



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

STUART BATHURST CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL SANDWELL

Inspection dates 22nd - 23rd November 2010
Reporting Inspector Mr Joseph Skivington

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Mixed Comprehensive
Age range of pupils	11-18 years
Number on roll	823
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Fr Colin Fortune
School address	Wood Green Road Wednesbury West Midlands WS10 9QS
Telephone number	0121 556 1488
E-mail address	admin@stuart-bathurst.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	November 2007
DCSF School Number	333/4600
Unique Reference Number	104020
Headteacher	Mr William Branney

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors. The inspectors visited 8 religious education (RE) part lessons to observe teaching and learning, students' behaviour, and held meetings with governors, staff, and groups of students. They observed the school's work, including assemblies, and looked at a range of evidence, including key documentation such as the school's development plan, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in RE, and students' work.

Information about the school

Stuart Bathurst is an 11-18 Catholic High School and College of Performing Arts, with 823 students on role, of whom 56% are baptised Catholics and a further 20% from other from Christian backgrounds. Around 35% of staff are Catholic. Prior attainment on entry is about average. Students come from mixed socio-economic settings with 25% representing ethnic minorities. There are currently 110 students in the sixth form.

Overall effectiveness of the school as a Catholic school

Stuart Bathurst provides a good Catholic education with some outstanding features observed during the inspection. Every student is welcome to participate fully in its life regardless of faith or background. This openness springs from a clear acknowledgment of the intrinsic worth of each individual in the eyes of God, called to service in the His Kingdom. This is then realised through the community cohesion policy of the school, which provides fruitful links and effective outreach to the local community and beyond. Students generally respond well to daily prayer, as well as extra opportunities for voluntary participation in the school chapel, and play an active part in the celebration of the Mass and assemblies on the big occasions. The numbers involved in voluntary worship will hopefully increase with the encouragement and animation of the newly arrived chaplaincy worker.

Outcomes from the religious education programme are good overall, with satisfactory learning and progress at Key Stage 3, good achievement and attainment at Key Stage 4, and good results and steady improvement in the sixth form. Students with special educational needs, as a result of extra support in lessons and tasks which are appropriate to their learning needs, achieve as well as the others. The more able students are, on occasion, not as challenged and stretched as they could be, the result of the varying quality of individual teachers' expectations and planning for learning. By the end of Year 9 students have achieved a good level of knowledge and understanding of the topics covered. Attainment at AS and A level is average and standards are rising with most of the small numbers taking the subject achieving well given their starting points. The religious education programme makes a significant contribution to students' spiritual and moral development.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good. Issues raised at the last inspection have been effectively addressed. There is a sustained, although not solidly consistent, upward trend in standards of achievement due to good teaching in the well managed RE department. This trend is set to continue. Religious education and Catholic life are regularly monitored through well-embedded procedures, which include specific in-service education and subject reviews and reports, allowing for reflection and the revisiting of the mission of the school. The school is very aware of the areas of weakness, particularly in teaching and learning, and has put in place more effective strategies for improvement. The effectiveness of the chaplaincy in animating the prayer life of the school community is at present satisfactory, and further development plans aim to increase student involvement and response.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure a consistently high quality of teaching across the school, which challenges particularly the more able students.

- Develop assessment for learning which informs teaching strategies and shapes lesson objectives, and sharpen the impact of marking in Key stage 3 so that it shows students how to improve the quality of their work.

How good outcomes are for individuals and groups of pupils

Standards of attainment in religious education at the end of Key Stage 4 are above the diocesan average. All students at the end of Key Stage 4 are entered for either GCSE RE or an RE course with ASDAN. Results are very pleasing with 78% achieving A*-C or equivalent grades. This is the result of good and often outstanding teaching at this stage. At the end of Year 9 students achieve standards which are in line with expectation, when measured against the subject's own level indicators.

Results at AS Level have improved on previous years, with 100% pass rate, but only 2 out of 10 gaining grades A-B. At A2 Level in 2009, two out of seven gained grades A-B, with one C grade and 100% pass rate. Less able students particularly struggle initially with the demands of the subject at this level but are well supported and encouraged by their teachers. The growing numbers opting to take RE at A Level indicates the enjoyment and real interest in the subject. Students in the sixth form follow a core RE programme which is relevant and popular.

Students benefit much from the Catholic life of the school and in a variety of ways make a good contribution to it. They appreciate and value the Catholic ethos of the school but at the same time feel able to express their own views and seek a rationale for the Faith. They have a fair grasp of the different viewpoints of other faiths. They respond generously to the needs of others beyond the school and this makes a valuable contribution to the harmony of the whole community. Students take an active part in evaluating the quality of their school experience, and have the opportunity to reflect on the school mission, for instance, in lessons in Year 7. In interview, the school council representatives spoke of the benefits they perceived in the Catholic ethos, particularly the shared values, tolerance of other religions and viewpoints, community respect and the sense of belonging to a bigger family. All agreed that 'It makes you a better person'. Older students generously and effectively mentor and help the younger ones, after undertaking appropriate training, and organise a variety of events themselves. The students appreciate these opportunities to play a part in the running of the school, and to act responsibly in representing the views of every group of students through the active school council. They have noted in their time at the school that their voice is heard more and that they are given real responsibilities and opportunities for service, not least through fundraising for a number of charities.

