



The John Henry Newman Catholic School

Hitchin Road, Stevenage SG1 4AE

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 14 -15 November 2019

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is outstanding

- The content of the religious education curriculum is successfully mapped against all the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. It offers a cohesive and creative response to the needs of all pupils through a consistent, differentiated approach to learning outcomes
- Over the last three years the GCSE results have been above average and demonstrate that pupils make excellent progress in religious education. In particular, the department has enabled many pupils to achieve the higher grades at GCSE.
- Teaching is consistently good across the religious education department with examples of some outstanding lessons. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge which enables their pupils to make good progress. The behaviour of pupils is very good in lessons, pupils want to learn and are highly cooperative with each other and with their teachers.
- There is a dynamic and creative vision for religious education in which the pupils' experience and learning is placed at the heart of decision making. The subject leader has a strong understanding of the centrality of religious education in the Church's educational enterprise.
- The subject leader has an excellent grasp of the strengths and areas for development within the religious education department; the department improvement plan and the self-evaluation documentation are all very accurate. The result is that this religious education department is flourishing.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The religious education department has a secure place in the curriculum, as it is seen as a core subject. Religious education meets the mandatory minimum curriculum time required by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
- Prayer and liturgy are a central feature of the life the school. Pupils receive their entitlement to experience daily prayer through well-prepared resources that are utilised effectively in tutor time. The liturgical and sacramental life of the school is strongly supported by the generous commitment of the Dean and other clergy in the local deanery.
- A significant strength of this school is the authentic commitment and contribution to the Common Good and social justice. The call of the Church to action for peace and justice is understood and lived out by the staff and pupils. The school offers a wide range of opportunities for the pupils to develop their leadership skills and serve others
- The school has strong support from parents as demonstrated through the inspection parent survey; for example one parent stated that 'the pastoral and spiritual care has been wonderful; this would not have happened without the caring, hard-working and thoughtful souls that work at this school.'
- The headteacher has a sophisticated and well thought out vision for Catholic education, that places the holistic development of the human person at the heart of his leadership. Pupils, parents and staff are rightly proud of their school as it is an outstanding Catholic school.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

At the last inspection, the department was asked to 'secure a valid base line as a starting point in Year 7 against which to measure progress in religious education'; the department has worked hard to fulfil this target. Secondly, they were asked to 'ensure that there is always sufficient challenge for each group of pupils, especially the most able, in every lesson in the main school and in the sixth form'. The GCSE results provide evidence that this target has been met as the most able achieve high levels of success. Thirdly, to 'further refine the pupils' responses to teachers' marking and target setting so that in setting their own targets, the pupils take on board teachers' written guidance'. There is a strong system of marking that ensures teachers give regular feedback, and excellent practice in the way pupils are guided to respond to their assessments.

The content of classroom religious education is outstanding

The content of the religious education (RE) curriculum is successfully mapped against all the requirements of the Bishops' Conference Religious Education Curriculum Directory. Each unit of study offers a cohesive and creative response to central Catholic teaching and considers the needs of all pupils through a consistent, differentiated approach to learning outcomes. There is a wide range of evidence that demonstrates a well thought out curriculum, embracing spiral learning, where key concepts are revisited in greater depth as the pupils progress through the school. There is an age appropriate study of other religions from an introduction to world religions at Key Stage 3, to a detailed study of Judaism at GCSE level to a broader critique of new religions such as Scientology in Core RE. There is a well-established Year 8 visit to different Christian churches in Stevenage, which the pupils thoroughly enjoy; there is further scope for enrichment visits to support the curriculum. Throughout the programme of study there is a solid foundation in the traditional teaching of the Church supported through links with scripture, the Catechism and the collective wisdom of Christian men and women; this foundation is successfully linked to contemporary concerns such as feminism and stewardship.

Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding

Over the last three years, the GCSE results have been above average and demonstrate that pupils make excellent progress in RE. In particular, the department has enabled many pupils to achieve the higher grades at GCSE. Within the school at GCSE, the RE department is consistently good or better than other core subjects. For the most recent RE GCSE, there was a small but significant number of pupils who ended up either not sitting or not being entered for the exam. This was an exception, as the policy of the school is to enter all pupils for the RE exam. There are robust systems for assessment which enable the department to effectively track the progress of pupils so that challenging targets can be set to support pupil achievement. The department have embraced new guidance on assessment from the diocese with the result that the Key Stage 3 assessments are more effective in promoting pupil progress. In the recent past, there have been small numbers at A level, however this has recently changed with more reasonable group sizes coming through. The department, working with others in the school, should continue to encourage students to take A level Religious Studies. The progress of students in the current A level groups in Year 12 and Year 13 demonstrate that they are on course for examination success.

