



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 103013

St Philomena's Catholic High School for Girls
Pound Lane
Carshalton
SM5 3PS

Inspection date: 16 & 17 September 2013

Chair of Governors:	Dr M Howard
Headteacher:	Miss M Noone
Inspectors:	Mr J Carvill Miss S Powell

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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

St Philomena's is a voluntary aided comprehensive school for girls founded in 1893 and is in the trusteeship of the Congregation of the Daughters of the Cross. It is situated in the Sutton Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark and is maintained by Sutton LA. The parishes which the school serves are St Elphege's, Wallington; Holy Cross, Carshalton; St Andrew's, Thornton Heath; St John the Baptist, Purley; St Teresa's, Morden; St Peter and Paul, Mitcham; St Aiden's, Coulsdon; St Anne's, Banstead and St Mary's, Croydon. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 100% in Years 7-11 and 90% in the Sixth Form. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 8.6% in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and 3% in the Sixth Form.

The school takes pupils from 11 to 18 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 1283. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is above average. The percentage of students from minority ethnic groups is 40.6% which is well above the national average of 23.5%. The percentage of students with statements of Special Educational Needs is 4.3% compared to the national average of 12.1%. The percentage of students whose first language is not English is 12.8% which is in line with the national average, (13%). The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is 10.6% which is significantly below the national average of 26.7%. 1.8% of pupils receive extra support in class. About two thirds of pupils are white British and the rest are mainly from white Irish, white other and black British-African heritage.

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

St Philomena's High school for Girls is an outstanding Catholic school. It achieves both academic excellence and outstanding personal and spiritual development for all pupils.

The leadership of and management by the headteacher is outstanding. She has a very clear vision for the school, leads a dedicated senior leadership team and hardworking staff and is an excellent role model for the girls. In her vision and management she is strongly supported by a highly committed governing body.

Pupils make an outstanding contribution to, and benefit from, the religious, spiritual and pastoral life of the school and their attainment and achievement are also outstanding. The monitoring and evaluation of the provision in Religious Education and the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. Teaching is overall good and often outstanding and pupils make outstanding progress at St Philomena's.

The school has successfully addressed all the issues raised at the last inspection (April 2008). For example, there is now a nationally recognised Religious Education course in place for Sixth formers and the quality of worship in form tutor time is now very good. The school has done well to double the amount of time given to Religious Education in Key Stage 3 since the last inspection. However, at 8.6% of curriculum time, it is still less than the 10% laid down by the Bishops' Conference.

The inspectors believe the school has, under the present leadership, excellent capacity to improve even further.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

In order to improve even further the Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Ensure that when planning lessons in Religious Education teachers ensure the instructions to pupils are clear and that the tasks or activities to be undertaken match the abilities of the pupils.
- Encourage those leading assemblies and Tutor Group Acts of Worship to provide more time for pupils to reflect or meditate.
- Complete the consultation on the Mission Statement as soon as is practical.
- Continue to increase the amount of time for curriculum Religious Education so it meets the requirement of the Bishops' Conference.

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

Pupils' contribution to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school is outstanding.

Pupils take full advantage of the opportunities offered to them at St Philomena's and are happy to contribute to all aspects of school life. In particular, sixth form students are exceptional in terms of witness and as role models for the younger pupils. They achieve this by their proactive service to the whole community through the many leadership groups, such as the environmental group, the e-safety group, the teaching and learning group and the school council, to mention but a few. Year 7 pupils feel welcomed into the school and many expressed the view that they were 'joining a family'. Pupils have a strong sense of justice and fairness for all, both within the school and beyond its gates. For example, the school community raised just under £19,000 last year for various local and national charities. Many students undertake voluntary work with children with multiple disabilities; others campaign for Street Child Africa, while Year 12 students are involved in community service in the local area on Wednesday afternoons.

Pupils feel safe in the school and are very happy to be here. They are very appreciative of the pastoral care and support they receive. Year 7 pupils are particularly appreciative of the 'buddy' system whereby they have a Year 11 mentor assigned to them to look out for them during their first year.

Pupils are delightful to talk with. They are self-confident and have a strong pride in and respect for the Catholic identity of their school where they 'buy into' the ethos and legacy of the school's founding Order. Relationships between pupils and pupils and between pupils and staff are excellent.

