



DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION REPORT

incorporating Section 48 and Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on
behalf of the Archbishop of Southwark

URN 103013

St Philomena's Catholic High School for Girls

Pound Lane

Carshalton

SM5 3PS

Inspection date: 10th & 11th December 2018

Chair of Governors: Dr Mary Howard

Headteacher: Ms Maria Noone

Inspectors: Mr Tom Cahill

Dr Janet Croggon

EDUCATION COMMISSION

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Director of Education: Dr Simon Hughes



Key for inspection grades

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

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Philomena's is a popular and oversubscribed voluntary aided comprehensive school for girls. The school was founded in 1893 by the Congregation of the Daughters of the Cross. At the time of the inspection, the school had just celebrated its 125th anniversary of providing high quality Catholic education to girls from a wide catchment area in South London. The school is situated in the Sutton Deanery and is now in the trusteeship of the Archdiocese of Southwark, the trusteeship having transferred from the Congregation of the Daughters of the Cross since the previous inspection in 2013. As a voluntary aided school, it is maintained by Sutton Local Authority.

The principal parishes served by the school are St Elphege's, Wallington; Holy Cross, Carshalton; St Teresa's, Merton; St Peter and Paul, Mitcham; St Cecilia's, North Cheam; St John the Baptist, Purley and St Mary's, Croydon. Overall, students come from over 50 parishes and the school serves a large catchment area covering much of South London. 99.5% of students in Years 7 to 11 are baptised Catholics and 92% in the Sixth Form. Overall, the school allocates 10% of curriculum time to Religious Education at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 having significantly increased the time allocation since the last inspection.

The school has undertaken a significant expansion in recent years at the request of Sutton Local Authority and there are now 1405 girls on roll. The school will continue to grow until 2020 and new facilities have been built to ensure the school can accommodate this growth.

Although the school is located in a selective area, but does not select pupils on grounds of ability, the average attainment of students on entry to the school is above national average. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is 48% which is well above the national average. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is 8% and is well below the national average of 15%. The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or who have an Education Health and Care Plan is also below the national average. The school has fully addressed the recommendations made in the previous inspection report.



SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Philomena's is an outstanding Catholic school because:

- The school provides a distinctive and outstanding Catholic education to all students.
- The Catholic ethos and gospel values influence every aspect of school life.
- The outstanding behaviour of the pupils and their mature and impressive attitudes to learning help them to make exceptional progress in Religious Education. All students benefit hugely from being part of this exceptional Catholic community where the pastoral care offered to the students is of the highest quality.
- Leadership and governance is outstanding. The Headteacher provides exemplary Catholic leadership allowing students and staff to thrive in a caring and nurturing environment. Governors provide the perfect blend of support and challenge to hold school leaders to account which ensures the legacy of the Daughters of the Cross continues to flourish.
- The provision for, and the quality of Collective Worship is outstanding, as is the response of the students to the many opportunities for prayer and worship each day. The school has ensured the Chapel remains the spiritual heart of the school and is open to students at all times.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

- Senior leaders and governors should review the school's mission statement to ensure it is well known and understood by the students.



Overall Effectiveness

How effective the school is in providing Catholic Education.

1

Catholic Life

1

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

1

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

Religious Education

1

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

1

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

1

Collective Worship

1

How well pupils respond to and participate in the schools' Collective Worship.

1

The quality of provision for Collective Worship.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

1

CATHOLIC LIFE

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- The school provides a highly effective, all round and distinctly Catholic education where prayer and worship is at the heart of school life. The students thrive in a safe and happy community which is underpinned by an exceptionally strong and distinctly Catholic ethos. The charism and legacy of the Congregation of the Daughters of the Cross lives on even though they no longer teach at the school. It is summed up by the school motto, 'Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain who build it'.
- In response to the high expectations of the school, the behaviour of the students is outstanding. Their behaviour in and out of the classroom is both mature and respectful. Their exceptional behaviour and their very positive attitudes to the ethos of the school and to their learning ensures that all students derive huge benefit from being members of the community at St Philomena's. They understand the core belief promoted by the school that 'Those who truly love God, love their neighbour' and this translates on a daily basis as 'Faith in God and Service to others'.
- Students made clear to inspectors how much they enjoyed school and valued greatly the care and support provided by the staff of the school. They really are excellent and very loyal ambassadors for the school.
- The school has identified 10 core values that each member of the school community should uphold. The students know these core values very well and they are the foundations of what happens at the school each day. The school has also developed a new mission statement but this is less well known by the students even though it is printed in their daily planner. The school should review the mission statement; perhaps with student involvement, to ensure it is widely promoted and understood in a form that is more accessible to the students.
- The school provides many leadership opportunities for the students which they respond to with great enthusiasm. Roles such as prayer monitors, anti bullying ambassadors, peer mentors and school council representatives are just a few of the many opportunities open to the students and almost all students are involved in at least one role. Some students are also part of CAFOD's young leaders scheme.
- There is a strong student voice in the school in the form of a school council as well as other groups, which are used to gain feedback on all aspects of school life from the student body.
- Service to others and helping those less well off are key aspects of school life. Each year the school raises money for many charities including CAFOD, Aid to the Church in Need, the DePaul charity which supports the homeless, Macmillan Cancer, Holy Cross Hospital and the NSPCC. Of particular note is the food bank, which has been set up by the school and clearly supports local families in need with items of food generously provided by parents, pupils and staff. Last year the school raised in excess of £15,000.00 for good causes.



- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and this was reflected in the very high number of questionnaires returned to the inspectors. Many parents took the opportunity to include written comments making clear how much they valued the headteacher, staff and the all-pervading Catholic ethos. As one parent wrote, "St Philomena's offers a fantastic and highly inclusive Catholic education to its students. It is a wonderful faith community and I could not ask for anything more".
- Another parent wrote, "It is clear to our family that St Philomena's promotes and lives the gospel values in all aspects of the school life; and that God's love is at the centre of all that they do".
- Parents are kept fully informed through regular newsletters and a highly effective school website. They are also invited to attend assemblies and other celebrations and are able to attend the weekly Mass in the school chapel.

The quality of provision of the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- Students have many opportunities to live and practice their faith each day. Prayer is at the heart of the school as is the beautiful chapel, which contributes so much to the spiritual development of the students. The school is a beacon of exceptional Catholic education for girls and deserves fully the high regard it is held in by the local community, Local Authority and Diocese.
- The school is fortunate to have a full-time chaplain who is well known to the students and is seen as someone the pupils can approach if they have any worries.
- The chaplain has established a strong network of support from local priests who are highly supportive of the school. They enable the school to provide Mass in the school chapel on a weekly basis as well as regular opportunities to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Students are able to attend a number of retreats including Aylesford Priory in Kent. They also have the opportunity to attend residential retreats, although places for these are limited and are offered to the more senior students.
- Just prior to the inspection, the school held a Mission Week led by the Sion Community. This was a great success and many students mentioned to the inspectors the significant impact the activities had on their spiritual development. As one student said "Mission Week was fantastic and brought great joy to the school". This reflected the views of most students when they spoke to the inspectors about the event. As a follow up to the Mission Week, the school is running an Alpha Course.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding

- The headteacher provides exemplary Catholic leadership to everyone in the school community and is an inspirational role model to the students and staff alike. She is highly respected by the students and their parents and is held in high regard by the staff and the governors. As one parent wrote, "the headteacher gives an amazing lead to the school community showing that it is not just a job but a vocation". Another



parent wrote, “St Philomena’s has exceptional leadership from the Headteacher which filters down to the students and staff”.

- Governance is also excellent. The highly committed and proactive governing body is led by a very experienced Chairperson and their top priority is maintaining and developing the Catholic life of the school as well as the legacy of the Daughters of the Cross. They provide the perfect blend of challenge and support to the leadership of the school. Governors have established highly effective ways, both formally and informally of promoting and evaluating the Catholic life of the school. They know the school exceptionally well and are regular visitors. As a result, self-evaluation undertaken by the school is accurate and grades awarded were fully endorsed by the inspection team.
- Some parents had, in the past, expressed a worry that the recent expansion of the school might be detrimental to the Catholic life and special ethos of the school. Leaders and governors have ensured, through careful planning and additional resources, these elements have not only been maintained but also enhanced and as a result, even more girls can benefit for attending this outstanding school.
- Governors are determined to maintain, and indeed enhance the Catholic life of the school, as seen by their commitment to having a fulltime chaplain and the appointment of a senior leader with specific responsibility for Catholic life. The school development plan has a distinct section covering the development of the Catholic life of the school.
- The school is outward looking and works in partnership with a number of schools and organisations including the Archdiocese. This includes the Avila Partnership with another outstanding Catholic girls’ school in nearby Merton LA.

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is outstanding.

- Students told inspectors how much they enjoy their Religious Education lessons and value the commitment and hard work of their teachers which helps them achieve excellent outcomes.
- National performance tables show that students at St Philomena's make exceptional educational progress during their time at the school. This is also the case for Religious Education, which achieved the highest number of top grades at GCSE of any subject. Achievement is highest at GCSE and data shows that all students, whatever their ability, make better than expected progress in Religious Education.
- The Achievement of students taking 'A' level courses is less strong but the department has taken action to improve grades achieved by the students.
- Religious Education teachers go the extra mile to ensure their students make excellent progress in the subject. They are always available outside of lessons to provide extra support and guidance where needed.

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is outstanding.

