



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 101814

St Mary's Catholic High School
Woburn Road
West Croydon
CR9 2EE

Inspection date: 13 & 14 May 2015

Chair of Governors: Mr Francis Conteh
Headteacher: Mr Patrick Shields
Inspectors: Mr Joe Carvill
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EDUCATION COMMISSION

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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

St Mary's Catholic High School is voluntary aided, situated in the Croydon Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark and is maintained by Croydon Local Authority. The principal parishes which the school serves are Our Lady of Reparation, West Croydon; St Andrew's, Thornton Heath; St Chad's, South Norwood and Good Shepherd, New Addington. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 41%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and 3.3% in the Sixth form.

The school takes pupils from 11 to 19 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 719, making it a smaller than average secondary school. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is significantly below the national average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is almost double the national average, while the number of pupils who receive extra support in class is also significantly above the average. 96% of pupils come from a minority ethnic background with Black African and Caribbean being the largest groups. About 60% of pupils are believed to have English as an additional language.

Date of previous inspection:

21/06/2010

Overall Grade:

2

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

As a Catholic learning community St Mary's is overall a good school, although some areas require improvement.

Leadership is now very good following the appointment of a new headteacher in September 2014 and the subsequent enhancement of the senior leadership team. Governance is now good with the newly constituted governing body more able to support and challenge the leadership team.

There are now more opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities within the school community through the new student leadership team structure.

Pastoral care is a real strength of the school and pupils know there is someone within the school community to whom they can go to if needed. Pupils feel safe in the school and most speak of St Mary's with affection and they take pride in their school.

Attainment in Religious Education is broadly in line with other core subjects at Key Stage 3 and better at Key Stage 4. Achievement of pupils is very good compared with similar schools. Pupils overall enjoy Religious Education.

The quality of teaching and learning is overall good although occasionally it requires improvement.

The opportunities for prayer and Collective Worship are good. However the quality of the assemblies and form tutor prayer time requires improvement.

The school has successfully addressed two out of four issues raised in the last inspection (June 2010). Religious Education now has 10% curriculum time and this meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference, while assessment for learning is well embedded in most lessons in Religious Education. Under the new school leadership team the issue of residential retreats is being actively considered which would supplement the current good programme of days of recollection for every pupil. The practice of sharing good practice in the teaching of Religious Education is developing.

The inspectors believe the school, under the new leadership and reconstituted governing body, has a very good capacity to improve.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Improve the quality of assemblies and prayer in form-tutor time by providing expert guidance and support to assembly leaders and form tutors on preparing and delivering acts of worship.
- Ensure there is a more robust monitoring programme of the quality of assemblies and form time prayer.
- Ensure the monitoring of teaching and learning in Religious Education is more consistent and that the sharing of good practice becomes a regular feature across the department.

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school

Most pupils make a good contribution to and clearly benefit from the Catholic life of St Mary's.

Pupils take full advantage of and appreciate the many opportunities the school provides for their personal and academic support, for example, the after-school and Saturday morning booster lessons and the excellent pastoral care system. An inspector attended a meeting of the pastoral inclusion panel and was particularly impressed by the commitment, dedication and skills of the pastoral staff on the panel who provide essential emotional support to pupils and families.

Pupils confirmed that they felt safe in the school and most identified a teacher or member of staff to whom they could go if concerned about a personal matter.

Behaviour is good and many pupils commented that it has improved greatly since September. Pupils are courteous and welcoming to visitors and many of them warmly greeted and willingly engaged the inspectors. Relationships among pupils are good and they show respect for each other.

Most pupils take pride in the school. They respect the environment and the school is clean and tidy.

Most pupils value the school's Catholic values. One pupil said, "We are taught right from wrong" while another Year 11 pupil told the inspectors, "St Mary's prepares us well for life after school."

Pupils who are in the Inclusion Unit for behavioural issues appreciate that the reason they are there is a consequence of their actions.

Some pupils make a very good contribution to assemblies. For example, the Head Boy and Head Girl gave an excellent talk to a Year 10 assembly on the theme of 'leadership'. The school is currently preparing to elect pupils to the new Student Council and the student pastoral and academic leadership teams, which will enhance further the opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities and contribute to the life of the school.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strength of the school. They support CAFOD in its charitable work by fundraising, and older pupils help in organising an annual dinner and dance for over 100 senior citizens. The school is also a collection centre for local food banks.

There is a significantly enhanced rewards system in place, including, for example, regular postcards home or film night rewards each half term. These are appreciated by the pupils.

