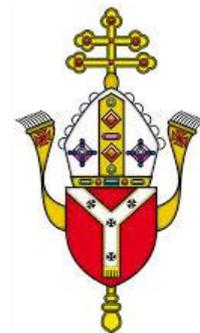


Westminster Diocese Inspection Report

Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School

Colney Heath Lane, St Albans, AL4 0TT

Date of inspection: 5 & 6 May 2016



A. Classroom Religious Education

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

Overall Grade 2

The overall effectiveness of classroom education is good. As pupils progress through the school, the well-structured delivery of religious education ensures progression and development of the curriculum content. The schemes of work are in line with the Curriculum Directory. With the re-establishment of a stable staff following a legacy of turbulence, subject specialist teaching is improving rapidly and is now good. Progress across all year groups is good and the GCSE cohort in 2015 made up much of the legacy of underachievement. The school recognises however, that there is more to do to ensure that the most able students achieve their potential in religious education. In lessons, most students make good progress in enhancing their knowledge of the Catholic faith and their religious literacy appropriate to their age and ability. At Advanced Level, both Year 12 and Year 13 students achieve exceptionally well. The recently appointed head of department ensures that non-specialist staff are well supported. Classroom religious education is well led and managed. Governors and senior leaders give high priority to developing the currently good quality of religious education and are determined to ensure continuous improvement for this school. The school knows its own strengths and areas for improvement and its self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate.

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 2

The overall effectiveness of Nicholas Breakspear School's commitment to the Catholic life of the school is good. It is evident that the leadership team and governors are aiming to put religious education at the heart of the school. Prayer opportunities include class prayer, assemblies, liturgies and traditional practices such as praying the rosary. The school community was involved in designing a new school prayer that students have further developed into a school hymn, both of which are used at all major liturgical celebrations. There has been an increased involvement of students' preparation for the liturgy. Delivery is enhanced by cross curricular links in music and drama. There is a new chaplaincy centre where there is a daily act of worship led by both teachers and students. The school provides the students with a varied range of experiences of what it means to live according to Catholic teaching and traditions. Students' engagement in promoting the Common Good is rooted in a deepening understanding of the social teaching of the Church. This not only provides opportunities for all to develop personal responsibility but also to engage in action to support others locally and internationally. The senior leadership and governors of the school are committed to developing their relationship with the diocese. They have developed effective links with the adjacent parishes and primary schools. Governors offer very good support in overseeing and reviewing the quality of the Catholic life of the school.

Introduction

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation during the conduct of the inspection. The inspectors spent two days in school; visited 12 lessons, 2 acts of collective worship and carried out 7 interviews with school staff, pupils and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, discussion with local clergy, and scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and an examination of school documents.

The Inspection of Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School was carried out under the requirements of the Canon 806 and Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Framework 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.

Inspection Team

Mrs Mary Coyle	Lead Inspector
Mrs Sheila Nolan	Associate Inspector
Mrs Katie Marson	Associate Inspector
Miss Nicola Walsh	Associate Inspector

Description of School

Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School is a Voluntary Aided co-educational school on the outskirts of St Albans. The school is a three form entry in the local authority of Hertfordshire. The school serves the parishes of Hatfield, London Colney, Potters Bar, St Albans and Welwyn Garden City in the Deaneries of Stevenage, Lea Valley and St Albans in the Archdiocese of Westminster. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 62%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 19% and from other Faiths 9%; 10% have not declared their faith. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 23%.

There are 578 pupils on roll, with 3 pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health & Care Plans (EHCP). The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is above average. The number of pupils speaking English as an additional language is above average. There is an average rate of families claiming free school meals. 113 pupils are in receipt of the Pupil Premium.

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DFE Number:	96/49137
URN Number:	137938

Executive Headteacher	Mr. Clive Mathew
Associate Headteacher	Mr Declan Linnane
Chair of Governors	Mrs Linda Graham

Date of previous inspection:	October 2011
Previous Inspection grades:	Good

Key for inspection grades:	Grade 1	Outstanding
	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 has improved in classroom religious education since the last inspection?

- The school now has well-considered plans in place to raise standards through the development of schemes that are closely linked to assessment for learning.
- The introduction of the Year 7 diocesan baseline assessment has given the department a clearer idea than previously of students starting points to inform planning and measure their progress.
- The department is using data more effectively to monitor attainment and progress in lessons.
- The school uses the half termly reports focusing on strengths and areas for development for the department.

