

**DIOCESE OF PLYMOUTH  
VICARIATE FOR EVANGELISATION CATECHESIS AND SCHOOLS**



Notre Dame Roman Catholic School  
Looseleigh Lane  
Derriford  
Plymouth  
PL6 5HN

**URN 140737**

Head Teacher: Mrs Kate White  
Chair of Governors: Mr. Graham Johnson

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Canonical Inspection under Canon Law 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Plymouth and  
inspection of Denominational Education under S48 of the Education Act 2005

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**Date of Inspection 14-15<sup>th</sup> May, 2018**

Inspectors:  
Miss Sarah Adams  
Mr. Michael Antram

## Context of School

Notre Dame is a smaller than average-sized secondary school for girls which takes boys into the sixth form. It is part of Plymouth CAST. The trust was formed in April 2014. It welcomes pupils of all denominations and faith backgrounds.

## Context Data

NOR: 691 Girls: 662 Boys: 29

EAL:6% SEN: 10% 17 Students have EHCP FSM 12% PP 24% British Service Families10%

<b>Over-All Effectiveness:</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
The School as a Catholic Community:	Outstanding	Grade 1
Leadership and Management:	Good	Grade 2
Word (Curriculum RE)	Good	Grade 2
Worship and Spiritual Life of the School	Outstanding	Grade 1

## Summary of Key Findings

Notre Dame is a school which is **Good**.

### The school has the following strengths:

1. Notre Dame is a school with a strong sense of purpose where Gospel values flow through the life and work of the community.
2. Relationships within the school are highly positive. Although the school has been under significant pressure the staff have worked hard to support one another and move the school forward.
3. The Head Teacher and senior leadership team are committed to ensuring that every child grows to the best that they can be academically and spiritually. To this end they ensure that the curriculum offers many opportunities for the whole child to be nurtured.
4. The governing body is relatively new, has recently undergone a review of governance and is now working with greater precision and determination to ensure that the school moves forward. They are proactive and challenging in their meetings and with their expectations.
5. Chaplaincy and the spiritual life of the school is highly valued and seen as important by staff and students. It is central to the way the school operates. In particular the Year 7 programme 'Ubuntu' is an example of exemplary practice. The school provides the pupils with a wide variety of well-planned and spontaneous spiritual experiences, which enable all pupils to grow in their understanding and appreciation of God's presence in the world.
6. Induction is taken seriously. There is a clear framework for supporting new staff and enabling them to engage with the Catholic Life of the school. Teachers spoke about feeling welcomed and confident about expectations. They are supported to engage

with the prayer life of the school. Follow up meetings ensure that concerns can be raised quickly and dealt with effectively.

7. The Head of RS is a committed member of staff who seeks to develop the RS department and improve outcomes for students. RS at KS5 is particularly strong and outcomes are excellent.
8. Pastoral care in the school is excellent. The school's key people who work with SEND students are highly trained, creative with resources and committed to ensuring that all students who need any kind of support can access effective support. The lead for Safeguarding is a highly respected member of staff. She is well qualified and works cohesively with the SEND team.
9. Student Voice and leadership are strong. There are a number of different groups of students who focus on a particular area of school life. A popular and growing group are the Young Spiritual Leaders. (YSL)

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

1. The school should ensure that the daily act of worship takes place across the school, and that it is a prayerful, and reflective experience for all students and staff. Inspectors suggest the use of YSLs to assist in monitoring and developing this.
2. Ensure that the school meets the expectations of the Bishops' Conference regarding curriculum time allocated to RS (In KS3 and KS4 this is 10% and in KS5 5%).
3. Embed the S48 review within the annual monitoring cycle, so that from Governance outwards this permeates all areas of school life, and ensures that it is a central part of the whole school review and development planning processes.
4. To ensure that outcomes for RS at KS4 become at least good, by seeking new ways to stretch and challenge students; so that they are engaged in their learning, and that lessons are meeting students' learning needs through differentiated planning, targeted questioning, and effective assessment of progress.
5. In regard to RS review approaches to assessment and feedback, especially given the new RS specifications at KS4 and KS5, to inform teacher planning for next steps in learning, to make more effective use of teacher feedback by students, and to form students as confident, independent learners.
6. Ensure that the KS3 RS curriculum is dynamic and creative, and provides a good grounding in RS concepts and skills so that it is an effective preparation for higher study at KS 4 and KS5, making sure that KS3 does not become merely an exam preparation stage.

## **FULL REPORT**

### **THE SCHOOL AS A CATHOLIC COMMUNITY**

**Outstanding**

- Notre Dame is, without doubt, a school with a strong sense of Mission, rooted in the life of the foundress, St. Julie and founded on Gospel values. The vast majority of the school community embrace these values and strive to live by them in their relationships with one another, their desire to hold faith at the centre of daily life and the commitment staff have to each student as a unique child of God.

