



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 118908

St John Fisher Catholic Comprehensive School
Ordnance Street
Chatham
ME4 6SG

Inspection date: 8 - 9 July 2014

Chair of Governors:
Headteacher:
Inspectors:

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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

St John Fisher School is voluntary aided, situated in the Chatham Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark and maintained by Medway Local Authority. The principal parishes which the school serves are St Michael the Archangel, Chatham; Our Lady of Gillingham, Gillingham; St John Fisher, Rochester and St Simon Stock, Walderslade. The vast majority of pupils live in the local ward, which is one of the most deprived in the South East (Chatham Central). The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 31%. This number dipped over previous years and is now beginning to increase. The school is also a choice for those of other Christian faiths and other faith backgrounds. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in Key Stages 3 and 4. In the Sixth Form the percentage ranges from 6.73% for all pupils who study a programme on the NOCN course through to 29% for those pupils taking up additional opportunities such as A level courses and liturgical debating.

The school takes pupils from 11 to 18 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 852, including 129 in the Sixth Form. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is below average (KS2 APS 25.2 as compared with national 27.9) because of the influence of six grammar schools in the area working within the selective system operated by Medway Local Authority. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average as is the percentage of pupils with special educational needs. The school is ethnically diverse with about half the pupils from white British backgrounds, while pupils from Eastern European and black African heritage make up the largest minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is high.

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 John Fisher School has been on a significant journey of improvement since its last Section 48 inspection in September 2010, hence it is now outstanding. The school has successfully addressed the issues from the last inspection and it is clear that there is excellent capacity for sustained improvement in the future. The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding and governors are very effective. The Governors, Headteacher and all leaders monitor and evaluate provision for Catholicity and regularly plan and implement improvements to outcomes for pupils. The Headteacher's leadership is inspirational, while her Catholicity and spiritual beliefs are evident throughout the school both physically, culturally and in dealings with staff and pupils. The Headteacher clearly has a different horizon to her job. She is well supported by an excellent senior leadership team, who share her passion for improvement, and a desire to make their mission statement a reality. Pastoral care is a strong feature throughout the school, while pupils and staff benefit from a dedicated Chaplain, who acts as a counsellor and spiritual mentor. All pupils feel safe and are happy in their learning. Throughout the community at St John Fisher there is mutual respect and a common purpose, hence pupils readily capitalise upon opportunities to participate in the Catholic life of the school and give to others selflessly. This was evident throughout the inspection. Moreover parents recognise the fact that the school has improved, thus they are overwhelmingly supportive. Collective Worship is outstanding and pupils always participate in assemblies through music, presentations and talks to others pupils.

Standards in Religious Education are good, as is the quality of teaching and learning, while the leadership and management of the department are outstanding. The Religious Education curriculum meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory and the Bishops' Conference. St John Fisher has excellent links with the local deanery and is now becoming a very popular, oversubscribed school.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Continue to raise attainment in Religious Education to outstanding through:
 - consistently challenging the most able pupils;
 - providing all pupils with opportunities for independent learning.
- Review and rationalise the documentation needed to sustain improvement and pupil progress.
- Further develop the school's retreat programme.
- Fully engage all stakeholders, for example, by including parents and pupils in the 'Faith, Mission and Ethos' meetings.

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

The school has moved considerably in its development of wide ranging spiritual activities for pupils and as a consequence opportunities for contributing to the Catholic life of the school are excellent and include all pupils in a community which is not predominantly Catholic. It is this aspect of St John Fisher which makes the school truly unique. St John Fisher is a very welcoming learning community which lives out the mission statement in its everyday life hence the motto underpins the ethical values and practices of pupils. Facilitated by the Chaplain and Heads of Years, pupils deliver assemblies and lead prayers during session three of the timetable through chapel prefects, who support prayer for those staff who do not have a faith. All pupils appreciate and value the Catholic tradition and religion, whilst at the same time having a sense of pride in their own background and personal worth. The high priority given to inclusiveness is epitomised annually with the John Fisher Feast day where pupils celebrate and contribute to Mass and engage in prayerful activities during PSHRE. Pupils who do not feel able to involve themselves directly in liturgies enjoy choir music by pupils and participate in charity activities. Local priests are attached to year groups and work with the chaplaincy team and pupils to plan the liturgy of the word and read their own prayers and intentions. Form prayers and meditation exercises are common across the school, while celebration is a major aspect of everyday life, be it for pupils or staff. The school's 'behaviour watch' system encourages a Catholic approach to behaviour for learning with a focus on praise, achievement and aspiration leading to rewards for pupils.

