



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 118907

St Gregory's Catholic Comprehensive School
Reynolds Lane
Tunbridge Wells
Kent TN4 9XL

Inspection date: 18 -19 April 2013

Chair of Governors:	Mr Anthony Moffatt
Headteacher:	Mr Stephen Adamson
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EDUCATION COMMISSION

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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

The school is voluntary aided, situated in the Tunbridge Wells deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark and maintained by Kent Local Authority which operates a selective system of education. The principal parishes which the school serves are St Augustine's, Tunbridge Wells; St Thomas', Sevenoaks; Corpus Christi, Tonbridge and St Dunstan's, Southborough. The proportion of students who are baptised Catholics is 58.4%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 8.0% in Key Stage 3, 8.3% in Key Stage 4, 20% for A level studies and 3.3%, equivalent to 30 guided learning hours, for General Religious Education in the Sixth Form.

The school takes students from 11 to 18 years. The number of students currently on roll is 1028 including 180 in the Sixth Form. The attainment of students on entering the school is broadly around average although, owing to 35% of more able pupils in the local authority attending selective schools, the school has a lower number than nationally from the highest ability range. The proportion of students eligible for free schools meals (around 12%) is well below average (approximately 28%). Around 27% of the students receive extra support in class, which is above the national average (approximately 20%). The majority of pupils are White British (around 80%) with a higher than average proportion of pupils from a White European heritage. The proportion of students from homes where English is an additional language is around average (approximately 11%).

The school has a number of awards including International School status and retains its former specialism in Mathematics and Computing for the benefit of the wider community.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

GRADE

1

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The school's leaders successfully promote a welcoming and caring ethos, which reflects Gospel values and the school's mission statement, 'Christ at the centre of living and learning'. The school has adopted a collegial approach to leadership where the Headteacher successfully leads an outstanding team to promote and provide a very clear direction for the Catholic life of the school community. Leaders at all levels communicate a strong sense of purpose to ensure that each pupil is given a wide range of opportunities to unlock their potential spiritually, morally and academically. The school is a vibrant community with the welfare of pupils at its heart. Pastoral care is outstanding, as is the quality of provision for personal and collective worship. Chaplaincy in the school is outstanding and the newly-appointed, lay chaplain is a strength of the school. She is line managed by the Headteacher and reports to the Governors' Catholicity, Community and Care sub-committee. There are very strong links with local clergy, who act as chaplains to year groups, visit the school regularly and celebrate Masses and sacramental liturgies. The quality of assemblies and of the form tutor prayer time is at least good and provides pupils with many opportunities for reflection. The school very successfully promotes community cohesion, in the locality and abroad. Standards in Religious Education are good at Key Stage 3 and outstanding at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. Religious Education provision in the school promotes heightened pupil awareness of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life and of the interdependent nature of communities worldwide. Assessment and tracking are driving up standards and Religious Education makes a significant contribution to this aim. Since the last inspection, the curriculum time requirement has been significantly increased at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and is more nearly approaching the Bishops' Conference requirements. The retreat programme has been extensively extended to cover all Year groups, excepting Year 11, and the school has had a full-time chaplain in place since September. The school has significantly improved resources and materials to meet pupils' individual learning needs.

The school has developed a robust school improvement plan, informed by canvassing views from all stakeholders and by departmental reviews. With the spiritual life of the school featuring prominently in its evaluation and planning processes, the inspectors believe that the school has an excellent capacity to improve further.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, headteacher and staff should:

- Devise plans to provide the Chaplain with a dedicated chaplaincy area
- Continue to increase the curriculum time for Religious Education at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 so that it meets the Bishops' Conference requirements of 10%
- Extend the range of visits to places of worship, particularly those which relate to the world religions covered in the Religious Education curriculum

