



Diocese of Westminster

INSPECTION REPORT

St Elizabeth's School

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DfE Number: 919 7006

URN Number: 117665

Headteacher: Mr Brian Sainsbury

Chair of Governors: Sr Annette Clemence

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

Date of inspection: 28 January 2011
Date of previous inspection: 20 May 2007

Reporting Inspector: Mrs S Nolan

Description of School

St Elizabeth's is a non-maintained special school for pupils from 5 to 19 in the trusteeship of the Daughters of the Cross of Liege. It shares its site with provision for older people with learning difficulties and disabilities. The 48 students currently on roll have severe learning difficulties as well as complex medical needs. Almost three quarters of the students have epilepsy and other neurological conditions. All students have a statement of special educational need and are funded by local authorities. The school serves families from a wide geographical area and most pupils are boarders. Around a quarter of the students are Catholics. Other students come from a range of Christian and non-Christian faiths, enrolled on the basis of their needs. Of the 16 full, part-time and temporary teachers, 47% are Catholics and 7 hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (CCRS) or other Catholic qualifications. Nine well-qualified teachers are responsible for Religious Education in the school, supported by the charism and ethos of the Daughters of the Cross and by the full-time Chaplain. The school strives to be a safe, caring environment helping its students to 'live life to the full' through individually tailored programmes very well grounded in gospel values.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Satisfactory; Grade 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

St Elizabeth's is an outstanding Catholic school with some exceptional features. Not least is the way the headteacher has built up a strong committed team which has sustained Religious Education at the heart of the school. Particularly striking is the way the coordinator is driving forward the best practice in assessing the students' progress. This excellent team work is reflected in the harmonious ethos among the students and staff, despite the huge challenges faced daily by the school community. Teaching is outstanding in its multi-sensory approach and the work of the department is monitored as rigorously as that of the core areas. All staff at St Elizabeth's are very well trained to understand the students' need for high structure and motivational stimuli. Above all, however, St Elizabeth's is a fully inclusive community that is trying to grow together 'in love... to make the world a better place for all.'

Grade 1

Improvement since the last inspection

At the last inspection, the school was asked to exemplify the P-levels of attainment in the schemes of work and develop further appropriate unit awards in Religious Education. It has been very successful in both areas. Not only is students' progress monitored weekly using P-Levels but the religious education coordinator regularly moderates students' work using exemplification materials. Since the last inspection, and despite a changing profile of students, significant numbers have gained one or more AQA-unit awards in Religious Education. Students achieve as well in Religious Education as they do in other curricular areas. Teaching is never less than good and often outstanding. The religious education department strives successfully to model the best inclusive practice in involving all students in its work, both in the classroom and in other school worship and activities. All students have the opportunity to attend Mass in the chapel on a daily basis as well as other forms of prayer and liturgy. Whatever their faith, students participate fully in assemblies and religious education lessons. The school regularly plans for ever more opportunities for students to deliver liturgical events and prayers, using symbols and music very effectively. St Elizabeth's has also developed well in other ways.

Religious education themes are integrated where possible with other areas of the curriculum. Events and activities are well exemplified for the students by drawing on their own experiences. 'Thoughts for the Day' and themes from the staff briefing are taken into the classroom by all staff. Improvement since the last inspection is very good.

Grade 1

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

St Elizabeth's has a strong capacity to improve further. Its planning is well informed by the rigorous quality assurance cycle which monitors and evaluates all aspects of the religious education provision. Links with governors are particularly helpful in overseeing the religious practice of the school and the development of the religious education department. There is a clear and shared vision of how to promote the Catholic identity of the school whilst, at the same time, including all those of other beliefs, both Christian and non-Christian. This drive is ably supported by the chaplain and the presence of the Daughters of the Cross. The school is in a strong position to build on its strengths, not least because of the commitment of school leaders at all levels to support the spiritual development of pupils of all backgrounds and to find ever increasing ways to enable all groups of pupils to express their participation in worship. St Elizabeth's is at the heart of a joint project with other Catholic special schools to make more precise and exemplify further the P-Levels of attainment in religious education schemes of work.

Grade 1

What the school should do to improve further

- Take forward existing plans to develop even further the exemplification of the P-Levels of attainment in Religious Education.

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

The leadership of the school takes very seriously the school's Catholic mission. This is clearly demonstrated in the way the Centre Management Team (CMT) is providing increasing guidance for staff about the expectations of those who work in this Christian organisation. The headteacher and senior school team are central to this work. This guidance is supported regularly and very effectively through well-planned professional development for all staff. Celebrations of Mass are very frequent along with many opportunities for sacramental and traditional practice. The chaplain is a well-known figure to the school community and liaises directly with the coordinator for Religious Education. The CMT and the governing body are working assiduously to raise the profile of the school throughout the diocese. Many local clergy are regular visitors, participating gladly in drama events such as the Easter journey of Christ. Parents are closely involved in the moral and spiritual development of their children. The school works hard to engage parents in the religious life of the school as well as in the students' education.

