



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 100637

La Retraite Catholic Girls' School
Atkins Road
Clapham
SW12 0AB

Inspection date: 28 February – 1 March 2013

Chair of Governors:
Headteacher:
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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

La Retraite School is a voluntary aided comprehensive school for girls. The school is situated in the Brixton Deanery in the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Lambeth Local Authority. The principal parishes which the school serves are St Anne's, Vauxhall; St Bede's, Clapham Park; St Francis de Sales, Stockwell; Corpus Christi, Brixton and St Mary's, Clapham. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 68%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 6.7% in Key Stage 3, 9% in Key Stage 4, 20% in the Sixth Form (AS Theology) and 3.3% for Sixth Form General Religious Education. The school is part of the South London 6 (SL6) sixth form collaboration with four other schools and recruits boys (currently 10%) as well as girls.

The school takes pupils from 11 to 18 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 935, including 188 in the Sixth Form. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is around average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (40.6%) is above the national average (26.7%). The proportion of the pupils supported at School Action Plus or with a Statement of Special Educational Needs (around 12.5%) is well above the national average. The majority of the pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds (79.8%), with those from African and Caribbean heritages making up the largest proportion. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is well above average (around 53%).

The headteacher has been in post for 18 months.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

GRADE

1

La Retraite is a welcoming Catholic school community. The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding and governors effectively carry out their role. The headteacher is a spiritual and reflective leader who is committed to providing a Catholic education which meets the needs of pupils in the twenty-first century. Ably supported by the leadership team, the headteacher's vision for the school is well articulated and shared with all stakeholders. He gives a high priority to continuing the development of the Catholic life of the school. Governors ensure that this vision, together with the strategic direction of the school, will develop and flourish. The school has a very distinctive Catholic ethos which is easy to identify. The Catholic ethos underpins the policies and planning of the school and is experienced in the excellent relationships within the school community. The religious artefacts and displays, such as the crucifixes in most rooms and statues, together with the impressive chapel and the prayer life of the school, mark the school as distinctly Catholic. Chaplaincy is outstanding. As well as co-ordinating worship throughout the school, organising and leading retreats, the Chaplain acts as counsellor to pupils and staff. In this her contribution is invaluable. Pastoral care is also outstanding and the very close involvement of chaplaincy with the formal pastoral care system is to be highly commended. Links with the parishes are good and, throughout the year, the chaplain arranges for priests from the local and neighbouring parishes to come in to celebrate Mass with the pupils. Pupils feel very positive about the school. They value the very strong sense of community and feel that the rare incidents of bullying are immediately dealt with. Relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and staff are excellent and pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Pupils feel safe in the school and they value the efforts staff make to ensure their safety. The school's high quality planning and accurate self-evaluation demonstrate that the school has an outstanding capacity to improve. The three key areas identified in the last report have all been successfully addressed.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, headteacher and staff should:

- Develop opportunities for personal reflection during tutor group prayer time and ensure that this is applied consistently across all year groups.
- Conduct an audit and mapping of Religious Education across the curriculum, so that the school's leadership may consider ways in which to meet the curriculum time requirements of 10% at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 5 and 5% for Sixth Form General Religious Education, as stipulated by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
- Extend pupils' understanding of world religions by increasing the variety and number of visiting speakers from other Christian traditions and faith backgrounds.

The Catholic life of the school

GRADE 1

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. The headteacher has successfully articulated his vision to governors and senior leaders who support this vision with professional dedication. The headteacher's leadership empowers leaders at all levels to flourish and succession planning is realised through the opportunities given to middle leaders to experience senior leadership areas of responsibility. The Governing Body is very aware of the strengths of the school and the areas which require further development. They give strategic direction to the school through a positive blend of support and challenge. The governors are regular visitors to the school and are making themselves known to pupils, staff and parents. For example, they canvas opinion from parents for the school survey at the year group parents' evenings. The local parish priest is the Link Governor for the Catholic life of the school and monitors the progress made in this all-pervading area. Planning at all levels is infused with Gospel values at the heart of the school's educational endeavour. The school's newly devised 'Christ Centred Curriculum' is an end product of this. The Mission Statement has been reviewed within the last two years and, together with the revised motto, 'Faith, Values, Excellence', successfully captures the vision of the school. Pupils, staff and parents have been consulted during this process. Pastoral care is excellent and effective management systems are in place to serve all pupils, especially those with additional needs. The work of the assistant headteacher for Inclusion is a strength of this high performing school. She works to great effect with SEN teachers, learning mentors and other agencies to ensure that pupils, who may otherwise be deemed as vulnerable, are able to achieve to a high level with the outstanding support structures which are provided for them.

