



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 103009

The John Fisher School
Peaks Hill, Purley
Sutton
CR8 3YP

Inspection date: 12 & 13 November 2013

Chair of Governors:

Mr Emerson Samuels

Headteacher:

Mr Mark Scully

Inspectors:

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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

The John Fisher School is a voluntary aided Catholic comprehensive school for boys, situated in the Croydon Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. The school is funded by Sutton Local Authority, which operates a selective system. The principal parishes the school serves includes: Our Lady of the Annunciation, Addiscombe; St Elphege's, Wallington; St John the Baptist, Purley; St Mary's, Croydon and Holy Cross, Carshalton. Data provided by the school indicates that the catchment area of the school has reduced considerably in recent years, with the majority of students joining Year 7 coming from 5 local Catholic primary schools.

The school is fully subscribed with baptised Catholics and, at the time of the inspection, there were 1045 students on roll, including 270 students in the Sixth Form. The ability of the students on entry to the school is above the national average, but in line with the local average and the school attracts a fully comprehensive intake. The percentage of students with a statement of educational need is in line with the national average.

The majority of students at the school are White British and the percentage of students whose home language is not English is below the local and national average. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is also below the national and local averages.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education

GRADE
1

The John Fisher School is an outstandingly effective Catholic school. In the school's previous Section 48 inspection, in December 2008, inspectors graded the school outstanding and the school continues to go from strength to strength. The recommendations made in the previous inspection have been on the whole addressed. These recommendations included increasing support for the Chaplain, enhancing the retreat programme and increasing the amount of curriculum time allocated to the teaching of Religious Education.

The school benefits significantly from the excellent leadership of the Headteacher, who ensures that gospel values influence and permeate every aspect of school life. He has a clear vision for the school, which is shared by staff and governors.

The school is highly regarded and fully deserves the excellent reputation it has, both within the local Catholic community and beyond, as a beacon of Catholic education for boys.

Students indicated to inspectors how much they appreciated being part of the family which makes up The John Fisher School. Students value highly the excellent pastoral care offered by the school and all the opportunities it provides to them in terms of developing their spirituality, a very wide range of extra-curricular activities, as well as high quality teaching. These together, allow all students to make excellent progress in core subjects, including Religious Education.

Students felt safe and secure and felt that bullying was simply not an issue at the school. If students needed someone to talk to, they were confident that they could approach a teacher at the school, or a member of the Sixth Form. As one student told inspectors, "The John Fisher School is a very welcoming school and where the Catholic faith is the backbone of the school". Students felt they were listened to, although they also felt the School Council could have a higher profile within the school.

Throughout the inspection, the behaviour of the students was exemplary and they were excellent ambassadors for the school.

Parents interviewed by inspectors were overwhelmingly positive in their views of the school and this was reinforced in the responses received to the inspection questionnaire. Parents praised the excellent pastoral care offered to their sons and how teachers at the school provide excellent role models for their sons. As one parent wrote, "There is a genuine partnership between the home, school and parish and I would strongly recommend this school to any parent". In a meeting with inspectors, parents spoke warmly and with pride about the 'John Fisher Brand' and the school's distinctive nature as a faith community. They were made to feel very welcome to a range of activities at the school, including House Masses, Benediction, the monthly Epilogue Service and the annual Carol Service.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Keep the curriculum under review, to ensure the time allocated to Religious Education is in line with the requirements of the Bishops' Conference.
- Review the workload of the current Head of Department and consider the issue of succession planning in relation to leadership of the Religious Education Department.

- Provide further professional development to teaching staff, to further enhance the quality of collective worship.

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

The school provides an excellent range of opportunities for students to both contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school. The school is very fortunate to have a highly effective chaplaincy team, which organises an extensive retreat programme. All year groups have the opportunity to participate in retreats to places such as Worth Abbey, Emmaus House and Aylesford Priory.

