



DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP INSPECTION REPORT

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

URN 135264

St Matthew Academy
St Joseph's Vale
Blackheath, London
SE3 0XX

Inspection date: 4 & 5 March 2015

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Introduction

Description of the school

Established in 2007, St Matthew Academy is an all-through school for pupils of primary and secondary age. It is situated in the Lewisham Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. As the academy is sponsored by the Archdiocese, the Education Funding Agency, rather than the Local Authority, funds it. The principal parish which the school serves is Our Lady Help of Christians, St Mary's, Blackheath; however, currently the school has seven main feeder parishes from the local area. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 30%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in the primary phase, but there is a shortfall in provision in the secondary phase.

The school takes pupils from 3 to 16 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 1241. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is below the national average. The prior attainment of pupils on entry to the secondary phase is below the national average. The school has a higher than national average proportion of pupils with special education needs. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities is above national average. The proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium is 47%, which is higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is above average. The school's specialisms are in Business and Enterprise.

Date of previous inspection:

19/03/2010

Overall Grade:

2

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1 Outstanding
Grade 2 Good

Grade 3 Requires improvement
Grade 4 Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education

GRADE
2

St Matthew Academy is a good school with many outstanding features and offers a warm, nurturing and highly inclusive environment in which pupils thrive. This reflects the school's Lasallian tradition of finding God in all things. This represents significant improvement since the previous inspection and is the result of highly effective leadership now in place at the school.

The school's provision for its Catholic life is also good with many outstanding features, including chaplaincy and Collective Worship. It is highly effective in promoting the development of the whole child; spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. Further developing the Catholic ethos is a high priority for the school. In the past 12 months, two INSET days have been allocated for staff development specifically linked to Catholic ethos.

Leadership and management at all levels convey a sense of enthusiasm and commitment that inspires and empowers staff and pupils to live out the school's mission. They also are highly ambitious and act as professional role models for young people. A member of the clergy remarked how much he enjoyed his weekly visits, stating: "The Catholic faith is all embracing, enveloping the whole community as a living body like a seamless garment where everyone is encouraged to 'Let their Light Shine'."

The standard of teaching is good overall and is poised to improve further once aspects such as lesson planning, challenge for the more able and improvement in writing levels are embedded.

Pupils embrace the academy's mission. This is apparent throughout in pupils' behaviour, attitude to work, manner in which they respect staff and one another, together with the pride they take in their school as a community.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the academy. They are keen to convey how much they appreciate the improvements in pastoral care, 'open door support' and academic drive to raise standards that have been implemented since the appointments of Principal and the two Vice Principals, Head of the primary and Head of the secondary phase in 2012. At interview, parents concurred that "the Principal and Vice Principals lead the school very well, as they have a "visible presence and are very approachable." Another parent responded, "The teachers are always there to support the pupils and work together with parents, based on the Catholic ethos of the school." Parents are encouraged to attend the two coffee mornings held each week to help further build links with the school.

The Catholic character of the academy is visible, tangible and spiritually uplifting; for example, the displays relating to 'Lenten promises' bear testament to whole school cohesion in developing the pupils' faith formation.

Chaplaincy and input from the clergy are outstanding, as their ongoing support and guidance enhances provision throughout.

The school has taken robust action to address the recommendations highlighted in the previous inspection. It has been very proactive in trying to increase the Catholic intake into the school and, although the school has grown significantly in size since the last

inspection, it has been able to maintain the percentage of Catholic pupils attending the school.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Leaders and staff should:

In the primary phase:

- Continue to raise teaching standards by introducing more structured lesson plans that focus on pace, more challenging differentiation and paying due attention to pupils' written presentation.
- Further develop assessment procedures by compiling a school portfolio of the pupils' work which is levelled against national criteria and moderated with at least one other school in the diocese.
- Focus on teaching pupils about the structure of the Mass and its responses.

At secondary level:

- Review the time allocation for Religious Education to ensure it meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference.
- Increase the percentage of teaching which is outstanding by improving pace and challenge in lessons which allows pupils to think, reflect and apply their learning.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to be involved in the planning and review of liturgies and Collective Worship.

