

St Michael's Catholic Grammar School

Nether Street, North Finchley London N12 7NJ

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 22-23 November 2018



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is outstanding

- In the previous inspection there were three targets for improvement which have all been successfully met.
- The content of curriculum religious education fully meets all the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory in an exceptional way.
- Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding.
- At Key Stage 4 pupils make excellent progress and consequently GCSE results are significantly above the national average.
- Attainment in A level Religious Studies is outstanding.
- Teaching is consistently good with some examples of outstanding lessons.
- Most teachers have excellent subject knowledge and pupils feel encouraged to achieve high standards of work.
- Pupils take a pride in their exercise books and marking in Key Stages 4 and 5 is excellent with detailed diagnostic comments by teachers.
- The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education is outstanding.
- The head of department is tenacious in the desire to achieve the best outcomes for pupils.
- The head of department has a very strong understanding of the centrality of religious education in the mission of the Church.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The appointment of the new headteacher led to a wide-ranging review of the school's curriculum. As a result of the review the timetable was changed and religious education in nearly all year groups now exceeds the 10% minimum standard required by the Bishops' Conference.
- There is now no doubt that religious education is at the heart of the school's curriculum provision.
- The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community is outstanding.
- There are many opportunities for staff and students to participate in and reflect on their experience of worship.
- The celebration of the Eucharist is a central part of the life of the school.
- The high levels of cooperation between the parish priest, the lay chaplain and religious education department ensure that the pupils have an engaging, innovative and creative experience of worship and prayer.
- The school provides extensive opportunities for pupils to participate in the Church's call to action for justice and peace, particularly at Key Stages 4 and 5.
- The parent questionnaire revealed that parents have a very positive partnership with the school and value the Catholic education on offer.
- The headteacher has a clear vision of Catholic education that embraces the aims of educating the whole person rather than a narrow focus on qualifications.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

In the previous inspection there were three targets for improvement which have all been successfully met. The first one was: 'refresh reference materials for religious education in the school library and encourage students to make use of journals and texts to further promote their independent study'. This is evident through the use of textbooks for pupils to facilitate independent study. The second target, 'ensure students make thoughtful written responses to teachers' regular marking and guidance' has also been achieved. This is particularly strong in Key Stages 4 and 5 pupil responses. The third target set was to 'provide more regular opportunities at Key Stage 3 for assessments that are moderated and levelled in line with diocesan attainment targets'. The evidence to support this is very strong.

The content of classroom religious education is outstanding

The content of curriculum religious education fully meets all the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory (RECD) in an exceptional way. The curriculum is creative and engaging. The decision at Key Stage 4 to teach St Mark's Gospel at GCSE is to be commended as this is a challenging option which many schools shy away from. The programmes of study and schemes of work provide for a systematic study of God, the life and teachings of Jesus, and the central beliefs of the Church. The teaching of other religions in Key Stage 3 is evident and this is supported by visits to relevant places of worship. The content of the core religious education (RE) programme for sixth formers appropriately extends their learning beyond the GCSE. The curriculum provision covers theological, philosophical and ethical issues. Assessment in core RE allows pupils to reflect on their understanding of the curriculum and develop their religious literacy. There is some further scope for students in core RE lessons to reflect in more detail on their learning. The A level course and the GCSE are both fully compliant with the demands of the RECD.

Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding

Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding. When joining the school, pupils' level of attainment is typically above average and they continue to make solid progress through the key stages. At Key Stage 3, the pupils' progress is systematically tracked to ensure preparation for public exams further up the school. The department carefully monitors pupils to check on their progress and provides additional interventions if required. At Key Stage 4 pupils make excellent progress and consequently GCSE results are significantly above the national average. All groups of pupils make outstanding progress at GCSE. The consistently high proportion of pupils achieving the top grades at GCSE is a particular strength of the RE department and a testament to both the pupils and teachers hard work. Attainment in A level Religious Studies is outstanding. Across all key stages pupils are motivated and proactive in seeking to develop their understanding of the curriculum. Given the high levels of success at GCSE, particularly in relationship to other subjects in the school, it is surprising that recently the recruitment for A level has dropped. Attitudes to learning are overwhelmingly positive. Pupils display a thirst for learning and actively participate in lessons. In particular, there is a culture of encouraging pupils to approach their RE teachers for further support as needed. This 'open door' strategy has helped to support the desire to do well in RE. Pupils enjoy their RE lessons and are proud of the dedication of their RE teachers.

