

St Joan of Arc Catholic School

High Street, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire WD3 1HG

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 6-7 October 2016



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is outstanding

- The content of the classroom religious education is outstanding.
- A significant example of excellent practice is the supplementary programme called ARC (Active Roman Catholics), this approach is worthy of further dissemination across the diocese.
- Pupils' achievement in religious education is outstanding; pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points in Year 7 to the end of Year 11.
- At GCSE pupils attain consistently well above the national average. The achievement of pupils is very good particularly in comparison to other subjects in the school.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding.
- A key feature of the department is the excellent working relationship with pupils that result in high levels of cooperation and excellent attitudes to learning; pupils enjoy religious education lessons.
- There were some excellent examples of skilled teacher questioning that encouraged pupils to think at a deeper level.
- The quality of the leadership and management of religious education is outstanding.
- The department is formed of a cohesive team who work closely together to enhance not only the students' academic learning but also support the Catholic life of the school.
- The subject leader has a vibrant vision for Catholic religious education that encompasses both a dedication to achieving excellent academic outcomes for pupils and an ambition to prepare them for the demands of religious commitment in daily life.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum is outstanding.
- The experience of Catholic worship is outstanding. The liturgy provision demonstrates that worship and prayer are central to the life of the school for pupils.
- The Eucharist is a significant feature of the experience of pupils; there are regular opportunities to attend Mass both at school and in the local parish church.
- The chaplain and pupil chaplaincy team make a significant contribution to the Catholic life of the school.
- The contribution to the Common Good is outstanding.
- The school has an extensive programme of giving opportunities for pupils to respond to the needs of others.
- The ARC programme significantly contributes to pupils' ability to understand the rationale for engaging in social action as a result of the challenge of the gospels.
- The partnership between parents, school and parish is outstanding. Relationships with local parishes are very good.
- The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school is outstanding.
- The mission statement permeates all aspects of school life from policy to every day practice.
- The headteacher and governors have high ambitions for the school and instil in staff and pupils the desire to strive for excellence as an effective Catholic school.
- There is clear evidence of high levels of staff collaboration to effectively promote the Catholic life of the school.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

In the previous inspection, the religious education department was challenged to “develop further support for more able students and strengthen marking further, by identifying clearly aspects of pupils’ work that have been successful.” There is good evidence, in the form of lesson observations that have been carried out over a number of years that the more able have been catered for. Stretch and challenge tasks were evident in a number of lessons observed in this inspection and outcomes for pupils at GCSE demonstrate that pupils of all abilities make very good progress. There is very strong evidence that the department has improved the written feedback that it gives to pupils. Pupils’ work is consistently marked with some examples of high quality teacher comments that enable pupils to make excellent progress.

The content of classroom religious education is outstanding

The content of the classroom religious education is outstanding. The department fully meets all the requirements of the Curriculum Directory at all key stages. The schemes of work have sufficient detail to support effective lesson planning and are clearly linked to the Curriculum Directory. The curriculum is designed to ensure pupils experience a systematic programme of study organised around the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, the Church, its beliefs, celebrations and way of life of Catholics who follow that teaching. The teaching of other faiths is an integral feature of the curriculum that supports the aim of fostering interfaith dialogue. At both GCSE and A level the Eduqas examination board is used. At GCSE foundational and applied Catholic theology is studied as is Judaism. There is a programme of enrichment, such as visits to the Jewish Museum, the range of which could be extended further. At Key Stage 3, the curriculum is ripe for review given the changes at Key Stage 4 and 5, as well the changes with the primary curriculum. There is partial evidence from lesson observation that the content of some aspects of Key Stage 3 could be improved to increase the rigour. A significant example of excellent practice is the supplementary programme called ARC (Active Roman Catholics) that starts in Key Stage 4 and continues into Key Stage 5 as part of the Core RE provision within the sixth form. The programme is based around Jesus’ parable of the sheep and goats from Matthew’s Gospel. Pupils are presented with the Church’s moral and social teaching so that they can critique the underlying trends in contemporary culture and society. They are then challenged to help the vulnerable and disadvantaged in society. This approach is worthy of further dissemination across the diocese.

Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding

Pupils’ achievement in religious education is outstanding; pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points in Year 7 to the end of Year 11. Different groups of pupils make excellent progress in religious education. The majority of pupils join the school with above average levels of attainment. At Key Stage 3 pupils make excellent progress which is based upon a rigorous assessment framework. Pupils’ work is regularly moderated and as a result staff are well placed to guide pupils to further improve their work. At GCSE pupils attain consistently well above the national average. The achievement of pupils is outstanding, particularly in comparison to other subjects in the school. At AS students’ attainment and progress is in line with expectation and at A2 there has been a shift with more students achieving higher grades. The number of students opting to study at A level has reduced over time and this matches the trend within the school, however the department could consider ways in which it can further contribute to the school’s drive to increase student numbers in the sixth form.

