



Diocese of Westminster

The John Henry Newman School
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DFE Number: 9195413

Headteacher: Mr C Mathew
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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: 11-12 December 2013
Date of previous inspection: 20-21 September 2006

Reporting Inspector: Mrs S Nolan
Associate Inspectors: Miss K Poitiers & Mr A O'Neill

Introduction

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspectors spent two days in school, visited 8 lessons and two assemblies and had discussions with school staff, students 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, examination of school documents, and a number of learning walks across the school.

The inspection of the John Henry Newman School was carried out under the requirements of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Framework and Schedule for Section 48 Inspections approved by the Archbishop of Westminster. The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the school is in providing Catholic education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation.

Description of School

The John Henry Newman School is a seven-form entry, mixed 11-18 school in the local authority of Hertfordshire and the locality of Stevenage. The school serves over 25 parishes but caters mostly for families from the parishes of St Hilda's, The Transfiguration, and St Joseph's, all in Stevenage. The proportion of students who are baptised Catholic is close to 92%. The proportion of students who are from other Christian denominations is 6% and from other Faiths, 0.7%. Approximately a quarter of the sixth-form students are non-Catholics.

There are 1572 pupils on roll pupils on roll, with 28 students with a statement of special educational need. The proportion of students from ethnic minority groups is above average as is the proportion of students that speak English as an Additional Language. There is a below average rate of families claiming free school meals.

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1: Outstanding;*
Grade 1: Very Good;
Grade 2: Good;
Grade 3: Requires improvement;
Grade 4: Causing Concern.

A. Classroom Religious Education

How religiously literate are pupils in the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith and how well do they know, understand and appreciate the importance of religious faith and practice in everyday life?

What is the overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy?

Overall Grade: [1*]

Classroom Religious Education is outstanding overall in developing students' religious literacy. The implementation of the Curriculum Directory is very well developed and supports very well all provision at both Key Stage 3 and 4. Students have an excellent knowledge of the religious education curriculum and understand very well how it must be witnessed in daily life. Students report how important the school's motto of 'heart speaks unto heart' is to them and how they try to show it in practice in the way they treat one another. Students achieve very highly at the end of Key Stage 4 and are well versed in how to make fast progress. There are robust structures in place to develop at least good and mostly very good teaching. This relentless drive to provide ever better classroom practice adds up to an overall outstanding experience for the students. The leadership of the department has high expectations and communicates these very clearly to the specialist staff, encouraging a shared vision and a desire to be ever better professionals. Self-evaluation is generally accurate and the department's contribution to supporting the school's mission is exemplary. The specialist religious education programme throughout the school is excellent, and the department is working on developing further the general programme at post-16 to ensure all groups of students find it fully engaging. There is outstanding support both for and within the department by the chaplaincy team who, in addition to their other responsibilities, give generously of their time in the classroom as needed.

What has improved in classroom religious education since the last inspection and what should the school do to further improve in classroom religious education?

Since the last inspection, the school has implemented changes to the allocation of curriculum time for religious education. At Key Stages 3 and 4, students now spend 10% of the available time in religious education. The departmental specialist staff has expanded to eight, refreshing the team. Assessment practices have sharpened with all staff having ready access to centralised systems although not all are yet able to use the system fully effectively to plan students' learning. Resources have improved, including the provision and use of new technologies. Numbers opting for advanced level religious studies have increased since the previous inspection. The number fluctuates, however, and in some years can be small.

The school has agreed the following areas for improvement in classroom religious education:

- secure a valid base line as a starting point in Year 7 against which to measure progress in religious education
- ensure that there is always sufficient challenge for each group of students, especially the most able, in every lesson in the main school and in the sixth form
- further refine the students' responses to teachers' marking and target setting so that in setting their own targets, the students take on board teachers' written guidance.

How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements the Curriculum Directory?

Grade [1*]

The religious education curriculum is based firmly on the new Curriculum Directory. Schemes of work have been mapped explicitly to signpost the content expected across the academic and Church year. Resources and texts are carefully linked to topics and support increasingly good quality classroom practice. Emphasis is given to scriptural sources in lessons and students' development of religious literacy is very well supported, especially at Key Stages 3 and 4. Resources are shared very well among the teaching team. Post-16 students have access to library resources, some of which are in the process of renewal. There is still scope, however, to increase the range of academic journals and texts to which these students have ready access.

Students' work at Key Stage 3 builds upon a foundation informed by 'The Way, The Truth and The Life'. It is carefully amended to fit closely with the liturgical year and with the work of the chaplains. Besides this programme, students have the opportunity to explore other Christian Faiths at the end of Year 8 and during Year 10. There are well-focused links to other World Religions in Years 7 and 9 and in the sixth form. 'Chapel lessons' supported by the chaplains, intensify the department's work on the reflection and contemplation strand as do the retreat days.

Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education

Grade [1*]

Students typically achieve highly in religious education by the end of Key Stage 4. Students' attainment in religious education compares very favourably with their performance in other core subjects and is regularly well above average. In GCSE examinations, a high proportion of students, double that nationally, gained A*/A grades in religious education. Over 90% of students gain a higher A*-C GCSE grade, including those from other Faiths. Students make very good progress from their overall above average starting points in their time at the school.