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

St Matthew Academy has a vibrant Catholic ethos. The pupils understand and embrace the school's mission. Pupils from Early Years upwards are proud of their cultural diversity and exude an awe of self-worth and confidence. Members of the School Council appreciate that they have a voice. Those interviewed were eager to convey how their idea to install a 'Friendship Stop' in the playground had a beneficial impact on playtime. Pupils are proud of being ambassadors for their school in sporting activities and performing in the Gospel choir to support charities. Primary phase pupils benefit greatly from their engagement with pupils at the senior level, as the older pupils are good role models and support them with various activities. Parents cited how much they, "appreciate the all through school", stating that, "the older pupils are more gentle, communicative and helpful because of their daily encounters with younger children."

The pupils benefit from a range of retreat experiences. All Year 7 pupils participate in a residential retreat to St Cassian's, at Kintbury, which is part funded by the school. Other year groups are offered voluntary retreats to St Vincent's, at Whitstable.

Community cohesion is also a strength of the school. The whole school's 'House System' is very well orchestrated, as it serves to promote caring team spirits with cross-phase liaison and co-operation. Liturgies are inclusive, although these could be further enhanced by pupils being more involved in their planning and review. The 'open door' policy at the school allows the community to engage and have access to a range of quality facilities. The school maintains good links with the local Anglican parish, as well as other local groups such as The Mizen Foundation, Age Concern and Age Exchange.

Fund raising for a range of charities is well supported by pupils and an impressive sum of money is raised each year. During the inspection, two charities were presented with cheques totalling over £3,000, to support their good works. This included 'Anerly Cross' which arranges for sick people to visit Lourdes, as well as the local St Vincent De Paul Society.

The three Gospel choirs play an important part in the life of the school, as well as promoting the school in the local community. They sing in local parishes, as well as St George's Cathedral at Christmas. The lower school choir was rehearsing during the inspection and the pupils were clearly inspired by their teacher to sing in a joyful way, which was spiritually uplifting.

The secondary School Council told inspectors that bullying is rare and that they felt safe at the school. The pupils remarked on the inclusive nature of the school, which created an atmosphere of mutual respect. They highlighted the higher expectations of the school in terms of behaviour and very much appreciated the introduction of the one way system around the school. They also highlighted many of the improvements which have taken place over recent years. The pupils praised their teachers for being caring and approachable and always willing to go the extra mile for them.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Pupils achieve good standards in Religious Education. Progress across the primary phase is good, given that pupil attainment is below average on entry. Pupils state that they enjoy their lessons and their knowledge about the life and teachings of Jesus is good. Pupils' oral skills are better than their writing, where overall skill levels fall short of expectations. School strategies to address raising literacy skills are currently a focus area and, once embedded, standards will rise further.

In the secondary phase progress is good, due to an improvement in the quality of teaching. The pupils' very positive attitude to Religious Education lessons was witnessed during the lessons observed by the inspectors. Pupils particularly enjoy opportunities for group discussions and are respectful towards one another and the different views expressed. The pupils clearly valued the hard work and support provided by their teachers in lessons and in the extra sessions provided to pupils, especially during preparation for their public examinations.

Outcomes at secondary level are good overall and predictions for 2015 show a continuing upward trend. They are in line with expectations, taking into account pupils' ability on entry to Year 7. Last year, there was a significant fall in the GCSE results, partially as a result of changes to the examinations system nationally, but also due to staffing issues. The Principal and Subject Leader took rigorous action at the time and these staffing issues have been effectively addressed. The department has good systems for tracking pupil progress and the evidence provided to inspectors supports the view that GCSE results in 2015 will continue the upward trend of recent years.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

The pupils' engagement to prayer and Collective Worship is outstanding. Pupils in the Early Years are given a truly spiritual foundation in the purpose and power of prayer and these foundations are built on effectively in Key Stages 1 and 2. The engagement of pupils during the Key Stage 2 assembly witnessed during the inspection, was excellent as they were attentive, respectful and responded to prayer and reflection in a reverential manner. Prayer areas in classrooms have been introduced and reflect the pupils' engagement with their Religious Education topics and celebrate the liturgical year. The wording of the school prayer has relevance for all age groups and it is excellent to witness how the pupils invoke the intercession with genuine sincerity from the earliest age.

