



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

BISHOP WALSH CATHOLIC SCHOOL

SUTTON COLDFIELD

Inspection dates 21st - 22nd September 2011
Reporting Inspector Mrs J M Mellor

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Secondary
Age range of pupils	11-18 years
Number on roll	1034
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mr B H Holden
School address	Wylde Green Road Sutton Coldfield Birmingham B76 1QT
Telephone number	0121 351 3215
E-mail address	enquiry@bishopwalsh.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	January 2009
DCSF School Number	330/4661
Unique Reference Number	103536

Headteacher Mr John Farrell

DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors. The inspectors visited seven full religious education (RE) lessons to observe teaching and learning, students' behaviour, and held meetings with governors, staff, and groups of students. They observed the school's work, including assemblies and looked at a range of evidence, including key documentation such as the school's development plan, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in RE, and students' work.

Information about the school

Bishop Walsh Catholic School is an oversubscribed comprehensive school serving mainly four parishes in Sutton Coldfield. There are 1034 pupils on roll, including 265 in the growing Sixth Form. Almost all of the pupils and over half of the staff are Catholic, with a small number of non-Catholics having joined the Sixth Form. By far the majority of the pupils are white British and from above average socio-economic backgrounds. The school's population is very stable. The proportion of pupils who receive free school meals, as well as those from minority ethnic backgrounds and those with English as a second language is well below average. The number of pupils with a statement of special needs is about average. Generally there is a rising trend in the number of pupils with special needs but overall this remains well below the national average. The attainment of pupils entering the school is above local and national averages. The school is popular and enjoys a very good reputation both in the locality and in the diocese. Its first specialism of Performing Arts has been linked closely to the Catholic mission of the school and enriches its Catholic life.

Overall effectiveness of the school as a Catholic school

Bishop Walsh is an outstanding Catholic school both in terms of the quality of provision for Catholic life and outcomes for pupils. The Catholic ethos underpins all that the school does and seeks to achieve. There has been significant improvement since the last inspection, when the school was judged to be good. Since then there has been consistent rise in the attainment of pupils at GCSE level as a result of outstanding progress from Year 7. The number of pupils gaining A*/A grades has been excellent and has grown year by year. At A2 and AS level attainment has been good but progress is not as consistent as at GCSE level. High quality teaching means that pupils learn very well and they recognise that they are well taught. Curriculum provision has developed considerably with new schemes of work for the younger pupils to include challenging issues and reference to other religions, and for the Sixth Form with a project to promote awareness of poverty on a national and international scale. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the many opportunities for participation in the Catholic life of the school which are provided by the chaplaincy team working with the whole school community. There is clear evidence of a planned approach to provision for spiritual and moral development and that it has significant positive outcomes. Pupils develop a sound understanding of the concepts of religious education and skills to analyse and respond.

The issues from the previous inspection have been effectively addressed. The capacity of the school for sustained improvement is excellent. Leaders and managers are firmly committed to monitoring, evaluation and strategic planning. They take swift and thorough action to find innovative ways to deal with issues. Change has led to improvement, but leaders are resolute in moving on again when analysis shows that there is still room to achieve more. Several new initiatives are in place from the start of the academic year 2011-12. The school has the excellent support of the chaplain and the governing body, and they have played an important role in the development of Catholic life of the school and in supporting the religious education department.

What the school should do to improve further

- Embed the new assessment procedures and evaluate them rigorously
- Improve the prayer life of the school by exposing the pupils to a wider variety of prayer
- Ensure consistency in the use of the new marking policy

How good outcomes are for individuals and groups of pupils

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils in religious education are outstanding. From already high attainment levels on entry to the school, the pupils progress very well. Therefore GCSE results are excellent. They are consistently well above national and diocesan levels. Religious education is the highest achieving core department in the school. A large proportion of pupils have attained A* and A grades each year. In 2011 this rose to 56% of the cohort. Although more girls achieve these top grades than boys, the progress of boys is excellent. Pupils with special needs achieve well as a result of careful and focussed support. At A level in 2009 and 2010 over half of the examination candidates gained A or B grades. Progress has generally been good and results have demonstrated good value-added. In 2011, however, there was some underachievement at A level, but this was an unprecedented dip in results and the school has taken swift remedial action.

