



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Inspection Report

Name of School: The Palmer Catholic Academy

LEA: Redbridge

Inspection Date: 2nd May 2018

**Reporting Inspectors: Damian G Fox (Lead Inspector)
Derek Kelly**

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of School: Secondary
School Category: Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils: 11 - 18
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 1091
Appropriate Authority: The Governing Body
Date of previous inspection: November 2012

School Address:
Aldborough Road South
Ilford
Essex
IG3 8EU

Tel. No. 020 8590 3808
Headteacher: Mrs A. Moise-Dixon
Chair of Governors: Mrs M. Leslie-Povoas

Information about the school

The Palmer Catholic Academy is a mixed Catholic school in the London Borough of Redbridge in the Diocese of Brentwood. The school serves the Catholic Deanery of Redbridge. The school mainly serves the Catholic Parishes of SS Peter and Paul, Ilford and St Cedd, Goodmayes. There are currently 1120 students aged 11-18. 53% of pupils are Catholic. 13% are from other Christian faiths. 34% are from other faith backgrounds. Students come from at least 55 Catholic primary schools.

Levels of attainment on entry are below the national average. The majority of pupils, 92%, are from black and Asian ethnic backgrounds. Currently, 10% of pupils are on the Special Needs Register, in line with the national average. This includes 9 pupils with a statement or EHC plan. There are 49% of pupils for whom English is not the first language. 27% of pupils are eligible for free school meals which is above average. There are 68 fte. teachers of whom 41% are Catholic. Ten teachers hold the CCRS and six have other Catholic qualifications in Theology and Catholic Leadership. There are seven teachers of Religious Education.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires Improvement 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic School

Grade 2

The Palmer Catholic Academy is a good school with many outstanding features. Leaders, governors and managers have a deep commitment to the Church's mission in education and to the service of the students. The community proudly lives by the example of the founder, Canon Palmer, "to do all things to the glory of God and the service of all". The Chair said, "our purpose is our young people".

Governors are supportive of and are regular visitors to the school. They are fully informed of the strengths of the school and work effectively with the Headteacher and staff. The Head Teacher is an excellent role model. She has a clear vision for the Academy and works with governors and senior leaders to develop the strong foundations the school has for sustained growth. In the school's rapid improvement over recent years, leaders and governors have not lost sight of the steps that need to be taken to ensure that the Catholic life of the school remains at the heart of their work.

Students are excellent ambassadors for the impact of Catholic Education on the lives of young people. They respond willingly to the mission of service to others. Students are safe and happy at the school. They are proud of their achievements and of belonging to The Palmer Catholic Academy. Pastoral care is a significant strength of the Academy. Students appreciate the care teachers have in dealing with their concerns. Bullying is rare. When incidents do occur, they are effectively addressed. Teachers were praised for their support in and outside of the classroom. The Academy is totally inclusive of students with different strengths and challenges and offers unstinting support to their families.

There is a strong Catholic identity in the Chapel and religious displays in the classrooms and around the school. Parish-school links are strong. The school is fortunate to have the services of several priests who confirm that they are happy to serve the staff, pupils and families of the Academy. They said that there was an excellent spiritual ethos.

What the school should do to improve further

Governors should continue to strengthen their monitoring and support of the school to ensure an effective transition to new leadership of the school.

Leaders and managers ensure that the new structure in the Religious Education Department is supported so that new initiatives are fully embedded, monitored and evaluated regularly.

Extend the leadership of 6th Form students to encompass Chaplaincy provision throughout the school.

There has been an upward trend in outcomes in GCSE Religious Studies over the last three years from 61% to 67%. Targets for this year indicate further progress. The school's data highlights two specific areas for development, the gap between the achievement of boys and girls, and between pupils with free school meals and those who do not. The progress made at both KS4 and KS5 is showing improvement. Achievement of A-level pupils is significantly above national averages. 6th form students said that they were well prepared for their GCSE exams last year. Teachers had high expectations with expected and aspirational grades and targets set.

The AS and A2 uptake numbers are low but the increase this year reflects the ambition of the department and academy leadership.

Inspectors noted the enjoyment of the students during Religious Education lessons. There was a good level of engagement in learning. Behaviour was very good overall. In several lessons, students were enthusiastic and willing to contribute their ideas. They were able to articulate this in discussions with Inspectors. The philosophical debates and interactive learning helped them learn more quickly. The quality of the written work in the pupils' books was generally of a very high standard and clearly shows that the whole school focus on improving outcomes is bearing fruit. Pupils are proud of their work and are keen to learn.

