



# Diocese of Westminster

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St Michael's Catholic Grammar School  
Nether Street, North Finchley, London N12 7NU  
Telephone: 020 8446 2256  
e-mail address: office@st-michaels.barnet.sch.uk

DFE Number: 302 5404

Headteacher: Mr Julian Ward  
Chair of Governors: Mrs Debra Quigly-Jones

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Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Archbishop of Westminster  
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Date of inspection: 14-15 October 2013  
Date of previous inspection: 10 March 2008

Reporting Inspector: Mrs S Nolan  
Associate Inspector: Mr Matthew Dell  
Associate Inspector: Mr Stuart Alexander  
Associate Inspector: Ms Patricia Cusack

## Introduction

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspectors spent two days in school, visited seven parts of lessons and an assembly, and carried out several discussions with school staff, students and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of students' work, observation of students in and out of lessons, examination of school documents, and a number of learning walks across the school.

The Inspection of St Michael's Catholic Grammar School was carried out under the requirements of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Framework and Schedule for Section 48 Inspections approved by the Archbishop of Westminster. The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the school is in providing Catholic education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation.

## Description of School

St Michael's is a three-form voluntary aided school in the London Borough of Barnet and the locality of North Finchley. The school serves families across a wide range of parishes, around 120, in the North London area. It is the only Catholic selective school in the Archdiocese of Westminster. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 91%. All students in Years 7 to 11 are baptised Catholics on entry to the school. A very few students of other Faiths, or no faith, are admitted to the sixth form. The proportion of students who are from other Christian denominations is 4% and from other Faiths, 3%. The Trustees are The Sisters of the Poor Child Jesus.

There are 750 pupils on roll, including 274 in the sixth form. None has a statement of special educational need. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is above average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is also above average but none are at the early stages of learning English. There is a well below average rate of families claiming free school meals.

### Key for inspection grades:

*Grade 1\*: Outstanding;*  
*Grade 1: Very Good;*  
*Grade 2: Good;*  
*Grade 3: Requires improvement;*  
*Grade 4: Causing Concern.*

## **A. Classroom Religious Education**

*How religiously literate are pupils in the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith and how well do they know, understand and appreciate the importance of religious faith and practice in everyday life?*

### **What is the overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy?**

**Overall Grade: [1]**

Curriculum Religious Education is very good overall. There are outstanding aspects, particularly in the examination outcomes for the students at both GCSE and Advanced Level. The implementation of the Curriculum Directory is thorough and supports very well the provision at each Key Stage. Students achieve highly and are well versed in how to make progress. There are secure structures in place to sustain good and often better teaching. The leadership of the department, currently managed by the second in charge, has high expectations and communicates these well not only to the specialist staff but also to temporary and non-specialist teachers of religious education. There is a shared vision and a desire to be ever better professionals. The department's contribution to supporting the school's mission is strong and the specialist religious education programme throughout the school is very good although the time restrictions within the timetable at Key Stage 3 can at times make for coverage that has less depth than might be expected in order to match the students' needs.

### **What has improved in classroom religious education since the last inspection and what should the school do to further improve in classroom religious education?**

Since the previous inspection, St Michael's has sustained high achievement in external examinations, both at GCSE and at Advanced Level. High numbers continue to study religious education into the sixth form and a few into higher education. At the last inspection, the school was asked to ensure that time within the religious education curriculum was given to teaching about, and learning from, other faiths. This the school has done, and there is a concentration on other World Religions with Hinduism in Year 7, Sikhism in Year 8, Islam in Year 9 and Judaism which is studied in a number of areas of the curriculum. In each of Years 12 and 13, students also study a module on World Religions. The chapel has been refurbished so that it provides a welcoming and prayerful atmosphere for the school community. Additional resources have been purchased despite an increasingly tight school budget. New technology and texts support the religious education curriculum. The time allocated to timetabled religious education has, however, not yet increased to the expected Bishops' Conference requirement time although this was an issue at the last two diocesan inspections. Currently, in the main school, the time allocation stands at 8% with 3% for core religious education in the sixth form. This is a limiting judgement as the school does not provide students with their full entitlement to curriculum religious education.

The school has agreed the following areas for improvement in curriculum religious education:

- refresh reference materials for religious education in the school library and encourage students to make use of journals and texts to further promote their independent study
- ensure students make thoughtful written responses to teachers' regular marking and guidance
- provide more regular opportunities at Key Stage 3 for assessments that are moderated and levelled in line with diocesan attainment targets.

## **How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?**

**Grade [1\*]**

The religious education curriculum is well based on the Curriculum Directory. Schemes of work have been mapped explicitly to the revised Religious Education Curriculum Directory. Resources and methodologies are very well matched to each of the four areas, clearly indicating when and how key aspects of the content are taught. Emphasis is given to the Church's social teaching, to the sacramental life of the school, to the way the students are helped to reflect on how God makes himself known to us, particularly in both the Old and New Testaments, and to the nature, order and authority of the Church. The schemes of work provide systematic guidance for each Key Stage and ensure a secure theological framework for teachers' planning. Work to highlight the Year of Faith has been well integrated into the students' classroom and wider experience.