The quality of teaching**is outstanding**

The quality of teaching is outstanding. A key feature of the department is the excellent working relationship with pupils that result in high levels of cooperation and excellent attitudes to learning; pupils enjoy religious education lessons. Religious education lessons are characterised with well-planned lessons that are matched with excellent resources that differentiate to enable all pupils to achieve. In a lesson on the role of women in religion, the teacher skilfully built upon learning to enable high order thinking that supports pupils articulating their own views. The balance between teacher talk and pupil activity was very effective in a number of lessons observed. There were some excellent examples of skilled teacher questioning that encouraged pupils to think at a deeper level. In a lesson on stewardship teacher questioning enabled pupils to rapidly develop their understanding of Catholic teaching on care of the environment. Teachers imparted their high levels of subject knowledge with confidence and authority to ensure that pupils are engaged effectively in learning. In a sixth form ARC lesson pupils were challenged to explain why the Catholic Church opposes human trafficking, the teacher was able to link this to free will and also Kant's categorical imperative. Where teaching was less effective, the level of challenge was not at an appropriate level, as a result the pace slows and pupils do not make rapid progress. At Key Stage 3 the department needs to ensure that all lessons demonstrate the ambitious learning objectives seen in the best lessons which enable pupils to make significant progress. There is good evidence that a culture of dialogue marking has been established which results in pupils making good progress, as they are active participants in identifying the next steps in their learning. There is further scope within the department for the sharing of excellent practice, especially with regard to marking.

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

The quality of the leadership and management of religious education is outstanding. The department is formed of a cohesive team who work closely together to not only enhance the students' academic learning but also support the Catholic life of the school. The subject leader has a vibrant vision for Catholic religious education that encompasses both a dedication to achieving excellent academic outcomes for pupils as well as preparing them for the demands of religious commitment in daily life. High levels of collaboration are apparent in the department and strategies are in place for the sharing of good practice, including paired lesson observations and a shared drive for resources and ideas, resulting in very thorough lesson planning. There is careful monitoring to ensure very good levels of consistency across the department. Support strategies are in place and the subject leader is well aware of the next steps in the development of the staff within the department. There is strong evidence to support the successful tracking of pupil progress through the rigour of the assessments that are in place, target sheets and pupil self-assessment forms. The subject leader is proactive in working with colleagues in other secondary schools as well as primary schools. The effective outcome of this is that there is a strong culture of continuing professional development that enables the department to maintain its outstanding quality of achievement for pupils. The department self-evaluation is very accurate; the subject leader has an excellent understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement. The subject leader is very well supported by the governors and leadership team with the result that the department thrives.

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

- Given the recent changes to the GCSE and A level specifications the department will need to review the provision at Key Stage 3
- To further develop the recruitment at A level Religious Studies

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

In the last inspection the school was targeted to “improve the range of opportunities for pupils to experience Eucharistic celebrations and further develop support systems to ensure that pupils always experience morning prayer”. The school has fully met both targets. Pupils now have many more opportunities to experience Mass and this has become an established part of what the school does. Pupils routinely experience prayer as a normal part of their day.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum is outstanding. The school fully meets the requirements for pupils to receive the weekly entitlement of 10% curriculum time as directed by the Bishops of England and Wales. In Key Stage 4 pupils receive 12% curriculum time. The budget for the department is comparable to other core departments. Since the last inspection there has been an increase in dedicated classrooms although some aspects of the rooming could benefit from improvement. The governors are fully committed to the development of excellent religious education. The leadership team provides excellent support and guidance to the department and ensure that religious education has a high status in the school.

