



# Archdiocese of Birmingham

## INSPECTION REPORT

### **BISHOP ULLATHORNE CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL COVENTRY**

---

Inspection dates 24<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011  
Reporting Inspector Dr John Lally

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	863
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mrs E Lee
School address	Leasowes Avenue Coventry CV3 6BH
Telephone number	024 7641 4515
E-mail address	admin@ullathorne.coventry.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	February 2008
DCSF School number	331/4701
Unique Reference Number	103742

**Headteacher** Miss J A Byrne

---



## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by 2 Diocesan Inspectors. The inspectors visited 9 full religious education (RE) lessons to observe teaching and learning and students' behaviour, and held meetings with governors, staff, and groups of students. They observed the school's work, including a class Mass and a sixth form assembly, 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 Ullathorne is smaller than average Catholic comprehensive school with 863 pupils on roll, including 114 in the sixth form. 79% of the students are baptised Catholics. The school roll has fallen by about 6% since the last inspection with a corresponding decline in the number of Catholics and a slightly larger percentage fall in the sixth form. The number of pupils from ethnic minority groups is well above the national average with 37% of pupils from minority backgrounds. Of these, a majority (19%) are of White European background. The proportion of pupils with English as a second language is average, but the number of pupils in Year 7 whose first language is not English is above average. The proportion of pupils with special needs and eligible for free school meals is broadly average.

## Overall effectiveness of the school as a Catholic school

Bishop Ullathorne is an outstanding Catholic school in respect of both the outcomes for the pupils from the Catholic life and religious education and the quality of their provision. In these, the school has made marked progress since the last inspection when it was judged to be a good school. The achievement of the pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 is consistently high with results at GCSE in RE which are outstanding at the higher A<sup>+</sup>-A levels. Similarly the standards achieved at AS and A2 Level are always very good but were outstanding in 2010. Learning amongst pupils of all abilities and backgrounds is of high quality and is supported by teaching that is often outstanding. Pupils respond well to the opportunities offered to them to participate and lead in collective worship and other areas of the Catholic life of the school, especially the chaplaincy team, and they show clear signs of good spiritual and moral development. Curriculum provision in RE is very good. There is coherence in the provision made by the school as a whole for pupils' spiritual and moral development and by the RE department for their understanding, skills and response to the content and concepts of religious education.

The capacity of the school for sustained improvement is excellent. Significant improvements were made following the last inspection, the impact of which is clearly evident in the quality of the Catholic life and of religious education. The leadership of the Catholic life and the RE department shows the ability to grow in response to change. Monitoring and evaluation and planning for improvement are the key to the effectiveness of the school. The school is very well supported by governors and the chaplain. They have played a full part in the improvement of the school since the last inspection.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Seek to reduce the gap between the achievement of boys and girls in GCSE religious education.
- Review the school's mission with full involvement of the pupils so they enjoy a greater understanding of that mission both in education and the world at large.
- In evaluating the work of the RE department, consider how the quality of pupils' learning might be evaluated other than by their attainment or progress in their grades.

## How good outcomes are for individuals and groups of pupils

Pupils' attainment on entry is average, but they make excellent progress in religious education through the school. As a consequence, results at GCSE are high and very high at Advanced Level. Both boys and girls perform consistently above the diocesan average at GCSE. The proportion achieving A\*-A grades is particularly high averaging over 30% over the last three years. Pupils perform above the expected levels and above those they achieve in most other subjects in the school. Despite boys performing well compared with diocesan and national averages and making very good progress in the subject, they are significantly outperformed by girls. However, there is no indication of underachievement amongst any groups of pupils. Lower and middle ability pupils make good progress and perform well and almost all pupils in Year 11 in 2010 achieved a grade in the A\*-G range in RE. At AS and A2 levels no student has failed over the three years since the last inspection and the proportion of higher A-B grades in 2010 was exceptionally high. This is a clear reflection of the quality of learning in the sixth form philosophy and ethics course. The students are taught to be, and become, effective independent learners during the course, but this is based upon their learning a good measure of independence during Key Stages 3 and 4.