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

Grade 2

The religious education (RE) curriculum has been thoroughly revised at each key stage to ensure it is carefully aligned with the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. The department uses a good range of resources to enhance the delivery of religious education. The department are developing their schemes of work to accommodate a new three year Key Stage 4 curriculum. Religious education programmes are used creatively and supplement and enhance the delivery of the Curriculum Directory resulting in a progressive and cohesive programme for each key stage. Post-16 courses develop further some of the content of the earlier key stages, ensuring clear progression that sustains the students' interest and deepens their religious literacy. The implementation of the curriculum in the daily life of the classroom demonstrates the team drawing regularly on scriptural, traditional and current sources to engage students in understanding the impact of their study in daily life.

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

Grade 2

Students' achievement is good overall. The school holds convincing data on the progress of current students. Attainment is at least as good as in other core subjects. Students achieve results slightly above the national average in GCSE. With the use of more robust data systems now in place the school can see an upward trend. The department makes good use of the diocesan baseline assessments to support staff and students in assessing work and understanding how it can be improved. Students' enthusiasm in lessons and the quality of their answers in class reflects their very willing commitment to apply themselves to their learning in religious education. They have a good understanding of religious literacy and participate in all aspects of classwork. Those post-16 students following Level 3 courses students do exceptionally well in both advanced and advanced subsidiary examinations. Students' uptake of the subject has grown impressively since the last inspection. Students know and understand what they have to do to improve their work and show good understanding of the levels of attainment. Students' attitude to learning, including individual and group work is consistently positive and has an impact on the progress they make.

The quality of teaching

Grade 2

Teaching is good and most students make good progress over time. There is a positive climate for learning and students are interested and engaged in lessons. The head of department has made it a priority to share, develop and support departmental colleagues in joint planning to ensure that the needs of all students have been met. Teachers use data provided by the head of department to inform their planning for students who are underachieving and give them targeted support. Students are provided with detailed feedback in the lesson and in their exercise books and they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. The written work in students' exercise books, alongside their oral responses in class, demonstrates good levels of religious literacy. Schemes of work are updated and reviewed every half term to ensure quality teaching and learning is taking place. Students place religious education consistently high in terms of their enjoyment of subjects. Teachers provide good opportunities for students to discuss complex theological issues as observed in a Year 13 lesson. In most lessons observed students developed an understanding of religious experience and were confident enough to explore their thinking and were engaged in their learning. There was good modelling of examination answers in both a Year 11 and Year 13 lesson. In a Year 10 lesson on natural resources, the students were guided to recall their earlier learning and there were many opportunities for students to speak and listen to others. The progress of students was checked in the lesson and students knew their target grades and how to improve. In all the lessons observed there was a good use of praise and encouragement by teachers.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade 2

The head of RE was recently appointed. In common with senior leaders, she has a clear vision for the development and growth for the department and strives for rapid progress for all groups and excellence in learning. There is an ethos of collaborative collegiality among the team. As a result the leadership and management of religious education are good. The head of department supports non-specialists by providing teachers with resources and theological notes. There is an open door policy which encourages all members to share good practice. The head of department ensures all teachers have relevant data to inform planning and ensure that any students who are underachieving are supported in their learning. There are effective systems in place to regularly monitor and track pupil progress. Self-evaluation is generally accurate and there are clear and robust strategies for addressing areas for improvement. The governors of the school offer good support, challenge and commitment as to the place and importance of religious education in the school. There is a link governor who has had regular visits and updates regarding the progress and development of the RE department.

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

- Ensure high attaining students always make the progress they are capable of in RE. This will continue the drive to raise achievement above that of the core subjects.
- Ensure the KS3 students have the relevant 10% RE curriculum time.

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 has improved since the last inspection?

- A wider variety of prayer experiences than at the last inspection have been embedded including those in lessons. There are now many more opportunities for students to participate in liturgy.
- There is ongoing development of links with Catholic feeder primary schools and adjacent parishes to improve the recruitment of Catholic pupils to the school.

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

Grade 2

Students in Key Stage 3 currently receive 8 % of curriculum time. At Key Stage 4 all students receive 10% of curriculum time. Next academic year, the curriculum will provide 10% for all Key Stage 3 students. At post 16, students receive their full entitlement of 5% of curriculum time. The religious department budget is in line with other core subject departments. The allocation of staffing to religious education, both in the classroom and at whole school level is generous. There are three non-specialists. The RE department has recently moved in to the main building of the school, allowing it a central presence. The newly converted chaplaincy quarters, the Emmaus Centre offers an excellent resource to support the ministry of the chaplain and provides space for prayer, group work and counselling. The leadership team and governors are committed to the review and development of quality religious education. New staff including, newly qualified teachers and those in training, receive good support on the distinctive nature of a Catholic school.