Pupil voice in the school is very effective. Opportunities are provided for pupils to propose ideas and discuss them with the senior leadership team through the Student Council and Student Leaders. The innovation of canvassing pupils' views online via the 'Big Survey' together with consultations with Year Leaders and the Student Council have resulted in the school being able to respond to the needs of the pupils in a wide array of areas such as Chaplaincy, anti-bullying procedures and assessment. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers surveyed were positive about the school. One parent wrote, 'We are confident that the school provides a well-rounded Catholic education and that the Catholic faith is alive and at the centre of school life at La Retraite,' whilst another stated, 'La Retraite School is a caring community and my children are thriving at the school and making very good spiritual progress.' Although a sizeable proportion (around 9%) felt that they were not kept informed about Religious Education and worship, the inspectors feel that the school works hard to advise parents about these areas through parental consultation evenings, by issuing a quality weekly newsletter and through the school's informative website.

Quality of provision for personal and collective worship

GRADE 1

The quality of provision for personal and collective worship is outstanding. As a result of the excellent work of the Chaplain, who has been in post for eighteen months, and supported by the senior pastoral leaders, the prayer life of the school has been considerably enhanced. Ten members of staff join the Chaplain to form an effective chaplaincy team. The school has plans to invite pupils to become members of the team. There is an excellent and comprehensive programme of Masses, liturgies and assemblies which mark the important dates and seasons of the liturgical year. The Chaplain collaborates with the Head of Religious Education, House and Pastoral Leaders to provide effective spiritual opportunities for the whole school community. As part of her role she supports staff and pupils in providing relevant resources for assemblies and tutor group

collective worship. For example, plasma screens and electronic whiteboards are used to provide a thought for the day accompanied by a prayer which tutors and assembly leaders can use as part of an act of daily worship. Pupils say they feel empowered to plan and lead prayer meetings whilst staff, including those from other religious backgrounds, feel more confident to deliver spiritual input through the Chaplain's support. The quality of assemblies is outstanding. The themes for these are clear and topical and they make a very strong contribution to the pupils' moral development. For example, in an outstanding Year 10 Lenten assembly held in the Chapel and led by the headteacher, pupils entered in an orderly fashion to music played on the piano. The school's Gospel choir opened the assembly with an inspiring song to the Holy Spirit. Pupils participated in a quiz which focused on facts surrounding the season of Lent. Pupils were asked to select an area in their lives where they felt they needed help, for example, with patience. A period of time was given for them to write it down on a small card with hands reaching out printed on them and then place their contribution in a basket by the altar. Throughout this section of the assembly, reflective music was played in the background. The headteacher shared a few of the thoughts contributed by the pupils. Pupils prayed well together from a PowerPoint slide. The engagement of pupils throughout was very good and the headteacher's use of simple images and a selection of the Stations of the Cross facilitated the spiritual and moral development of the pupils present. Retreats are made available to all year groups. Years 7 to 10 all attend one-day retreats at St Mary's, Clapham. Residential retreats are made available to all year groups at St Vincent's, Whitstable or St Cassian's, Kintbury. Pupils interviewed during the inspection remarked how they greatly valued these opportunities and how they felt that they came away having grown spiritually. One Year 9 pupil said, 'After the retreat, I felt that there was another way to talk to God.' The school Chapel has been refurbished within the last three years and is an attractive worship space. It is an outstanding setting for personal and collective worship for the whole school community. Eye-catching displays in the Chapel serve to enhance the spiritual and moral development of pupils in the school. For example, pupils inscribed on colourful cards, during Epiphany celebrations in January, the gifts they were able to bring to the school community.

