



SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the
Archbishop of Southwark and Inspection of
Denominational Education under Section 48
of the Education Act 2005

URN 100859

Notre Dame Catholic Girls' Secondary School
118 St George's Road
Southwark, London
SE1 6EX

Inspection date: 1 & 2 October 2013

Chair of Governors:
Headteacher:
Inspectors:

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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

Notre Dame Catholic Girls' School is a voluntary aided 11-16 comprehensive school located in the Cathedral Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is situated in and maintained by Southwark Local Authority. The school recruits students from a large number of parishes and ethnic chaplaincies, as well as a large number of primary schools, including some north of the River Thames. There are currently 620 students on roll.

The school serves a very diverse population, with the majority of students having a West African background. In total, over 90% of the students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The vast majority (around 85%) of students are baptised Catholics and the remaining students are mainly from other Christian traditions.

Many families served by the school face serious deprivation and a high number of students (27%) are entitled to free school meals. Many families are either economic migrants or asylum seekers and over 70% of students come from homes where another language other than English is spoken.

The ability of the students on entry is just below the national average, but above the local average. The school has far fewer students on entry who are of higher ability, compared to most other schools. The percentage of students with a statement of educational need is below the national average.

The traditions and ethos of the school are derived from the charism of St Julie Billiart and the Sisters of Notre Dame. The school has existed for over 150 years, reflecting St Julie's belief that education is the greatest work on earth. St Julie's vision was to teach the children what is necessary to equip them for life. This vision is lived out daily at the school.

Key for inspection grades

| | | | |
|---------|-------------|---------|----------------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | Grade 3 | Requires improvement |
| Grade 2 | Good | Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education

GRADE
1

Notre Dame Catholic Girls' School is an outstanding Catholic school. Students at the school excel, due to excellent teaching and the care they receive from their teachers. The highly supportive and inclusive learning environment has been created by all the staff who work tirelessly for the students. The Catholic ethos permeates every aspect of daily life and strongly reflects the traditions, values and influence of the Sisters of Notre Dame.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school, as evidenced by the very high number of very positive responses on questionnaires returned to the inspector. As one parent accurately stated, "Notre Dame is a great school and I am so pleased my daughter attends the school". This sentiment was also expressed in the many additional comments made by parents on the questionnaire.

Students also spoke highly of the very caring nature of the school and mentioned, in particular, the Big Sister scheme, where younger students are paired with older students. Students feel safe and were clear that bullying rarely happens at the school and, if it does, they know it will be dealt with firmly by the teaching staff. Many students said they felt being at Notre Dame was like belonging to one big family, where everyone felt cared for and valued.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Ensure that the departmental handbook is updated to reflect current custom and practice, to ensure a consistent approach by all teachers in the Religious Education department.
- Ensure the departmental development plan has clear and measureable targets against which progress can be measured.
- Ensure schemes of work reflect the potential of the managed learning environment and the use of ICT by students, to enhance their learning in Religious Education lessons.
- Keep under review the curriculum time allocated to RE, to ensure it fully meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school

It is clear that students derive huge benefit from being part of the family of Notre Dame School. They speak warmly and proudly about their school, their teachers and the many opportunities given to them to develop and deepen their own faith. Behaviour in class and around the school is exemplary and is based on mutual respect for one another. This, in turn, creates a highly effective learning environment, where students feel safe, secure and valued.

There is a well-established programme of high quality retreats, which means that all students in all year groups have the opportunity to experience retreats which take place off site, but using local facilities belonging to the Cathedral and facilities such as those belonging to the Salvation Army.

Fund raising for charity is a feature of the school and a significant sum of money is raised for good causes, including local, national and international causes. The school supports two schools, one in Nigeria and one in Peru. Both of these schools are funded and run by the Sisters of Notre Dame. Other fund-raising takes place on St Julie's Day, as well as through Lenten lunches, raising funds for the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development. Students also raise funds for St Christopher's, the local hospice, as well as the national charity: Children in Need.

The Chaplain provides excellent support to students and works closely with the Head of Religious Education, to ensure liturgies and retreats are of a high quality. The new chaplaincy area contributes greatly to the spiritual life of the school, where class Masses are held, as well as morning prayer. It also provides a safe haven and counselling for those students who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. A counsellor from the Cabrini Society is also deployed in the chaplaincy area.

Each year, around 15 students in Year 10 are commissioned as extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. They serve both in the school and sometimes in their own parish. A number of students expressed their gratitude to the school for giving them such an opportunity and the trust shown in them by the school.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

It is clear that students at the school thoroughly enjoy their Religious Education lessons. High quality teaching and excellent work habits enable the students to make very good progress and achieve results above expectations. The excellent relationships between staff and students provides for a high quality learning environment. Students achieve high standards in their public examinations.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

Collective worship is outstanding. It is carefully planned to meet the needs of the students, who respond positively and thoughtfully and always in a highly respectful manner. In an excellent assembly seen during the inspection, students were challenged in their thinking about Mary as Mother of Christ and how she is a role model to all women. Students sung well and participated in readings and prayers. The school has a highly effective programme of Masses and liturgies, both in school and using the nearby St George's

Cathedral. Students spoke joyfully of St Julie's Day, which is celebrated each year in February.

