

St. Michael's Catholic High School

High Elms Lane, Garston, Watford, Herts, WD25 0SS.



Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 2-3 May 2018

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is outstanding

- The Religious Education Curriculum Directory informs all planning and each key stage is explicitly mapped to highlight the four strands.
- The Key Stage 3 scheme of work has been designed to be thematic and provides the theological foundation for a progressive curriculum.
- The specialist, in-depth subject knowledge of the religious education staff is an obvious strength and is demonstrated by the quality of the resources.
- Teacher expectations are very high which results in pupils making excellent progress in religious education.
- Pupils are very articulate and use theological vocabulary confidently.
- Pupils excel, particularly at Key Stage 4, as a consequence of being fully engaged in their learning and independently opting for higher level tasks in lessons.
- Learning at Key Stage 3 instils a love of the subject and allows for the development of relationships which underpin the academic success enjoyed further up the school.
- The observations conducted and the pupils' books clearly demonstrated that lessons are of consistently high quality.
- Lessons are varied, creative and engaging.
- The fully specialist team are confident in the material being delivered and adopt strategies which maximise learning and interest.
- The collective planning and sharing of ideas is a discernible feature of the department.
- Effective support and direction from the headteacher, leadership team and religious education link governor help to create a culture of ambition and industry.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The school meets the requirement of the Bishops' Conference for pupils to receive 10% curriculum time for religious education.
- The school has a strong tradition of celebrating success; pupil achievement and effort is recognised and rewarded through a variety of means.
- The vibrant and charismatic approach adopted by the school's chaplain engages pupils and staff fully.
- Pupils talk about their experience of the school's liturgical life with passion.
- Worship and prayer are very much a part of the fabric of St Michael's.
- Prayer takes place within form groups and pupils take the lead on this in both its preparation and delivery.
- The school provides extensive opportunities for pupils to participate in the Church's call to action for justice and peace.
- The school works with the pupils to care for the needs of the local community as well supporting their impressive international links.
- Students show a good understanding of the call to human flourishing and identify that they are 'living what they have learnt'.
- Within lessons pupils are able to explain the ethics of the market place and how this links to the Church's social teaching.
- The school works closely in partnership with the local community, including the local deanery, parents and other Catholic schools.
- St Michael's maintains its strong links with the Dominican Order.
- The headteacher has great ambitions for the school and his confident and apostolic leadership cultivate a community enlivened by Gospel values.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

The recommendation from the previous inspection was to ensure greater consistency in marking by providing more opportunities for pupils to act on teachers' feedback and to evidence such actions. Marking across the department is consistent but opportunities for students to act on teachers' feedback are not yet embedded across the department. It, therefore, remains an area to be monitored.

The content of classroom religious education is outstanding

The content of classroom religious education is outstanding. The Religious Education Curriculum Directory (RECD) informs all planning and each key stage is explicitly mapped to highlight the four strands. The department has effectively incorporated the study of world religions into each phase. The Key Stage 3 scheme of work has been designed to be thematic and provides the theological foundation for a progressive curriculum through the key stages. For example, during the inspection, a Year 8 lesson on the Sacrament of Marriage was observed where it was evident that the groundwork for GCSE was being prepared. To enhance the delivery of religious education (RE), the department has invested considerable energy into producing an impressive range of resources. The specialist, in depth subject knowledge of the RE staff is an obvious strength and is demonstrated by the quality of the resources.

Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding

Teacher expectations are very high which result in pupils making excellent progress in RE. Pupils excel, particularly at Key Stage 4, as a consequence of engaging in their learning and independently opting for higher level tasks in lessons. This level of engagement was evidenced in an A level lesson where pupils made rapid progress through peer coaching. Pupils are very articulate and use theological vocabulary confidently. For instance, in a Year 12 Core RE lesson students referenced the Catechism to discuss human beings' intrinsic worth and dignity. At Key Stage 3, pupils' achievement relative to starting points, is outstanding. This phase instils a love of the subject and allows for the development of relationships which underpin the academic success enjoyed further up the school. Pupils' achievement at Key Stage 4 is also outstanding. Achievement is at least good or better than in other core subjects and there is an increasing upward trend in the percentage of A/A* grades. Groups make good or better progress at Key Stages 3 and 4. At Key Stage 5 students achieve in line with expectation and the school has rightly made this an area of focus. Systematic intervention has been put in place to address the three year downward trend and in-year data shows that pupil progress is significant and results will improve. A level Religious Studies continues to be a priority for the school. The introduction of Level 3 material and assessment in Core RE is allowing pupils to make greater progress in their religious literacy but there is scope to develop this still further.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