The quality of teaching is good

Teaching is consistently good across the RE department with examples of some outstanding lessons. Lessons are successfully planned to scaffold pupils learning journey through knowledge to understanding to evaluation as evidenced by final tasks centred on discussions like 'It was not fair for

God to allow David to go into battle' (Year 7) and 'Jews can worship God just as well at home as in the synagogue' (Year 10). Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge which enables their pupils to make good progress. For example, in a Year 10 lesson on the Trinity, pupils actively engaged in evaluating the success of the Council of Nicaea in comparison to the First Council of Constantinople. The best examples of questioning scrutinised the pupils understanding and led them to a deeper engagement with the area of study; the less successful examples of questioning accepted the pupil's first superficial response without further scrutiny of their understanding. In a Year 7 lesson on King David and the prophet, Nathan, the teacher's questioning led to higher order thinking and the effective use of storytelling enthralled pupils to engage at a deep level with the Biblical text. Teachers create a positive learning environment in which pupils engage with their study through paired and group discussions and a variety of creative written activities. The behaviour of pupils is very good in RE lessons, pupils want to learn and are highly cooperative with each other and with their teachers. Differentiated tasks are present in most lessons allowing all pupils to access the curriculum and make progress with their learning; there is still a need to ensure differentiation is an integral part of all lessons. Pupils are provided with regular summative assessment on different units of studies with detailed feedback from teachers and an opportunity for pupils to reflect and improve on their performance. The lessons promote religious literacy successfully and make thought-provoking links with current concerns, for example the exploration of the nature and role of religion in society. In a Year 13 lesson on new atheism, the teacher skilfully drew out from students their understanding of the topic as well as supporting them to make links across other parts of the specification. Pupils confirm that their RE teachers are fully supportive of their preparation for exams so that they are fully informed of the content and trained in exam technique strategies. Teaching in the RE department can be further enhanced by more creative teaching strategies that match pupil needs.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education

is outstanding

There is a dynamic and creative vision for RE in which the pupils' experience and learning is placed at the heart of decision making. The head of RE has a strong understanding of the centrality of RE in the Church's educational enterprise. There are highly effective systems in place to monitor and track and thus ensure pupils make excellent progress in RE. There is a continued drive for excellence based on a collaborative approach to managing the team of RE teachers. Communication between members of the department is strong, and as such, results in high levels of professional collaboration. The shared resources on the school's intranet demonstrate the commitment of the teaching staff to collegiality. There is a very good commitment to continuing professional development, for example two members of the RE department have recently completed their Masters qualification in teaching and learning and another recently completed the Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies (CCRS). RE teachers are encouraged to develop and as a result are supported in their work as examiners. The head of department has an excellent grasp of the strengths and areas for development within the RE department; the department improvement plan and the self-evaluation documentation are very accurate. The result is that this RE department is flourishing.

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

- Improve the experience of pupils in RE lessons by more creative teaching strategies that match pupil needs.
- Continue to develop strategies with the school and the RE department that encourage the recruitment at A level Religious Studies.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

At the last inspection, the school was given the target to 'demonstrate visibly and securely that the curriculum time allocated to general religious education at both Year 12 and Year 13 meets the 5% requirement'. This has been fully met.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

The RE department has a secure place in the curriculum, as it is seen as a core subject. RE meets the mandatory minimum curriculum time required by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. The headteacher and governors clearly value the place of RE in the curriculum and as such this is demonstrated in the very strong support given to the RE department. There is scope for more investment in the RE department specifically in terms of Bibles so that pupils do not need to share. The staffing, budget and accommodation for the department all reflect the place of RE as a core department. Members of the RE department have a high profile across the school.

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

is outstanding

Prayer and liturgy are a central feature of the life the school. Pupils receive their entitlement to experience daily prayer through well-prepared resources that are utilised effectively in tutor time. The liturgical and sacramental life of the school is strongly supported by the generous commitment of the Dean and other clergy in the local deanery. Lunchtime Mass is celebrated weekly in the chapel by the priest chaplain, who also offers the opportunity for pupils and staff to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at any time and more formally during the seasons of Advent and Lent. There are year group as well as tutor group Masses at relevant times throughout the year. The liturgical year, with its cycle of scripture readings and themes, is the foundation of all experiences and opportunities for prayer and reflection for staff and pupils. Tutor time offers pupils the opportunity for prayerful reflection using scripture, Christian prayers and enables them to engage with current issues, for example, Interfaith week, exploring theological links through well-developed debate and discussion. This is a key strength of the school. Liturgical celebrations are planned by the pupil and staff chaplaincy team enabling close collaboration between the RE department and staff from the music, drama and art departments to provide engaging and creative experiences of the richness of the Catholic tradition. All assemblies are focused on a liturgical theme. They are well-planned and engaging liturgical experiences that pupils appreciate. Pupil behaviour is excellent in all assemblies and for tutor time prayer, resulting in an atmosphere of reverence. The recent canonisation of John Henry Newman, the school's patron, gave the school numerous opportunities to celebrate and develop in pupils an understanding of the significance of John Henry Newman in the life of the Church. Given the strength of the liturgical life of the school, the leadership team is keen to continue to develop strategies that secure high quality chaplaincy provision to further support the Catholic life of the school.