- The desire to serve the Common Good is strong. Despite the challenges which the school has faced this remains key to its ultimate success.
- Notre Dame is a warm and welcoming school community. Faith, hope and love are reflected in the school's motto, 'Head, Heart and Hands' and lived out in the desire of all to be inclusive and embracing of diversity and difference. Scripture quotes and sayings of St. Julia are evident around the school and act as a reminder to the whole community of what is important and essential to the heart of community life.
- Pastoral care lies at the heart of the school's mission. The needs of students, particularly those who may be vulnerable, are identified prior to and on arrival at the school. Comprehensive assessments of their needs ensure that well focused plans and support systems are put in place so that each student is enabled to thrive and integrate fully into the life of the school. Great care is taken to ensure that the physical environment of the learning support unit enhances and encourages the young people to feel valued and at ease.
- Heads of Houses know their students well and are conscious of the different needs within their house. As a team they work together to ensure that there is a consistent approach across the houses. As a result expectations are high and behaviour across the school is good.
- Induction for staff is carefully planned. New staff are offered a pre-employment induction to help them to feel at ease from the beginning of taking up employment. Once they have started this continues with support from the Head of Spirituality and the Lay chaplain. Their involvement is invaluable in helping those who have never been in a Church school before, to feel welcome, comfortable and aware of the expectations that belonging to a Church school brings.
- In all other respects the quality of HR support for the school reflects the commitment that the school has to ensuring that all members of the community are welcomed, and supported to grow in their own professional and personal development. There is a comprehensive wellbeing offering for all staff. Staff surveys show that the vast majority of staff value this provision.
- Pupil Voice in the school is excellent. There are many opportunities for students to take on roles of responsibility and be ambassadors for the school. They do this with confidence and commitment. In particular the Young Spiritual Leaders are a growing group, with students from all year groups wanting to take on roles of responsibility for the spiritual development of the community. Their desire is for the school to make the religious dimension of the school to be its 'distinct and standout feature'. To this end they meet regularly and are keen to develop what they do.
- The school has many positive partnerships. They engage fruitfully with other local schools and services. They are keen to develop their relationship with the parish which, although positive, is limited by the availability of the clergy, who have two other schools in the locality. There is the willingness on both sides to develop a closer relationship and it is hoped that this could be planned for over the next academic year.
- 10% of parents replied to the survey for this inspection. Whilst only a relatively small number, their responses were overwhelmingly positive. The school is working hard to develop relationships with parents and hopefully this will see more parents becoming involved and responding to the school's efforts to have a consistently strong partnership.

## **THE SCHOOL AS A CATHOLIC COMMUNITY (LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT)      Good**

- There is no doubting the commitment of the leadership team of Notre Dame to ensure that the school has a strong Catholic ethos, where every student matters academically and spiritually. The Head and the SLT have endeavoured to respond to a number of challenges with integrity and honesty in the true spirit of what it means to be a leader within a Christian context.
- The Head Teacher, her senior leadership team and middle leaders all aspire to exemplify and share the school's Christian vision and purpose. At the heart of this is a commitment to demonstrate the ambition of the school to become outstanding overall, which is highly aspirational and seeks to involve all members of the community. Communication is key to this and the school embraces a variety of means to ensure that this is as strong as it can be.
- The school has been working hard to re-assess the whole of its assessment and monitoring activities. This has been extensive. Various training courses and regular meetings with Faculty leaders, SLT and Governors has led to a radical change in the school's approach. The school believes that this is now consistent across the school. As yet, the searching analysis, self-challenge and rigorous monitoring which the school has undergone, will only be seen to be effective or not with the outcomes this summer and beyond. The school is hopeful that these will demonstrate that the work they have done has been effective.
- The governing body has had a major review of its role and although still at an early stage of development, are confidently growing in their capacity to evaluate and challenge the leadership team of the school. They are perceptive and determined to ensure that the school makes the progress it needs to do and at the same time embed systems so that the trajectory is continually on an upward path. Governors with a responsibility of the ethos of the school consistently evaluate how the school is developing in this area. However, at the time of this inspection the governors as a whole group had not had any involvement in evaluating the Catholic Life of the school and recognise that this is a further area for their own development.
- The Head and SLT are committed to ensuring that all staff are motivated, respected and effective in their roles. The school has a strong CPD programme which has improved leadership and in particular Middle Leaders, who though young in their roles, are growing in confidence and their capacity to take on leadership roles.

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## **THE SCHOOL AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMUNITY (WORD)      Good**

- The person with responsibility for RS is a key member of the school and is well-respected. He is passionate about the subject and is highly motivated, promoting high standards in RS through his own deepening subject knowledge and ability to develop students and staff, leading by example.