The quality of teaching across the religious education department is outstanding. The observations conducted and the pupils' books highlighted the consistent high quality of lessons. This is a clear strength of the department and explains in part why pupils enjoy their lessons to such a degree. The impact on pupil progress is significant and results in impressive progression rates from GCSE to A level. Lessons are varied, creative and engaging. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on the character of Joseph, post-it notes, images, props and peer teaching were used to elicit the messages of the Old Testament story. The individual needs of pupils are recognised and accommodated by careful planning. The fully specialist team are confident in the material being delivered and adopt strategies

which maximise learning and interest. The willingness of the staff team to develop and share best practice is demonstrated by their commitment to training new teachers of which there were three at the time of the inspection. Teaching staff take their pastoral role very seriously and have forged excellent working relationships with pupils. Pupil behaviour in lessons is excellent and makes for a harmonious learning environment. In lessons, pupils feel comfortable and interact with ease. In some instances, classes are shared but the working relationships between staff and pupils make the transition between lessons seamless. Assessment is regular and marking and feedback are frequent but the adherence to the departmental policy is not yet consistent across the department and so the impact of assessment is not maximised for all learners.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management of religious education is good. The newly appointed head of department has a strong sense of the educational mission of the Church and a clear vision of how this can be achieved in the religious education department. Effective support and direction from the headteacher, SLT and RE link governor help to create a culture of ambition and industry. The collective planning and sharing of ideas is a discernible feature of the department. The emerging strategies proposed to address the areas for development will undoubtedly develop RE further and ensure greater consistency across all areas of the department. The school's self-evaluation was largely accurate. The head of department while fully cognisant of the many strengths of the department is aware of the need to formalise systems and record keeping to support the continuous drive for improvement. As recognised by the school, there is a need to focus on the implementation of a rigorous and robust assessment and monitoring cycle. Internal and external moderation of work across the key stages takes place but has yet to be fully embedded into the monitoring cycle to ensure maximum effect. The department and students benefit greatly from the focus on continuing professional development and the adoption of numerous successful initial teacher training programmes.

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

- Develop a thorough monitoring and evaluation schedule for teaching and learning to ensure the quality of teaching remains outstanding and never less than good.
- Ensure assessment procedures across all key stages have parity to facilitate effective tracking of pupil progress.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last Inspection the school has partially succeeded in extending the opportunities for pupils to participate more fully in liturgy and acts of worship by introducing the role of 'Catholic Ambassadors' at sixth form and commissioning nineteen pupils as Eucharistic ministers. However, there is scope to extend leadership opportunities lower down the school.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum is outstanding. The school meets the Bishops' Conference requirements for pupils to receive the weekly entitlement of 10% curriculum time in Key Stages 3 and 4. At Key Stage 5, although students receive their 5% religious education entitlement a more structured breakdown of how this is arrived at is necessary. The department benefits from a dedicated suite of well-equipped classrooms and access to a beautiful chapel. The budget for the department is generous in relation to other core departments. The school has a strong tradition of celebrating success and, to that end, pupil achievement and effort is recognised and rewarded through assemblies, certificates and commendation letters. The headteacher and SLT are fully committed to ensuring religious education is central in the school, and this vision is shared by the governing body.