The Catholic life of the school

GRADE 1

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The school's leaders successfully promote a welcoming and caring ethos, which reflects Gospel values and the school's Mission Statement, 'Christ at the centre of living and learning'. The religious artefacts and displays around the site mark the school as distinctively Catholic. For example, in the impressive foyer, which has been recently refurbished, there is a large wooden cross which takes pride of place, whilst in the school chapel, there is an extremely attractive modern crucifix on the wall above the altar and crucifixes are present in each classroom. The school is privileged in having the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the chapel. In addition to the above, photographs of the Pope are prominently displayed in the administrative corridor and the Religious Education classrooms. The school has adopted a collegial approach to leadership where the Headteacher successfully leads an outstanding team to promote and provide a very clear direction for the Catholic life of the school community. The Governing Body and the Headteacher provide strong strategic direction in order to promote the Catholic life of the school and to raise standards in Religious Education. Governors make an outstanding contribution by acting as critical friends to the senior leadership team and to middle leaders. They attend key events such as the Governors' Link Visit Day where six governors spend the day with their departments, meeting students and staff and spending time in the classroom or offices. Leaders at all levels communicate a strong sense of purpose to ensure that each child is given a wide range of opportunities to unlock their potential spiritually, morally and academically. The school is a vibrant community with the welfare of pupils at its heart. Pastoral care is outstanding and pupils with Additional Educational Needs (AEN) flourish in the caring environment reflecting the school's Catholic ethos. Middle leaders are ably supported by a senior leadership team committed to putting the school's Mission Statement into practice. Rigorous quality assurance procedures ensure that appropriate interventions are provided to meet the needs of pupils across the age and ability ranges. Of particular note are the excellent vertical tutoring arrangements where pupils from Year 7 through to Year 13 meet as 'Review' groups for twenty-five minutes at the end of each day. During these times, senior school students are encouraged to support younger pupils during Review time. In particular, Sixth Form students are attached to Review groups and also carry out mentoring roles with all year groups and this forms part of their enrichment programme. One parent commented, "We have been very impressed by the strong Catholic life at the school and by the way pupils are encouraged to nurture one another through Review time and as Sixth formers by helping in classes and mentoring younger pupils." Pupil voice is expressed through an active Learning and Teaching Council. As a result of their suggestions for improvement to senior leadership, a number of enhancements have been made to enrich the pupil experience. For example, pupils requested that Review time incorporates opportunities for pupils to gain even more benefits to their learning. This led to revision time being introduced for Year 11 pupils during a selected number of Review meetings. Currently, the Learning and Teaching Council are discussing with the Parents' and Teachers' Association (PTA) ways to re-design the upper courtyard so that there is space for pupils to study outside. The school has strong links with the Diocese, with leadership at all levels regularly attending meetings and training offered by the Diocesan Education Commission. As a consequence of the strong commitment to Catholic education by the whole school community, pupils progress very well.

Quality of provision for personal and collective worship

GRADE 1

The provision for prayer and worship is outstanding. The full-time Chaplain has been in post since September and, since that time, has had a major impact on the Catholic life of the school. She involves students in liturgies and Masses through readings, music and

drama and hopes to develop this through re-establishing a Student Liturgy Group. She is highly regarded by pupils who describe her as 'brilliant'. The support she gives to staff and pupils is outstanding. For example, her ideas have empowered pupils to take responsibility, in times of prayer and during liturgies, to become even more active. They write and produce their own presentations and role play for assemblies. They compose their own prayers for the 'Prayer of the Faithful' during Mass and, during liturgies and tutor group meetings, for thanksgiving and intercessory prayers. In an outstanding assembly on the homeless, pupils were involved in role play, reflections and intercessory prayers. Pupils said that they gained a great deal from the assembly and the message it conveyed. Strong links exist between the school and the parishes it serves with some parents, staff and governors being actively involved in parish life. Pupils are also involved in parish liturgies as servers and readers. The Chaplain, together with the Head of Religious Education and local parish priests, produce a comprehensive programme of Masses, liturgies, assemblies and themes for Review meetings which map to the liturgical calendar and Religious Education curriculum. The Religious Education department provides support in liturgies such as the Advent service where they help pupils in preparing and delivering Advent readings and collaborates with the Music department in preparing the school choir and band. One parent wrote, 'The chance for parents to participate in school functions with a Christian focus, for example the carol service and the 'successes' assemblies has always been inspiring.' Governors are regular attendees at Masses and liturgies in the school. Since the previous inspection, the school has extended the retreat programme to cover all year groups except Year 11. The numbers of pupils attending retreats are increasing significantly because of the drive by the Chaplain to ensure that pupils see this as an opportunity not to be missed. In this way, pupils are provided with excellent opportunities to further enrich their spiritual and moral development. The Chaplain currently shares an office with an administrative officer. The school should now explore ways in which to provide pupils with a dedicated space in order to further enhance chaplaincy in the school.