- The quality of teaching seen during the inspection was consistently good and much of it was outstanding. Teachers work hard and plan challenging and interesting lessons, which allows students to develop an excellent understanding of their own faith as well as other world faiths. Teachers use a variety of resources and strategies to enthuse the students and ensure high levels of engagement in lessons.
- Assessment is a growing strength of the Religious Education department. Students are assessed regularly and are given detailed feedback on how to improve their learning. Clear tracking procedures used by the department ensure that students know what level they have achieved and what they must do to move to the next level. Any underachievement is quickly identified and catch up classes are provided for any students who may fall behind.
- All aspects of the Religious Education curriculum offered by the school meet the requirements of the Catholic Curriculum Directory. Key Stage 3 covers Years 7, 8 and 9. The course has been designed by the department and provides a challenging foundation for GCSE. At Key Stage 4 (Years 9-11) the department has opted for AQA Syllabus B, which covers Catholic Christianity as well as St Mark's Gospel and an in-depth study of Judaism. The latter is supported by a member of the Religious Education team who has expert knowledge of the Jewish faith and its practice.
- The Edexcel course is offered at 'A' Level and all students study a Core Religious Education programme designed by the school although this course is not assessed or validated externally.



How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is outstanding.

- Leaders and governors have an excellent grasp of the many strengths and few weaknesses of the Religious Education department and they take decisive action when required. In the previous academic year, staffing difficulties proved very challenging. Since then, as a result of leaders and governors being both proactive and creative, the school has been able to recruit three additional Religious Education teachers, two of whom are experienced and have whole school responsibilities. The department is very fortunate now to have a full complement of very well qualified Religious Education teachers all of whom have excellent subject knowledge.
- The subject leader is very experienced and provides strong and effective leadership. He has managed the many changes to the Religious Education curriculum effectively particularly at GCSE and 'A' Level. Staff morale in the department is high as it is across the whole of the school.
- The Chair of Governors is the link governor for Religious Education and is a regular visitor to the department. The headteacher also line manages the subject leader. They give their full support to the department, which is rightly seen as a core subject within the school.
- Leaders and governors have taken action to ensure that Religious Education now has the time allocated on the timetable according to the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. This was a recommendation in the previous inspection report.
- Leaders and governors have ensured that Religious Education is resourced well and has good teaching accommodation, which provides a stimulating learning environment for the students. As mentioned above the Religious Education department is now fully staffed to ensure the curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. This has meant a very significant financial investment by the school.
- The school has recently reviewed its Sex and Relationship Policy to ensure it meets the requirements of the Diocese.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding.

- Prayer life is at the heart of the school and students respond enthusiastically and with great respect to the many opportunities for prayer and Collective Worship. Prayer takes place at the start of each day in forms or in Year assemblies. A prayer is also said at the beginning of every Religious Education lesson. In most cases the students lead the prayers including those written by the students.
- Assemblies are of high quality. They are well planned and are linked to the theme of the week, which is printed in the school diary. In an excellent assembly seen during the inspection, the students took responsibility for creating the assembly as well as delivering it. Role-play was used to highlight how the core values of the school should influence their behaviour at Christmas such as giving gifts but not expecting to receive anything in return.
- A very large number of students are members of the various choirs, which are part of the school. These include the chapel choir, the junior choir and the new gospel choir. Inspectors attended a lunchtime choir practice for the junior choir with over 200 students participating. The students sang beautifully, clearly inspired by their music teacher.
- A number of senior students are commissioned each year as Eucharistic Ministers, a role they take seriously and carry out with great respect.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding.

- The beautiful school chapel lies at the heart of the school and provides a sacred space for assemblies, Masses and other forms of Collective Worship including weekly benediction. The Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the Chapel. The Chapel also possesses a magnificent organ as well as a bell tower. The bells have recently been refurbished by a volunteer from the local community. The Angelus is said each day during Advent. The chapel bells are rung at noon each day when the school community stops and prays together. Together with the beautiful artwork and sculptures that make up the Stations of the Cross and the mosaics covering the walls, the chapel makes a very significant contribution to the spiritual development of the students and really enhances collective worship for the students.
- Liturgies and Collective Worship are carefully planned and follow the Church's liturgical year. Leaders ensure liturgical celebrations are given the high priority they deserve.



How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding.

- The school has clear structures for monitoring and evaluating this core aspect of its work. All staff are given resources for prayer, and guidance on providing time for students to benefit from moments of quiet reflection. Each academic year has an overarching theme with 2018/19 being 'Salt and Light'. Each week also has a theme which is shown in the school planner.
- The appointment of the new senior leader for Catholic Life is already having a very positive impact within the school. He makes regular reports to the 'Ethos Committee' of the governing body and attends most year assemblies and other major acts of Collective Worship.
- Governors are also regular visitors to the school and attend assemblies and other forms of Collective Worship.

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