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

is outstanding

The experience of Catholic worship is outstanding. The liturgy provision demonstrates that worship and prayer are central to the life of the school for pupils. The school has effectively established a culture of prayer with numerous opportunities for communal and individual prayer, for example the chapel is available for both private prayer as well as daily communal prayer. Since the previous inspection there has been an improvement in resources for tutor time prayer which have had a significant impact on the embedding of prayer as a core activity of the school. There is further scope for the development of pupil engagement in the planning and preparation of tutor time prayer so that it reflects the breath and richness of the Catholic tradition. The Eucharist is a significant feature of the experience of pupils; there are regular opportunities to attend Mass both at school and in the local parish church. The chaplain ensures that prior to Mass pupils are given preparation time that enables them to deepen their experience of Mass. The provision for the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Advent and Lent has seen increased numbers of pupils opt to speak with one of the local priests who support the school. The chapel is an excellent resource that is promoted well and used by pupils. Pupils take an active part in the planning of liturgies and assemblies, and are particularly appreciative of the creative liturgies that result from pupil involvement. There is a strong evaluation and monitoring culture as pupils review assemblies regularly and give feedback to the chaplain and the leadership team. The chaplain and pupil chaplaincy team make a significant contribution to the Catholic life of the school. The retreat programme is comprehensive and regularly reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of all pupils. The school has engaged very successfully with the Jubilee Year of Mercy called by Pope Francis. The school commissioned fifty pupils as ‘Apostles of Mercy’ with a remit of leading on corporal acts of mercy such as fundraising for the Udayan charity.

The contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice

is outstanding

The contribution to the Common Good is outstanding. The school has an extensive programme of giving opportunities for pupils to respond to the needs of others. For example the school has

established a long term link with Udayan, a home for the children of families affected by leprosy in Kolkata, India. They have raised significant amounts of money as well as raising awareness of the issues and how this relates to Catholic social teaching. The ARC programme significantly contributes to pupils' ability to understand the rationale for engaging in social action as a result of the challenge of the gospels. The school supports a wide range of organisations from the local food bank to the Catholic Worker Farm. Pupils can articulate the theological rationale behind their call to serve, citing the school's mission statement 'Love Christ, inspire others' as their starting point. Pupils' achievements and talents are celebrated regularly and through different forums such as assemblies and award ceremonies. Recently pupils were nominated for the Cardinal Hume Award as part of the Million Minutes organisation. The school provides excellent opportunities for pupils to develop and celebrate their gifts and talents as individuals and as a community.

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 partnership between parents, school and parish is outstanding. Parental questionnaires regularly demonstrate that the school receives high levels of support. This is the result of the school's endeavours to collaborate with parents and deepen the shared understanding of the mission of the school. Parents are encouraged to participate in school liturgical events, for example at the Advent Carol service. Relationships with local parishes are very good. This is especially seen in the weekly attendance of pupils at a morning parish Mass. The chaplain works closely with the local parish priest, who is also a governor, to support the liturgical experience of pupils. The school has very strong links with the diocese and has worked extensively in supporting other local Catholic schools, both primary and secondary.

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

is outstanding

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. The mission statement permeates all aspects of school life from policy to every day practice. Pupils have a clear sense of the school's distinctive understanding of itself as a Catholic school. The headteacher is a driving force in the school's commitment to the education of young people with a vision of discipleship for life. The headteacher has high ambitions for the school and instils in staff and pupils the desire to strive for excellence as an effective Catholic school. The leadership team and the staff are excellent witnesses to the values of the school; the impact can be seen in the outstanding attitudes and behaviour of pupils in the school. There is clear evidence of high levels of staff collaboration to effectively promote the Catholic life of the school. The school self-evaluation is highly accurate and as a result the school's development plan is a genuine vehicle to further develop the Catholic life of the school. There are very effective systems and support in place for the induction of new staff into the Catholic life of the school. The governors of the school make a significant contribution to ensuring the school is an outstanding Catholic school. The chair of governors has an excellent vision of the value of Catholic education and with his team of highly skilled governors, works very effectively with the leadership team in safeguarding and promoting the Catholic life of the school.

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

- Further develop pupil engagement in the planning and preparation of tutor time prayer so that it reflects the breadth and richness of the Catholic tradition.

Information about this school

- The school is a seven form entry Catholic Academy school in the locality of Rickmansworth.
- The school serves the parish of Our Lady Help of Christian's, Rickmansworth, St John the Evangelist, Mill End and St John Fisher, Chorley Wood, as well as a large number of other parishes from the wider area.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 96.6%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 1.9% and from other faiths is 0.2%. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 44%.
- There are 15% of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 11 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 below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 54 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (4.4%).

Department for Education Number	919 5418
Unique Reference Number	137914
Local Authority	Hertfordshire

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	1225
The appropriate authority	The governing body and academy trust
Chair	Mr Tony Leahy
Headteacher	Mr Peter Sweeney
Telephone number	01923 773881
Website	www.joa.herts.sch.uk/
Email address	admin@joa.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 March 2011
Grade from previous inspection	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 14 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended nine 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.

Mr Matthew Dell	Lead Inspector
Miss Winnie Greer	Associate Inspector
Miss Anne Moloney	Associate Inspector
Ms Paula Whyte	Associate Inspector

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