Pupils take a full part in and enjoy the prayer life and collective worship of the school and they are comfortable praying, singing at assemblies or participating in liturgies. For example they act as Eucharistic Ministers, servers, readers or choristers. It is this network of spiritual and religious activities that gives the pupils the time, space and intellectual tools to reflect on and deepen their own faith.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Pupils' achievement and attainment are outstanding at all key stages. At Key Stage 3 93% of the year group reached level 5 or above. 78.4 % got to Level 6+ where 24% exceeded their expected target grade and 12% reached Level 8. At Key Stage 4 95% were awarded A*-C grades (national average for girls 78%), with 51% gaining A*/A grades (national average for girls 38%). At AS and A2 level 83% and 93% (national average for girls 81%) were awarded A*-C grades respectively, with 100% pass rate at both levels. The achievement of some groups, for example, minority ethnic pupils, pupils with learning needs and free school meals, were particularly outstanding. 100% of those Year 12 students entered for the new NOCN level 1, passed. The Religious Education results are among the best in the school. It is a high achieving department in a high achieving school.

Overall pupils make outstanding progress in Religious Education. They enjoy the lessons and their behaviour is exemplary. They are curious and collaborative learners, working well with each other and responding well to the challenges of the teachers.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

Pupils actively participate in the prayer and liturgical life of the school with enthusiasm. They are involved in the many Masses and Eucharistic services as Eucharistic Ministers, readers, musicians, choristers and altar servers. Pupil and staff attendance at the voluntary Mass on Tuesday mornings is very good indeed with some 40-50 pupils attending. Pupils' involvement in assemblies is extremely good. An excellent house assembly, led by sixth form students, was seen during the inspection in which the pupil body responded with great respect and reverence and sang the school prayer/hymn with great gusto. Equally pupils are active participants in form tutor prayer time where they lead the prayer or undertake the reading. Pupils are confident and comfortable in praying and see prayer as a fundamental part of school experience.

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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

The leadership and management of St Philomena's is outstanding in its promotion, monitoring and evaluation of provision for the Catholic life of the school.

The headteacher is dedicated to the school, conscientious in her role and committed to Catholic education. She has a very clear vision of what a Catholic school should be, a vision she shares with and is well supported by a dedicated governing body and a hardworking senior leadership team all of whom are deeply committed to the Church's mission in Catholic education.

The Self Evaluation Form (SEF) for RE is a very accurate, honest and comprehensive document. It is discussed annually with the governors. The senior leadership team monitor and evaluate the provision and quality of prayer, chaplaincy, worship and liturgies regularly through observations, spiritual life questionnaires, retreat questionnaires and discussions with pupils.

There is a well thought-out school development plan which has eight strands or intents, the first of which is to promote and enhance the spiritual and Catholic life of St Philomena's. The relatively recent appointment of a full-time chaplain and the allocation of a substantial budget to chaplaincy is testimony to the importance the leadership and the governors place on maintaining and promoting the spirituality of the whole community. The governing body meets fully its statutory duties and goes beyond this in offering challenge and support to the senior leadership team. In 2012 it established the Catholic Ethos committee to involve more governors in monitoring and supporting and enhancing the Catholic life of the school. The committee receives a verbal and written report from the chaplain, who sits on the committee, concerning activities and planning which impact on the spiritual development and growth of the community, for example, about chaplaincy, retreats and liturgies.

There are very good links with the local parishes and many of the priests visit the school regularly to celebrate Masses on key school days, or the weekly voluntary Mass on Tuesdays. A 'pool' of some 12 priests is called on to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Lent. Links with the Catholic feeder schools are extremely good as are links with other Catholic girls schools in Wimbledon and in Hammersmith when, for example, students visit these schools for leadership conferences.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and many spoke enthusiastically about the headteacher's leadership, the staff's care for the girls and the Catholic ethos. "Simply an outstanding school with a strong sense of community and inclusion", "I could not wish for a better environment to nurture the faith of my daughter" and "The pastoral care of the girls is exceptional", are some of the opinions expressed by parents and which sum up the view of the vast majority. These opinions are supported by the findings of the inspectors.

The iconography in and around the school – the statues, the crucifixes, religious icons - demonstrates the school's distinctive Catholic identity. The legacy of the Daughters of the Cross and the gospel values of love, compassion and forgiveness permeates through all aspects of school life.

Cross curricular activities contribute enormously to the promotion of the spiritual life of the school, in particular in music and art where some impressive work by pupils was seen on display.

Almost all the school policies are based on or make reference to the Church's teaching or the Gospel values. The Mission Statement is currently being reviewed through a wide consultation exercise with all the stakeholders to ensure ownership of and commitment to the final version.

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

The position of Head of Department has been vacant since September this year. The school has tried, and continues to try, a number of strategies to appoint a suitable candidate. In the meantime one of the Deputy Heads oversees the team of Religious Education teachers. He offers a clear direction and his emphasis on distributive leadership allows team members to lead on various areas and initiatives.

