

Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection report for **St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School**

URN: 110084

Carried out on behalf of the Right Rev. David Oakley, Bishop of Northampton on:

Date: 7-8 February 2024

Overall effectiveness The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school.....	1
Catholic life and mission (p.3) How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.....	1
Religious education (p.5) The quality of curriculum religious education.....	1
Collective worship (p.7) The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school.....	1
The school is fully compliant with the curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference	✓
The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop	✓
The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection	Fully

Summary of key findings

What the school does well

- The leadership of the head teacher is the driving force behind the success of this Catholic school in both word and deed.
- The chaplaincy provision is imaginative and integrative, whilst at the same time being respectful of the traditions of the Church and school.
- The school is a joyous and alive community based on inclusion and love.
- The mission statement permeates the life of the school and walks with every member of the school community.
- Exemplary practice is seen in the RE department in planning and leadership.

What the school needs to improve:

- Strategically plan opportunities for the exemplary practice of the religious education department to be shared more widely, with a particular focus on pedagogical practice and assessment and feedback activities.

Catholic life and mission

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

Catholic life and mission key judgement grade:.....	1
Pupil outcomes The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school	1
Provision The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school	1
Leadership How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school	1

The Catholic mission of St. Bernard's school is central to the experience of staff and students, giving a strong and faithful steer to all decision making and actions. The original charism of the Bernardine sisters is a lasting legacy on the identity of the school, guiding the rhythm of prayer and liturgical practice. Students have a strong sense of their own worth and identity and can articulate this from a strong Catholic perspective. One Year 13 student said, 'we try to embody the Catholic faith'. Catholic social teaching forms an effective backdrop to all the workings of the school community. Human relationships and commitment to mutual respect makes the community of St. Bernard's a place of witness to the love of God. The chaplaincy service is the foundation of prayer. Students and staff are taught to pray with gentleness and conviction. This radiates through the school and is a source of inspiration. A pupil remarked 'it is enriching to be part of this school.'

The mission statement is not lived in isolation; it is treasured and drives the leadership of the school at all levels, enabling the school to thrive and flourish. Staff are galvanised by the integrity of the mission statement which inspires them to give so much more than expected. Attendance at the Bible study group, one of many lunchtime and afterschool groups that enrich the Catholic life of the school, illustrates intellectual and reflective challenge. Dialogue between different faiths enables a considered and deep community where differences facilitate powerful connections. Insightful practice is seen in the chaplain's collaboration with the pastoral team, an inspirational group with Christ at the centre of their dealings with all young people, especially the most vulnerable. The physical environment of the school is cared for and houses a rich experience of spiritual development in the traditional chapel which is well used. Students are formed in faith and prayer in a systematic and organised way. The pastoral programme is excellent in intent and

implementation and relationships, sex, and health education R(S)HE, has Catholic social teaching at its heart.

The students and staff of St. Bernard's school clearly own a shared understanding of the mission statement. Community chaplaincy links have been built to make connections with parishes and to support students' spiritual growth. Catholic social teaching is carefully promoted in school and permeates through the curriculum, leadership activity and school priorities. The leadership of the head teacher is guided by the mission statement; staff are clear that sound judgement and wisdom are used to make decisions. The Catholic curriculum is kept under review by governors and leaders. Planned changes in the Religious Education Curriculum Directory have been implemented and there is evidence of thoroughness and rigor in the intent and planning. Catholic culture is visible across the taught curriculum in the school and staff are well prepared for this through a comprehensive induction programme. Governance at St. Bernard's is a real cause for celebration because the school is well understood and there is a constant striving for excellence in the opportunities offered to the students. The evaluation of the Catholic life of the school is collaborative, regular, and accurate. Parents are appreciative of their school with one stating 'we feel so blessed that our children have the opportunity to deepen their faith and grow closer to God through their school life at St Bernard's.' All staff spoken to have received appropriate training which enables professional growth.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade:.....

1

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education.....

1

Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education.....

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for religious education.....

1

Students have excellent religious knowledge and understanding of key ideas and concepts, and they can confidently articulate this in a range of contexts. Students show clear ability to make links between learning in religious education and their everyday lives. This results in students, without exception, engaging fully in their learning and showing exceptional commitment to their own development. Students display competent religious literacy and draw on a range of complex sources to demonstrate ethical and theological thinking. In the best examples of pupil work, there are creative approaches and a real maturity of response to questioning. Teachers provide structured opportunities for students to recall knowledge from prior learning and consequently students can readily make links to concepts covered in other units. This was evident in a Year 11 lesson where students made links between the current topic of pilgrimage and prior learning on the liturgical year. Attainment and progress are excellent across all key stages. Students respond exceptionally well to the high level of challenge that teachers present and they demonstrate an independence in their thinking and curiosity that deepens their learning. They understand how well they are doing and value opportunities to consolidate their learning.