Students are also involved in a wide range of local, national and international charities. In the past two years, students have raised nearly £9,000 for charities such as: Talk Easy Trust, St Mungo's and CAFOD. The school has also supported schools in Rwanda and Ghana, raising funds through Fair Trade sales and by providing books, laptops and sports equipment for the schools.

Inspectors were also impressed by the fact that all Year 7 students are trained as altar servers and that many of the students serve regularly in the School Chapel.

The thriving Faith Club provides students in all year groups the opportunity to meet weekly after school to discuss issues of faith and to socialise with one another. Over the years, the Faith Club has encouraged a number of students to study for the priesthood; indeed, the largest number of any school in the Diocese. Students also benefit from a range of other extra-curricular visits to places of religious significance, including pilgrimages to Rome and Lourdes, as well as local places of worship, including those of other faiths, as part of cross-curricular studies.

As a specialist sports college, the students not only enjoy high quality sporting opportunities, but the specialism is used to raise the awareness of the disabled and disadvantaged through links with a local special school. This includes students from the special school attending sporting activities at the school. The School's Art Department has developed an impressive and substantive Year 8 scheme of work to raise the awareness of the disabled and this has been shared with other secondary schools in the Diocese.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Outcomes for students in Religious Education are outstanding overall. GCSE results in Religious Education are consistently amongst the very best in the school and are at least in line with those in English and Maths and often exceed them. In 2013, 87% of Year 11 gained A*-C grades in Religious Education, with a very impressive 35% of grades being A* or A's. Such results are outstanding, taking into account all students follow and are entered for a full GCSE course in Religious Education.

Results at Post 16 are good overall. At AS, results in 2013 were not as strong as in previous years, but A2 results were in line with expectations.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

The School Chapel plays a pivotal role in the life of the school and in collective worship. Students responded enthusiastically, but respectfully, in collective worship seen during the inspection. The Chaplaincy team is very supportive in working with students, staff and local clergy, to ensure collective worship is relevant and meets the needs of the students.

Students are involved in the planning of many liturgies and are keen to be involved in role play, readings and prayers. In recent years, the school has increased its focus on celebrating achievement, which includes popular celebration Masses for students, together with their parents and teachers, at important stages at their time at the school.

The school's choir is also very impressive and deserves its excellent reputation for the quality of its music. While in recent years it has extended its repertoire, there remains a strong emphasis on sacred music, which makes a significant contribution to the liturgical life of the school. The dedication of students from all year groups, along with their teachers, in this area of the school life is outstanding and they display their God-given talents to the fullest at Masses, liturgies and concerts, both in school and to the wider community throughout the year.

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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

Senior leaders and governors ensure the Catholic life of the school is at the heart of their work. They know the school well and monitor carefully the development and impact of the Catholic ethos of the school. Senior leaders ensure that at least one INSET day each year is focussed on the Catholic life of the school and the latter has a high profile in the school development plan.

Senior leaders provide a wide range of detailed information to governors, to ensure they can monitor the work of the school. A termly report from the Spiritual Life and Ethos Committee ensures governors are aware of activities such as retreats and major acts of collective worship, such as the Remembrance Day Service. It also informs governors of the various charities the school supports and other charitable activities the students are involved in on a regular basis.

Senior leaders also ensure that the school's extensive annual Liturgical Calendar has a high profile and that opportunities for collective worship, liturgies, retreats and other events are not compromised as a result of any other demands on school time. The highly effective Spiritual Life Coordinator, as a key member of the Chaplaincy Team, provides students with opportunities to participate in a wider and more diverse variety of school, deanery and diocesan events. These are viewed as equally important as any other school activity and clearly appreciated and enjoyed by the students.

Governors are highly effective and give their time generously. They visit the school during the day on a regular basis. They attend many school functions, including Masses, Benediction and the Epilogue Service, which takes place at the end of each month in the School Chapel.