The provision for Religious Education is effectively monitored in a variety of ways: formal lesson observations, which are logged and issues arising addressed; regular work sampling; 'learning walks' by the senior leadership team. There is a robust system of assessment, tracking pupils' progress and setting targets. Pupils are assessed four times per term. The information gained from these monitoring exercises is shared with the whole department and new targets are set or intervention strategies devised to improve teaching and learning. The information is also used to complete a detailed and comprehensive SEF RE and identify priorities for the departmental development plan. The department planning is set within the context of developmental priorities for the school.

The Standards and Progress Committee of the governors scrutinises the examination results in Religious Education. The Chair of Governors and one other governor are the link governors with the department whom they meet formally twice a year when they visit lessons. They also meet regularly, informally to act as 'critical friends' and mentors. They have an excellent knowledge and understanding of the work of the department.

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

The quality of teaching is overall good and often very good to outstanding.

Where lessons are good or better they are well structured and delivered. For example, the planning of a sixth form Religious Studies lesson was meticulous in detail. Such lessons have clear and obtainable lesson objectives which the pupils understand. They contain suitable, challenging and relevant activities for the ability group. Teachers have high expectations of pupils, both in terms of work and behaviour. Most lessons have very good pace. Excellent use is made of ICT. For example a powerful video clip was seen in a Year 8 lesson on evil and suffering which provoked challenging questions. Teachers also challenge pupils to extend their thinking through excellent questioning technique. Pupils' contributions and achievements are recognised and acknowledged and their self-worth is nurtured through constant encouragement, praise and affirmation. Differentiation is generally very good and is provided by tasks, additional resources or by outcome. In the lessons seen excellent use was made of the learning assistants. Here the teacher makes prior contact so that the assistants know the lesson topic and intended outcomes and are then able to provide the optimum support.

In those lessons that occasionally need improvement it is usually because more attention needs to be given to lesson planning. In particular more care should be given to making sure instructions to the pupils are clearly understood and to ensuring activities are suited to the abilities of the pupils.

Relationships, behaviour and attitudes are exemplary in all lessons. Teachers provide a safe and secure environment in which pupils feel valued and in which they make very good progress in Religious Education.

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

The Religious Education curriculum is appropriate to the needs of the pupils. At Key Stage 3 the curriculum has been developed in-house and is based on the national projects 'Icons' and 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' and covers the themes outlined in the Curriculum Directory.

In Key Stage 4 pupils follow the AQA specification with a study of Roman Catholic Ethics and Roman Catholic Traditions. All pupils are entered for GCSE examination. At AS and A2 level the department follows the OCR Religious Studies specification, which incorporates modules in Philosophy of Religion and Religious Ethics.

The General RE course in Year 12 is the nationally recognised NOCN 'Award in general Religious Education' Levels 1 and 2. The topics are highly engaging, encourage independent thinking and lead to personal development and skills that will support post-16 students across the whole curriculum and in adult life.

Pupils take advantage of and benefit from the rich opportunities for spiritual and moral development that are provided by the department and chaplaincy such as visits to places of religious interest or significance, for example, Lourdes, The Vatican, Aylesford and local places of non-Christian worship.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

The quality of collective worship is, overall, very good and often outstanding.

During the inspection an excellent House Assembly on community and identity was observed. It was thoughtfully planned and well led by sixth form students and contained excellent interaction with and participation by pupils. Excellent use was made of ICT and music to enhance the experience and all pupils sang the school prayer/hymn with great enthusiasm.

There is a full programme of school Masses on all Holy Days of Obligation that fall in term time, on the school's key Feast Days, as well as a welcome Mass for Year 7 pupils, a Leavers' Mass, a weekly Mass for tutor groups, a voluntary Mass every Tuesday and a Eucharistic service twice a week, led by Sixth Form girls.

During Lent, Stations of the Cross are organised. There is a weekly Benediction service in the school's beautiful listed chapel and The Rosary is recited during May and October. Since the last inspection form tutor prayer time has improved significantly and is now very good. There is a reading based on the theme for the week provided by the Chaplain and a prayer, which all pupils say. Pupils are reverent and respectful. The quality of the form prayer time could be improved further by providing a little more time for girls to reflect or meditate on the reading or their own spiritual needs.

Chaplaincy is good. The newly appointed Chaplain leads and co-ordinates prayer, collective worship and liturgies as well as supporting form tutors through weekly themes and prayers for their form period prayer time. He also offers high quality daily reflections on the school web site. There is a strong religious formation programme in which all pupils in years 7-9 have retreats at Aylesford Priory or in-house reflection days, while there are opportunities for residential retreats at Kintbury, in Berkshire, for girls in the upper years.

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