Community cohesion

Community cohesion is an outstanding feature of this inclusive school. During the inspection, pupils stated that incidents of bullying are extremely rare at the school and the buddy system is effective in supporting the anti-bullying policy. Some non-Catholic pupils said that they were very happy with the way in which they were made to feel included in the school and added that they were able to join their peers in leading prayers during school liturgies. The school works with its partner Catholic schools in the Tunbridge Wells Deanery, aiming to further promote their schools' Catholic identity through greater collaboration and mutual support. For example, more able pupils in Religious Education visit the primary schools to deliver assemblies and assist in Religious Education lessons. A great deal of very effective work has been done with local primary schools. In projects such as the World Book Day, pupils took total control of running the whole afternoon session and positively endorsed this opportunity. The Maths Fun Road Show and a "Murder Mystery" literacy based event are further examples of this cross-phase collaboration. There is evidence in some booklets that these interventions are much enjoyed by the primary school pupils. There is a very strong and active PTA. The Association involves the school and the local community through their social and fundraising events. For example, the PTA organised a Bollywood Night multicultural evening for pupils, parents and staff. Funds are raised through annual events such as the Summer Fair and a Soirée Française night to contribute towards the purchase of items to enrich the school environment or curriculum. A current example of these is the on-going refurbishment of the inner courtyard adjacent to the hall and the purchasing of a pottery kiln for the Art department. Very good links exist with parents and carers. They are kept informed through a number of

GRADE 1

means, including parent consultation evenings, pupil assessment sheets, an informative monthly newsletter, which is displayed both in the parishes and on the website, and the PTA. As part of a school specialism in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), teachers go out into the community on the 'Outreach Project', each Wednesday morning to work on offsite classes with members of the community, some who are senior citizens, and others who are out of work, in a relatively deprived area of Tunbridge Wells. This has had some impact in terms of preparing the unwaged for work, which they have been successful in obtaining, following classes in CV writing and interview technique. Students involved in studying for the ICT Diploma have been involved in this as part of their course. The school community expresses its generosity by raising funds for a number of local charities, including the Mayor's Toy appeal and local hospices, nationally for the Cabrini Children's Society and internationally for CAFOD. The Religious Education programme supports social cohesion through the study of world religions, including Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam. There are educational visits to the local parishes, although visits to other places of worship are not yet offered. However, this study of other faiths positively impacts on pupils' understanding and respect for other communities. The school reaches out to the wider community by forming links with schools abroad. There are established links with the St Charles Lwanga school in Kitui, Kenya, and the neighbouring St. John Eudes orphanage in the same city. In addition, the school actively supports the FISCH project in Tanzania which cares for street children. Consequently, pupils are made aware of the important role they play in society caring for the well-being of others in communities locally, nationally and globally.