Their response to, and participation in, collective worship when there are well-planned liturgies for special occasions, such as All Souls Day Mass, Christmas, and Easter assemblies, is good. Response to voluntary Masses and opportunities for prayer is affected in some measure because of difficulty in finding an ideal slot during the busy school day. But nevertheless, respectable numbers take the time to attend and become actively involved. Students are prayerful and reverent at prayer in the classroom and assembly. The quality of assemblies ranges from the outstanding to the satisfactory. In Year 7 there was an excellent opportunity for students to lead prayer, with strong, confident reading, contributing thoughtfully to a reflection on the condition of the trapped Chilean miners. This led on to heartfelt prayers for their safety and their loved ones, which showed a real depth of understanding and concern for others. The parish priest is an always available, popular and supportive figure in the celebration of the Mass and the Sacraments, and a welcomed, familiar figure to the students and staff.

How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the school

The Catholic life of the school is promoted effectively by leaders and managers, who plan realistically and review continually how to nurture the ethos of the school. There are clear procedures in terms of feedback from parents and students shaping the development plan, and

regular reports to the governing body on the health of the school ethos. Induction for new staff on the distinct nature of a Catholic school is part of a wider Inset for all staff on spirituality and ethos which the school itself feels could be developed further. A whole school mission is already planned for 2011. Collective worship is monitored, with close liaison between governors, senior leadership and the chaplaincy to ensure a good provision for assemblies and liturgies. The RE department makes an invaluable contribution to this provision by taking the lead and supporting the chaplaincy. The school will benefit further from having a new chaplain to animate the school prayer life. Tutors are well supported by useful and relevant materials to encourage a good quality of daily prayer for their charges, and students confirm that they pray every day with their tutor group. The success of leadership and management is seen in the students' good behaviour and care for others and their very good relationships with peers and staff. The governing body provides effective challenge and knowledgeable support for the Catholic dimension of the school, setting targets for performance and visiting the school frequently. They meet all statutory and canonical requirements fully, such as those pertaining to curriculum and time allocated to religious education. The chair of governors, who is also the parish priest, monitors the quality of provision and gives very knowledgeable support to the department, as well as to the senior leadership team.

The leadership and management of RE under the present acting head of department is maintaining standards and moving the subject further on, in terms of profile and student interest in continuing with RE at A Level. Priorities are clearly laid out and planned for, and through lesson observation and subject reviews the quality of teaching and learning, although variable, is steadily improving with extra support given when needed. The level of self evaluation and the analysis of results at all stages are good. The tracking data on student progress is used well, though not consistently so, but is certainly making a real impact especially on the very pleasing GCSE results.

There is a clear policy promoted by governors and senior staff to promote community cohesion with the result that the school has an openness to all, all are included in its life, and generous outreach to the local and global community is a strength of the school. The school collaborates well with other Catholic schools and participates in community undertakings, such as the Sandwell Project and links with Tanzania. The major festivals of other faiths are marked and celebrated. There are music and drama groups who work in the community. Those of other denominations or faiths feel that they are able to express their beliefs comfortably. Students explore other faiths to some considerable depth through the RE curriculum. All groups of students feel included and welcomed into every aspect of the school's life.

The quality of the school's work in providing Catholic education

The quality of teaching is solidly good with both satisfactory and outstanding practice observed during the inspection. Teaching in the sixth form is good and this is reflected in the good achievement of students at AS and A Level, as well as the relevant engagement offered by the core RE course popular with all sixth form students. Challenging teaching encourages the students to think for themselves, through research, independent and peer learning, and peer assessment. This was well exemplified in an outstanding lesson to a class of Year 11 students with specific learning needs, who were caught up in their work, enthusiastic and very focused. Teacher expectation was high and students rose impressively to the challenge, demonstrating skills of presentation to the whole class and well reasoned arguments for their opinions. As a result a group who might well be considered not able for GCSE were working at, and determined to get nothing less than, a B grade. Students are given very helpful examination preparation, especially in evaluative writing, and although examination orientated, the lesson objective does not neglect the important aspect of learning from religion as well as about religion. Such excellent practice could fruitfully be shared and imitated by all teachers, especially where lessons are over didactic and the teacher fails to challenge particularly the more able students because tasks are too easy and they face little probing questioning. There are some pockets of weaker classroom management which the school is tackling supportively and effectively. Assessment for learning is having a growing impact on lesson planning to meet the different learning needs of the students, but is inconsistent especially at Key stage 3. The scrutiny of written work indicates that full, formative marking helps the students to see what they must do to improve. Anything less than this has little impact on progress.

The learning needs of all groups of students are addressed well by the curriculum. Curriculum *Directory* and diocesan requirements are met fully. The previous thematic approach at Key Stage 3 has been evaluated, as suggested by the previous inspection report, and a return has been made to discrete teaching of RE in Years 7 and 8. Relationship education is dealt with sensitively and clearly, consistent with the teaching of the Church. Teaching about other faiths is included in the curriculum with extra curricular activities and visits, so that students can understand and have a conversation about similarities and differences between the world's major religions. Resources are well managed. ICT is used very effectively as a teaching aid, but also as a research resource.

Provision for collective worship is good. There are ample opportunities for spiritual nourishment through prayer, assembly, voluntary discussion groups, rosary groups, and retreats. Masses are celebrated on key liturgical days, with helpful focus provided by the new Mass booklets. The liturgical season is well marked and celebrated, particularly Advent, Lent and Holy Week. The school is planning realistically to improve provision and the impact of the chaplaincy.