for progress in Religious Education and for embedding spirituality in the lives of staff and pupils, is understood and shared by the whole community. In discussion and in lessons, pupils displayed an appreciation of what the school provides and they have an obvious pride in the school and in their own achievements. They are excellent ambassadors for Catholic education.

Pupils said that they felt safe and that bullying was not an issue. They added that when incidents occur, they know that staff and older pupils would help. One pupil said that the school motto, *Labore Cum Amore*, "sums up the teachers."

Of the 276 responses from parents, 81% strongly agreed that St Simon Stock is an outstanding Catholic school. 57 parents wrote positive comments in support of the school, especially the impact the school has on their children who felt happy and cared for. A non-Catholic parent wrote that the school was "very inclusive" of all pupils.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Continue the professional development of the Head of Religious Education and Spirituality, who is new in post, to ensure that he builds on the impressive foundations of his predecessor. They should also continue to provide training and support for the two NQTs and the Christian Youth Worker.
- Extend the programme of retreats and religious opportunities for all pupils.
- Ensure that the new and enlarged Chapel is available for all staff and pupils as soon as possible.
- Ensure that the amount of time given to Religious Education at Key Stage 3 meets the Bishops' requirement of 10% of taught curriculum time.

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

Pupils take full advantage of the excellent range of opportunities to contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school. There is a weekly Mass which is prepared by pupils, whole school Masses, and a programme of assemblies for all year groups.

The impact of the La Sallian framework is manifest in the relationships between pupils and the obvious mutual respect and care they have for each other. There are two memorial gardens for pupils who have died. They are designed and cultivated by pupils. The school recently suffered the loss of an excellent Head of Religious Education. Staff and pupils came together in faith to pray and to offer mutual support. Sixth Formers, in particular, make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic life of the school from which younger pupils benefit. The peer ministry and the new Junior Leadership team, led by older pupils, are examples of how the message of the Gospel impacts on the life and welfare of all pupils. One parent wrote that the Catholic faith "is central to every lesson and the school life."

In discussion, pupils were able to articulate their awareness and appreciation of prayer and how it was a natural part of the day. The new Christian Youth Worker works closely with the Religious Education staff to provide a period of prayer and reflection in the chapel. A Year 11 pupil said that he was not a Catholic but over the years he had become aware of the faith because of the school and asked questions about it. A Sixth Form pupil who joined from another school said that he wished he had been part of the school from Year 7. The priest confirmed that he was very happy with the Catholic and spiritual life of the school and that he always felt welcomed.

Awareness of the needs of the international and local community is evident in fundraising which is a central feature of the school. All pupils are involved in a wide range of charities. £3,000 was raised for Children in Need, £2,000 for the Porchlight centre for the homeless and the Demelza children's hospice. Sixty Sixth Form pupils and eight staff also organised the 'Big Sleep Out' to raise funds for the Cardinal Hume Centre.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Outcomes in Religious Education are outstanding overall and compare very well with English and Maths. The GCSE results for A*-C increased from 72% to 79%. They are on a par with English and above Mathematics. For A*/A, Religious Education achieved 20%, above both English and Maths.

The figure for pupils achieving 4 levels of progress in Religious Education was 55%, higher than English and Maths. For 5 levels of progress in RE, the figure was 18%, again above English and Maths.

A2 results, with an entry of 30, were 100% A-C, with a value added figure of +8%. 55% achieved A/B, up from 13% in 2013. AS results, with an entry of 37, up from 11 in 2013, were 74% A-C. The value added figure was +10%.

Lesson observations showed that pupils were highly motivated. Their interactive work and exemplary behaviour reflected their willingness to achieve in a positive learning environment. The presentation in exercise books was of a very high standard and showed they were proud of their work. Year 11 pupils said that they were being well prepared for exams.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

The Chapel is both the physical and spiritual centre of school life. It is a quiet area which helps pupils pray, reflect and share in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. An inspector was invited to observe a class at prayer in the Chapel and described the experience as very spiritual. Pupils are always involved in the preparation of Masses and assemblies.

At the time of the inspection a new area had been found for the Chapel, which will be larger and will enhance the spiritual life of the school and afford greater opportunities for pupils to respond to and participate in Collective Worship. In one Religious Education lesson, pupils were invited to offer their own intentions as they prayed. In all examples of worship that inspectors observed, pupils of all ages were respectful and responded sincerely and in a heartfelt way. They are at ease with prayer at St Simon Stock. The spiritual ethos was very tangible. The House prayer books with pupils' own prayers were evidence of their faith and their response to Catholic worship, although their use was not monitored regularly.

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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

Leaders and managers at all levels across the school have demonstrated their commitment to the Church's mission in education. The Governors are highly effective in their monitoring role and in both supporting and challenging the senior leaders. They have a clear vision for the growth and impact of the Catholic and spiritual life of the school. They ensure that they are fully informed of the achievements of the school and that they actively support the Headteacher.

One governor described the catholicity of the school as an "invisible thread running through the fabric of the school." There is a link governor for Religious Education but they have restructured the governing body further to address Catholicity more effectively. Each of the three Heads of School now report to two governors who then report to the full Governing Body.

