



Diocese of Westminster

John F Kennedy Catholic School

Hollybush Lane, Hemel Hempstead, HPI 2PH

Telephone: 0144 2266150

e-mail address: admin@jfk.herts.sch.uk

DFE Number: 9194619

URN Number: 117557

Headteacher: Mr P Neves

Chair of Governors: Mrs H Houston

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

Date of inspection: 17, 26 January 2013
Date of previous inspection: January 2009

Reporting Inspector: Mrs S Nolan

Introduction

The inspector would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspector spent two days in school, visited four lessons and carried out a number of interviews with school staff, pupils and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, discussion with local clergy and the chaplaincy team, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents. The continuity of this inspection was interrupted by severe weather conditions.

The Inspection of John F Kennedy Catholic School, Hemel Hempstead 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 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 school is a six- form entry secondary school in the local authority of Hertfordshire and the locality of Hemel Hempstead. The school serves the parish of St Mark's. The parish church is on the school site. It also serves families from several other parishes with a reach as far as Luton. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 92.5%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 6.5% and from other Faiths, 0.5%.

There are 1120 students on roll, with ten students with statements of special educational need. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is below average as is the proportion of pupils speaking English as an additional language. There is a below average proportion 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.

A. Classroom Religious Education

How religiously literate are pupils in the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith and how well do they know, understand and appreciate the importance of religious faith and practice in everyday life?

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

Overall Grade:[1*]

Classroom religious education develops students' religious literacy exceptionally well. This is clearly demonstrated in the highly successful outcomes at GCSE and at post-16. Not only do students succeed outstandingly well in examinations, they also show a genuine interest and enthusiasm for their religious studies. Sixth formers were impressive in their desire to study further at university with surprising numbers opting to study Theology in a range of courses. This was all the more remarkable because of the high grades asked for by university departments. Students at all levels also demonstrate very positive attitudes towards their Catholic faith and show a willingness to put that faith into action.

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

At the last inspection, the department was asked to improve the consistency of its marking and to further the sixth-form retreat programme. In the latter, it has succeeded exceptionally well. General Religious Education is common to all sixth formers. Marking is certainly undertaken regularly and well, although there is still more to do in making sure that all students respond actively to teachers' guidance on how to improve their work. Besides this, departmental staffing has improved with almost all specialist teachers and the timetable allocation for religious education meets the 10% requirement at Key Stage 4 as well as providing a 5% allocation for those post-16 students not following a full A-level course.

Besides improving the students' response to marked work, the department would like to enhance students' skills and confidence in liturgy planning and extend as far as possible its programme of visits to a wider range of places of worship. Because of increased time-table allocation, the department also wants to revisit the Year 9 curriculum to make best use of the additional lessons.

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

Grade [1*]

The schemes of work of the religious education department are very clearly linked to the curriculum directory and well suit the needs and potential of the students. This is reflected not only in excellent academic results and the high numbers choosing to continue their academic studies in the sixth form and beyond, but also in the very positive views of parents, students and staff as to how well both Catholic practice and a community ethos are generated through the religious education department. Students' gains in religious literacy are outstanding because schemes of work are carefully planned and refined so that students with a range of abilities and faith development can flourish.

Since the last inspection, the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 has been further amended to provide what is now a very coherent study of the Catholic faith, mapped carefully to the 2012 curriculum directory. Similarly at Key Stage 4, specialist staff can relate each lesson to an area within the

directory. There is extensive coverage of moral and spiritual issues as well as relationships with other major world faiths. In each year, students make an in-depth study of one world religion. This not only contributes purposefully to supporting community cohesion but also to students' understanding of what it means to support the common good through the study of religion and human rights.

A creative and expanding resource base adds richness to lessons and helps staff to meet successfully students' learning needs, as well as encouraging independent learning. Pastoral days, retreats and themed events such as the 'Justice, Faith and Knowledge' day in Year 10, all add positive value to the school's efforts to sustain the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Post-16 course specifications have been developed to follow logically from students' key stage 4 experience. The general course for Years 12 and 13 follows a similarly rigorous and stimulating programme which students greatly appreciate.