- Teachers and support staff engage well with their students and interact positively with them. As a result relationships are good and ensure that students behave well in their lessons.
- Although students generally spoke well of RS they do believe that teachers could make greater demands on them in lessons and with homework.
- Of the lessons observed over the two days, teaching was strong in KS5 but much weaker in KS3. In KS5, although much of the work was revision, the approach to this was for the most part, engaging, challenging and effective. As a result the confidence about the forthcoming public examinations, was relatively high. In KS3, lessons did not challenge sufficiently the needs of all students. Differentiation was rarely evident and as a result the most able were not being stretched.
- The school has opted to start the RS GCSE in year 9. However, the amount of curriculum time given to students in Years 7 and 8 (6%) falls significantly below the expectations of the Bishop's Conference (10%). As a consequence the school will need to assess whether the students are ready to take on the demands of GCSE at Year 9 following a limited programme of study. The school has recognised that it needs to re-develop their KS3 curriculum to ensure that they are ready.
- Although results in KS5 are excellent there has been a downward trend in KS4 over the past three years. Outcomes here are not yet good. The work that the school has engaged in across the curriculum, to improve outcomes, will hopefully bear fruit in RS. However, for this to happen teachers need to have higher expectations for all year groups and ensure that lessons enable all students to explore, analyse and evaluate. This must be secured by effective approaches to assessment and feedback.
- As part of the over-all curriculum the school has developed two additional programmes in KS3. These are Ubuntu in Year 7 and Kairos in Year 8. The first is rooted in the liturgical year and is aimed at inducting students in to the positive attitudes promoted by the school. Although a form of SEAL it has a strong spiritual focus. The Kairos programme builds upon the Ubuntu programme and enables students to see themselves as citizens of the world. Both of these programmes are highly popular. They are not part of the RS programme but if they are to be maintained and incorporated into the RS programme the school will need to ensure that the themes tie in with the Curriculum Directory for RS, and can be assessed and evaluated in terms of teaching, learning and outcomes.
- Work in books is closely monitored along with observations. This has shown a progression in the quality of deeper marking in some of the books. Dedicated Improvement Time (DIT) is used effectively by some students in some groups but the potential impact of such approaches has yet to be fully secured.

#### **THE SCHOOL AS A CELEBRATING COMMUNITY (WORSHIP AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT)**

**Outstanding**

- The continually developing Spiritual life of Notre Dame is outstanding. The school takes its mission and vision seriously and all members of the community are offered many opportunities to grow in their own spirituality.

- Throughout the school, displays, artefacts, quotes from scripture and St. Julie, constantly draw people's attention to the central ethos of the school. The quotes in particular are encouraging and sustaining.
- The school has its own chapel which is inviting and engaging. Here students and staff can gather for more intimate smaller group Masses and other prayer opportunities. It is used for Ubuntu, the staff prayer group, reflections with Young Spiritual Leaders and whenever people want an opportunity to be silent, reflective and prayerful. Evidence of activities which have happened in the school enhance the chapel and help to create an engaging and prayerful atmosphere.
- The school ensures that students are given a variety of experiences to develop their prayer life. Daily acts of worship in tutor time are supported by the school's lay chaplain. However, these could be developed further by students taking greater responsibility for devising and delivering these. This would ensure that they do take place consistently.
- Each week house assemblies take place with different staff and students taking responsibility for these. These, too, could be enhanced by developing an understanding of creating sacred space and allowing silence to form part of the reflection time.
- Every four years the school has a Mission, facilitated by a variety of groups and key people who witness to their own faith life. These are popular with students. They are well planned and engaging, offering students a different experience and opportunities to pray, reflect and respond to the challenges of being a Christian or Muslim in an increasingly secular world. The students embrace these opportunities with varying degrees of enthusiasm but ultimately believe it is a good thing which the school offers them.
- The school is fortunate to have a strong music group which supports the liturgical life of the school. This enhances such liturgies as Mass which take place three times a year and other liturgies and enables the students to participate more fully in acts of worship and other traditions rooted in the liturgical life of the Church.
- The Young Spiritual Leaders are an asset to the school because, although a relatively new group, they are growing in their own confidence to support the prayer life of the school. They are fortunate to have a highly committed lay chaplain and Head of Spirituality who believe in offering a rich and reflective diet of spiritual activities for people to grow in Faith.
- A small proportion of students at Notre Dame are Muslim. The school honours their presence and encourages them to grow in their own faith tradition, providing space, opportunities and support for their needs.
- Staff are also enabled and encouraged to grow in their own spirituality. Each year an INSET day is dedicated to this, involving outside speakers and the school's own Spiritual leaders. This focus allows all staff the time to reflect and be aware of the mission of the school not just for students but for themselves.
- A particular strength of the school is the programme of three-day house retreats for all year seven students, which take place off site. This ensures that those students who do not come from a church background, feel included and accepted and the House can gel as a group. In the sixth form a further opportunity for a voluntary retreat is offered to which a number of students respond positively and value.

- The spiritual life of the school plays a significant role in helping the students to look outwards at the wider world and to reflect on the gifts they have to make a difference in the world. There is no doubt that this dimension of school life allows the students to develop their sense of what is right and wrong, accept responsibility and develop a positive attitude to the world around them.

### **Conclusion**

Notre Dame is a good Catholic school with a strong heart, where Christ is at the centre and is the inspiration behind much of what the school has to offer. Recent years have been very challenging, but the commitment of the senior leadership to move the school forward is unquestionable and will ultimately lead to a rich education for all students, set within a caring and compassionate faith-filled community.

Sarah Adams  
Michael Antram