The Headteacher has had, and continues to have, a major impact on the growth of spirituality in the school community. His School Improvement Partner described him as "outstanding" and that there was "an ambience of care" across the school. His spiritual strength and personal faith are manifest in his own relationships with pupils and the obvious 'Gospel in action' which permeates throughout the whole school. The Headteacher has a clear vision that a Catholic school "is where they find Christ." Pupils acknowledged that teachers cared for them and, as one Sixth Form pupil put it, "go above and beyond" the classroom. Student Leaders, as role models and fundraisers, reflect the Headteacher's belief that relationships are key to the growth of a spiritual community.

Senior leaders ensure there are improvements in Religious Education and that there is a detailed programme of Collective Worship. The Sanctuary and the Carmel centre were established for more vulnerable pupils and those who needed a quiet place of study. There is a timetabled reflective period for classes to meditate and pray together in the chapel. This is led effectively by the new Christian Youth Worker. She is a valuable addition to the school and makes a significant contribution to the faith experiences of pupils. One pupil said that the school "helps us find our vocation."

The Headteacher monitors the progress of the Religious Education department with a detailed tracking system and with a programme of lesson observations.

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

The school's self-evaluation was honest and accurate and reflected their many achievements. They monitor the work of the Religious Education department through regular lesson observations, the scrutiny of exercise books and rigorous tracking of pupils' progress. Data is collected and used to set targets for the department and for pupils. The flight path graphs were particularly useful for teachers to identify the strengths and needs of pupils. Senior leaders plan strategically based on the Religious Education Improvement Plan.

There has been a smooth transition from an outstanding Head of Religious Education to a newly appointed one. He was able to demonstrate an understanding of the processes and strategies which were deeply embedded in the work of the school. He has a line manager who supports him in his new role and monitors his progress as a new middle leader. He wants pupils to leave "knowing what it means to have attended a Catholic school."

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

The quality of teaching overall is outstanding. Inspectors observed ten lessons, six of which were outstanding and four of which were good. The outstanding lessons were characterised by a consistently high level of effective interaction and very good pace and structure. All pupils were engaged throughout the lesson, working collaboratively and enthusiastically in groups and in the feedback to the class. They responded well to the opportunity to contribute to and learn from others. There was evidence of high level questioning which encouraged them to think for themselves and to make good contributions to the group or to their partner. In the lessons observed, all pupils participated. The grouping of pupils showed that the teachers were aware of each individual's ability and needs. As a result, pupils demonstrated high levels of motivation and learning. They confirmed that there are often times when paired or independent learning is expected. They appreciated the variety of teaching and learning styles. A parent wrote, "The Religious Education department is outstanding."

The teachers whose lessons were good showed outstanding features, but they did not provide the extra challenge for the higher ability pupils.

In all lessons, behaviour was outstanding and demonstrated a mutual respect for one another. All teachers were positive and praised the pupils appropriately.

The marking and the dialogue between teachers and pupils was of a very high quality and offered guidance to pupils on how they might progress.

In a Year 11 lesson, pupils said they were being prepared well for the GCSE exam. Religious Education has always come top of the *Kirkland and Rowell* surveys for their impact and the enjoyment of pupils.

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

At Key Stage 3, the school follows "The Way, The Truth and The Life" programme. At GCSE, since the last inspection, the school has developed the teaching of Mark's Gospel, especially in Year 9. GCSE achievement and progress data show that the curriculum is presented in a way which is relevant to the pupils' understanding of how they can and should live according to the commandment to love. For example, a Year 7 class learnt about John the Baptist but were then given real life case studies to help them develop an understanding of how they should apply repentance and forgiveness in their own lives. A Year 11 class were revising the story of 'the Sheep and the Goats'. They were learning the facts and the significance of the story for us today.

AS and A2 pupils study the Philosophy of Religion and Religious Ethics. The exam data and increased numbers in Year 12 reflect a high level of interest in the subjects. Lesson observations showed that the curriculum is designed to help pupils relate to the variety of beliefs and practices in our world. The school also runs the NOCN General Religious Education course for all Sixth Form pupils. Almost all pupils received accreditation at the end of the course.

The time allocated for Key Stage 4 is 10%, but the 8% for Key Stage 3 does not meet the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. This is balanced by excellent achievement and progress in Religious Education and by the time given to assemblies and the school's Personal Development and Wellbeing programme. The extra 2% for Key Stage 3 to meet the Bishops' requirements will be allocated from September 2015.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

Overall, the quality of Collective Worship is outstanding. It is central to the life of the school and there are extensive and varied religious experiences for staff and pupils. There is a weekly voluntary Mass which the priest confirmed was well planned and attended by pupils. There are six priests who come to school for Mass, assemblies, and services to celebrate the seasons of the Church. There is a detailed weekly plan of Collective Worship.

Pupils confirmed that prayer is "embedded" into their lives in the school. Prayer was not just at the beginning of the lessons and the daily Angelus, but also in assemblies and Masses. One assembly on the Holocaust was described by an inspector as "stunning" with "excellent opportunities for spiritual and moral development." The music and use of symbols such as the candle were very effective in creating a real spiritual experience. The quiet period for one class in the Chapel was an excellent example of how pupils might be inspired to meditate and talk with God at their own level. Staff and pupils were comfortable with celebration and occasions of sadness.

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