

# St. Mary's Catholic School

Windhill, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 2NQ

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 6-7 December 2017



## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### A. Classroom religious education is outstanding

- Pupils are provided with an inspiring, vibrant and engaging curriculum which promotes independent thought and enquiry and fully meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory.
- Pupils' attainment in religious education is outstanding. They make excellent progress in relation to their starting points and capabilities.
- High quality teaching and learning ensures that all pupils achieve their full potential. All groups of pupils achieve well. Standards of attainment are very high and can exceed those of other core subjects at the highest grades.
- Teachers demonstrate a deep understanding of the faith and impart this to pupils in interesting and dynamic ways; pupils are constantly challenged by well-tuned teacher expectations.
- Assessment in religious education is well established and informs teaching and learning. Systems of peer and self-assessment enable pupils to have greater involvement in their learning.
- The subject leader has a deep understanding of the centrality of religious education, with exceptionally strong subject knowledge, modelling outstanding practice.
- The governors and leadership team promote, monitor and evaluate the department very well. A carefully articulated development plan and regular reports to governors ensure rigorous monitoring. The school's systems of review and evaluation are accurate and robust. Student and parent evaluation of the department's work is sought regularly and triangulates this evidence.

### B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The school's Catholic ethos is reflected in the excellent relationships between members of the school community and in the courteous, considerate and helpful behaviour of the pupils, where the mission statement and the school's Catholic ethos pervade all aspects of school life.
- The school fully complies with the curriculum time requirements of the Bishops' Conference.
- The school has a rich and vibrant Catholic life which supports pupils academically, socially and spiritually. Pupils enjoy coming to school and are very proud to be part of the community.
- Pupils are very much involved in the prayer life of the school and are skilled in helping to prepare and lead worship. Pupil-led prayer is a significant strength of the school.
- The school offers a wide range of prayer and worship opportunities. These reflect the traditions of the Catholic Church and encourage pupils to deepen their relationship with God.
- Pupils have a strong understanding of what it means to serve and strive for social justice. They understand the call to human flourishing and the school offers a myriad of opportunities to celebrate their gifts and talents.
- The headteacher provides inspirational leadership. He is ably supported by a strong governing body, his senior leadership team and a cohesive staff team who share his vision of excellence in Catholic education.
- Governors are deeply committed and conscientious in their role. They know their school well and play a very active part in the school community.

## A. Classroom Religious Education

### What has improved since the last inspection?

There has been a greater emphasis placed on extension and challenge in lesson planning and resources in addition to the development of higher order questioning in assessment tasks and schemes of work. This has led to greater opportunities for pupils to extend and explain their ideas more fully. Schemes of work have been revised to ensure tasks develop independent learning. As a result, the promotion of independent thought and enquiry are integrated elements in outstanding lessons.

### The content of classroom religious education is outstanding

There is a wealth of evidence that the programmes of study and supplementary resources used fully meet the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory in a creative and engaging way. Resources are shared and are used to create an interesting and challenging curriculum, where topics are re-visited to ensure greater depth and progression across all key stages. Assessment tasks have been redesigned to emphasise promotion of progress over time. The curriculum is carefully reviewed to ensure it remains challenging and inspiring. Schemes of work are carefully planned, resourced and evaluated. The curriculum is enriched by visits, outside speakers and deeper exploration of other faiths.

### Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding

Pupils join the school with knowledge and skills that are generally above average. The religious education department skilfully accelerates their progress so that their achievement is outstanding. Pupils typically achieve highly in religious education (RE) at each key stage, and their attainment compares very favourably with their performance in other core subjects. Pupils attain well above average results at the end of Key Stage 4 that are in line with successful attainment in other core areas of the curriculum and exceed those of core subjects at the highest grades. Those post-16 pupils following Level 3 courses in Religious Studies achieve well in both A2 and AS examinations although the cohort size taking the subject are variable over time. The general religious education course for all post-16 pupils involves pupils in extensive service for others and continues to develop their religious literacy. The content and assessment of this course has been reviewed in order to ensure it is both relevant and rigorous. Comprehensive, systematic and closely monitored tracking ensures all pupils make rapid and sustained progress. The development of the pupils' religious literacy is at the heart of the department's drive to support pupils' learning. Teachers set high expectations, and pupils are challenged to achieve these goals - they are enthusiastic and engaged in their learning. As a consequence, pupils demonstrate high levels of religious literacy and knowledge in their work.

