



INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

ST BERNARD'S VOLUNTARY AIDED CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL

Daws Hill Lane, High Wycombe, HP 11 1PW

DfE School No: 825/4701

URN: 110516

Head Teacher: Mr R Simpson

Chair of Governors:

Reporting Inspector: Mr J Welsh

Associate Inspector: Mrs M Shinkwin

Date of Inspection: 23 November 2010

Date Report Issued: 10 January 2011

Date of previous Inspection: December 2007

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and
in partnership with Buckinghamshire Local Authority

Information about the school

St. Bernard's is an 11-18 mixed Catholic secondary school in the diocese of Northampton and Buckinghamshire Local authority. The School exists within a selective system although it does not select on ability. It has been a specialist science college since 2008. There are 675 pupils on roll of which 371 are Catholic (55%). 34 members of staff are Catholic out of a total of 74 teaching and support staff. Attainment on entry is below the national average. 2.7% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Mobility into the school after year 7 is high. St. Bernard's is a member of the Buckinghamshire Catholic schools' Partnership.

Overall effectiveness

Grade 2

St. Bernard's is a good Catholic school with many outstanding features. The spiritual and moral development of pupils is nurtured by the liturgical and prayer life of the school. Standards of achievement in RE are good at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and satisfactory at Key Stage 5. Teaching and learning are good in RE. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good. The governors provide strong support to the head teacher, subject leader and lay chaplains. The Head teacher has a mature vision of the nature of Catholic education and communicates it effectively to the school community. The subject leader is a dedicated and experienced manager and has led the department successfully since the last inspection.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding. Since the last inspection general RE is taught in year 12 and there have been 5 symposia for Key Stage 5 RE. The lay chaplains have substantially more time and resources and the renewed use of the chapel. The school mission in July is a testimony to the expertise and dedication of the chaplaincy team. Links with parishes and deanery are developing. Registration and assemblies are monitored for the quality of prayer provision, and resources have been improved. Quality assurance procedures in RE lessons are good. The Senior Leadership Team and subject leader have been trained to Ofsted standards in lesson observations. The parent portal is being developed to aid communication with parents. Morale in the school is high.

What the school should do to improve

- continue to develop the very good work of the Chaplaincy paying close attention to the provision of masses in the liturgical year
- use assessment consistently to raise attainment
- commit staff and resources to Key Stage 5 RE
- review provision for the very able within RE.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade1

Pupils contribution to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. Pupils are proud of their Catholic school. Moreover, it is very popular with families of other faith communities in the town. Pupils are courteous, helpful, and thoughtful. They consider their school to be very friendly with a strong sense of community. One year 13 pupil said that he travelled on public transport 21 miles to and from school getting on the bus at 7 each morning, and has done for 7 years. His reason for doing so was: "It is a Catholic school; everybody knows and cares about each other. I don't want to leave!" Pupils interviewed formally and informally, all said that they loved the school, and that there is a strong sense of belonging. The school council co-chaired by the Head Boy and Head Girl meets regularly to provide a forum for pupil voice. Their agenda and recommendations are always taken seriously by senior management and acted upon when it is appropriate to do so. Peer mediators have been trained and function in years 10-13 to deal with some of the issues which concern pupils in their daily life. When asked what makes your school distinctive they replied: "It is a very strong community and the teachers are extremely supportive." They feel that the school lives out its mission statement.

Pupils participate in and enjoy the different celebrations of the liturgical year and take full advantage of the opportunities provided. Presently, they are marking the first Sunday in Advent with wreaths for each form. Furthermore, each form is preparing a Christmas hamper of foodstuffs to give to the SVP to distribute to elderly residents in the town. Two acts of worship and one registration were observed. Each assembly was pupil led, carefully planned, resourced and appropriate to the audience. Pupils were visibly moved and felt inspired to act on the scenario presented to them. Pupils were attentive and challenged. Applause was spontaneous at the end of the assembly. In registration, prayer was pupil led. They were quiet and reflective. The teacher followed up the prayer with his own exegesis. Pupils are at ease when praying collectively.

Chaplaincy provision is outstanding. It is valued by pupils, staff and members of the wider school community. Pupils feel cared for and are very aware of the need to put their faith into practice in their daily life and in serving the wider community. The leadership team gives chaplaincy its full support. This is reflected in the school mission in July, two trips to Rome a trip to Kenya the Cafod group and "Connect". The weekly prayer sheets are comprehensive and a valuable source for tutors, governors and placed on the Virtual Learning Platform. The school newsletter to parents always begins with a religious reflection by the Head teacher.