Students benefit greatly from the many opportunities to contribute to the Catholic Life of The Palmer Catholic Academy. They know they are part of a community that lives by Gospel values. The Academy is committed to the common good. Students' sense of belonging to the academy community is real, profound and life enhancing. They said that there is a "genuine Christian ethos". Their relationships, including those with those from different backgrounds, are very strong. Relationships across the community reflect the great mutual respect people have for each other. The 'Friendship Ambassadors' is a student run body that supports the community. It is effective and has academy wide support. They have refurbished benches as a lasting legacy of their efforts as an outward sign of their continued commitment. Students understand that the Catholic life of the academy is about living out the Gospel with Jesus at its heart. They value Catholic traditions and clearly understand that they are all called to serve and seek justice for those less fortunate. Charitable fundraising is an integral aspect academy life. This is evident through the time and effort the students put into their charitable endeavours, specifically CAFOD, St Mungo's, Christmas Hampers and other charitable causes students identify as close to them. Students have the opportunity to promote causes close to their hearts. For example, year 11 have recently looked to fundraise for Down's Syndrome. Students have also taken part in collaborations with local Catholic schools to either fundraise and to be part of a wider Catholic community.

The school is fortunate to have a beautiful chapel that is regularly used for group and individual prayer. The stained glass windows were presented by a former pupil and parent. The prayer garden is being renovated as a prayerful and reflective space.

Students actively live core values within and outside the academy and are regularly ambassadors at events, including World Youth Day, students have left the academy to work at Walsingham House, attended Flame Congress the past 3 occasions as well as the 7th Annual Pilgrimage abroad. Relationships with those of different backgrounds and beliefs are strong, mutually supportive and enriching and this is particularly evident in the 6th form.

An established and well used BCCS counsellor helps to support students as part of early identification of vulnerable students as well as in response to a time of need. The school has also offer parenting support groups for parents of anxious students.

SS Peter and Paul's Church have created a Prayer garden to which the 6th Form students have contributed artwork. The academy makes an annual pilgrimage to the grave of the founder, Canon Patrick Palmer. They also have an Irish themed lunch to celebrate.

Students display a spiritual reverence and a dignified respect in Collective Worship at all levels and on all occasions. They participate actively in both year and main academy assemblies and every lesson begins

with the Academy prayer. The Chaplaincy team is made up of students of all ages. They confirm that they are becoming more involved in preparing liturgies throughout the year. 6th Form students said that their profile had been raised and that they were better role models. An area for development is the increase in liturgy leaders in each form and giving the Chaplaincy Team greater responsibility for preparing and leading acts of collective worship.

Students are confident in asking for support with special Masses for individuals in the academy community such as serious illness of a member of the school and bereavements. They are welcome to offer their own intentions and are ease when at prayer.

Student participation in retreats, form and whole academy Masses and liturgies is reverent, respectful and engaged

An Inspector joined a year 11 class that held a prayer service in the Chapel. It was led by the students on the theme of Creation and stewardship. It was spiritual and all students participated respectfully and prayerfully. There was time set aside for private reflection.

The priests confirmed that pupils were actively involved in liturgies as readers, servers and musicians. They added, “prayer and worship is reverent and a strength of the school”.

Leaders and managers

Grade 2

Leadership throughout the school is good. Leaders, governors and managers demonstrate a strong commitment to the Church’s mission. Governors understand their role in monitoring and developing the Catholic life of the school. They are passionate about maintaining and strengthening the spiritual ethos and ensuring the school continues to be inclusive of everybody. One governor said that families are “front and centre of everything we do”. The Headteacher demonstrates this with her personal faith. The spiritual growth of the whole community is central to her work. She leads staff induction days on the distinctive nature of a Catholic school. The Director of Spirituality is very experienced and brings his own deep faith to his work. He meets the Head Teacher weekly. The Catholic Life of the school and the opportunities for prayer and worship are excellent.

The school has been on a journey over recent years but the vision for the Catholic life of the school has not been lost. It is a praying and worshipping school. There are appointed governors for Religious Education and Spirituality who have begun to visit regularly to monitor and evaluate the work of school leaders. The staff retreat at Our Lady of Lourdes, Wanstead, will be an annual event.

The Chaplaincy continues to be an integral part of the school, providing weekly prayers and reflections and working closely with the student chaplaincy group. It provides many opportunities for prayer and for giving pastoral support for younger pupils. Senior leaders and the Head of Department work closely with the Chaplain to develop the Catholic life of the school. Staff INSET days begin with collective worship and liturgy, with many members of staff taking an active role.

Leaders, governors and managers are fully committed to improving standards in Religious Education. The school’s self-evaluation was honest and realistic. Leaders are aware of where the school is and they understand the steps that must be taken to ensure sustained improvement. Inspectors noted the impressive progress made over the last three years. The link governor is visiting lessons more regularly. New leadership and departmental structure is already having an impact on the overall grades 9-4 targets for this year.

Three newly appointed teachers of Religious Education have joined the two established members of the teaching staff. The department has a new Head of Department. She is a knowledgeable and passionate leader who is developing a cohesive and effective team of teachers. More recently the school employed a consultant for a term. There are strong foundations and detailed plans are in place to ensure sustained improvement in the future. Capacity for improvement has grown significantly since September 2017. Inspectors are confident that there is good capacity to sustain the growth in outcomes in the teaching and learning of Religious Education.

New schemes of work are in place and having an impact in all key stages. GCSE targets this year should show a marked improvement on previous years.