### The quality of teaching is outstanding

In line with the department's own evaluation, the quality of teaching in religious education is outstanding. A collaborative and supportive approach, in addition to robust monitoring and evaluation all contribute to sustaining teaching that is consistently of the highest standards. During the inspection, the quality of teaching seen was never less than good, with a number of examples of outstanding teaching. Where teaching is outstanding, lessons are well crafted by expert teachers and learning is challenging and inspiring with excellent pace across sequences of lessons, incorporating a wide variety of strategies which allows pupils to lead in their own learning, exploring independent thought and enquiry. Pupils are highly engaged and enthusiastic, as well planned teaching incorporates a wide variety of strategies an interesting selection of tasks and resources, suitable to learners' needs, in order to deepen pupils' learning. In a Year 12 lesson on beginning the ontological

argument for the existence of God, pupils made very good progress and were confident in sharing their ideas with each other, drawing on previous learning. A hallmark of the department is that teachers demonstrate a deep understanding of the faith and impart this to pupils in interesting and dynamic ways and pupils are constantly challenged by well-tuned teacher expectations. There is a positive climate for learning in all lessons with pupils very engaged and eager to succeed. In a Year 7 lesson on discovering how Jesus and Moses are connected, detailed planning, fluid pace and higher level questioning ensured that pupils were challenged to make very good progress. Interesting and varied activities enriched by cross curricular links, engage and enthuse pupils. Work in pupils' books is well presented and reflects the pride pupils take in their learning. Assessment in religious education is well established and informs teaching and learning. Systems of peer and self-assessment enable pupils to have greater involvement in their learning and regular feedback demonstrates how they can improve. Pupils usually respond actively to teachers' marking, and deepen opportunities to advance their skills and knowledge, although the level of student response is frequently variable. The drive for excellence is a characteristic of the department's work; there is no complacency with a relentless focus on improving learning outcomes for every student. Evidence from student voice surveys strongly indicates that pupils enjoy their religious education lessons and appreciate the importance of these to their own lives.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education is outstanding**

The leadership and management of religious education are outstanding and effective in achieving excellent outcomes for pupils' religious literacy. There is strong evidence of a dynamic, strategic and operational creative leadership which creates a community clearly dedicated to excellence for all. Department records are meticulous, providing robust quality assurance in all aspects of the department's work. The subject leader, who is an assistant head, is proactive, with exceptionally strong subject knowledge, modelling outstanding practice. He has an excellent grasp of strengths and areas for development within his team and curriculum developments, leading to a clearly articulated and shared vision for the subject, and staff are well supported through professional development. Effective and thorough systems for monitoring learning and teaching are well established. Members of the RE department work closely as a team and are committed and experienced subject specialists. The subject leader and second in department work closely with others through a 'dispersed leadership' model to monitor, evaluate and plan for improvement. They are attentive to the views of pupils, parents, clergy, and colleagues and welcome collaboration. Assessment is a key lever in the department to raise attainment. Diagnostic marking along with self and peer assessment involve the pupils in identifying where they are in their learning and how to improve, and this strand of work is continuing to develop. Staff constantly assess learning in lessons, through homework, during the course of a module and throughout the key stage. They are skilled at using assessment for learning initiatives and understand the importance of effective assessment in raising attainment. Data is used effectively by the department and the line manager; it aids planning, directs lessons, identifies intervention and helps measure progress. There is a relentless pursuit for excellence within the department.

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

- Continue to develop and embed teacher feedback so that it focuses on next steps of improvement, thereby providing greater opportunities for pupils to engage in relevant target setting for their own learning
- To further develop more opportunities for pupil to lead in their learning.

## B. The Catholic life of the school

### What has improved since the last inspection?

Opportunities for pupils to participate and lead liturgy have been significantly strengthened through establishing a very vibrant chaplaincy team, complimented by a liturgy music group. The role of pupils has been further strengthened in the formal evaluation of the Catholic life of the school through regular evaluative feedback and surveys, evaluations of retreats, feast day activities and the planning, delivery and evaluation of liturgies.

### The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

**is outstanding**

The curriculum time of 10% for religious education at Key Stages 3 and 4, and 5% for sixth form general religious education fully complies with the Bishops' Conference requirements. The school views religious education as the core of the curriculum and consequently, time, money and resources are allocated in accordance with this status. Its generous annual budget is in line with or exceeds other core areas. All teachers, including those new to the school, are well supported in improving their practice and regularly attend diocesan in-service training. There are sensitive arrangements in place for the induction of all staff, including those from non-Christian faiths, in the Catholic life of the school. The place of religious education is well established at the heart of the school in that the department is situated largely in one building and in close proximity to the chapel. The current accommodation is well maintained despite its challenges and provides a vibrant learning environment.

