



# Diocese of Westminster

The Sacred Heart Language College  
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DFE Number: 310/4700

Headteacher: Miss G A Higgins  
Chair of Governors: Mr J Coyle

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Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Archbishop of Westminster  
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Date of inspection: 25-26 November 2013  
Date of previous inspection: 8 October 2008

Reporting Inspector: Mrs S Nolan  
Associate Inspectors: Ms N Brady,  
Mr D Callaghan

## Introduction

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, students and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspectors spent two days in school, visited nine lessons and an assembly and carried out several discussions with school staff, pupils and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons, examination of school documents, and a number of learning walks across the school.

The Inspection of the Sacred Heart Language College was carried out under the requirements of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Framework and Schedule for Section 48 Inspections approved by the Archbishop of Westminster. The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the school is in providing Catholic education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation.

## Description of School

The Sacred Heart Language College is a five-form entry, 11-16 girls' school in the London Borough of Harrow and the locality of Wealdstone. The college serves over 24 parishes as well as catering for families from the local parish of St Joseph's. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is close to 99%. The proportion of students who are from other Christian denominations is around 1% and from other Faiths, 0.2%.

There are 742 pupils on roll, with 18 students with a statement of special educational need. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is well above average as is the proportion of students that speak English as an additional Language. There is a below average rate of families claiming free school meals.

### Key for inspection grades:

*Grade 1\*: Outstanding;*  
*Grade 1: Very Good;*  
*Grade 2: Good;*  
*Grade 3: Requires improvement;*  
*Grade 4: Causing Concern.*

## **What is the overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy?**

**Overall Grade: [1\*]**

The overall effectiveness of curriculum religious education is outstanding in developing students' religious literacy. The implementation of the curriculum directory is well embedded and supports very well all provision at each Key Stage. Students have a very good knowledge of the religious education curriculum and understand increasingly well how it is witnessed in daily life. Students experience high levels of success in external examinations but also are encouraged to reflect on what they believe, why they believe, and how they implement their beliefs in their daily lives. There are clear structures in place to sustain at least good and often outstanding teaching. The leadership of the department has high expectations and communicates these very well to the specialist staff, encouraging a shared vision and a desire to be even better professionals. Self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate. The department's contribution to supporting the college's mission is exemplary and permeates all aspects of the college.

## **What has improved in classroom religious education since the last inspection and what should the school do to further improve in classroom religious education?**

Since the last inspection, the school has sustained high attainment, a fast rate of progress for all students, and very good levels of challenge for the most able. High expectations of the most able students are demonstrated clearly in the strong outcomes at Year 11 in the advanced supplementary examinations. In order to sustain its excellent outcomes for students, the school has developed an innovation plan to nurture its high quality practice and creative approaches to the students' learning. Schemes of work have been matched to the curriculum directory as have resources to further develop classroom practice. The school is also working on embedding the diocesan levels of attainment within its assessment systems and in the renewed Key Stage 3 curriculum. Extensive professional development has continued and new technologies are now well embedded within all lessons. The Year 11 external accreditation has been changed to allow for sufficient challenge for all students.

The school has agreed the following areas for improvement in curriculum religious education:

- ensuring that planning always allows each student sufficient opportunity to deepen her knowledge of what is being taught and has enough time for reflection in lessons
- continuing to foster the existing academic rigour in lessons whilst nurturing even more students' self-understanding of a lived faith.

## **How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?**

**Grade [1\*]**

The religious education curriculum is firmly based in the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. The schemes of work across the school reflect a systematic study of God, the life and teachings of Jesus and the Church, and the central beliefs of the Catholic faith. Work done across the school has been mapped against the Directory, and the departmental schemes have explicit links to the Curriculum Directory with clear references to resources used as well as to how key aspects of the content are taught and assessed. At Key Stage 3, the curriculum has been re-modelled to provide a challenging and innovative approach so that the gap between primary and secondary work can be bridged carefully. At Key Stage 4 students study successfully for external accreditation on a par with their other core subjects. Well-focussed links to other faiths such as Islam and Judaism are in place at both Key Stages, clearly seen in display in classrooms. Schemes of work are so designed as to meet the needs of all groups of students and in particular to challenge the most able. The

departmental team strives constantly through its imaginative resources to offer students as many opportunities as they can to develop their spiritual lives building on their academic success.