The Retreat Programme is being developed by the Chaplain to include every year group since the Year 7 retreat to Aylesford has been highly successful and more days of recollection have been asked for by pupils. While this is an area for development by the school, the Chaplain's improvement plan and Religious Education departmental development plans have already catered for future developments in this area. Every opportunity is used by the school, not only to listen to the student voice but also to embed its distinctive Catholic character. Many pupils participate in the 'Student Medway Citizenship' awards and recently they have been winners of a Chaplaincy award and other prizes for contribution to the Kent area. The school has also extended its 'outreach programme' to include the Diocese of Damongo resulting in a volunteer group travelling to Ghana in summer 2014. The aim of the programme is to get as many pupils as possible to experience the lives of the people living there. Ventures such as the 'Outreach Programme' make a huge impact on the pupils of the John Fisher school and highlight once again a community whose objective is to give to others who are less fortunate. In addition to various opportunities for pupils to be involved in local, global and national communities, time is regularly set aside to raise monies for charity by all classes, the main ones being, Cafod, Macmillan and a Demelza Hospice for children. Such enterprise indicates a very strong sense of community and the fact that pupils take on responsibilities and participate well in the Catholic life of the school. All pupils are very loyal and supportive of St John Fisher School and they appreciate the hard work by staff and relentless focus on improvement. They equally appreciate the fact that staff make time; time to listen, time to talk to them, and time to care.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Pupils make good progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 given their low starting points and APS on entry to the school. At Key Stage 3 62.1% achieved level 5 and above, while about half of the cohort of pupils are currently working at an A* -C grade in Religious Education. Three year trends of attainment and achievement at Key Stage 4 show that there is evidence of improvement and that an increasing number of pupils are entered for the full course. Attainment in Religious Education for 2013 was good at 73.9%, an improvement of 10% on the previous year. Despite not matching the improved standards achieved in English, the number of pupils making three (67.9%) and four levels of progress (46.3%) exceeded the school's own target by 30%. The Religious Education department's projections for 2014 indicate possibly lower outcomes for pupils due to the change to linear exams, however clear action plans for improvement are in place for the future. At Key Stage 5, tracking data and predication for the summer of 2014 indicate that pupils will achieve the best ever grades. The steady improvement in results over time is due to the good to outstanding teaching and the passion for the subject by all teachers and pupils. It is also the outcome of clearly targeted intervention strategies, such as 'walking, talking mocks' and using streamlined revision sessions to tackle white English boys' underachievement, which impact positively on pupils' final results.

The standard of religious literacy is high. For example, a Year 8 lesson about 'sin and salvation' showed that pupils were able to use key words appropriately and in context, while they were able to differentiate between different types of sin using valid judgements. The standard of pupils' oral work is excellent and their writing is reflective. Throughout the school, pupils' attitudes to learning are consistently positive which enhances their progress in Religious Education lessons. Pupil progress over time is good to outstanding, while behaviour in lessons is exemplary. During the inspection the majority of pupils said that they enjoyed Religious Education, that they learnt well in class, and that it was one of their favourite subjects. Dedicated Religious Education classrooms are well placed and equipped. Displays that illustrate elements of the curriculum and celebrate pupils' work contribute to a positive learning environment.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

The Eucharist and prayer are central to the day to day life of the school. Pupils in Years 7 to 13 regularly prepare and lead excellent worship with confidence and enthusiasm, in a variety of liturgies. All pupils are respectful, reverent and open to participating in Masses, assemblies, prayers in the Chapels situated in the centre of the school, or other acts of worship. The organised PSHRE programme, which has been established since 2013, enriches the quality of pupils' response to worship by fostering a culture of independent religious thought and student leadership. For example, in the Sixth Form the student leadership team includes two pupils responsible for liturgy and liturgical literacy, while all sixth formers willingly participate in Catholic events such as penitential and carol services. In addition the liturgical teaching and debate sessions which are held weekly with a local deacon, allow pupils to develop their liturgical literacy and impact significantly on pupils' holistic development and understanding of worship. The Choir which was heard during the inspection was enchanting to listen to, while the atmosphere in the assemblies based on moral issues, was spiritually moving. Prayers are a regular feature of form time, and the Chaplain produces booklets of classroom prayers and worship resources centred around liturgical seasons and focused on the Sunday readings. These support and guide staff and pupils to participate in meaningful prayer and worship. The Chapels are regularly used by all pupils as a place for quiet reflection and their feedback highlighted

that they valued this area of the school.