Grade 1

The Prayer Life of the School

The Church's liturgical cycle is well integrated into the life of the school. The provision for prayer life and collective worship is excellent. With the help of the chaplain, assisted by other local clergy, students are regularly able to participate in the Eucharist and other liturgical events which are very well adapted to meet the wide-ranging needs of the students. All are about to be involved, for example, in the annual celebrations for the Foundress of the Daughters of the Cross, Blessed Marie-Therese. Students are increasingly exposed to traditional Catholic practice through assemblies, drama, singing and other opportunities that match individual students' stages of development. All age groups have daily prayers and students join in assemblies as best they can. This was well demonstrated in the assembly on the Good Samaritan which was led by class 'S5' and enjoyed by all other groups. Students use their unique talents to express their worship in singing such as the 'Our Father' at the end of assembly. The many artefacts around the school, including the sculpture of St Elizabeth in the school entrance, reinforce the gospel messages they experience in their daily lives both in the school and in boarding houses.

Grade 1

How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?

A real strength of the school is the way it includes students from many faiths and some from non-faith backgrounds in its religious observance. Students enhance their experience of traditions other than those of their own through life in the boarding provision but also through the way the apostolate of the Daughter of the Cross exposes them to many different visitors from across the world. On the Foundress's day, they will see, for example, the flags from the many countries in which the Sisters are involved. Students also experience other forms of Christian worship as well as learning about other religions. Not only do they study Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and Hinduism, for example, but the Salvation Army is a popular visitor. The students know the local Anglican parish church as well as exploring other religious groups. Strong multi-agency partnerships are very effective in finding the right help for the students and their families. In so far as it is possible, the school promotes community cohesion exceptionally well and is deeply rooted in its local community as well as in its understanding of its place in the Church's global mission.

Grade 1

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Students make the same outstanding progress in Religious Education as they do in other areas of the school's curriculum. Students make fast progress in linking their personal experiences to religious teachings. They use a diverse range of forms of expression to show their enthusiasms in lessons and liturgical celebrations. Above all, the students learn to bear witness to Christian values through the respect promoted by the school for people who are different. They are proud of their efforts and some have gained accreditation in a number of AQA unit awards in Religious Education, many piloted by the school. The students' personal development is also strong because of the integrated approach by teaching, medical and other staff so that they can develop as fully as possible.

Grade 1

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is outstanding. In the lessons seen during the inspection, students were challenged to think spiritually, ethically and theologically about how to follow Jesus in their lives. Lesson content was varied exceptionally well to match the age range and needs of the students. The oldest students, for example, responded very positively to the calm and 'can do' ethos of the classroom. They were able to identify how they can be friends and what this meant in the gospel story. They were able to act out the disciples roles, including those of fishermen and even the tax collector. They were able practically to show through their foot models how they too would follow Jesus. Younger students were also very well engaged by the concrete examples from the wise and foolish men who respectively built their houses on rocks and on sand. The carefully thought-out practical tasks, well matched to the individual students, well illustrated the importance of firm foundations and what this means in daily life. Staff are very knowledgeable and well qualified for their task and show a strong commitment to the Church's mission. Relationships between staff and students are excellent and this leads to mainly positive attitudes to learning. Resources are imaginative and well used and departmental planning is particularly creative. Students with very diverse and complex needs are superbly supported by both teachers and support staff.

Grade 1

Quality of the Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is very good. Religious Education is as central to the school's curriculum as are other core areas. It fully meets the Diocesan requirements with regard to the allotted time and is well supplemented by prayer and worship. Cross-curricular links are used well, particularly to reinforce the students' literacy and modes of communication. Those for whom it is possible, for example, are able to read at assemblies and formulate bidding prayers for use during Mass. The religious education curriculum, as with so much else at St Elizabeth's, aims to develop the whole student and, thus, makes an invaluable contribution to building the school community. Schemes of work are well constructed to ensure progression through year groups and according to the particular needs of the students.

Grade 1

Leadership and Management of Religious Education

Religious Education at St Elizabeth's is very well co-ordinated and managed. The current subject leader, in post since September, has built very successfully on the excellent work of the previous coordinator. Together with the very supportive senior staff, the coordinator nurtures well the staff team and has built up a committed group of class teachers and support staff. Religious Education has a high priority in the school. Monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice, teachers' planning and student's performance and progress are rigorous. The department leader has a strong sense of the Church's educational mission and shares this with the staff. Professional development opportunities are accessible to all staff and well based on findings from the rigorous quality assurance work. The coordinator has done very well in the short time since taking up his post, particularly in developing a strong sense of partnership with other Catholic special schools and in driving forward initiatives to improve assessment in Religious Education.

Grade 1