### **Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education**

**Grade [1\*]**

Students typically achieve highly in religious education at each Key Stage. Students' attainment in religious education compares exceptionally well with their performance in other core areas and is regularly well above average. In GCSE examinations, a high proportion of students, double that nationally, gained A\*/A grades in religious education. Over 90% of students gain a higher A\*-C GCSE grade, including those from other faiths. Students make very good progress throughout their time in the school. Those Year 11 students studying at advanced supplementary level also achieve very well. Students' work over the school year is accurately assessed and well informed by the diocesan levels of attainment. Examples of moderated work are readily available and used well by staff to ensure consistency in grading. The school gives high priority to its target setting and tracking of religious education and monitors progress as rigorously as in other key curricular areas. Regular and thoughtful marking, ensures that students' progress is checked thoroughly.

### **The quality of teaching**

**Grade [1\*]**

Students learn very well in lessons. This is clearly reflected in their examination results but also in their work in class. Lessons are characterised by warm working relationships which give students the confidence to flourish and openly discuss their thoughts and understanding. Specialist staff have excellent subject knowledge and the students' knowledge base is systematically strengthened and built upon. High expectations of the students mean that they take their study of religion very seriously. At the same time, staff are striving to help the students apply their learning to their lives but recognise that this is an area where even more can be done. The most successful lessons involve the students very actively in supporting each other in discussion and in clarifying their ideas. This was very evident in a very good session for Year 7 on what feelings Mary may have experienced in her role over the course of Christ's life. In a Year 11 lesson, students coped well with sensitive topics because of the teacher's careful orchestration of the topic. They were able to express their thoughts comfortably without fear of being wrong.

The work in students' books and folders demonstrates high levels of religious literacy. Students communicate knowledgably about the faith, the Church, and their everyday experience of Catholic living. Teachers' marking of their written work is regular and gives very good guidance on how to improve. Many students respond well to this guidance, making their own written response. Most students have a clear picture of their long-term targets but are not always totally clear on how their current work matches up to these targets.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education**

**Grade [1\*]**

The religious education department is outstandingly led and managed. The department builds its work on the school's mission statement of '*Confident in God's love for us, we commit ourselves to his service*'. Management responsibilities are well distributed across the staff who follow through conscientiously and draw on their own research backgrounds and personal study to back up their daily work. The department is well supported by senior leaders and by members of staff from across the school community. There is a clear vision and direction for religious education, shared by all departmental members as well as a relentless focus on improving teaching and learning through a

range of professional development activities. The team are creative and reflective and share the well established culture of new ideas and collaborative working to meet the needs of all students. Non-specialist staff who teach occasional lessons are well supported not only by the specialist staff but also by the detailed schemes of work and imaginative resources. The department is very successful in leading thinking and developing opinion across the school, particularly through resourcing for the personal and social education programme, making links with the Gospel of the week.

## **B. The Catholic life of the school**

*How well do pupils experience the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing through all areas of school life?*

**What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?**

**Overall Grade: [1\*]**

The overall effectiveness of the school in developing students' experience and understanding of a Catholic way of life is outstanding. The governors, headteacher, senior leaders and all those responsible for religious education ensure that the school's mission is recognised as the core of the curriculum, both by staff and by the students. This is demonstrated in the priority given to the allocation of curriculum time, resources, staffing and accommodation. Worship and prayer are central to the life of the school and offer students a rich experience of Catholic tradition as well as liturgical celebrations. There is a rich sacramental life as well as opportunities for personal prayer and devotions. The chapel is thoughtfully placed at the heart of the school. Liturgical celebrations are well linked to the Church's calendar and students play a very active part in their preparation and planning. The school is committed to excellence in all facets of its provision, including the development of the students' spiritual life. The school's commitment to the common good is outstanding. Students flourish at the school and have a strong sense of working for others and doing their bit to secure justice.