Outcomes for pupils are excellent also in terms of their growing understanding of theological concepts and of their own faith. From the outset of Year 7 they develop skills in considering the big questions of life and the beliefs of other religions. They are challenged by work which stretches them. They make rapid progress in participation in class and group discussion, in extended writing and in independent learning. Pupils learn to express complex ideas coherently both verbally and in writing. They work with computer resources to produce extended work from Year 7. They develop responsible attitudes towards their own progress. There is evidence of clear progress in religious literacy through the use of key words and concepts, and this develops further for Sixth Form GCE pupils who have the ability to discuss philosophical and higher level ethical issues with appropriate competence.

Pupils' spiritual and moral development is of a very high standard. This is evidenced by their very positive perceptions of the visits to Alton Castle in Year 8, and to Soli House in Years 10 and 11 and in the Sixth Form, as landmarks in their experience, as well as their enthusiastic participation in the visit of Pope Benedict XVI in September 2010 to Birmingham. Pupils have a deep awareness of the needs of others and this results in enthusiastic fundraising activities, such as those during Lent. By the time they leave the school after the Sixth Form many have developed a first-hand experience of caring for the sick and elderly through taking part in the diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes. Pupils appreciate their school and what the teachers do for them, and their behaviour is outstanding. They contribute enthusiastically to discussion about school issues through the school council and pupil voice. They show respect for each other. Sixth Form pupils understand their role to be guardians of the younger pupils and respond readily to opportunities to take on responsibilities. Older pupils willingly take on roles as mentors and are committed to the initiative of 'Christian duty'. Younger pupils quickly learn to become part of the community of the school and to contribute to its success. They are very comfortable with the ethos of the school and willingly participate in its spiritual life, particularly in prayers and the celebration of Masses through reading, drama and music.

How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the school

Since the last inspection the Catholic life of the school has been further developed so that it is clearly the very bones of the school and pupils benefit greatly from it. Its excellent quality stems from the rigorous and inspirational leadership of the headteacher, supported by an outstanding governing body and the full support of staff and pupils. The work of the chaplaincy is extensive. A local parish priest is the school chaplain and he gives very generously of his time to ensure the celebration of a weekly form group Mass and Masses on Holy Days and other special occasions, to support the spiritual development of the pupils and to assist in pastoral work. His role is greatly valued and is integrated into the work of senior management. There is provision for the Sacrament of Reconciliation with a group of priests during whole days in Lent and Advent. The chaplaincy team involves many staff including a teacher from the music technology department and the

chaplains co-ordinator who teaches mathematics, as well as teachers of religious education. The chaplains co-ordinator has a vibrant approach, is highly committed and effective. New parents are made aware of the importance of the Catholic life of the school by the headteacher and pupils in Year 7 are taught about the mission statement of the school. Governors are very aware of their roles and responsibilities in ensuring the Catholic nature of the school and the quality of religious education. They are committed and enthusiastic, acting as critical friends to the leadership and management of the school. They are quick to see the implications of new developments for the Catholic life of the school, for example in ensuring that new teachers are supported in joining the staff. They have a very wide range of expertise. Catholic life is the first priority of the school's development plan. The headteacher and senior management are excellent role models and ensure that the school's ethos remains the key focus. This is accomplished through in-service training, careful monitoring and evaluation. Recently, for example, the school undertook an audit of the prayer life of the school in order to assess where support is needed. Planning is now in hand for a bank of resources on the school's computer system to update the prayer resource currently in use. Self-evaluation is very thorough and honest, and there is no spirit of complacency. Senior leaders are innovative in their approach, for example in developing training for teachers taking up appointments in the school.

The religious education department is very well led and there are high expectations of staff and pupils. The team of teachers has been consolidated since the last inspection and classes are taught by very well qualified and experienced staff, who work together very effectively. They are hard-working and highly committed to their role in fulfilling the school's mission. This leads to excellent outcomes for the pupils, at all levels in the school. The department has shown an outstanding commitment to the development of the Catholic life of the school through extending the preparation for GCSE to three years from two in order to allow more time for pupils to explore in more depth aspects of the Catholic faith which are especially relevant to the young. Prior to this change the early entry policy for GCSE religious education, which has been in place since the last inspection, led to the development of an enrichment course for Year 11. This is based on the study of other religions and ethical issues not covered by the GCSE syllabus. Currently the focus lies in ensuring that new programmes are well embedded and that pupils are engaged in learning and achieving their best.