There is more intervention to support students who are in danger of underachieving. Extra booster classes have been introduced this year.

Assessment procedures based on the new Edexcel syllabus are developing as the new course specification is rolled out. Teacher feedback and target setting informs students and enables them to reach next level. The Religious Education department adheres to the academy marking policy of assessment and feedback.

Provision

Grade 2

Overall, the quality of teaching is good with some examples of outstanding practice. Lessons that were at least good were characterised by teachers' excellent subject knowledge and by using a variety of styles that engaged pupils throughout the lesson. There were well planned tasks and a lively pace. There were examples of good questioning. Year 11 revision lessons were effective in focussing on higher mark questions. Pupils demonstrated a good understanding of what was required to achieve high grades. They felt well prepared. Key stage 3 lessons engaged pupils by linking scripture to real life. For example, the importance of the Holy Spirit was explained by discussing Confirmation and the qualities needed for daily life. Consequently, concentration was sustained and progress was made, although there were examples where additional challenge for higher ability pupils would have deepened pupils' understanding further. Pupils clearly enjoy Religious Education and behaviour was excellent.

Recruitment of new staff this year has significantly improved the capacity for continued improvement in the quality of teaching. The Religious Education Leader provides an outstanding example in giving support and challenge to all pupils, particularly the more able.

Challenging the higher ability pupils appropriately is a priority for the school. In year 9 classes, for example, this year, the GCSE exam framework was being used so that pupils could develop the higher mark questions. Standardisation is achieved at KS4 by all assessments being marked by someone other than the class teacher, thus ensuring parity. The impact of this is excellent sharing of good pedagogical practice and a guarantee that all students' experiences are equal and independent of individual teachers.

The assessment and tracking of student progress is now more rigorous and robust. Additional training and collaborative work with Director of Religious Education and a sister Catholic school is leading to consistency and accuracy in tracking and monitoring progress. The school acknowledges that developing consistently accurate assessments will help teachers give more focussed support and challenge as appropriate.

Key Stage 5 follows a new specification and is currently taught by two members of staff. Schemes of work and resources are being developed and improved upon as the course runs for the first time. Tracking of Key Stage 5 students shows learners are predicted to make their expected grades.

All classes receive at least the full allocation of the 10% of curriculum time for Religious Education. The school ensures the curriculum covers the programmes of study set out in the Directory. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is currently being redeveloped to follow People of God. In KS4 the department teaches Edexcel - Catholic Christianity (50%), Judaism (25%) and Ethics and Philosophy (25%). Teachers ensure that lessons are both informative for the exam but also challenging beyond it, to enable the students to apply their beliefs in practice in modern moral situations.

The chosen programme at AS and A2 level is currently Eduqas. Students study Philosophy of Religion and Religion and Ethics, with Christianity as the religion chosen. Each year, students have additional resources via access to emails from teachers regarding the resources for next lessons, as well as revision material and access to at least six other textbooks to supplement the course requirements. The school has introduced a new programme of drop-down days for General Religious Education that serve as reflective days of study and prayer. Students are given opportunities to discuss moral issues in the context of Church teaching but which they face daily.

The impact of the curriculum in its wider sense is excellent. Throughout the school the many displays reflect the deep commitment of the school to its Catholic identity and pupils' learning. These include examples of pupils' work and relevant exam material such as GCSE and A-level key words. The curriculum is enriched by the many opportunities for charity work throughout the year such as for CAFOD and Haven House for terminally ill children.

Collective worship is a great strength of the academy. CPD on types of prayer was given by the Chaplain to all staff in January 2018 to further enhance prayer across the academy. Each day and each lesson begin in prayer and the Academy prayer is known by all staff and students. The Chapel is the spiritual centre of the academy. It is a beautiful place and is used daily for small group and individual prayer. Mass is celebrated weekly on Friday. Each form class has the opportunity to attend these masses throughout the year. School Masses are celebrated on Holy Days of obligation, Easter and the Founders day. Year 11 and Year 13 celebrate a leavers Mass.

Retreats form the core of the Catholic life for the students in the academy. The rich and vibrant retreats give students the opportunity for a sustained spiritual experience to reflect on the importance of Christ in their lives. Year 7 have a residential retreat to Walsingham house which is well attended and a time for students to bond. Year 8 visit Aylesford Priory. Years 9-13 have in-house retreats led by the Lay Chaplain. Additional leadership residential courses are offered to Key Stage 4 students.

Morning assemblies and form times are led by Liturgy leaders and Pastoral staff with daily prayers, which are linked to the liturgical calendar. Every year group has a weekly assembly, with Forms taking turn in leading the assembly. 6th formers have weekly assemblies. Assemblies adhere to the liturgical calendar, thus ensuring that the liturgy is supported and explored. The year 9 assembly was excellent. It linked the Beatitudes to being courageous in choosing to do the right thing. Heads of Year share Chapel time each morning with a form class to provide a more intimate form of collective worship additional to assemblies.