**What has improved since the last inspection and what should the school do to further develop the Catholic life of the school ?**

Since the last inspection, the school has maintained and further strengthened its partnership links at all levels. The work has continued to liaise with the sixth form college, and the local boys' Catholic school. In particular, links with schools throughout the world that have been founded by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions, have matured. This has encouraged the students' understanding of the Church's global mission. The school has also given high priority to the re-location of the school chapel so that it is right at the heart of the school. Students take great pride in their contribution to the refurbishment, especially the work on making the altar and designing the windows.

Governors are very clear that the Catholic life of the school has strengthened significantly under the current headteacher. They evaluate the impact annually of the Catholic life on the students' understanding of how to live out their Catholic Faith. The induction of new staff ensures that upholding the school's Catholic ethos and participating in the Catholic life of the school is non-negotiable. Parents, too, are regularly invited to the weekly Mass and invited to join in prayer at other school events.

As a result of rigorous self-evaluation, the school has agreed that the following area is a priority for improvement:

- helping students even more to apply their intellectual understanding of the faith in their daily community life.

## **The place of Religious Education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget**

### **Grade [1\*]**

The school meets fully the requirements of time of the Curriculum Directory. At Key Stages 3 and 4, students spend at least 10% of the available curricular time in religious education. The department rejoices in a specialist staff and a full-time chaplain. The budget matches well that of other core areas. Religious education is seen and valued as the core of the curriculum. The specialist classrooms, although in temporary accommodation, are well maintained and equipped with new technology and other resources, well used by staff.

The school's mission, 'Confident in God's Love, We Commit Ourselves to his Service' is exceptionally well promoted both within the department and throughout the school. Staff and students share a common determination to use their talents as well as possible in the best interest of their Catholic community and in the service of others. Staff also have regular opportunities to join in in-service training from the Diocese and to develop their expertise through gaining further Catholic qualifications. Days begin with prayer. Students, in discussion, are completely secure in their 'school family' with its wrap-around care. Parents also confirm their high degree of satisfaction with the Catholic life of the school.

## **The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community.**

### **Grade [1\*]**

Prayer and worship are at the heart of the school and are a key part of every school celebration. There are regular acts of worship, including morning prayer, year- group Masses, and weekly Mass in the school chapel and local parish Church. Students engage and respond in a very respectful manner that empowers them to deepen their understanding of the Eucharist. There are many opportunities to celebrate and worship with parents at such events as the Welcome Liturgy for Year 7 students, the Year 11 Leavers Mass and the Carol Service Liturgy. Liturgical events and daily prayers throughout the school reflect the rhythm of the Church's calendar. Assemblies involve the whole school in carefully considered themes and tutor time provides opportunities for prayer on a daily basis. Students are regularly very engaged in the planning and preparation of prayer and worship – each class has a Prayer Book written by students or prepared by the school. This is a very inclusive resource, valued and respected by staff and students alike, and reflects the diversity and needs of the entire community.

Opportunities for reflection are encouraged positively and punctuate the school day. Assemblies provide an opportunity to reflect on the distinctive nature of the school and the mission statement, and to celebrate success and recognise individual gifts and talents. The Catholic identity of the school is evident from the entrance hall and throughout. The governors, parents, staff and students are aware that the teaching of Christ underpins the school curriculum and drives the staff to strive for excellence in the spiritual development of each student. Landmarks in the students' development such as Confirmation are celebrated regularly in conjunction with the local parish. The school provides outstanding opportunities to promote the students' spiritual development through reflection and meditation, discussion and shared understanding of what it means to be a practising Catholic.