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

is outstanding

A significant strength of this school is the authentic commitment and contribution to the Common Good and social justice. The call of the Church to action for peace and justice is understood and lived out by the staff and pupils. There is a plethora of enthusiastic support provided to local charities (e.g. Herts Homeless / Stevenage Food Bank), national charities (e.g. HCPT) and global

charities (e.g. Cafod). The school has an impressive long-term relationship with a community in Uganda which it supports through the 'KISS' charity. Pupils understand the theological underpinning of their service to others and can articulate maturely the reasons why they engage in charity work. For example, one pupil stated: 'It is our duty to look after those in need, we should make sacrifices for them'. The active pupil chaplaincy team liaise with staff regularly to ensure student fundraising activities are carried out effectively. The school offers very good range of opportunities for the pupils to develop their leadership skills and serve others, for example through becoming members of the pupil parliament and the 'Well-being Team'. Pupils form good relationships with each other through opportunities like the Year 7 'Friendship Day' led by members of the sixth form and the recently established vertical house system. The school celebrates pupils' successes and recognises their gifts and talents through systems such as the pupil of the lesson awards and 'Newman points'.

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 school has strong support from parents as demonstrated through the inspection parent survey, for example one parent stated that 'the pastoral and spiritual care has been wonderful; this would not have happened without the caring, hard-working and thoughtful souls that work at this school.' Parents have many opportunities to get involved in school events such as Masses and there are many examples of the school working closely with parents to foster the school's mission of service to others, e.g. Food Bank collections / collections for homeless charities. The links made with clergy have been very successful in terms of supporting the liturgical life of the school. Clergy are creatively attached to a year group, supporting the year group for liturgical celebrations and services through the year. The regular school newsletter always highlights chaplaincy news to parents and informs them of student-led fundraising and awareness raising activities. Links with feeder primary schools are strong and pupils are involved in visits to these schools to deliver talks on well-being. As a result, pupils who transition into Year 7 feel secure and welcomed. Partnership with the diocese is very strong. Staff are engaged in the support offered by the diocese as well as putting itself at the service of the diocese in a number of ways, for example through providing the music at diocesan events such as the Good Shepherd Mass and acting as associate inspectors for diocesan inspections.

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

is outstanding

The mission statement of the school is regularly reviewed, however there is scope to develop its impact across the school curriculum. Staff are in the process of articulating a comprehensive teaching and learning vision that underpins the whole curriculum experience. Pupils are aware of the school motto 'Heart speaks unto Heart', however younger pupils needed assistance to unpack its meaning, whilst older pupils can give highly developed theological explanations. The school's self-evaluation is highly accurate and reflects strong systems of accountability and analysis. The governors provide strong strategic support and effective challenge to the school. The headteacher has a sophisticated and well thought out vision for Catholic education that places the holistic development of the human person at the heart of his leadership. Pupils, parents and staff are rightly proud of their school as it is an outstanding Catholic school.

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

- Continue the review of implementing the mission statement so that it has wider impact across the school curriculum.
- Continue to develop strategies to secure high quality chaplaincy provision.

Information about this school

- The school is an eight form entry Catholic academy in the locality of Stevenage, Hertfordshire
- The school serves the following parishes: St Hilda's, The Transfiguration and St Joseph's, all in Stevenage; Our Lady Immaculate and St Andrew, Hitchin; St Hugh of Lincoln, Letchworth; St Thomas of Canterbury & the English Martyrs, Royston; Holy Trinity & St Augustine of Canterbury, Baldock; St Thomas More, Knebworth; St Bonaventure's and Holy Family in Welwyn; The Immaculate Conception & St Joseph, Hertford.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 95.8%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 2.5% and from other faiths is 0.7%. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 45.9%.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 13.
- There are 16.7 % of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 30 have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is above average.
- There is a below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 126 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (10%).

Department for Education Number	9195413
Unique Reference Number	137895
Local Authority	Hertfordshire

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy - Converter mainstream
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	1545
The appropriate authority	Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust
Chair	Mr Kieran Halpenny
Headteacher	Mr Clive Mathew
Telephone number	01438 314643
Website	http://www.jhn.herts.sch.uk/
Email address	admin@jhn.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11-12 September 2013
Grades from previous inspection:	
Classroom religious education	Outstanding
The Catholic life of the school	Outstanding

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 18 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended one assembly and a number of acts of worship.
- 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 Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

Mr Matthew Dell	Lead Inspector
Miss Catherine Bryan	Associate Inspector
Ms Eleisha Maton	Associate Inspector
Mr James Stacey	Associate Inspector
Mr Brian Finnegan	Associate Inspector

Information about inspection

The purpose of Diocesan inspection is to report to and advise the Archbishop on the quality of classroom religious education and the Catholic life of the school. The inspection report is also used to inform parents and carers, and the wider Catholic community. Inspection provides an opportunity to support, challenge, evaluate and promote the work of Catholic schools. It also assists schools in the work of self-evaluation and improvement, and enables the Diocese to celebrate with schools their sense of identity and their strengths as Catholic schools.

Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

This report is published by the Diocese of Westminster and is available at:
<http://rcdow.org.uk/education/schools>

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