Currently there is a good programme of retreats whereby every pupil has a 'day of reflection' either on-site or at Aylesford Priory. In the absence of a chaplain, these days are organised by the Head of Religious Education and they have a very positive impact on the

spiritual life of the pupils. The school leaders are hoping to organise residential retreats for the senior pupils.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Achievement by pupils in Religious Education is good overall and is in line with their prior attainment and expectations.

Pupils join the school with attainment that is significantly below the national average. At Key Stage 3 nearly 70% of the pupils are working at level 5 or above which compares favourably with other core subjects. The GCSE results were also good with 52% gaining A*-C grades and 10% getting A*/A grades. Every pupil entered for the GCSE examination gained a qualification last year and standards in the subject are significantly higher than some core subjects.

Standards of written and oral work in the classroom are high, especially among the more able pupils. The quantity and quality of written work is impressive. Pupils make good progress during lessons and over time, with disadvantaged pupils doing particularly well.

In Key Stage 4 pupils underachieving are given support through the school's programmes of booster classes and the identification of key marginal pupils who are targeted for extra revision.

Behaviour and relationships in classrooms are good. Most pupils enjoy Religious Education and all speak very respectfully of their teachers.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

Pupils' response to and participation in Collective Worship is variable.

In Masses pupils act as readers, altar servers, musicians or they lead prayers of intercession. They undertake these roles willingly. Occasionally there are hymns and the school is actively encouraging the development of hymn singing.

In the Year assemblies observed by the inspectors the behaviour and conduct of the pupils on entry was good. They were generally attentive, listened reverently and responded assuredly to questions. In a Year 10 assembly the Head Boy and Head Girl talked confidently about leadership and the qualities needed to be a leader. Most pupils take part in reciting the Lord's Prayer or the school prayer. On the whole, however, pupils are passive participants in assemblies.

Pupils' response to prayers in form tutor time is also variable. They are respectful of whoever leads the prayer but there is often little participation beyond saying the school prayer or one of the traditional prayers of the Church.

Many lessons begin with a prayer and pupils are at ease in joining in.

Overall pupils' active participation in assemblies and form prayer is currently underdeveloped and the school should explore ways to provide opportunities for pupils to play a more active role.

How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils

The leadership and management of this Catholic school are good.

The leadership of the school is strongly focused on its Catholic mission, on raising standards and promoting the personal development of pupils. This has created a shared sense of mission among staff.

The Headteacher, who has an affirmative presence around the school, is very well respected by the pupils. He and the leadership team have a clear vision for the development of the school as a Catholic learning community created and supported by pupils, parents, staff and governors.

Governors, staff and pupils agree that the recently appointed Headteacher (September 2014) has brought new levels of motivation and direction to the school, to the extent that some staff and pupils described the school as "already a different place."

Together with the governors, the Headteacher has strengthened the senior leadership team which, through effective monitoring, has accurately identified the strengths of the school and also the areas in need of improvement. This has resulted in an ambitious yet realistic School Improvement Plan to bring about measurable improvements within a realistic timeframe. One of the eight strands of the plan addresses the Catholic and spiritual life of the school.

The governing body has recently been reconstituted. A new chair has been appointed and two local priests have joined it. This further enhances the already well-developed links with the local parish, whose parish priest is a regular visitor to the school. The governors are aware of the need to improve their monitoring and have already begun the process of setting up a committee to monitor more closely the catholicity and spiritual life of St Mary's.

Pastoral care is excellent and is a real strength of the school. Pupils feel safe and well cared for in the school. Bullying is rare and when it does happen it is dealt with quickly. The inclusion panel, made up of school councillor, pastoral mentor and heads of years, is exceptionally effective at monitoring and helping pupils who need emotional support. Home visits by staff to support families are not uncommon. The learning support unit is a valuable asset in addressing pastoral issues and most pupils appreciate the lengths to which staff often go to help them.

Community cohesion is strength of the school. The pupil population is exceptionally diverse but the school operates as one cohesive unit. Relationships are very good and pupils confirmed to the inspectors that behaviour has improved dramatically since September.

Links with the local parish are good. The school celebrates Mass in the parish church each Friday and other whole-school events, for example, termly Masses, Advent and Lenten services. The school is hosting the reception for an ordination in the parish in May 2015

and it makes available the lower playground for church parking for first Friday and funeral services.

School policies are based on and reflect the school's mission statement. However the mission statement itself is not well known by the pupils It is too wordy and should be reviewed and rewritten to make it easily understood and remembered by even the youngest pupil.

Parents who responded to the questionnaire are overwhelmingly supportive of the school, although a small number said they are not informed sufficiently well about Religious Education or worship.