In the secondary phase, pupils also respond very positively to Collective Worship. In an assembly seen during the inspection, pupils were fully engaged by a range of activities, including meditation, prayer and two guest speakers who were presented with funds raised by the pupils for charity. The quality of the assembly was further enhanced by high quality singing provided by one of the school's three Gospel choirs. The theme of the assembly linked to the weekly Gospel reflection, based on The Transfiguration and change. This weekly Gospel reflection takes place across the whole school on a Monday, during 'Gospel Reflection Equals Action Today' (GREAT) time and contributes significantly to the ethos of the school and the spiritual development of the pupils.

Mass is offered every week in the school prayer room and whole school Masses take place on the Feast of St Matthew, for Advent and for Easter. Pupils make excellent use of the prayer room and very much value the support they receive from the Chaplaincy team.

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 the school are outstanding. The commitment and vision of the Principal is inspirational, as he is fully conversant with the Church's mission in education and has the determination to make the school the best that it can be. He is ably supported by outstanding leadership from both the Vice Principals, Head of Primary and Head of Secondary. Together, as a Senior Leadership Team, they have the experience, relevant expertise and an uncompromising and highly successful drive to move the school forward on its journey to becoming an outstanding Catholic school.

The SEF (self-evaluation form) is accurate, honest and comprehensive. The Leadership Team monitor and evaluate provision for prayer, chaplaincy, worship and liturgies and have correctly identified areas for improving provision in the primary section relating to teaching the pupils about the Mass. Inspectors identified that acts of Collective Worship are not conducted daily and this gap in provision needs to be addressed.

The school benefits hugely from an experienced and committed Governing Body, who know the school well. They provide an appropriate blend of both support and challenge and clearly hold the school to account. The Chair, who is also the Parish Priest, works closely with the Principal and meets weekly with him to monitor the work of the school. The Governors are kept fully informed on the Catholic life of the school through detailed termly reports from the Principal. The Senior Chaplain also attends the Catholic Community Committee of the Governing Body, which monitors the Catholic life of the school. Outcomes for students are monitored through the Learning Committee, ensuring accountability at all levels, which was a weakness at the time of the previous inspection.

Leaders and Governors are aware that the percentage of Catholics attending the school is low compared to other Catholic schools, but this has allowed the school to reach out to the local community and offer many disadvantaged pupils, who are not Catholic, a quality Christian education, again reflecting the mission of the Church. As one Governor said, "We do what we do, not for Catholics, but because we are Catholic."

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

Accurate self-evaluation of Religious Education provision at primary level is rigorous and reflects the drive by the Head of primary for continuous improvement. She brings a wealth of professional experience to the role and her vision is making a positive impact on raising standards and provision. Under her stewardship, staff morale is high and parents speak highly of her leadership skills. Well thought out strategies and procedures are now in place and, when these are embedded, outcomes in Religious Education will improve further. Provision and outcomes are regularly reported to and discussed by the Governing Body, who also fulfil their monitoring role by regular visits and observations. Leadership of the subject is good, as the co-ordinator has established a staff training programme to ensure that all teachers are equipped to deliver the curriculum. Assessment procedures

are developing well and pupil progress is tracked and monitored. To improve assessment provision further, leaders and staff should collate a school portfolio of pupils' work that is levelled against national criteria and moderated with one other school within the deanery. Further liaison with fellow co-ordinators at local primary schools would be advantageous to share and learn from best practice.