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How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils

The school is very fortunate to have a long serving, inspirational and visionary Headteacher. She is seen by students and staff as the spiritual leader of the school community. The school also benefits greatly from a fully committed and experienced governing body. Leaders and managers know their school very well. They build upon the strengths of the school and readily tackle any weaknesses, to ensure the students experience the best possible Catholic education. The school's mission statement is displayed prominently around the school and in the students' planners. Students know well the mission statement and the school has put the words to music, which the students sing with enthusiasm. The mission statement, which is reviewed regularly, also appears on all school policies, to ensure these reflect the values of the Notre Dame Sisters.

The recent development of the new spacious Chaplaincy area reflects the school's commitment to developing the Catholic life of school and it offers great potential to develop this important aspect of school life beyond the already high provision on offer.

Another outstanding and highly effective feature of Notre Dame School, is the number of staff who have gained the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies whilst at the school. This has been a direct result of Governors and leaders investing wisely in this school based course, which is supported and taught by visiting lecturers from the Liverpool Hope University. Over 15 staff were in the most recent cohort that completed this course and this included a number of non-teaching staff.

The Headteacher also plays a leading role in the organisation of the annual Diocesan Secondary Headteachers' Conference, which takes place in June. This provides a valuable opportunity for Headteachers to share good practice, as well as supporting their own personal spiritual development. The school also very generously pays for the cost of this conference, which is well supported and very much appreciated by all Headteachers.

How well leaders, governors and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education and plan and implement for improvement to outcomes for pupils

The Chair of Governors is the link governor for the Religious Education department and meets regularly with the subject leader and departmental staff. He, along with senior leaders, has an excellent grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the Religious Education department. However, governors and senior leaders would be better able to assess and monitor the progress made by the Religious Education department if the departmental development plan had more precise and measureable targets. They recognise the need to appoint a full time subject leader and are proactive in terms of succession planning in relation to this key post.

Governors and leaders also ensure the Catholic ethos and Catholic life of the school features prominently in the school improvement plan. Currently, Religious Education is allocated 8.7% of curriculum time, whereas the recommended allocation is 10%. However, other high quality learning opportunities, such as Year assemblies, also contribute to the Religious Education programme.

The Religious Education department is allocated funding for resources at a level similar to English and Maths. Most Religious Education teaching takes place in specialist rooms, which are well equipped and have appropriate religious symbols.

The school has again been fortunate to have the benefit of a highly experienced and long serving Head of Department. She has ensured the department has gone from strength to strength. She is well supported by other specialist staff in the department.

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The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education

Teaching in the Religious Education department is consistently good and much of it is outstanding. Teachers are meticulous in their preparation of lessons, which ensures all students are actively engaged in their learning. All lessons seen showed clearly how much students valued and enjoyed their Religious Education lessons. They spoke openly of their appreciation for their teachers' efforts to deliver stimulating and engaging lessons and their willingness to go the extra mile to ensure the students made the progress expected. This included extra revision lessons, both after school and in the holidays, as well as the very helpful feedback given by teachers to their students, showing how they could further improve their work and make even better progress. Teachers make effective use of ICT in the classroom, but more use of it could be made by the students to enhance their learning. The school has access to a managed learning environment, but it is not used consistently by teachers or students.

It was also noted by the inspector that the departmental handbook was not up to date and had not been updated for some time which does not help to ensure a consistent approach by departmental staff to such things as marking and the use of ICT.

The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning

At Key Stage 3, the curriculum is based on the Icons programme. At Key Stage 4, the students follow the AQA syllabus (A). Students, where appropriate, are entered for their GCSE examination in Religious Education at the end of Year 10. Results achieved are outstanding and many of these students study AS Religious Education and, again, outcomes are excellent. For students who do not follow the AS course, they take part in the Faith Friends Programme, which links with the local Catholic primary school. Students speak highly of this programme and the skills and confidence they are able to develop as part of this programme. As a result of the above, the curriculum is closely matched to the needs to the students.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

Overall, the quality of collective worship is outstanding. Collective worship is carefully planned to ensure it is inclusive but challenging. The school has built very strong links with local clergy, including those at the Cathedral. Morning prayer takes place regularly, with a special focus on Mary in October and May.

In a high quality morning prayer meeting which took place during the inspection, students and staff were introduced to the Rosary. All those present were given a Rosary and these were blessed by a visiting priest from the Cathedral. Students responded maturely and sensitively to this opportunity. Students and staff also develop their spirituality through the excellent work of other Sisters of Notre Dame, who visit the school on a regular basis.