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

Grade [1*]

Students join the school with knowledge and skills that are generally above average. The religious education department skilfully promotes their progress so that their achievement is outstanding. Students attain well above average results at the end of Key Stage 4 that exceed their successful attainment in other core areas of the curriculum. At Key Stage 3, regular in-house assessments through well-structured open-ended tasks, surface opportunities for all students to excel. Around three quarters of Year 9 students reach an impressive Level 6. Those post-16 students following Level 3 courses in Religious Studies achieve significantly well. Religious Studies has the highest value added score of all A2 courses. Other sixth formers continue to develop their religious literacy well through the well established general provision. In religious education lessons, students engage well in discussions of moral and religious issues as in the lessons on abortion and marriage.

The quality of teaching

Grade [1*]

Teaching is consistently never less than very good and the cumulative effect of such daily experiences results in the impact of teaching being outstanding. The specialist well qualified staff have a deep knowledge of the Catholic faith. Their informed understanding of how to challenge students to do as well as they possibly can in religious education lessons underpins the students' fast rate of lessons. They have high expectations of them in terms of academic work and their personal development and behaviour. Lessons are carefully planned to allow students a degree of independence through thought-provoking activities and discussions that engage and interest students. Staff shares a common vision to advance the students' understanding of their faith and of the foundations on which it is built. This was clearly seen, for example, in two lessons, one exploring St Mark's Gospel and one exploring how Catholics interpret the Bible in their daily lives. Students learn to apply the idea of stewardship to their own learning, increasingly taking responsibility for their progress and talents. Staff checks on students' learning are thorough and regular, and students receive much helpful feedback both written and oral. However, there are examples of marking that is less than the best and this is an area that the department rightly recognises could be further improved. Students, too, do not always respond actively to teachers' marking, thus missing opportunities to advance their skills and knowledge. Parents are routinely involved in students' learning through the Learning Platform. Not all parents, however, perceive that they have such opportunities to keep informed about learning in Religious Education.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade [1*]

The department, together with the senior leadership of the school, shares a commitment and a vision to and for high quality religious education for all students. The department leader promotes exceptionally well a common sense of purpose and a strong understanding of the nature of Catholic

religious education. There is a relentless focus on improving teaching but also a desire on the part of all members of the department to work as a team and contribute in whatever way they can. Specialist staff are very well qualified academically. They are also very knowledgeable as to the requirements of examination specifications. All members of the team share resources and ideas through which to enhance students' understanding. Professional development, both in-house and through diocesan activities, are valued and effectively managed. Recent examples of training for staff include experience with the Holocaust Education Trust and a focus on assessment for learning. Very good use is made of departmental meetings to discuss new areas within the curriculum, displays, moderation of students' work and the celebration of good practice.

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 school's overall effectiveness in developing students' experience of Catholic life and belief is outstanding. Members of the governing body and senior leaders, together with the religious education department, go the extra mile to make sure that Catholic life is at the centre of staff's and students' experience of school. This is clearly demonstrated in the time given to Religious Education, to liturgical events and to out-of-hours activities. Members of staff are confident in their roles as members of a Catholic Faith community and new staff are expected to participate as best they can in contributing to the school's Catholic life. Guided by the headteacher, professional development activities are well geared to sustaining and fostering a catholic ethos and to developing well-qualified young people able to participate in the Church's mission. Leaders and managers at all levels are exceptionally effective in promoting the Catholic life of the school.

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 Year 9 curriculum has been strengthened by the development of pastoral days. The curriculum time for religious Education is now securely at 10% for all of Years 7 to 11. Accommodation has been much improved. Schemes of work have been modified and developed to make them congruent with the new curriculum directory. There is greater student leadership of liturgical events and assemblies and the house system now has patron saints.

The department is always seeking to improve even further and recognises that it must find ways to involve hard to reach parents who perceive they are not well informed about the provision and practice of Religious Education in the school.