All teachers demonstrate and model strong subject knowledge and take responsibility for further professional development. This impacts on students as they trust their teachers and place great confidence in them. Teachers have high expectations, and this results in exemplary student behaviour and participation in lessons. All teachers frequently plan opportunities to assess prior knowledge, and this is particularly effective in Year 11 lessons. Planning clearly promotes thinking at a high level extending students' knowledge even further and developing a high level of evaluative skill. In the very best practice, teachers provide specific and sharply focused feedback which enables students to demonstrate an understanding of what they need to do to make accelerated progress. In a Year 9 lesson on Hajj, students had the opportunity to access learning in a variety of forms

including a game, card sort and evaluation tasks, therefore demonstrating creative provision of forms of expression. Students thrive in this environment and enjoy their learning experience. Teachers clearly understand the importance of religious education lessons for the spiritual development of their students and consequently they provide meaningful opportunities for reflection, allowing students to make sense of, and articulate, their experience of the world.

Leaders ensure that the religious education curriculum is a faithful expression of the Directory, and resources are effectively deployed in its delivery. Leaders are committed to ensuring that religious education is given parity with other core subjects. The Head of department has the enthusiasm and drive to bring her vision for religious education to reality. She has a secure and thorough understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the department and is an exemplary practitioner. There are further opportunities to explore that would enable her excellent practice to be shared more widely. The detailed curriculum map demonstrates careful sequential planning so that learning clearly builds upon prior learning. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, students can make links between church hierarchy and Vatican II. The Head of Department attends governor committee meetings to share provision and respond to monitoring and evaluation activities. These lead to strategic actions being implemented. Excellent links are formed with local schools and charities and Year 12 students plan and deliver lessons for Year 5 children at a local school during their Core RE lessons. Interfaith dialogue is strong and promoted by leaders and students and staff really value this rich diversity.

Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school.

Collective worship key judgement grade:.....

1

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

1

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for collective worship

1

The opportunities for prayer and liturgy provide a rich backdrop to help students gain personal depth in their spirituality and to connect with others. Students are explicitly taught how to pray using a detailed plan of liturgical practice and types of prayer. Liturgy leaders provide the focus for prayer in each classroom and lead both prayer and silence according to the Church's liturgical year. This is helped by the physical environment of the school which enables students to be reminded of their faith through images and statues. Students are committed to prayer and liturgy and see it as an expression of the faith and direction of the community. A pupil of a different faith commented that 'prayer and reflection in the chapel enables him to connect with his god.' Catholic voices in the students' consultations upheld the prayer times they had experienced in Masses and the pertinence of praying the stations of the cross together because 'they felt loved by God.' The religious formation of students is not isolated to the religious education department but is reflected in all elements of the curriculum. In Years 7 and 8, students record their experience through personal journals which support and enrich their personal faith journey.

Prayer and liturgy is part of the daily ritual of the school community. Staff and students collaborate over resources produced, guided by the expertise of the chaplain. Students spoke of the range of liturgies and that these responded to human need at times. There is a healthy synthesis between tradition and creativity, and this creates a richness and depth to prayer experiences. In form prayer, scripture was selected to support the well-being focus of the morning prayer. This was chosen sensitively and explored so that personal spirituality was seen as a key element of well-being. Staff are entirely committed to the Catholic life of the school and there is a strong trust in leaders because this is modelled and lived in a highly effective way. Staff commented that they are taught how to embed Catholic values into the lived experience of their classroom. A clear plan is in place to develop personal prayer in a staged way across whole year groups. Partnerships with parents are supported

through the care and direction of the pastoral team and leaders. One parent stated, 'I feel included in the spiritual journey of the school, and my child, with regular communication from the Head Teacher.'

The school's prayer and liturgy policy is written to ensure a clarity of purpose. It reflects the mission statement, and it is lived on a daily basis. There is a comprehensive strategic plan for the development of, and participation in, prayer and liturgy. The effective delivery of this plan is evidenced through the maturity of participation and the students' responses that are witnessed. Future developments of this plan will require reflection on participation levels within liturgical celebrations. All staff are trained in the expectations of leading within a Catholic school. This is regularly endorsed and is part of the school's responsibility to form leaders and staff in faith. Leaders do significantly more than understand a range of prayer and liturgical opportunities. Excellent practice was observed in the use and understanding of prayer traditions and in the richness of conversations around prayer experienced by staff. Monitoring and evaluation activities are thorough and robust. High quality support is readily available and ensures that provision is enhanced and celebrated. The mission statement clearly articulates the mandate of the school to give the shelter of God and as a consequence is a community where students thrive and flourish.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Bernard's Catholic Grammar School
School unique reference number (URN)	110084
Full postal address of the school	Langley Road, Slough. SL3 7AF
School phone number	01753 527020
Name of head teacher or principal	Paul Kassapian
Chair of governing board	Roisin Holden & Sandra D'Souza-Zerkhfaoui
School Website	https://www.st-bernards.slough.sch.uk
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Type of school	Secondary selective
School category	Voluntary aided
Age-range of pupils	11-18
Trustees	Diocese of Northampton
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	June 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

The inspection team.

Jo-Anne Hoarty	Lead inspector
Bernadette Grimley	Team inspector
Laura Maw	Team inspector

Key to grade judgements

Grade	England	Wales
1	Outstanding	Excellent
2	Good	Good
3	Requires improvement	Adequate and requires improvement
4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and in need of urgent improvement