From the first term in Year 7 pupils are faced with and rise to challenge in their learning both in respect of the concepts of the subject and in producing extended structured writing. While just occasionally this can slip into barely modified reproduction of material from the internet, for the most part independent study leading to common assessment tasks is very well done and marks very good development of skills, knowledge and understanding. The capacity of the pupils and students to learn independently and communicate their understanding in extended and structured ways is one key to their outstanding success in public examinations. The other is the level of their engagement with their learning and enjoyment of the subject. They find lessons interesting, challenging and thought provoking and make them think about their own personal faith. From Key Stage 3 pupils are developing their religious literacy and growing in understanding of theological concepts.

At the last inspection the Catholic life of the school was judged to be good. Since then significant improvement has been made, including improvement to chaplaincy which was identified as the main area for development by the inspectors. In view of these improvements, the level of participation by the students, and the opportunities for the pupils to lead and organise collective worship, the school's Catholic life is judged to be outstanding. A chaplaincy group has been formed involving pupils and students from across the key stages, organised as junior and sixth form chaplaincies working closely with the chaplain and the RE department. While the numbers who are formally in the chaplaincy team are quite small, many others contribute in a range of ways to its work in organising and running charity activities, workshops with primary schools and for new pupils and during Advent and Lent, Masses in school and in parishes. The chaplaincy team is valued by other members of the school community for the work it does and the initiatives it takes. Many pupils respond well to the Masses offered in school, the frequency of which have increased with the recent introduction of class Masses in Key Stage 3. Pupils take responsibility for leading and organising the Masses as they do with assemblies during the year with each class organising and leading an assembly during each year. They do this well and with positive responses from the other students in their year groups. Through the Catholic life and collective worship, pupils embrace a Catholic vision and a sense of belonging which they ascribe to their being part of a Catholic school with a strong community which derives from its Catholic character.

Pupils respond well to the opportunities offered to them for their spiritual and moral development. One of the most striking aspects of the Mass during the inspection was the way that silence marked various moments of the celebration. The pupils were comfortable during these times and their prayerful demeanour contributed significantly to the quality of this collective worship. They pray with reverence in recognition of the significance of what they are engaged in. Many have an understanding of the relevance of faith both within the context of the school in creating a sense of community and also in the wider society. They see it as informing their moral awareness and decisions. Their response to questions of the meaning of life is thoughtful and given a context

through their work in religious education. In large part arising from the school's provision, they are developing a good awareness of vocation and how they are each called to contribute to the communities of which they are a part.

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

The quality of the Catholic life derives from the outstanding dedication and drive of the headteacher in promoting it, the support of the governing body, the full co-operation of the staff, the willing participation of the students, and the work of the priest chaplain. The Catholic life has a high priority in the school and the extent of the commitment of all in the community to the Catholicity is high. Governors are very aware of their responsibilities for both Catholic life and religious education and play a full part in shaping the direction of Bishop Ullathorne as a Catholic school. They know the school well and are prepared to challenge where necessary and so make a real difference to the outcomes. They are well skilled and knowledgeable. Leadership at all levels is effective in promoting and monitoring the Catholic life. It is through effective monitoring by heads of year, for example, that there is a common purpose and action in the provision of collective worship in form time and assemblies. Self evaluation in the school is thorough and extensive and is used to identify areas for development which are then subject to action to improve. Planning for development since the last inspection has been very effective with results that are clearly evident. The next steps have been identified and shared between headteacher and chair of governors in advance of the production of the next improvement plan. The chaplain has played a key role in the development of the Catholic life since the last inspection both as chaplain and as a governor of the school. His action in the school is formative. He is an essential support for the headteacher, the staff and pupil community, affirming and challenging where necessary. The pupils and students hold him in high respect. The outcomes of the work of all in the school leadership are a strong commitment and sense of belonging amongst pupils and staff alike and an understanding of the nature and value of the Catholic school. Knowledge of the school's mission is not quite so evident amongst the pupils, despite regular teaching about the mission statement. It is not an easy statement for the pupils to remember and, when the mission is reviewed, pupil involvement in evaluating and redrafting would be beneficial.