Governors also benefit from the termly report provided by senior leaders to the Pupil Welfare and Equality Committee. This report details such information as attendance data for students, as well as behaviour and exclusions. This enables the governors to know the many strengths and few weaknesses the school has and to hold the senior leadership to account through a powerful blend of challenge and support.

Inspectors felt that the school's mission statement did not have the high profile it deserved, as is found in most Catholic schools. However, senior leaders have already taken steps to review the mission statement, in consultation with the students, staff, parents and governors.

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 monitor the work of the Religious Education Department through regular lesson observations, the scrutiny of exercise books and the careful monitoring of student progress. The highly experienced Head of Religious Education provides inspirational leadership to the department and has been instrumental in the development and success of the Religious Education Department. She has also been appointed to the post of Head of Sixth Form and has managed to perform both roles highly effectively. However, as both

of these are highly demanding roles, governors should give careful consideration to the workload of the post holder and look carefully at succession planning in terms of the future leadership of the Religious Education Department.

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

The quality of teaching provided by the Religious Education Department is outstanding overall. Students are actively engaged in their learning and clearly enjoy their Religious Education lessons. Lessons were well planned and were suitably differentiated to meet the needs of all the students. Students make exceptional progress in Religious Education, due to the high quality teaching provided by the school. In the lessons observed by inspectors, the majority were graded outstanding and none were less than good. Teaching is therefore consistently of a high quality. In the most effective lessons seen, the students were fully engaged by well-planned learning experiences, which included a variety of teaching styles. Students responded very positively to the opportunities provided for paired work, group and whole class discussions.

Teachers observed were very skilful in their use of questions, which challenged the students to think and reflect deeply on the topics being covered in the lessons. Teachers provide very good feedback to students on what they have done well in their Religious Education lessons, but also how they can improve their work. All students were aware of their target grades in the subject, as well as the national curriculum level they were currently working at. Indeed, in the recent Ofsted inspection, marking and assessment in the Religious Education Department was highlighted as very good practice.

During the inspection, the behaviour of the students was excellent and based on mutual respect for one another. Students enjoyed very positive relationships between each other, as well as with their teachers. These two aspects ensure a learning environment where students feel comfortable to talk about their feelings and express their views and opinions.

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

At Key Stage 3, the school follows 'The Way The Truth and the Life' programme.

At Key Stage 4, the students follow the GCSE 'Catholic Christianity' course offered by Edexcel. In the Sixth Form, all students follow a General RE course designed by the Religious Education Department and, from discussions with students, this course engaged the students and clearly met their needs. At AS and A2, students follow the course offered by the OCR examinations board.

Although the school has increased the curriculum time at Key Stage 3, as recommended in the previous inspection, the time allocated for Religious Education still does not meet the requirements of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, particularly at Key Stage 3. However, the impact of this shortfall is greatly reduced by the high quality of teaching provided by the Religious Education Department. The impact of the lack of time is further reduced by the quality of the Key Stage 3 curriculum and, in particular, the Personal and Social Education programme, which was graded outstanding by Ofsted. These two aspects also contribute significantly to the spiritual development of the students, together with the opportunities for retreats, weekly assemblies and daily forms of collective worship.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

Overall, the quality of worship provided by the school is outstanding. There are many excellent opportunities for students to participate in collective worship, which is usually of a

high quality. Mass is offered several mornings a week in the School Chapel, as well as Benediction on a Tuesday lunchtime. Other Eucharistic Services are also offered by the Chaplain.

In a year assembly observed by the inspectors, all students entered the chapel in a highly respectful and reverent manner, blessing themselves and genuflecting as they passed the altar. Students took a leading role in the assembly, including readings, bidding prayers and reciting poetry. Candles were lit in front of the altar to remember those who had died.

Inspectors were also able to join the school at Benediction, which was enhanced by the school choir, which makes a powerful contribution to collective worship and the Catholic ethos of the school. It also contributes significantly to the spiritual development of the students. Most forms of collective worship seen offered students the opportunity for silent and personal reflection although, on occasions, these opportunities were missed.

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