The quality of teaching is good

Teaching is consistently good with some examples of outstanding lessons. This has led to consistently good progress with excellent exam results in the GCSE and A level exams. Teachers have high expectations for their pupils and there were some high level responses from pupils during

class discussions and group work, for example, in a lesson on Genesis 2, pupils were able to draw out various scriptural nuances. Most teachers have excellent subject knowledge and pupils are encouraged to achieve high standards of work. Teachers have created a very positive climate for learning through good teaching and well-planned lessons across the department. Pupils all appeared to have a good knowledge of prior learning with one Year 7 pupil explaining King Solomon's wish for wisdom rather than money before he became distracted by other ideas. A consistent feature of the department is that lessons begin with a learning question that quickly engages the pupils, for instance, 'Why do people attend Mass?'; this led quickly to good levels of engagement. In an excellent lesson about the ethics of surrogacy, pupils showed a great willingness to learn and participate through the imaginative use of a case study. In an A level lesson the teacher skilfully provided thought provoking resources that led to a well-informed discussion on the rise of atheism. To further improve the quality of teaching some lessons could have an increase in pace so that pupils are given more time for challenging work. Homework contributes well to pupils own learning. Pupils take a pride in their exercise books and marking in Key Stages 4 and 5 is excellent with detailed diagnostic comments by teachers. There is not yet consistency in the provision of high quality diagnostic written feedback to pupils in Key Stage 3.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education is outstanding

The head of department is tenacious in the desire to achieve the best outcomes for pupils. The department has undergone a number of recent changes in staff and the head of department has maintained the high levels of achievement in Key Stage 4 and 5 despite such turbulence. The head of department has a very strong understanding of the centrality of religious education in the mission of the Church. The system and structures in place provide strong support for new members of the department and ensure that curriculum is delivered efficiently. Members of the RE department are supported well in a team office that encourages regular dialogue. The head of department has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the team and provides bespoke support for the team. The self-evaluation form is strong and as a result the inspectors agreed with all the judgements.

What should the school do to develop further in classroom religious education?

- Ensure greater consistency in the provision of high quality diagnostic written feedback to pupils in Key Stage 3.
- Further improve numbers in Key Stage 5 by promoting the uptake at Religious Studies A level.
- Further improve some teaching by increasing the pace of lessons.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

In the past three inspections, the requirement by the Bishops' Conference that all schools give 10% curriculum time to religious education had not been met. The appointment of the new headteacher led to a wide-ranging review of the school's curriculum. As a result of the review the timetable was changed and religious education in nearly all year groups now exceeds the 10% minimum standard required by the Bishops' Conference.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

There is now no doubt that religious education is at the heart of the school's curriculum provision. The governors and leadership team provide outstanding support and active guidance to the department. The increase in curriculum time given to the teaching of religious education has led to an increase in staffing. The RE department is well resourced demonstrating the commitment of the headteacher to ensure that RE is at the core of the curriculum.

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

is outstanding

Catholic worship and prayer are central to the life of the school. Daily tutor prayer is predominately student led and reflects the needs and concerns of the whole school community. Students new to the sixth form commented on daily tutor prayer as a sign that this school takes its Catholic identity seriously. The liturgical resources for Advent and Lent evidence an imaginative and creative response to these liturgical seasons. There are many opportunities for staff and students to participate in and reflect on their experience of worship. Student voice speaks positively of these liturgies allowing them to grow closer to God, affirm Jesus' love for them and make connections between their life and their faith. Retreats are an integral part of the Catholic life of the school providing space for students to reflect on their friendships, draw inspiration from the saints and use scripture to nourish them spiritually. The weekly whole school assembly is very much appreciated by students as a time of reflection as well as an opportunity to reinforce a strong sense of community. A recent example of the effectiveness of the whole school assembly was how the Sunday gospel was incorporated into a presentation on mental health and bullying. The empowerment of students is clearly seen in their ownership of assemblies which they help to plan, prepare and deliver. The celebration of the Eucharist is a central part of the life of the school. Weekly Mass is held in the school chapel and is prepared by different classes. The inspectors attended the Friday Mass and were impressed with the quality of the experience, notably pupils taking an active part as a result of their comprehensive preparation led by RE teachers. There are also whole school Masses at various points during the school year, as well as opportunities to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The contribution of the music department has a very positive impact on the spiritual development of pupils. The high levels of cooperation between the parish priest, the lay chaplain and RE department ensure that the pupils have an engaging, innovative and creative experience of worship and prayer.