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 for the delivery of Religious Education. At Key Stages 3 and 4, all year groups spend 10% of the available timetable time on Religious Education. As well as specialist AS and A2 courses, post-16 students have 5% of curriculum time for Religious Education. The department is well served by good accommodation in a purpose-built block with six specialist classrooms, all well equipped. Its budget matches that of other core areas. The school is fortunate to have on its site, the local parish church which is available for students' use as well as

that of the parish. Besides specialist teaching staff, the department is also supported by the parish priest and the chaplaincy team. This team works across several parishes and is thus able to facilitate contact between the school and distant parishes. Governors, too, are closely involved in the Catholic life of the school and in the local parish, so that all staff are supported in their contribution to the Catholic life of the school. All, including those who are not Catholics, are supported through regular inset, staff briefings, meditation and through support for curricular events such as assembly. All staff, whatever their traditions, are expected to take part in school liturgy and prayer events.

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

Grade [1*]

‘My child feels a sense of community. Her spiritual beliefs have grown with her fuller understanding of the Catholic faith.’ Thus wrote a parent on a questionnaire. This reflects the fact that prayer and worship are central to the life of the school. The liturgical year is woven into the school year with students having excellent opportunities to experience the rhythm of the Church’s calendar. The life of the school is grounded in prayer. The academic year begins with a welcome Mass and ends with a farewell liturgy. Each day there are class prayers and key festivals are brought to the attention of the whole school. Students support liturgical events as altar servers, lectors, Eucharistic ministers and as musicians. Some lead school liturgies. Advent and Lent are marked by themed displays and events. Pastoral days and retreats offer genuine opportunities for prayer and reflection. Year 10 appreciate their in-house ‘Justice, Faith and Knowledge’ day, reflecting the school’s mission statement.

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

Grade [1*]

The school mission statement puts ‘justice’ at the heart of the community. This is underpinned by the way the school promotes an understanding of the diverse community in which the students live and by the way that equality of opportunity is encouraged at all levels of school life. Hard- to- place students are welcomed to the school. Well-established school systems ensure that respect and value for each individual is central to its daily life. The religious education curriculum offers students the chance to reflect and grow significantly in their understanding of the theology underpinning respect for diversity and their action for social justice through topics such as ‘Speaking Out’ in Year 9 and through exploration of areas such as conflict, reconciliation and social harmony at Key Stage 4.

Generally students are very active in the service of others. They volunteer, for example, as peer mentors, support younger students in lessons, act as prefects and offer support for school events. Besides this, however, the students are encouraged to look outwards and support a range of charities both at home and overseas. This is particularly so during seasons such as lent and Advent. CAFOD, a children’s hospice and Great Ormond Street, a teenage cancer trust are but a few of the organisations benefiting from the students’ generosity through a range of innovative activities. Students are very conversant with current business ethics and moral issues through the very well prepared and informed discussions in all year groups.

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 school makes a very positive contribution to the life of local Catholic parishes. There are very strong links with the local parish, not least through sharing resources and facilities. Senior staff, as well as the religious education subject leader, regularly attends diocesan events, meetings and

training. The regular attendance of the local Bishop at school celebrations serves to remind staff and students of the school's place in the diocese and in the universal Church. The subject leader is active in supporting the training of local deacons in their formation period. Involvement in such as the Lourdes pilgrimage helps raise students' awareness of the Church's world-wide mission.

Frequent communications, a parents' forum, programmes to support bereaved and other families are all part of the school's efforts to involve parents in the Catholic education of the students. Despite these efforts, around a quarter of the 200 (out of 1200) parents that returned questionnaires perceived that they were not well informed about Religious Education and worship and that they were not welcomed to school liturgies. The department makes good use of new technologies to keep parents informed. Regular newsletters to the many parishes served by the school also keep families up to date. However, the school appreciates that despite these efforts there are still parents who view their involvement as too little. Both senior leaders and the religious education leader are more than ready to strive even harder to make parents feel involved.

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

Grade [1*]

Members of the governing body and senior leaders, together with the religious education department, go the extra mile to make sure that Catholic life is at the centre of staff's and students' experience of school. This is clearly demonstrated in the time given to Religious Education, to liturgical events and to out-of-hours activities. Staff are confident in their roles as members of a Catholic Faith community and new staff are expected to participate as best they can in contributing to the school's Catholic life. Guided by the headteacher, professional development activities are well geared to sustaining and fostering a Catholic ethos and to developing well-qualified young people able to participate in the Church's mission. Leaders and managers at all levels are exceptionally effective in promoting the Catholic life of the school.



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The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

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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?

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

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

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

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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

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