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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

Given the transformational work that has been developed over the last few years at this school, leadership and management is outstanding. The Headteacher supported by a totally committed governing body and leaders at all levels, has an exceptional creative imagination which enables her to understand that serving others is key to living the Gospel and articulating the Church's mission. All leaders and governors are energised by the task of school improvement, and inspire others to believe that using one's gifts from God achieves excellence. The relentless focus on self-evaluation, school improvement plans, departmental plans, target setting, tracking data and clear outcomes for pupils has led to outstanding improvement in all areas, including those related to the spiritual and moral development of pupils. The school can therefore now afford to streamline its paperwork and concentrate totally on the craft of teaching and learning. The impact of the Headteacher is particularly impressive in her partnership work with other schools such as St Pauls Academy, St Simon Stock, St Gregory's, the Sixth Form consortium and the Catholic Teaching School Alliance all of which are aimed at ensuring excellent provision.

The Governors of the school are steadfast in their support of the school and the Headteacher, while they are actively dedicated to securing excellence in a Catholic context. They understand all that occurs at St John Fisher and through extensive reports, formal calendared and timetabled meetings with the Headteacher, meetings with the Chaplain, visits to the school, the 'Faith, Mission and Ethos' committee they hold staff to account and safeguard a Catholic interpretation of education. The governing body itself has three clerical representatives and the school Chaplain sits on the governing Faith Mission and Ethos committee, which is chaired by the local Parish Priest. The governor 'Faith Mission and Ethos committee' works closely with the Headteacher to maximize spiritual and liturgical provision across the school.

To monitor and evaluate the Catholic and liturgical life of the school, Governors engage in learning walks, lesson observations, discussions with pupils and staff, while they meet with senior leaders as and when appropriate. Their support can be defined as one of intelligent accountability; hence there has been vast improvement. A local primary school headteacher who is a member of the governing body, was effusive about the academic and Catholic transformation of the St John Fisher School. The school community is characterised by high morale with inclusion for all self-evident.

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 Religious Education department is led by a Head of Department, a Religious Education specialist, and is line managed by an Assistant Headteacher, a subject specialist in PSHRE. This enables the department to have outstanding leadership with a balance of resourcefulness and wisdom. The Assistant Headteacher also line manages the Chaplain, reports to the Headteacher and is a member of the senior leadership team. This shows that leaders and managers give high importance to Religious Education in the curriculum and the school. All Religious Education staff are subject specialists with an excellent

knowledge and appreciation of the concepts of Religious Education. There is a strong and successful focus on raising standards and ensuring that the curriculum contributes positively to the faith development of pupils.

Leaders and governors copious self-evaluation is a reflection of rigorous monitoring, searching analysis and self-challenge. Outstanding use of the assessment process has resulted in well targeted planning and strategic action taken by the school. In addition, outcomes in Religious Education accurately match pupils' ability through high quality monitoring, evaluation and review processes. Leaders and governors specifically monitor and evaluate through book scrutinies, lesson observations, pupil and parent questionnaires and discussions with various groups of pupils. Priorities for the next academic year and beyond have been set and high quality planning and processes are in place to ensure improvement in attainment and achievement. Assessment and tracking data are regularly reviewed by all leaders and it is common practice for staff to share lessons observations, all of which are consistently graded good, and contribute to self-reflection. The school has strong links with the Diocese, with senior leaders regularly attending meetings and training offered by the Diocesan Education Commission.