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

**is outstanding**

The school excels at being a community based on a rich tradition of Catholic belief, custom and practice. Worship and prayer are central to the daily life of the school and are fundamental to the school's understanding of itself as a Catholic community. The richness of the Catholic tradition is further enhanced by creative liturgies held at appropriate points in the liturgical calendar. In addition, pupils are offered the Sacrament of Reconciliation in Lent and are invited to celebrate exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel on a regular basis. There is rich and vibrant core strength in chaplaincy from both staff and pupils which provides opportunities for planning, preparation and evaluation of their actions. Pupil led prayer is a strength of the school and all members of the community from each key stage are encouraged to pause, reflect and offer their own petitions in tutor time, enabling worship to be a real celebration. The student chaplaincy team are an energetic driving force in bearing witness to their faith. They are a mature, impressive body of pupils from all year groups and are able to evaluate their experiences and the impact of their actions. They speak with pride about their outreach work, being role models, serving in Eucharistic and liturgical ministry both in school and in their parishes and are hugely generous with their time for love of their community. One pupil on reflecting on the value of the retreat experience commented 'I've learnt what things in my life create solid foundation'.

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

**is outstanding**

The school's commitment to the Common Good is outstanding. Pupils speak with pride about the school's fundraising activities for local, national and international causes. They take a leading role, through the house system, in deciding when and which charities to fundraise for and often support charities and causes which have affected members of their own school community. They have a

strong understanding of what it means to serve and strive for social justice. All threads of the assemblies during the inspection were clearly linked to the food items collection drive for the Cardinal Hume centre, organised and led by student sixth form volunteers across the whole community. Pupils understand the call to human flourishing and the school offers a myriad of opportunities to celebrate their gifts and talents, through serving others and the St Mary's award which espouses values of the Gospel and is based on developing personal attributes. Pupils are given opportunities not only to grow in terms of their personal faith journey but also to develop as leaders through a very wide variety of opportunities.

**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 partnership with key stakeholders is outstanding. Parents and carers are invited to attend a number of key events throughout the year. Communication is further improved through a very active cycle of student and parent voice surveys. The school regularly invites parent feedback in this way, so are very aware of parent views and concerns, if any. One parent commented 'My child is visibly developing in their faith journey and I love the way the sacramental life is so frequently celebrated'. Another noted 'the pastoral care at St Mary's is....the love of God in action'. Newsletters to both pupils and parents regularly feature the call to serve others and celebrate the school's Catholic life. The school has close links with the parishes it serves, and priests from the parish regularly celebrate Mass with the community. Staff and governors regularly attend the professional development opportunities offered by the Diocese of Westminster.

**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 charism of the Sisters of St Mary of Namur is very much alive in the Catholic life of the school and the school works hard to maintain and build on this in order that the charism continues to flourish. The leadership team has high ambitions for the school and works hard to ensure the Church's mission in education is demonstrated in a dynamic and creative way. The headteacher is very effective in leading and managing the school as a living faith community. He has a very strong sense of service and mission which colours all management decisions and policy making. His clear vision is shared with staff, pupils, governors and parents. As a result, the school has a very strong Catholic ethos with deep foundations. The school has a very real sense of inclusion and belonging. The governors and leadership team promote, monitor and evaluate the provision of worship, resources, curriculum and staffing of the RE department very well. The school's systems of review and evaluation are accurate and robust. Student evaluation of the department's work, together with the views of parents is sought regularly and triangulates this evidence.

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

- To strengthen the delivery and monitoring of the experience of prayer during form time
- To continue to develop and further embed the roles of the student and staff chaplaincy teams

## Information about this school

- The school is a 5 form entry Catholic Secondary school in the locality of Bishop's Stortford.
- The school serves the parishes of the Lea Valley Deanery in the Archdiocese of Westminster, and the Uttlesford district of the Diocese of Brentwood.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 93.4%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 4.4 % and from other faiths is 1.3 %. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 57 %.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 7.
- There are 12% of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 18 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 well below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 88 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (9%).

<b>Department for Education Number</b>	919/5422
<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117594
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary Aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11-18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	1000
<b>The appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Michael Welsh and Mr Nando Braz
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Andrew Celano
<b>Telephone number</b>	01279 654 901
<b>Website</b>	www.stmarys.net
<b>Email address</b>	info@stmarys.net
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	22 <sup>nd</sup> November 2012
<b>Grade from previous inspection</b>	Outstanding
<b>Grades from previous inspection:</b>	
<b>Classroom religious education</b>	Outstanding
<b>The Catholic life of the school</b>	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 15 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended 2 assemblies 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.

Ms Niamh Brady	Lead Inspector
Ms Winnie Greer	Associate Inspector
Ms Paula Whyte	Associate Inspector
Ms Susan Grace	Associate Inspector

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