At secondary level, the Subject Leader has been appointed since the last inspection. She provides strong leadership to her staff, who were all newly appointed at the beginning of this academic year. She is a very positive role model to her colleagues, who greatly appreciate the support and guidance she provides. As a result, staff morale is high. The school has committed extra resources to increase staffing in the Religious Education Department and it now has very good capacity for further improvement. It has correctly identified the need to further improve teaching so that more of it is outstanding, in order to help the school to achieve its target of academic excellence. The department would benefit from the appointment of a 'second in charge', once the staff and resources allow.

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

The quality of teaching is good overall. An over reliance upon generic lesson plans has resulted in a lack of consistency. Where lesson plans are good, learning objectives are clear and concise, while pace and differentiated tasks meet the needs of all pupils. These need to be emulated throughout. Marking of pupils' work in the primary sector is affirmative, with pockets of dialogue about pupils' understanding. The school should review its policy in this respect and establish 'next step' procedures so that pupils know how they can improve.

At the secondary phase, teaching is most effective where pace and skilful questioning lead to pupil engagement. With current staffing and the further sharing of good practice, there is the clear capacity to increase the percentage of outstanding teaching experienced by the pupils to further improve progress and outcomes. The high quality of display in the Religious Education classrooms, as well as around the school, help to promote the positive working environment at the school.

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

The Religious Education programme, 'The Way, The Truth and The Life', is enhanced, enriched and extended by a variety of relevant Religious Education lessons and opportunities. The high profile given by the school to spread the Gospel message weekly through 'GREAT' serves to enhance pupils' knowledge, understanding and application of the Christian way of life. Enrichment opportunities, such as Advent and Easter celebrations, weekly reflection for pupils on 'The Wednesday Word', learning about the liturgical calendar, Chaplaincy guidance on 'Walk with Me' during the season of Lent and day retreats for pupils from Year 5 upwards, all serve to engage pupils in the learning process. Parents interviewed in the primary phase stated that they would welcome more information about the content of the Religious Education syllabus. Information about the Religious Education programme in the primary phase is also an area for development on the school's website.

Learning about other faiths is well established, in line with Diocesan guidelines. Curriculum enrichment opportunities, to teach pupils about consideration for others and appreciation of cultural diversity, are excellent with a broad range of age-appropriate events and celebrations. The school supports pupils who receive the first sacraments in their feeder parishes and marks the occasion with a special celebratory Mass in school.

In the secondary phase, pupils have two Religious Education lessons per week of one hour and five minutes each. This is less than the time recommended by the Bishops' Conference. However, the provision of time for 'GREAT' and the quality of Collective Worship also make a significant contribution to their understanding and learning.

'The Way, The Truth and The Life' forms the basis of teaching at Key Stage 3, but it is personalised to meet the needs of the pupils and to reflect the diverse nature of the school's intake. The study of three other World Religions is included as part of the study programme at Key Stage 3.

At GCSE, the pupils follow the course offered by Edexcel, which includes a unit of study on St Mark's Gospel.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

Collective Worship is outstanding, central to the life of the school and a key feature of whole school celebrations. Prayer is integrated into the school day. This is a marked improvement on the previous inspection, where prayer provision was identified as an issue for development. Pupils have opportunities to reflect, write and lead prayers, as witnessed even in the Early Years Department. Prayer is used very effectively to encourage pupils to live out the school's mission. This was observed during an assembly, when Key Stage 2 pupils joined reverentially in prayer to seek God's help to "make a real change for the better in their own lives and the lives of all the people they meet."

Although pupils in the primary phase attend Mass on a regular basis, further work needs to be undertaken to increase the pupils' understanding of the significance of the celebration of the Eucharist, the components of the Mass and its responses. Chaplaincy support in the primary phase is developing well, with provision to support classes to hold reflections in the 'Prayer Room'. It is evident, from reading the pupils' prayerful intercessions and observing them in acts of worship, that the school's provision for worship makes a strong impact on their spiritual development.

At the secondary phase, Collective Worship is well planned and the pupils respond respectfully and in a prayerful manner. It is enhanced significantly by the work of the Chaplaincy Team, who ensure they take into account the diverse nature of the pupils at the school. Pupils respond very well to the opportunities for meditation, both during year assemblies and when classes visit the designated 'Prayer Room'.

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