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

Based on the lessons observed and evidence prior to inspection, the quality of teaching in Religious Education is good, with examples of some outstanding teaching. As a result all groups of pupils, including SEND, or those with disabilities, make good progress and achieve well over time in Religious Education. Consistently high quality marking of pupils' work and constructive feedback has led to improvement in pupil progress and is a particular strength of the department. Teachers systematically and effectively check pupils' understanding throughout lessons, which ensures that learners are confident in the classroom and willing to participate in discussion. All teachers have high expectations. They plan and teach lessons that deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding of Religious Education and enable them to develop a range of skills across the curriculum. There is a wide range of resources in the department and there is a collaborative approach to working with pupils in all year groups. Where lessons are outstanding they are well planned and challenge all pupils to think and work independently enabling pupils to learn exceptionally well. For example, in a low ability Year 8 class on Gurdwara, the teacher used well-judged and imaginative strategies, including setting homework that matched individual needs accurately, while the use of the LSA was excellent. Pupils at all key stages commented upon the engaging nature of Religious Education lessons and the variety of teaching styles adopted.

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

The Religious Education department is innovative in the way it presents the curriculum. The Religious Education curriculum is matched to the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. The department successfully seeks to regularly improve the coherence and relevance of well-planned courses to provide exciting opportunities for pupils to learn. As a result, they are in the process of re-writing various Key Stage 3 schemes of work. Currently at Key Stage 3 they provide a broad and balanced curriculum, which is 10% of dedicated curriculum time. In addition, the Religious Education department provides foundational learning for pupils of other or no faiths and opportunities for academic and personal development for more confident pupils of the subject. It is clear that following the separation of Religious Education from Humanities, the subject has improved provision for all pupils by creating schemes of work that relate to their needs and interests. All pupils therefore are enthusiastic and highly motivated learners who fully benefit from the spiritual, moral and vocational guidance provided in Religious Education lessons. At Key Stage 4 the school offers the Edexcel Religious Education GCSE, covering Unit 10: *Roman Catholic Christianity* and Unit 3: *Religion and life based on a study of Roman Catholic Christianity* which together also meet the requirements of the Bishops' conference. At Key Stage 5 the Religious Education department offers the OCR *Philosophy of Religion and Ethics* A Level course in line with the majority of Catholic schools in Kent. As a consequence they are able to share resources and teaching practices with other Catholic schools in the area and are able to make use of the resources and expertise of speakers such as Peter Baron who is the founder of the website 'Philosophical Investigations and Pushmepress'. It is evident that this popular A Level serves the pupils by providing the best materials, resources and expertise as well as making links between their GCSE and A Level learning.

Since the last Section 48 Inspection St John Fisher has established a post-16 non-

examined Religious Studies course affiliated with NOCN which has allowed them the freedom and flexibility to meet the needs of all Sixth Form pupils.

Cohesive and reflective curriculum practices have resulted in the Religious Education department collectively producing excellent lesson plans which secure good to outstanding progress for all pupils in lessons. In addition, all leaders have prioritised the School Improvement Plan to ensure that the Religious Education department is well resourced with a comparable budget to other core subjects. Sufficient funds are also set aside for whole school enrichment activities and trips linked to Religious Education which supports the spiritual growth of all pupils.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school is outstanding. It is at the heart of the Catholic life of the school as evidenced on both the upper and lower school site. All areas of the school displays outstanding exhibitions and presentations of religious art, pupils work, photos and Stations of the Cross, while the Mission Statement encourages pupils to "develop individually, collectively and freely a way of life modelled on Christ." Physical representations are constant reminders that the Headteacher and Governors place great importance on the Catholicity of the school, so that the organisation is seen not as simply a place of business, but of people. Prayer opportunities for staff and pupils are planned in a manner that attracts and facilitates worship. The staff briefing, interaction with each other and pupils underline how prayer is at the centre of the school's philosophy. There is a very comprehensive programme of assemblies, Masses and liturgies, linked to the liturgical calendar and pupils are actively involved in all, either as readers, servers at Masses or musicians. The upper and lower school assemblies were thought provoking and had a clear message, and it was obvious that moments for reflection were the norm. Pupil feedback said that they relished such moments of quiet. Pupils' liturgical formation therefore is well planned, appropriate to their faith backgrounds and shows progression. All pupils, including those with different religious beliefs, are assisted and supported in their prayer rituals by staff and numerous priests who regularly provide assistance with liturgies, advent, lenten penitential services, other sacramental services and day to day spiritual development. Thursday reflections by the Chaplain for year groups are another opportunity for pupils to gain an insight into the benefits of both individual and collective prayer.

Exceptional Collective Worship is promoted by a rigorous school development plan, by the 'Faith Mission and Ethos' committee, by student leaders and chapel prefects, and by the Chaplain and Religious Education department. This secures excellent provision.