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Religious Education

GRADE 1

Achievement and standards in Religious Education

Given pupils' starting points, attainment in Religious Education at all key stages is significantly above average. Pupils with special educational needs are valued by the school community and make good progress. Throughout Key Stage 3 pupils consolidate their learning and, given their initial capabilities, achieve good standards. This good progress continues throughout Key Stage 4 and, by Year 11, most pupils reach levels of attainment which match national expectations and a significant proportion exceeds them. Owing to timetable constraints mainly attributed to pupils following a vocational course and attending some sessions at a further education college, 11 pupils out of the cohort were not entered for the full GCSE course last year but received the short course award. In contrast, English GCSE forms part of the vocational qualification and is not hampered by the same constraints. Levels attained in Religious Education are broadly similar to those achieved in English and significantly exceed the national expectation. Religious Education work, in a sample of pupils' books scrutinised during the inspection, was neat and well presented. In addition, the content of work in their books is of a high standard, indicating that pupils take pride in their work. Pupils develop a good standard of religious literacy supported by key words which are displayed in each classroom in five different languages. This is reinforced by the inspiring displays, which include pupils' work around the school. For example, at Key Stage 3, the 'Leadership' displays and Diwali lights displays are of high quality. So too are the Key Stage 4 displays on 'Evil and Suffering' and 'The Sanctity of Life'. Most pupils enjoy Religious Education lessons and gain a great deal from them. There is an excellent work ethic in the school and pupils stay on task and make good progress in the subject during their lessons. When asked about their attitude towards the subject, one Year 11 pupil said, "In Year 10 I didn't like RE but I do now because of my teacher's help." Taking into account the quality of work and displays at all levels in the school, Religious Education makes a significant contribution to the moral, spiritual and social development of pupils.

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

GRADE 1

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. During the inspection, the majority of pupils who were asked said that they enjoy Religious Education. This, together with the effective and skilled application of the behaviour management policy by the staff, leads to little or no disruption in Religious Education lessons. The majority of lessons observed were outstanding. In lessons judged by the inspectors to be outstanding, the pace was brisk with an effective balance between teacher and pupil input. Teachers acted as facilitators for learning by using skilful questioning techniques and productively employed well-briefed, learning support assistants. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on 'Theories of the Origin of the World', the teacher used challenging questions to skilfully evoke pupil responses and used Kagan structures to enable pupils to teach other members of the class. Mini plenaries were used throughout to check pupils' understanding. When asked by the teacher what the discovery of the so-called 'God Particle' might be, one pupil said, "From a scientific point of view it could prove that God doesn't exist." Another countered, "On the other hand, it could be argued that something must have caused it." Teaching assistants are gainfully deployed in working with pupils by asking them challenging questions and enabling them to progress through the activity at a lively pace. Whilst interactive whiteboards were very well employed in all lessons observed, the application of these resources as aids to teaching and learning would benefit even more from an evaluation of the way in which their use can be further enhanced during lessons, particularly in relation to their interactive capabilities.

Assessment of pupils' work is regular and consistent and makes a very good contribution to their progress. During the inspection, interactive marking was evident in the vast majority of books sampled. There was evidence that notes were given on how to improve their learning and these were enhanced through attractive pre-printed stickers. In a minority of books observed, pupils failed to respond to comments requiring further action. However, the department is aware of this and has devised strategies to ensure that pupils are consistently proactive in their responses across the key stages. This should be embedded by the end of the academic year. Learning objectives are well matched to the full range of the pupils needs. Parents are kept well informed of their children's progress in Religious Education through parents' meetings and in pupil diaries. The department could further enhance this provision for parents by including information of work to be covered in Religious Education in the school newsletter.