Community cohesion

GRADE 1

Community cohesion is an outstanding feature of the school. The school is an inclusive and welcoming community. Pupils from different ethnic heritages say that they feel part of the school community and that their differences are celebrated in the school by marking the national day of every student and staff member in the community. Local links have been made with schools in the Deanery who meet at senior and Religious Education leader levels. Sports leaders in the upper school support the running of the deanery primary schools' sports days. Nationally, the school has supported a headteacher from a community school in Lowestoft, who visited the school to ascertain how his school's ethos could be further developed. In addition, an education advisor from the Channel Islands visited the school to investigate how to integrate work with Portuguese pupils. International links include pen pals in a Spanish school, with the pupils from each country writing in the language of the other, and a joint British Council art project called 'Rivers of the World' which partners the school with a group of secondary schools in Buenos Aires. The school is a member of London Citizens, a charity whose mission is to create a network of competent, informed and organised citizens who act responsibly in the public life of their communities and are able to influence, for the common good, decisions which impact on their communities. Currently, the school is involved in working to set up 'safe havens' in the area and is working with the Ecuadorean Embassy to promote the living wage and to organise a festival for Ecuadorean families in the community. Charitable giving is very generous through targeted fundraising and activities through both the House and the Year systems. Accordingly, under the guidance and supervision of the Chaplain,

charities which are chosen include CAFOD, UNICEF, the British Heart Foundation, Asthma UK and recycling of prescription glasses for those children in India who require them. As a result of the above experiences the school promotes, pupils are made aware of cultural ties and respond to the needs of various communities locally, nationally and globally.

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Religious Education

Achievement and standards in Religious Education

GRADE 1

Attainment at all levels in Religious Education is outstanding and exceeds the high standards achieved in English. Pupils starting points are in line with the national average on entry to the school and well above on completing Key Stage 4, with 82 % gaining grades A* to C in 2012 against the national average of 72%. These results are outstanding given that the whole Year 11 cohort in the school are entered. The school has robust plans in place to maintain the exceptional progress pupils make in the subject. The vast majority of pupils interviewed during the inspection said that they enjoyed Religious Education because the subject makes them think and helps them to lead a fulfilling life. Year 9 pupils said, 'RE helps me to understand and live out my faith.' Work in pupils' books is generally of a high standard with breadth and depth of coverage consistent across all Key Stages. Skills gained from other curriculum areas are applied to Religious Education to strengthen their understanding and help their progress. Levels of pupil behaviour are extremely good. At A level, AS and A2 results are outstanding with attainment well above the national average and rates of progress extremely high. The school is the highest performing school in the local authority with Religious Education one of the top performing subjects, significantly exceeding the national averages year on year. Pupils enjoy the subject and there has been a significant increase in uptake over the last two years. Students in the Sixth Form follow General Religious Education over thirty guided learning hours validated by the National Open College Network at levels 1 and 2. Respective pass rates for 2012 and 2011 have been 98.8% and 95.5% at level 1 for Year 12 and 94% and 98.4% at level 2 for Year 13.

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

GRADE 2

Teaching and learning in Religious Education is good with some outstanding features. Clear learning objectives are shared with pupils, who are able to judge how they have been achieved at the end of the lesson. Where lessons were outstanding, the pace was brisk, pupils were engaged in activities, challenge in the tasks set was appropriate to all abilities, including the most able and pupils were clear on the steps that they were required to take in order to improve. For example, in a Year 12 lesson on 'Evaluating the Approach of Christian Ethics towards Abortion', differentiated learning outcomes were displayed on the board. Pupils were involved in producing a key point on the whiteboard, for example, Aquinas' viewpoint on 'ensoulment', including references to scripture and papal encyclicals. During some feedback from paired work, a student countered Singer's view that a foetus is not a human being and is therefore unable to make choices by saying, 'A severely disabled person may not be able to make choices either but society would view their termination as murder.' Students in the lesson felt that they gained a great deal from this approach to learning and were able to apply it to challenging questions. The department follows the school policy of lesson drop-ins where teachers observe outstanding practice in other departments and where teachers from other subjects do likewise with Religious Education lessons. Religious literacy is well-developed with key words evident both in planning and in lessons observed. An example of religious vocabulary being used in context was observed during a meeting with Student Leaders when a Year 11 pupil, referring to cross-curricular themes, said, 'In English some literature refers to Biblical allusions.' Good use is made of support assistants in lessons. Lessons are well planned. In the best lessons the overall pace and challenge is good and a variety of teaching and learning opportunities were seen. Assessment of learners' work is regular and consistent and affirmative marking is clearly present in books across all key stages. During the inspection, diagnostic marking, which informs pupils how they might improve their work, was not always evident in a minority of books sampled but the senior leadership team and Head of Department are aware of this and are planning interventions to ensure that there is consistency across the department. Pupils value the opportunities their teachers give for

self-assessment and peer assessment. When asked by the inspectors, they felt that it gave them greater awareness of how to successfully apply their learning to Religious Education examination questions.