Students make good use of reference material, either provided by staff or through electronic research journals. The reference collection in the main library for religious education, however, is limited in its range and students report that they make little use of it for their independent study. There are strengthening links to other faiths, clearly reported in students' discussions. Post-16 students from other than Christian traditions contribute well to supporting students' understanding of World Faiths.

## **Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education**

**Grade [1\*]**

Results in GCSE and Advanced Level examinations in religious education are high and place the school in the top 10 of all schools nationally. The students' well above average attainment on entry is nurtured carefully so that typically, students excel in their learning in religious education at both Key Stages 4 and 5. Their achievements are outstanding. Students' attainment in religious education compares very favourably with their performance in other subject areas. One hundred percent of students gain a higher A\*-C GCSE grade in most years, and 9 out of 10 students regularly achieve an A\*/A grade. Their attainment in lessons, in discussion and in their written work generally outstrips age-related expectations. At Key Stage 3, students generally display high levels of religious literacy although work in Years 7 and 8 sometimes does not challenge the students to think deeply enough about issues and topics. The number of students opting for Level 3 courses in religious education compares favourably with that of other subjects and students do well both at advanced supplementary stages and in A2 examinations. Almost 85% of students taking A2 examinations gained A\* or A grades.

## **The quality of teaching**

**Grade [1]**

Specialist staff are well qualified and have a thorough understanding of the Catholic faith. They share a common vision and commitment to involve students in the Catholic life of the school and to stimulate their academic interest in religious studies. Typically, teaching is well informed and founded on strong staff subject knowledgeable. Teachers use a range of resources to support planned work in lessons. Relationships within classes are very positive and students engage exceptionally well in activities. They are consistently well motivated to increase their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith. Year 12, for example, were enthralled in a philosophy lesson where the erudition of the teacher was such as to genuinely enthuse them. In another specialist sixth form ethics lesson, group work both supported and engaged the students in what was an intellectually demanding task. Students feel confident to express their ideas and their responses are well used by staff to further their learning. In a Year 7 lesson on 'the faith journey', resources and questioning were very well used to help the students understand that like any journey, there will be ups and downs and doubts encountered on the way and that their grasp of the faith will change and develop as they themselves grow. In a Year 11 lesson on pacifism and a just war, students built exceptionally well on previous learning in preparation for an examination-style question. There are other occasions, however,

where the pace of learning slows and the level of challenge and content is not as great as it might be. This is partially because of the limited time for religious education in the younger year groups.

St Michael's takes seriously its target setting and tracking of religious education at whole school level and monitors progress as in other key curricular areas. Systematic half-termly assessment procedures support students' progress well, ensuring they attain highly. Teachers mark work regularly but do not consistently ensure that students make explicit and written responses to their guidance. The school recognises that there is more to do to fully embed the use of the diocesan attainment targets in assessing and recording the students' work at Key Stage 3. Marking at GCSE is detailed, diagnostic and provides very helpful guidance to the students.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education**

#### **Grade [1]**

Currently, the religious education department is very effectively managed on a day-to-day basis by the second in department. There is a genuine commitment to the educational mission of the Church. The department builds its work well on the school's mission of 'love one another as I have loved you'. Although the department is well supported by the senior team, there is a very lean allocation of staff to religious education so that much depends on one or two people. There is a sharp focus on improving and developing teaching and learning in line with other subject areas. The department has access to external and internal professional development, not least through regular contact and discussion with scholarly colleagues, particularly the current school chaplain. The learning environment for religious education is well looked after although the two main classrooms are small. The newly refurbished chapel is at the heart of the religious education department and is meticulously cared for and well used for private prayer as well as liturgical celebrations. Currently, the monitoring and assessment procedures for core religious education in the sixth form are not assessed systematically and links with general studies are not explicit.

## **B. The Catholic life of the school**

*How well do pupils experience the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing through all areas of school life?*

**What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?**

**Overall Grade: [1]**

The overall effectiveness of the school in developing students' experience of the richness of the Catholic way of life and belief is very good. The governors, headteacher, senior leaders and all those responsible for religious education are intent on giving priority to the school's Catholic life. This is demonstrated in the priority given to the allocation of resources, to prayer and to the Liturgy. Nevertheless, the school's overall effectiveness is limited by a legacy of non alignment over two inspections of the timetable allocation for religious education with the time required by the Bishops' Conference.

**What has improved since the last inspection and what should the school do to further develop the Catholic life of the school ?**

Since the last inspection, the school has made improvements in a number areas. The variety of liturgical experiences has been improved due to the setting up of a cross curricular liturgy committee, involving drama and art and other subjects as well as religious education, all chaired by the school chaplain. The chapel has been extensively refurbished and is at the heart of the religious education department. Students have the opportunity to participate in pilgrimages to Aylesford and Lourdes and Year 13 volunteer for the Kenyan Mission project. The uptake at post-16 has also risen as students successfully achieve excellent A-level results. Although there has been some improvement in the time allocation for religious education since the last inspection, this is not yet congruent with Bishops Conference requirements and limits the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school.