**The commitment and contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice.**  
**Grade [1\*]**

The school's commitment to the Common Good is outstanding. Charity initiatives are extensive and students have a strong sense of identifying with the charity that is the year group choice. Students are very active in the service of others. They volunteer as peer mentors in the 'Heart to Heart' scheme, and act as prefects among many other opportunities to share their gifts and talents both within the school day and in extra-curricular activities. Students feel that their voice is valued and that they can make a difference both to their own community and in the wider world. They have a strong desire to help those less fortunate and a real appreciation of the part they can play. They are keen and responsive to both local and global situations and want to put their faith into action. For example, students, themselves, asked for the opportunity to support the relief effort in the Philippines. This is also demonstrated in the work they undertake to achieve the first stage in the UNICEF Respecting Rights School Award. Their support of local needs is also prioritised and they provide, for example, food parcels for a local charity. In discussion, both students and staff, shared many examples of how the school promotes justice among its own family but also considers world issues in lessons, assemblies and other events.

Students clearly enjoy celebrating the richness and diversity of their community and every opportunity is taken to encourage mutual respect. They spoke with great pride of their school and activities. Students from a wide range of different backgrounds are recognised and valued so that they flourish as individuals who understand the importance of wider local and world issues. They are very aware of the moral and social issues within society and are keen to share their views, listen to others and reflect upon the impact of their actions. In this way, they are personally helped to develop their gifts and talents in the service of others.

**Enabling the authentic partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf;**  
**Grade [1\*]**

The Sacred Heart Language College sees itself clearly as part of the diocesan family. The school's leadership promotes strongly the belief that a successful Catholic learning community does not work in isolation. The school works very closely with parents and carers, doing its best to guide parents in their support of the students' development. Regular newsletters help keep parents and other community members up to date on the progress of the school's Catholic mission as well as on its other pursuits. The parent survey prior to this inspection shows a wide degree of satisfaction with the work of the school. Around 13% of parents responded and all were very positive. The school carries out its own survey regularly so is well aware of parents' views and concerns if any. Close partnerships with other Catholic schools in the area as well as with other secondary headteachers enables the school to place Catholic education at the centre of strategic planning.

The school is an active member of the diocesan community. Besides its own professional development through diocesan links, it is always willing to support if necessary other Catholic schools. Staff and governors regularly attend training events run by the diocese. The school Chaplain attends deanery meetings and liaises with the local clergy in planning the school's liturgical celebrations.



**The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school.**

**Grade [I\*]**

The headteacher, the leadership team and governors are striking examples of teamwork and determination. They have built and sustained an outstanding Catholic school where the spiritual and all-round development of staff and students is their priority. The mission statement, formulated in agreement with all members of the community provides a clear focus for daily worship and work. The governing body focuses regularly on how well the school is developing its Catholic mission and ethos.

School policies are clearly placed in the context of the school's distinctiveness as a Catholic institution where staff understand their roles in serving and enriching the needs of the school. The school's mission is expected to inform the work of every department. All members of staff, be they catholic or not are held to account for how they promote the common good and the school's catholic mission and ethos. Support for the religious education department is central and at least similar to that for other core subjects.

The positive approach by the school to its students is summed up by the chaplain's words. The school aims to 'see the face of Christ in each student'.



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Reporting Inspector: Mrs S Nolan

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*Grade 4: Causing Concern.*

#### **A. Classroom Religious Education**

##### **What is the overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy?**

**Overall Grade [1\*]**

How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?

Grade [1\*]

Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education

Grade [1\*]

The quality of teaching

Grade [1\*]

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade [1\*]

#### **B. The Catholic life of the school**

##### **What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?**

**Overall Grade [1\*]**

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget

Grade [1\*]

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community

Grade [1\*]

The commitment and contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice.

Grade [1\*]

The partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

Grade [1\*]

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school.

Grade [1\*]