The Religious Education curriculum

GRADE 1

The Religious Education curriculum is of very high quality and is at the heart of the whole school curriculum with the 'Christ-Centred Curriculum' being one of the pillars of teaching and learning across all subjects in the school. The subject promotes the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepares them for the challenges they face as they progress through the school. Provision is made for periods of reflection and is enhanced through the skilful use of ICT. The curriculum content 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. At Key Stage 4 the programme followed is the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR) GCSE course, where pupils study Catholic Christianity and the Gospel of Luke. In the Sixth Form, students follow the General Religious Education programme validated by the National Open College Network (NOCN). The school offers this qualification at levels 1 and 2. At A level in Year 12 and Year 13 students follow the Philosophy and Ethics course which is underwritten by OCR. The A level course is proving increasingly popular with the cohort increasing in size over the past three years to 16 students in Year 12 and 16 in Year 13. The study of World religions is enhanced by visits to other places of worship such as the Hindu Temple in Neasden, the Central Mosque in London, the Reformed Synagogue in Central London and Canterbury Cathedral for pupils in Years 7 to 9. The department is organising a trip to Rome for Years 11 to 13 in July. To further extend pupils' understanding of World religions, the school should explore ways of increasing the variety and number of visiting speakers from other Christian traditions and faith backgrounds. Although attainment for pupils in the subject is outstanding, curriculum time for Religious Education at 6.7% in Key Stage 3, 9% in Key Stage 4 and 3.3% in Key Stage 5 does not yet meet the Bishops' Conference requirements of 10% at Key Stages 3 and 4 and 5% in the Sixth Form. Bearing in mind that the school has implemented the 'Christ-Centred Curriculum' across all subject areas, the school's leadership would benefit from ascertaining the amount of time spent on Religious Education in the other disciplines by conducting an audit across the whole curriculum. From that starting point a corresponding curriculum map could be produced. Human relationships education (HRE) and sex and relationships education (SRE) are well integrated into the Religious Education curriculum, have strong links with PSHE and anti-bullying policies and are in line with the teaching and values of the Catholic Church. The HRE and SRE policies have been discussed with parents and ratified by the governors.

Leadership and management of Religious Education

GRADE 1

Leadership and management of Religious Education are outstanding. A 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. The head of Religious Education is a highly qualified, excellent practitioner and is line managed by the deputy headteacher. Together they provide outstanding support for a well-qualified team. There is a Link Governor who oversees the progress of pupils in relation to the subject. She visits the department on a regular basis and acts as a critical friend in regard to Religious Education. She is well informed about achievement and behaviour and strikes the balance between support and challenge so that the school can improve the learning experiences of all pupils through continuing to develop the quality of teaching in the department. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is outstanding with peer observations of lessons taking place in conjunction with those conducted by the Head of Department.

and senior leaders. Pupil progress is outstanding as is the comprehensive tracking and planning systems. Schemes of work are of a very high standard and links with Citizenship are being developed at Key Stage 3 but are well mapped at Key Stage 4. Planning for pupils with special needs is very good and teachers ensure that lessons are appropriately differentiated to meet the needs of students, including suitable challenges for the most able. At Key Stage 3 pupils know the level at which they are working and those preparing for public examinations know their target grade. A particularly effective innovation is the mentoring of Year 11 pupils who could be at risk of underperforming by trained Year 12 and Year 13 Religious Education students. As a result of the above interventions, GCSE Religious Education results have improved significantly. The Big Survey indicated that Religious Education is enjoyed by pupils. Likewise, a parents' survey is very supportive of the work that the department undertakes. Moreover, parents feel that Religious Education makes a positive impact on their children. Overall, Religious Education makes a very good contribution to the spiritual and moral development of pupils in the school and reflects its distinctive nature as a Catholic learning community. There are four dedicated classrooms, all of which have an interactive white board and storage for textbooks. They also have notice boards with attractive displays of current pupil work. Every pupil has access to an age-appropriate Bible. Although the funding for the department is lower than the budgets of the other core subjects, Religious Education is well resourced. The audit and cross-curricular mapping proposed by the inspectors should enable leaders to identify spending for the subject in other curriculum areas.

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