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

is outstanding

The experience of Catholic worship for the whole school community is outstanding. The vibrant and charismatic approach adopted by the school's chaplain engages students and staff fully. Worship and prayer are very much a part of the fabric of St Michael's. Mass is celebrated on a very regular basis and pupils are actively involved in the preparation of these celebrations. The chaplain has taken Pope Francis's challenge 'to meet people where they are' in his programme of the 'travelling' Mass whereby he celebrates Mass in form rooms. Prayer also takes place within form groups and pupils take the lead on this in both its preparation and delivery. Pupils talk about their experience of the school's liturgical life with passion and one of the Catholic Ambassadors remarked that it has 'prepared them for life and enabled them to grow in their faith'. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is offered on a regular basis and pupils are free to see the chaplain at any time if they wish. Local parish priests are invited in twice a year to support the chaplain in providing reconciliation services alongside celebrating Mass on feast days. Assemblies, always underpinned by Church teaching, are thought provoking and are monitored and evaluated effectively. The school offers a retreat programme and are aiming to expand this further across the year groups.

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 The Mission of Hope in Ethiopia through the fantastic 'PIPE' initiative and its fundraising to support the recent Grenfell Tower disaster victims. 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 local food banks and Easter eggs for local homes and hospitals. The school works with the Society of Our Lady of Lourdes to encourage twenty-five pupils to travel to Lourdes on a yearly basis. Pupils value this opportunity enormously and talk in depth about the impact the Lourdes pilgrimage has had on them as individuals. Students show a good understanding of the call to human flourishing and identify that

they are 'living what they have learnt'. Within lessons pupils are able to explain the ethics of the market place and how this links to the Church's social teaching. The school has encouraged pupils to examine these issues and their individual response to them.

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's key relationships with parents, other local schools and the Diocese of Westminster are outstanding. Staff regularly attend events provided by the Diocese and are closely involved with the Diocesan Education Service. The school works closely in partnership with the local community, including the local deanery, parents and other Catholic schools. The chaplain is building good relationships with a number of parishes. Parents were overwhelmingly positive in their responses to the inspection questionnaire and are pleased with the way that the school communicates and promotes the Catholic ethos through regular newsletters, attendance at the annual Advent service and award evenings. However, a number of parents would like more information about the RE curriculum itself and how, as their first educators, they might help support their children at home. The school has strong links with a number of nearby primary and secondary schools through curriculum projects and the wider social formation of pupils. The school maintains its strong links with the Dominican Order as evidenced by the fact that a member of the order is currently on the governing board. In addition, the order has been generous in providing speakers for the school's extra-curricular programme. The school recognises that while a range of opportunities exist they are not complacent and plan to develop further the opportunities available for pupils.

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

is outstanding

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. The headteacher has great ambitions for the school and his confident and apostolic leadership cultivates a community enlivened by Gospel values. The importance of the school's mission is fully recognised by the school's leadership through its recent review of the school's mission statement. Further, new staff are carefully inducted into St Michael's and are provided with every support to both understand and contribute to the truth at the heart of this Dominican community. The formation of the school's 'Catholic Life' committee is testimony to the value that governors, staff and pupils place upon the school's Catholic ethos and this committee will enable the school to develop its Catholic mission further. The school's self-evaluation, whilst being accurate, is mainly descriptive and could be enhanced by greater evaluation of the excellent work being undertaken by the school.

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

- Widen the involvement of pupils in worship and prayer by developing the programme of Catholic Ambassadors at Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Enhance the school's evaluation systems using its new Catholic Life of the School Committee to further develop evaluation of the school's Catholic ethos.

Information about this school

- The school is a 6 form entry Catholic secondary academy school in the locality of Watford.
- The school serves the parishes of the Watford Deanery.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 97.5%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 2% and from other faiths is 0.3%. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 48%.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 2.
- There are 9.9% of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 7 have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is below average.
- There is a below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 151 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (13.4%).

Department for Education Number	919/5417
Unique Reference Number	137922
Local Authority	Hertfordshire

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	1126
The appropriate authority	Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust
Chair	Mrs Catti Ferro
Headteacher	Mr Edward Conway
Telephone number	01923 673 760
Website	www.stmichaelscatholichighschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@stmichaelscatholichighschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	9 – 10 May 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 sixteen 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 Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

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Mrs Sharon O'Donovan	Associate Inspector
Mrs Alison Berwick	Associate Inspector
Mr Nicholas Kehoe	Associate Inspector
Ms Katie Marson	Associate Inspector

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