How well leaders, governors and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education and plan and implement for improvement to outcomes for pupils

Senior leaders effectively monitor and evaluate the Religious Education provision.

They have identified areas where improvement is needed and have strategies in place to address these including, for example, advertising for the appointment of two subject specialists.

There is an eight-strand departmental development plan which broadly mirrors the school improvement plan with some issues specific to the subject - for example the study of a second major religion and developing cross-curricular links with other humanity subjects.

The Head of the Religious Education department has initiated a good programme of book scrutiny to monitor the standard of pupils' work and the effectiveness of teachers' marking. Exercise books are marked regularly with teachers indicating what was good in the exercise and how it could be improved. There is a robust programme of regular testing and recording and pupils know the level they are working at and what their predicted level/grade is. The programme of lesson observations is developing while the practice of sharing good practice is underdeveloped.

Examination results are analysed by teaching group and gender and these results could be better shared and discussed with the department.

ICT is well used in the department by teachers as a teaching aid. Pupils should be given more opportunities to use it as a learning resource. Text book resources are adequate where every pupil has access to one, although the Bibles available are becoming shabby and ought to be replaced. The subject is less well funded than other core subjects and its funding ought to be reviewed.

The creation of a more vigorous development plan would help focus the department on key priorities, prominent among which is the establishment of a programme of monitoring teaching and learning and staff development. The sharing of good practice within and beyond the department would also contribute to a more consistent approach to teaching and learning.

The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education

Teaching and learning is, overall, good.

Where teaching is good, learning objectives are clearly displayed and articulated. Lessons are well planned and usually involve a suitable variety of learning activities. Pupils' responses are recognised and built upon and teachers take care to link the learning themes to the students' own life experiences. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge, build on pupils' prior knowledge, make good use of question and answer techniques, use praise and affirmation and employ a range of teaching strategies. Pupils are confident to present and discuss their work as in, for example, a year 9 class working on the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The Religious Education department needs to ensure that these qualities are developed in all lessons and provide adequate support strategies for non-specialist teachers of Religious Education so that teaching and learning is at least good at all times.

Where teaching is, occasionally, less than good it is usually because of too low teacher expectations, it is too teacher-led or lacks relevant and challenging learning activities.

All teachers make good use of the ICT resources available although use by the pupils of these is limited in the classrooms.

The department has appropriate schemes of work in place along with clear policies for assessment and marking. There is a developing system in place for monitoring teaching and learning. Classroom management is overall good

The department recognises the need for greater differentiation in lessons as an area for development. The department also needs to continue to develop robust strategies for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning across all key stages.

The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning

The content of the Religious Education curriculum is good. At all key stages the curriculum content meets the requirements of the Diocese, the Curriculum Directory and the needs of the pupils.

At Key Stage 3 the pupils follow 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' scheme which is approved by the Diocese.

Key Stage 4 pupils follow the Edexcel specification "Catholic Christianity" which is very relevant to pupils' lives today.

A small number of students in the Sixth form have embarked on a Philosophy and Ethics course at AS level, while the rest of the sixth form follow the nationally recognised NOCN programme, where they study religion in general and its impact on life.

Curriculum time for Religious Education, at 10% in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, now meets the requirements of both the Bishops' Conference and the Diocese.

Visits to places of religious interest or significance are limited and the school should try to expand these in order to enhance the pupils' religious experience.

Overall the curriculum makes a very significant contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

The opportunities for Collective Worship and prayer are overall, good.

There is a good programme of Masses with a Year Mass every Friday in the church which pupils attend on a rota basis. In addition there is a good programme of sacramental and non-sacramental services during Lent and Advent, as well as Masses on other special occasions. For example a Leavers' Mass. Pupil participation at Masses is good through readings, music and drama and, occasionally, singing.

The opportunities for assemblies are also good with every pupil attending an assembly every week. Added to this, each form is meant to have prayers during morning registration. All staff briefings, held daily, now begin with a prayer as do most lessons in Religious Education and other subjects.

The quality of the assemblies and the form prayers requires improvement.

The assemblies, while good as secular gatherings, are too adult-led where pupils are passive participants and there are too few opportunities for spiritual development or private meditation. Hymn singing does not feature in assemblies.

Prayer in form tutor time is, at best, perfunctory. Often it is too rushed and the impression given is that it is not important. There is little opportunity for pupils to quietly reflect or add their own intentions to the prayer.

Assembly leaders and leaders of form prayer time would benefit greatly from guidance and support in preparing and delivering these acts of worship. The school should identify or appoint a person who can act as liturgical co-ordinator/chaplain and provide such guidance.

While there is some monitoring taking place by senior managers this needs to be much more systematic and robust.