Progress in pupils' learning is good at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and satisfactory at Key Stage 5. Approximately 70% of pupils make 2 levels of progress at each key stage. Pupils are aspirational and keen to give of their best. They enjoy their RE lessons. At Key Stage 4, 109 pupils were entered for GCSE RE. 69% gained a C grade or above. Attainment is good at this key stage.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

The Head teacher, senior leadership team, subject leader and chaplains provide outstanding leadership in guiding this school community on its faith journey. In particular, the Head teacher's leadership is inspirational. There is a strong sense of moral purpose throughout the school. The Catholic mission is apparent everywhere and is understood by the wider school community. Pupils and parents are very aware of this, can articulate it and value it greatly. The Catholic nature and mission of the school is reflected in all its paper work. This is an important key issue in the school development plan. The SEF-RE needs a sharper focus and the departmental development plan smart targets.

The RE subject leader is effective and committed. Monitoring is good and contributes to raising attainment. He carries out quality assurance procedures such as lesson observations and work sampling on a regular basis and has been trained in lesson observations to Ofsted standards. Data is analysed closely leading to careful planning and targeting of resources. Gifted and talented provision needs to be factored into planning.

The governing body is very effective in its challenge and support of RE provision. The governors impact on the whole life of the school. Each governor is a departmental link governor. The RE governor is assiduous in visiting the department and chaplaincy. She has a thorough working knowledge of the department and is creative in suggestions and ideas. The governing body has the experience and knowledge to challenge and support the school in its work. The chairperson is active as a trainer for the diocese and the local authority. The governors are in contact with parents and pupils, are aware of issues when they arise, and are experienced and confident in challenging weakness.

The provision for Community Cohesion is outstanding. Inclusion is a central feature of school life and pupils relate well to people of other faiths and backgrounds. They have a developed sense of global citizenship and their duty to their neighbour. Local, national and international charities are supported by the school. All pupils feel part of this and enjoy assemblies where development themes are explored. Diversity is celebrated and pupils form relationships easily. Strong links exist between the school and other faith communities in the town. Chaplaincy is exemplary in forging such links and accommodating and sustaining these relationships. The RE curriculum offers opportunities to learn about world religions and pupils have a working knowledge and respect for the belief systems of others.

Provision

Grade 2

Prayer is a significant feature to life in the school. The staff pray together at morning briefing and the pupils' day begins with prayers in registration or assembly. The assemblies observed were good; they were pupil led, involved music and power point presentations and were prayerful. They encouraged reflection and reminded us that we are all members of the 'Body of Christ'. Assemblies were carefully planned and well resourced. Pupils were attentive and

respectful. Chaplaincy provision is very impressive. It is available to all in the school. Pupils of other faith communities are supported and affirmed on their faith journey.

The quality of teaching in most RE lessons is good, and sometimes outstanding. The teachers are subject specialists and the department is fully staffed. Sometimes the pace of lessons needs to be augmented and greater challenge offered to the more able students. The department needs to plan for greater differentiation in lessons. Every RE teacher was observed as was every key stage. Pupils enjoy their RE lessons. They are carefully planned well resourced and generally appropriate to pupils' abilities. Pupils make good progress.

The RE curriculum meets the needs of pupils at Key Stage 3 and 4, enjoying 10% of curriculum time. At Key Stage 5 general RE is offered to year 12. This is understaffed. This provision will be rolled out to the whole key stage in 2011. Resources and staffing need to be reviewed if this is to be successful and meaningful. The curriculum provides a good understanding of the Catholic and other world faiths. Lessons are creative and enjoyable. Consequently, pupils are highly motivated, on task, and enjoy lessons. Pupils' spiritual and moral development is very well catered for. Further opportunities for spiritual enrichment are offered by chaplaincy.

Achievement is celebrated, monitored and assessed. The department is developing expertise at levelling. Pupils are challenged and their progress tracked. Assessment could be used more consistently to raise attainment and demonstrate to pupils how to improve. In work sampling, some diagnostic marking was in evidence. However, marking was sometimes cursory and there was little evidence of peer and self assessment. Regular and consistent assessment would improve confidence and attainment.

The inspectors enjoyed visiting St Bernard's and very much appreciated the warm hospitality extended by all members of the school community.