The Religious Education curriculum

GRADE 1

The quality of the Religious Education curriculum is excellent. The curriculum follows Diocesan guidelines, meets the needs of the pupils and satisfies the requirements of the Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools. At Key Stage 3 the department bases the curriculum on 'The Way the Truth and the Life' Religious Education programme, supported with material from the National Project, ICONS. At Key Stage 4 the programme followed is the Edexcel GCSE course, where pupils study Christianity and Religion and Life Based on a Study of Christianity. In the Sixth Form, students follow the Diocesan approved National Open College Network (NOCN) General Religious Education course at levels 1 and 2. Deliberations are currently taking place in the school to extend the offer of a level 3 NOCN qualification to students. The A level offer of 20% of curriculum time is allocated to the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR) Philosophy of Religion and New Testament syllabuses. The school, however, does not quite meet the Bishops' Conference and Diocesan curriculum time requirements of 10% at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. The school delivers thirty hours of Religious Education focusing on 'Pilgrimage' within the innovative ACE Days programme in Year 7. ACE is a competency based curriculum which teaches students learning skills within a content-competency based model. This, when added to the more conventional Religious Education timetabled arrangements, amounts to 8.1% of total curriculum time. In Year 8 and Year 9 the figure amounts to 8%, whilst at Key Stage 4 the time amounts to 8.3%. The school should explore ways in which to increase curriculum time allocated to the subject even further at these key stages in its on-going review of the curriculum. The school allocates the 30 guided learning hours recommended by the NOCN awarding body over two years. Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) is taught throughout the school and is set in the context of the Church's teaching and values. The SRE policy has been ratified by governors and endorsed by the parents. Sixth form students recounted how they greatly valued visits from guest speakers in General Religious Education and how they found such occasions both interesting and thought provoking. For example, during the inspection six local priests visited the Sixth form as part of the General Religious Education course. The Priests' Forum involved questions from the floor which had been submitted to the priests by students before their arrival. Plans are in place for increased visits to other places of worship and for visiting speakers from other world religions to be further developed and implemented in the next academic year. The Religious Education curriculum is successfully employed by the school to meet the recommendations of the Diocese and of the Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools. It is carefully coordinated with personal, social and health education (PSHE) and linked together with SRE. As a result of this provision, Religious Education makes an outstanding contribution to the spiritual and moral development of pupils in the school and reflects the school's distinctive nature as a Catholic learning community.

Leadership and management of Religious Education

GRADE 1

Leadership and management of Religious Education are outstanding. One of the Assistant Headteachers, who has responsibility as a Director of Learning and for Community Cohesion, line manages the Head of Department. Together, with the support of the senior leadership team, they ensure that Religious Education has a high profile throughout the school. The Head of Department is an outstanding practitioner and gives high quality support to his teaching colleagues. The monitoring of teaching and learning and attainment is very effective and is having a dramatic impact on raising standards in the subject. Governors are well informed about Religious Education and are aware of its strengths and areas for development. For example, the Religious Education link governor carries out lesson observations and reports their findings to the Curriculum sub-committee. The improvement plan for Religious Education is fit for purpose. It is a working, accessible document which is constantly under review and has a direct effect on raising standards. The matching of resources to pupils' needs in Religious Education, highlighted in the last report, is now consistently applied in all teachers' planning. All five members of the department are well-qualified and are committed to teaching Religious Education and supporting the Catholic ethos of the school. Schemes of work are robust and used effectively to heighten pupils learning experiences. They include very good use of information and communication technology and are being made available electronically. To improve learning even further, the department should examine how to extend the use of pupil interaction with the electronic whiteboards during lessons. Regular, well-minuted staff meetings are held to ensure that staff are well equipped to deliver the Religious Education programmes at each key stage. Very good contact with local Catholic primary schools in the Deanery allows the Head of Department and co-ordinators to work together and share good practice. Accommodation and resources are good. There are three dedicated Religious Education classrooms and one shared with the History department, all of which have an interactive white board and storage for textbooks. They also have notice boards with vibrant displays of current pupil work. Every pupil has access to a text book and a Bible. Religious Education is viewed by the school's leadership as a core subject and the department is well resourced as a consequence. A robust system for tracking and recording pupils' attainment and also for setting targets is in place and parents are kept informed about their child's progress. At Key Stage 3 pupils know the level at which they are working and those preparing for public examinations know their target grade. A recent survey indicates that parents are very supportive of the work that the department undertakes. Moreover, parents feel that Religious Education makes a positive impact on their children.