Provision for community cohesion flows from the school's mission of learning to care. The basis of its activity lies in its success in creating a caring and vibrant Catholic school community, with which pupils and staff closely identify. Within the school pupils respect each other and their teachers. There are excellent links with feeder primary schools, so that the transition for pupils is smooth. The feeder schools work together with Bishop Walsh School to promote community and charitable events and to create a broad worshipping community in the local parishes which the school serves. Pupils are encouraged to raise money for charities from an informed position, especially during Lent. This and the emphasis in the school on Catholic social teaching give a sound basis to their efforts. The school has significant links with other institutions, for example Oscott College and the Maryvale Institute. It works closely with other schools in the Birmingham Catholic Partnership. The school's facilities are made available to a wide variety of clubs and associations, 35 in total, including a local choir for which the school provides leadership from one of its music teachers. Clubs also provide opportunities for pupils. Those leading the clubs have a high regard for care shown to them by the school. The Bishop Walsh Association raises funding for equipment for the school, including the lease of a second mini-bus, and is a means of seeking parents' views to which the school is responsive. The school's witness to the Christian faith has a high profile in the locality, especially through the carrying of the cross through the town centre on Good Friday. The participation in the Lourdes pilgrimage by Sixth Formers enables pupils to connect with sick pilgrims from the whole diocese and with pupils from other schools. There is strategic planning for work with a school in Zimbabwe, linked to the work in religious education in the Sixth Form on poverty. The school provides for a good understanding of other world religions through the curriculum, and this helps to prepare pupils for life in a multi-cultural and multi-faith world.

The quality of the school's work in providing Catholic education

Evidence from the lessons observed during the inspection shows that the quality of teaching in religious education never less than good and frequently outstanding. This is due to the high level of skills, qualifications and experience of the staff. As a result of analysis of the department's performance, a recent appointment to the staff has been made which enhances expertise in teaching to A level. They make detailed evaluation of their work and make changes in provision where this is deemed necessary. Lessons are well paced and there is attention to individual needs. Teachers create a positive working environment and have very good questioning skills. Pupils work collaboratively and purposefully. This results in good progress in lessons. There are clear opportunities for the development of independent learning and for self-assessment from early stages, for example the four hours' deep learning projects which replace short homework tasks for younger pupils. There has been some inconsistency in the marking of pupils' work. A revised whole-school policy for marking has been implemented for the start of this academic year. There is an emphasis on formative assessment so that pupils know how their work can improve. Pupils are responding well to opportunities for feedback to staff on their comments, and for peer assessment. A new computerised system of monitoring of progress has also been introduced with the result that pupils, teachers and parents can monitor progress from Year 7 to GCSE on the school's virtual learning environment. Target grades are made clear, and frequent updates are planned. Pupils are positive about this development. The school intends to monitor this system carefully. The impact of the teaching is shown in the excellent outcomes and in the collaboration and determination with which the pupils work. They gain a very good understanding of the Catholic faith, and how to apply it in their lives, as well as insight into the views of others.

Curriculum developments in the department are based on extensive discussion with senior management following rigorous analysis. The new scheme of work in Years 7 and 8 matches the requirements of the Curriculum Directory, representing a different approach rather than a change in content. It gives pupils the opportunity to explore questions of the meaning and purpose of life in the light of Catholic belief. The interim curriculum review of January 2010 identified world religions as an area for development and these are now integrated in a thematic way into the scheme of work. Examples of this are the study of the Buddhist teaching on happiness in Year 8 during the topic of 'What are sex, love and relationships?', and of the Jewish view of responsibility and the Sikh concept of service in Year 7 for the topic of 'Am I responsible for others?' Pupils find the work interesting and are engaged in lessons. In the Sixth Form the topic of poverty has been chosen for the religious education programme for all pupils, which aims also to develop study skills for higher education. Although just beginning, the work engages the pupils and is carefully related to other initiatives in the school such as fund-raising and the link with the school in Zimbabwe. The impact of the A level work in Philosophy and Ethics is evident in higher level thinking skills, for example in the work on making moral decisions. Provision for sex and relationship education has recently been revised. It is consistent with the teaching of the Church and pupils welcome its increasing profile and opportunities for discussion.

Provision for collective worship is excellent. Even when time is limited for morning and afternoon registration times, prayer is included. The importance of this is emphasised by senior leaders. Prayer is led in a dignified manner often by pupils from a prayer resource book. They are attentive and the atmosphere is conducive to reflection. Assemblies are well planned and respond to current issues, for example the rioting and looting in city centres in England in August. Catholic values are clearly promoted and there is encouragement for pupils to consider issues, such as materialism and relativism, and to relate the teaching of Christ in Gospel stories to their own lives. It is clear that a great many liturgical events include pupil participation in a variety of ways, and the liturgical life of the school is rich and integral to pupils' overall experience.