The school's self evaluation is broadly accurate but does not take enough account of the consequences of the time allocation for religious education. The school has agreed that the following area is a priority for improvement:

- ensure that students receive their full time entitlement to timetabled religious education both in the main school and at post-16

## **The place of Religious Education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget**

### **Grade [1]**

The school does not meet the requirements of time of the Curriculum Directory. At Key Stage 3, in particular, students spend less than 10% of the available curricular time in religious education. At post-16, the school does not meet the 5% requirement for general religious education. Although the department rejoices in a mainly specialist staff, there is only one full-time member of the team. This does not include the head of department who has, at his own choice, other teaching commitments within the school. The budget regularly matches or exceeds that of other core areas. Religious education is seen and valued as the heart of the curriculum despite the limitations of the timetable. This is clearly seen in the priority given to the refurbishment of the chapel and in the resources available to the department. The strong programme of Retreats is now supplemented by Pilgrimages and Mission projects. The school chaplain is a much loved and respected member of the school giving generously of his time.

## **The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community.**

### **Grade [1\*]**

Collective worship, liturgies and Masses follow the cycle of the liturgical year. Prayer and worship are central to each day. Opportunities for reflection and prayer are regularly provided in the mornings and at other times of the school day. Students and staff have ready access to the chapel at all times. There are weekly masses in the chapel with classes each taking their turn to orchestrate their organisation. The Catholic identity of the school is evident throughout with the religious art and artefacts spread across the site. The school's mission statement is proudly displayed in subject classrooms and adapted to fit specifically within individual subject areas. Traditional Catholic practices, including the rosary and the Stations of the Cross are built into the seasons of the year. Whole school liturgical celebrations form an integral part of each term, including induction and leaving times. The school has access to the local Parish Church of St Albans for whole school Masses. Assemblies are always planned to be mindful of the school's Catholic Mission with differing groups of students taking turns to participate. The students respond well at all times and behave impeccably.

Students have regular opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, particularly during Lent and Advent. All students, including sixth formers, whatever their religious tradition, are expected to and do attend liturgical celebrations. The school provides excellent opportunities to promote the students' spiritual development through reflection, discussion and a shared understanding of what it means to be a practising Catholic.

## **The commitment and contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice.**

### **Grade [1\*]**

Students flourish at St Michael's. They are generous in using their time for the good of each other and for others more vulnerable than themselves as well as for the good of the whole community. Individuals are respected and valued by staff and students alike. From the simpler tasks of buddying Year 7, becoming a *Guardian Angel* in the sixth form to working as volunteers at home and in the Missions, the students demonstrate a genuine commitment to the Common Good. Assemblies, prayers in class and discussions encourage students to focus on justice throughout the world. They are well versed in understanding the ethics of modern business practice, the moral values that should permeate Christian life and in striving to eliminate injustice and intolerance where they can. Practical support for a range of charities, including fund raising, hands-on support for a local hospice,

Lourdes helpers, sports leaders and work in local primary schools are but some of the service in which students are involved. Students respect other Faiths and cultures, learning well from those among them from other traditions. The students are encouraged to respond to the call of Pope Francis to serve the poor from their earliest years in the school.

**Enabling the authentic partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf;**  
**Grade [1\*]**

St Michael's has a very active commitment to partnership with the diocese. There is very good involvement of parents in the life of the school. Over 300 responses were received from the families over the course of the inspection. These were universally positive although a small proportion expressed a desire for greater involvement by the school in the many parishes it serves. The school serves families from around 120 parishes and is therefore very stretched to maintain regular contact. Nevertheless, not all of the parishes receive or accept the school's regular newsletters and this is an area for the school to review. There is a very strong commitment among senior leaders and staff to the school's mission as a Catholic institution within the Diocese of Westminster. Staff regularly attend diocesan training and conferences and the school welcomes clergy at all levels into the school. A large number of staff attended the local Deanery Mass. The school does its best to establish links with the local parish but relies heavily on the Mill Hill Missionaries for its main links with the clergy.

**The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school.**

**Grade [1]**

Members of the governing body and senior leaders regularly review the educational mission of the school. The leadership team and the staff do their best to be role models, living out their Catholic Christian values in their daily lives. The impact is seen in the reverence, prayer and respect for each other shown by the students at all times. The school's mission is expected to influence the work of every department and to be explicit in all their documentation. Despite budget constraints, the headteacher has given priority to such as the refurbishment of the chapel. Senior leaders give strong support to the religious education department. Despite many outstanding features of the Catholic life of the school, the lack of time allocated to religious education within the curriculum reflects a legacy of insufficient timetabled time and thus the leadership of the school is very good rather than outstanding in promoting the Catholic life of the school.



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### **A. Classroom Religious Education**

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**Overall Grade [1]**

How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?

Grade [1\*]

Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education

Grade [1\*]

The quality of teaching

Grade [1]

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade [1]

### **B. The Catholic life of the school**

#### **What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?**

**Overall Grade [1]**

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget

Grade [1]

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community

Grade [1\*]

The commitment and contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice.

Grade [1\*]

The partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

Grade [1\*]

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school.

Grade [1]