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

Grade 2

Prayer and worship are central to the Catholic identity of the school. Students experience a rich diet of the teachings and traditions of the church and are offered a good range of opportunities to appreciate and reflect on a Catholic way of living. The celebration of the Eucharist is placed at the heart of worship in the school community and there are many opportunities for students to attend Mass. During the inspection, Year 8 students participated in a celebration of Mass in their RE lesson. Students take an active role in leading and planning liturgical events and as a result celebrations are vibrant and engaging. The key theme of the chaplain's work is accompanying students through their faith journey. Opportunities for traditional Catholic practices occur throughout the year such as sacramental rites and the rosary. There is a comprehensive retreat programme for all year groups where both staff and students have an opportunity to reflect on their spirituality. The school has also trained ten sixth form Eucharistic ministers who act as role models to the younger pupils in the school. Students' spiritual and moral development is well provided for through discussion, time for quiet reflection and sharing during year group retreats. The Year of Mercy has been marked as students have created their own Door of Mercy in the school and students will also be visiting a Door of Mercy in a local parish. A new house system has been developed and students are attached to these houses based on Catholic saints. The school has adopted the last Friday in November as its annual Feast day; it commemorates the date on which Nicholas Breakspear became Pope. A house Mass is offered on this day and there are opportunities for deeper reflection. Theatre groups and speakers engage with the students and the entire school community is provided with an opportunity

for quiet reflections and sharing, especially those students from other faith traditions.

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

Grade 2

The school makes good contributions to the Common Good and social justice. As a Catholic community 'human flourishing' is at the heart of daily acts of worship. Each person is recognized as a unique creation of God and is reflected in the school's mission statement and vision. Students are well supported in their understanding of their 'call to human flourishing in a variety of ways including in the provision of fund raising for the international charity KISS, in Uganda and a local food bank. The school's sustained commitment to the work in Uganda is a way of bringing the community together and empowers students in younger years to raise awareness and money for this cause. There was a good understanding shown by students of the theological underpinning of their actions. The sixth form leadership team plays a key role in contributing to the Common Good by organising a local Christmas high tea for pensioners in the local community. The new head teacher has also implemented a highly effective and creative reward system for attendance, work and effort and students are proud to receive one of the Nicholas Breakspear reward cards.

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 2

The school demonstrates that it has good relationships with its parents, parishes and other Catholic schools and the diocese. The school welcomes and encourages parental participation, actively seeking ways to further consolidate their partnership. The annual diocesan questionnaire demonstrated that the majority of parents who replied were positive about the role of religious education within the school. One area where parents felt that the school could do more was homework. The RE staff regularly attend deanery and diocesan meetings and have shared assessment moderations with other local schools. Governors are actively involved in the school, attending in-school training sessions in religious education, contributing to the completion of the school self-evaluation document. The local primary schools are invited in for taster days and workshops. The school has a very close links with other Catholic schools in the diocese as part of the multi academy trust. The head teacher attends regular meetings and conferences for Catholic head teachers. The chaplaincy co-ordinator works with The John Henry Newman School, Stevenage to assist with their chaplaincy provision.

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

Grade 2

The school's leadership team and the governors are fully committed to the Church's mission and have high aspirations for the school as a Catholic community. The vision is of a place of learning that is shaped by its core Catholic values. The head teacher and head of religious education demonstrate strong leadership through a creative and dynamic approach which enables students and staff to experience the richness of opportunities of a Catholic way of living and discipleship for life. The school's self-evaluation accurately reflects the strengths and areas for development. There were numerous examples of the ways the school expresses its Catholic identity such as the wide opportunities for the pupils to experience a variety of forms of worship and prayer. There are effective systems in place to support and develop staff through ongoing staff development. They were very well supported in this by the head of department. The governors share in the strategic

leadership of the school offering highly effective support to the leadership team. The RE link governor and the local clergy are actively engaged in promoting the Catholic identity of the school. The school's mission statement has been recently reviewed and dynamically expresses the school's understanding of itself as a Catholic school. It is prominently displayed throughout the school is widely known and referred to by pupils and makes a significant contribution to and impact on all aspects of the school's daily life.

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

- Work on displaying more religious artefacts around the school
- Ensure all students say prayers in form sessions and monitor the use of school policy on morning prayers.