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

is outstanding

The school provides extensive opportunities for pupils to participate in the Church's call to action for justice and peace, particularly at Key Stages 4 and 5. This is exemplified by the school's support of a wide range of charities. At key points in the year, the school works with the pupils to support the needs of the local community, for example, by collecting food for hampers at Christmas and undertaking a 'workout' for LEPRO. There is a long-term partnership with a school in Luanda, Kenya,

and pupils regularly visiting the schools there to support their work. Governors, staff and pupils recognise the vital importance of this work and the impact that it has upon the school community. The school's systems ensure that the gifts of all pupils are recognised and celebrated. Pupils have a very good understanding of the theology underpinning their actions. One Year 7 pupil, for example, commented that she noticed immediately upon arriving that she 'had not just come to a school but a community.' Pupils are aware of the ethics of the market place and the moral issues in society and these are an integral part of both the curriculum and wider life of the school. The school works well to address the needs to pupils who are not Catholic as well as preparing all pupils for life in modern Britain. Non-Catholic sixth form students feel welcomed and through the RE curriculum issues of other faiths and tolerance are directly addressed. Recently a sixth form Muslim student led an assembly on Islamophobia which further developed pupils understanding of tolerance and interfaith dialogue. The school is also developing a relationship with a non-Catholic faith school as well as creating international school links. The ethos of the school ensures that students self-regulate their behaviour so that all are valued and respected.

The partnership with parents, school and parish, and collaboration as an integral part of the diocese through its relationship with the diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

is outstanding

The parent questionnaire revealed that parents have a very positive partnership with the school and value the Catholic education on offer. Parents are invited to key events such as the Carol Concert and are very supportive of school events with near 100% attendance at parents' evenings. Partnership with the local parish is excellent; the strong support given by the local parish priest is much appreciated by the school community. The parish priest is active in his support for the school through his work as a governor, celebrating Mass, and participating in assemblies. The school works closely with the diocese; there has been strong engagement with the diocesan advisor in enhancing the RE curriculum and the Catholic life of the school. A very visible sign of the partnership with the diocese is through the school participation in the Westminster Diocesan annual pilgrimage to Lourdes. Although one of the smallest secondary schools in the diocese, the school usually has the largest contingent of pupils on the pilgrimage.

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

is outstanding

The leadership of the school is committed to enabling young people to succeed in their studies so that they can take up positions of influence in society and so change it so that it more faithfully reflects the teachings of Jesus. The headteacher has a clear vision of Catholic education that embraces the aims of educating the whole person rather than a narrow focus on qualifications. The headteacher and the leadership team have high aspirations for pupil achievement and a desire to live out the school mission 'to love one another, as I have loved you'. The impact of this is seen in extremely high levels of respect and positive behaviour, as well as outstanding examination results. There are regular opportunities for staff to reflect on their role as staff in a Catholic school. The school has identified that a regular staff retreat would further support this reflection for staff and the planning for this has commenced. The school's self-evaluation form is highly accurate and as a result the inspectors agreed with all the judgements that the school made about itself. The governors provide active support and challenge to the school and to further support the Catholic life of the school, the headteacher has established an ethos committee within the governing body.

What should the school do to develop further the Catholic life of the school?

- To further develop the Catholic life of the school by introducing regular staff retreats.

Information about this school

- The school is a three form entry Catholic Grammar School in the locality of North Finchley.
- The school serves the parish of St Alban's, North Finchley and a wider number of other parishes across North London.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 94%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 2% and from other faiths is 3%. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 56%.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is two.
- There are 13% of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom three have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well above average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is well below average.
- There is a well below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 36 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (5%).

Department for Education Number	302 5404
Unique Reference Number	101361
Local Authority	Barnet

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Female (mixed sixth form)
Number of pupils on roll	735
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Alison Gartlan
Headteacher	Mr Michael Stimpson
Telephone number	020 8446 2256
Website	www.st-michaels.barnet.sch.uk
Email address	office@st-michaels.barnet.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	14-15 October 2013
Grades from previous inspection:	
Classroom religious education	Very Good
The Catholic life of the school	Very Good

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out (i) under the requirements of the Canon 806 and (ii) in accordance with the Framework for Diocesan Inspections 2015 approved by the Archbishop of Westminster and (iii) under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

- The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection.
- During the inspection 12 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended a number of acts of worship, including attending Mass.
- Meetings were held 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 and examination of school documents.

Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

Mr Matthew Dell	Lead Inspector
Ms Rose-Marie Sorohan	Associate Inspector
Mr Nicholas Kehoe	Associate Inspector
Ms Eleisha Mahon	Associate Inspector

Published by the Diocese of Westminster

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