Leadership of the RE department is outstanding and is critical for the high achievement of the pupils and students. It is such because the head of department has established and leads a very good team of teachers who, together, are responsible for the very high outcomes for the pupils. Teaching is monitored and evaluated very thoroughly, action is taken to improve areas identified, such as assessment for learning which was an issue at the last inspection, and good systems are in place for tracking pupils' progress. The only area where monitoring and evaluation might be strengthened is in relation to pupils' learning. At present the focus is upon the quality of teaching and on progress using levels of attainment and examination grades and targets. However, in this case the pupils are not affected by the lack of real attention to learning in the monitoring as the learning which takes place as a result of the very good teaching is varied and of high quality.

Provision for community cohesion flows naturally from the school's mission and is strongest within the school. Bishop Ullathorne is a highly cohesive community which is recognised and valued as such by the pupils. Planning acknowledges the range of differences in the school and the experience of all contributes from their distinctive faith or ethnic background to the values of the whole community. Friendship bonds across ethnic groups are evident. Increasingly the school is moving beyond itself into its parishes and feeder primary schools and the chaplaincy team plays an important role in this together with staff designated for such linking. The schools supports charitable work from local to international levels and the next stage of development in relation to the community would be to secure greater involvement in the wider local, national and global secular communities so broadening the impact of its Catholic commitment. Respect for other faiths is marked and effective teaching about some other world religions takes place in RE lessons.

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

The quality of teaching in religious education is not less than good and is frequently outstanding with the head of department leading by example. Lessons observed during the inspection were all at least good and often very good or outstanding. The work in pupils' books and in their common assessments as well as responses of pupils and students in interviews confirms that observations during the inspection were characteristic of the teaching over time. It is marked by encouragement of independence of learning, particularly in preparing for the common assessments, a range of teaching and learning styles and activities, work which is challenging while well matched to pupils' capabilities, excellent relationships which create an effective climate for learning, and good questioning. Assessment for learning is employed very effectively to ensure that pupils know how well they are doing and how they might improve their work. Marking, for the most part, is carefully done and both supports and challenges pupils. The impact of the teaching is evident, not only in the attainment of the pupils and their good progress, but in their collaborative working relationships, their very good understanding of the teaching of the Church, and in the extent to which they are able to apply what they learn about religion to their own lives and to understand the different perspectives of others.

The curriculum in RE is thoroughly thought out on the basis of the requirements of the Curriculum Directory and appropriately chosen GCSE units of study. In Key Stage 3 the treatment of the strands of the Curriculum Directory is very well balanced with an unusual, but appropriate, emphasis given to the strand on the Church. One way this might be developed further is to reduce the emphasis on fact files in dealing with Church history and to focus instead on key themes and concepts such as conversion or why the Reformation happened and with what impact on the Faith. In Key Stage 4 pupils still study Mark's Gospel, but dissatisfaction with the requirements of the GCSE course is understandably leading staff to review this. Provision for sex and relationship education is consistent with the teaching of the Church and pupils are confident in discussing it and do so with a high degree of acceptance of the Church's position.

Provision for collective worship is outstanding. Very good opportunities are provided for pupils to lead and organise worship and they do so very effectively revealing that they have been well prepared and trained to do so. Form worship is more than just a brief prayer but incorporates different approaches including occasions for quiet reflection, as do assemblies. As a consequence pupils are comfortable with silent reflection. Provision overall strongly reflects the Catholic character of the school and has a significant impact on the pupils.