Students' work over the school year is accurately assessed and well informed by the diocesan levels of attainment across both Key Stages. Examples of moderated work are readily available and used well by staff to ensure consistency in grading. The school gives high priority to its target setting and tracking of religious education and monitors progress as rigorously as in other key curricular areas. Nevertheless, the department has still to settle upon a valid base line to use as the starting point for Year 7 against which to measure students' progress. Meticulous marking ensures that students' progress is checked thoroughly and targets set for students at regular intervals. In the lessons seen, students' rate of progress across Key Stages 3 and 4 ranged from good to very good. This snapshot of what is demonstrably typical adds up over time to a pattern of rapid progress for most students in the development of their students' religious literacy. There is scope in some groups, however, to increase the level of challenge for the most able students and thus deepen their understanding of the work in progress.

All post-16 students follow a general religious education course, mainly at Level 2 in Year 12 and at Level 3 in Year 13. Small numbers take up advanced supplementary and advanced level courses, and achieve at least soundly in both. Because of the excellent GCSE outcomes for religious education, sixth form students start at well above average levels. The department recognises that there is more to do to raise the level of challenge, particularly in Year 12 for able students. There is evidence that the developments so far show recent greater engagement by students in the general course, although students reported that the level of challenge primarily stems from discussions around experiences of students of other Faiths.

There are strong moderation procedures in place to check the validity of teachers' assessments against the attainment levels. This is carried out regularly in conjunction with another successful adjacent Catholic school.

The quality of teaching

Grade [1*]

Overall, students learn outstandingly well, as both examination results and class work demonstrate. Relationships between staff and students are extremely positive, and this helps students flourish in religious education and achieve highly. Specialist staff have strong subject knowledge, high expectations and they provide opportunities for insightful discussion of theological issues in lessons. Students' engagement and behaviour are exemplary. The department has identified differentiation as an area for development, and whilst significant progress has been made in supporting less able students to achieve well, there is still some work to be done in ensuring there is sufficient challenge for the most able in all lessons. The most successful lessons show a strong awareness of the need to meet the needs of all students. This was clearly seen in a Year 11 lesson exploring family life and a Year 8 lesson based on The New Covenant. Work is well marked and students receive detailed diagnostic feedback regularly, but students' response in setting their own targets is not always sharply enough focused to help move their learning on rapidly.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade [1*]

The religious education department is led and managed particularly well. The department is formed of a strong team who work closely together to not only enhance the students' academic learning but also support the school's Catholic mission. The department is outstandingly well supported by the chaplaincy team. There is a sharp focus on improving teaching and learning through a range of development activities, including working collaboratively with diocesan personnel. Outcomes for the students are excellent and work is carefully moderated both internally and through cooperative working with external groups. In her short time in the post, the head of department has worked closely with senior managers to develop the quality of teaching through regular monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice. Through this programme, the subject leader is well aware of the next steps in the development of her staff.

B. The Catholic life of the school

How well do pupils experience the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing through all areas of school life?

What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?

Overall Grade: [1*]

The overall effectiveness of the school in developing students' experience of the richness of the Catholic way of life and belief is outstanding. Staff at all levels strive to ensure that all students flourish and grow into responsible caring people who reflect Christian values in their daily lives. Students and staff are proud to be part of John Henry Newman School. Prayer and worship are central to the life of the school, much strengthened by the advent of the chaplaincy team developed since the last inspection. Links with the diocese and with local schools and parishes are excellent as is the school's commitment to the common good. Parents recognise how well the school promotes the Catholic life of this community. Students appreciate the high quality education they receive and do their best to give back to others something of what they receive.

What has improved since the last inspection and what should the school do to further develop the Catholic life of the school?

Since the last inspection, the school has put in place at Key Stage 4, the students' full entitlement of 10% of curriculum time.. The appointment of a full-time lay chaplain has emphasised the high priority given to developing this catholic community. The school now benefits from a chaplaincy team of two. Students' involvement in supporting the Catholic life of the school has also strengthened. As a result, the students' participation in assemblies and other school worship has improved significantly. The chaplaincy teams have also developed closer relationships with feeder primary schools and surrounding parishes. The pastoral team has also grown in confidence following training on prayer and Catholic social teaching and is better able to evaluate the prayer life of the school. Although the school has raised the time available for religious education in the main school, it still supplements the general religious education time in the sixth-form with additional days rather than the full allocation of curriculum time. The work from these days has not been thoroughly and coherently tracked and audited for all students and only a few samples of work were accessible to demonstrate students' full participation. Through a whole school focus on catholic social teaching, the work of the pastoral team has been strengthened. This has also had benefits in the students' enthusiasm to support the community charities.

The department has agreed that the following area is a priority for improvement:

- demonstrating visibly and securely that the curriculum time allocated to general religious education at both Year 12 and Year 13 meets the 5% requirement.

The place of Religious Education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget

Grade [1*]

The school meets the requirements of curriculum time at Key Stages 3 and 4. Students spend 10% of the available curricular time in religious education. At post-16, the school provides 4% of curricular time and supplements this with additional provision through activities weeks and other activities. However, the school has not fully audited this provision and has not tracked thoroughly enough the students' participation and study from these events. During the inspection it was able to provide some samples of the types of work and outcomes.

Inspectors appreciated the school's efforts to find explicit evidence of the additional activities that make up the post-16 time. They judged that the balance of the evidence supported the time allocation in the sixth form as within the guidelines. Through its allocation of specialist staffing, resources on a par with other core areas, and the excellent chaplaincy support, senior staff demonstrate very strongly the school's commitment to promoting the Catholic life of its community. All students of whatever tradition are expected to participate in all aspects of Catholic life. A link governor has been appointed to explicitly review the spiritual life of the school community and reports annually. The headteacher, himself, in this large school, line manages the work of the religious education department. The majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire were very positive about the Catholic aspect of the school.

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

Grade [1*]

Both the prayer and liturgical life of the school are exceptionally strong. Worship is clearly at the heart of the school and there are numerous opportunities throughout the year for the school community to come together and celebrate their faith, including annual Masses for each year group. The involvement of students in Masses and liturgy, particularly those in the chaplaincy teams, facilitates very high levels of engagement and ownership. Daily prayer supports pupils' spiritual development and use of the school prayer affirms the school's distinctive ethos. The lay chaplain and priest chaplain work exceptionally well together, complementing each other's strengths. Students speak in glowing terms of the inspirational and inclusive nature of sacramental celebrations. Assemblies involve the whole school and provide a valuable opportunity for reflection on key themes, as well as a chance to gather as a Catholic community. The Years 8 and 10 assemblies exploring the theme of peace through the role model of Nelson Mandela provided excellent opportunities for quiet reflection, as some students played music and sang, which was a real highlight. The school chapel is well used by students and staff as a space for private prayer. Together with the prayer corners in classrooms and iconography around the school, it is a visible manifestation of the school's Catholic identity. There are outstanding opportunities for students to deepen their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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

Grade [1*]

The school's commitment to service and social justice is outstanding. Students contribute to the school, local and national communities, and do so very willingly as a result of a deep understanding of their faith. Charitable initiatives include financial support for The Passage and KISS, a Ugandan project supported by the students. Service is not confined to fundraising, and of particular note is the willingness of the Head Boy/Head Girl teams to spend Christmas with the communities in Uganda that are supported by KISS. Older students in particular, recognise the importance of 'giving

back' and speak of core faith values being instilled as they progress through the school. In discussion, students show not only real awareness of moral and social issues but also a firm individual commitment to practical action for social justice, with many involved in Fair-trade and Justice and Peace groups. The school works hard to develop leadership in its pupils and encourages them to use their individual talents to develop themselves and for the benefit of others, in capacities as diverse as form representatives, members of the Arts Executive Team, event organisers and as mentors for younger students. Students' pride in their school is evident and they flourish as members of this Catholic community. They understand the importance of respect for the practice of other Faiths.

Enabling the authentic partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf; Grade [1*]

The leadership of the school is committed to developing its role as a diocesan school. Staff regularly participate in diocesan training and senior leaders support other catholic schools in the deanery. Senior leaders support staff generously by allocating them time to develop their own expertise in developing their understanding of what makes for excellence among catholic schools. Already strong links with local parishes have been enhanced by the work of the chaplaincy team. Contacts with feeder primary schools have strengthened. Around 10% of parents responded to the questionnaire. The overwhelming majority of the parents were very positive in their views of how the school encouraged students to develop their catholic community life. A very few perceived that too little was done in the sixth form to enhance the catholic ethos and a few felt they were not invited often enough to take part in the school liturgy. Where possible the school does involve parents in its liturgical celebrations but it is constrained by space. Parents were recently invited to take part in a prayerful and very successful Advent celebration.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school. Grade [1*]

Senior leaders, governors and staff at all levels give real assent to the Catholic education mission of the school and support it outstandingly well. It is regularly under review. Those students of other faiths, mainly sixth formers, are expected to participate fully in the Catholic life of the school. The leadership team and the staff do their best to be genuine role models, living out their Catholic Christian values in their daily lives. The impact is seen in the reverence, prayer and respect for each other shown by the students. There is a real determination to ensure that the spiritual life of the school is not bolt-on but an integral part of the daily routine. All students are made to feel that they belong and their many talents recognised and built upon. The school is increasingly successful in providing high quality education within a living Christian experience for staff and students. The commitment of the headteacher and his team is seen in their appointment of the lay chaplain to support the work of the clergy as well as in the contribution to other catholic schools in the area.



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Overall Grade [1*]

How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?

Grade [1*]

Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education

Grade [1*]

The quality of teaching

Grade [1*]

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade [1*]

B. The Catholic life of the school

What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?

Overall Grade [1*]

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget

Grade [1*]

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

Grade [1*]

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

Grade [1*]

The partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

Grade [1*]

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

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