



Loreto College

Hatfield Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 3RQ

Date of inspection: 12th – 13th November 2014

A. Classroom Religious Education

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

Overall Grade I*

The overall effectiveness of the school's classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy is outstanding. The requirements of the Curriculum Directory are clearly met by the department. Pupils' achievement in religious education is outstanding; the progress of pupils is excellent and sustained. The achievement of pupils at GCSE is outstanding particularly in comparison to other subjects in the school; the number of pupils achieving A - A* is notable. All pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points in Year 7 to the end of Year 11. The school is to be commended for these excellent results. At A level the department is extremely successful at recruiting students. The quality of teaching is very good which results in pupils making outstanding progress. Teacher planning is very good and lessons are characterised by having very clear learning objectives. The members of the religious education department are strong witnesses to the Catholic faith and through their excellent relationships with pupils are effective in drawing them into the Catholic life of the school. The head of department has an excellent vision for the department which is grounded on establishing the right relationships so that the best can be achieved from each member of staff and each pupil.

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 I

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 is very good. Pupils have an excellent experience of Catholic worship. The religious education department drives the prayer and liturgy of the school. There are excellent opportunities for students to be involved in preparing for prayer, assemblies, prayer services and Mass. The call to human flourishing is at the heart of the school's mission statement and is consistently promoted through the Loreto school values. There is a keen sense amongst pupils and staff to promote justice and peace and the concern for those in need is expressed in many ways including high levels of fundraising. The school has an excellent pastoral care system ensures that pupils' wellbeing is paramount. Pupils feel that they are cared for and that staff go out of their way to help them. There are outstanding links with the parish and very high levels of parental support. The school has excellent links to the Diocese as well as with other Loreto schools in England. The leadership of the school, the senior leadership team and governors, is passionate about promoting a school that 'stretches hearts as well as minds' as well as promoting the values of truth, joy, justice, freedom and sincerity.

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 14 lessons and three assemblies, and carried out 14 interviews with school staff, pupils and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contact with parents through a questionnaire, discussion with local clergy, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

The Inspection of Loreto College 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 Cardinal of Westminster Diocese. 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

Mr Matthew Dell	Lead Inspector
Mr Andrew Bull	Associate Inspector
Miss Nancy Conoboy	Associate Inspector

Description of School

The school is a five form entry in the LA of Hertfordshire and the locality of St Albans. The school is an Academy in the trusteeship of the Loreto Education Trust. The school serves 46 parishes ranging from North London to Luton and there are 16 Catholic feeder primary schools with St Alban and St Stephen's the main feeder schools. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 98.6%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 1.4%. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 52%.

There are 939 pupils on roll, with 10 pupils with statements of Special Educational Need. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is well above average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is below average. There is a below average rate of families claiming free school meals. 91 pupils receive the Pupil Premium.

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Headteacher:	Mrs Maire Lynch
Chair of Governors:	Mr David Keiley

Date of previous inspection:	10 th June 2009
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Key for inspection grades:	<i>Grade 1*</i>	<i>Outstanding</i>
	<i>Grade 1</i>	<i>Very Good</i>
	<i>Grade 2</i>	<i>Good</i>
	<i>Grade 3</i>	<i>Requires improvement</i>
	<i>Grade 4</i>	<i>Causing Concern</i>

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?

At the last inspection, the religious education department was asked to strengthen the good practice in assessment through greater clarity in teachers' marking and explanations, to ensure that all groups of learners receive precise advice on how to improve their work. This issue has been addressed. Staff provide detailed feedback to pupils to enable them to improve their work; there was some outstanding practice seen in written feedback provided to students preparing for A level examinations.

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

Grade 1*

The content of classroom religious education is outstanding. The requirements of the Curriculum Directory are clearly met by the department. Schemes of work are detailed, and links to the four key strands of the Curriculum Directory are explicit. At Key Stage 3 pupils follow 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' which is supplemented with excellent material developed by the department. In Year 9, pupils study an engaging unit on world religions, which is further enhanced by the opportunity to visit places of worship. At GCSE all pupils follow AQA Mark's Gospel and Christian Ethics. Both the department and school library is well resourced with a range of text books to support the needs of all pupils. A Level Religious Studies builds on prior knowledge, whilst affording students the opportunity to develop high levels of religious literacy. The new core sixth form religious education programme has been well received by the sixth form, on the basis that it is 'interesting and relevant'. There is further scope for the development of assessment opportunities with the new programme. The catechetical programme run concurrently with core sixth form religious education enables pupils to fully live the Gospel message and share the 'Good News' with local primary schools.

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

Grade 1*

Pupil's achievement in religious education is outstanding; the progress of pupils is excellent and sustained. The majority of pupils join the school with well above average levels of attainment. At Key Stage 3 pupils make excellent progress which is a solid foundation for further achievement. 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; the number of pupils achieving A - A* is notable. There are no gaps in attainment with regard to different groups of learners. As a result all pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points in Year 7 to the end of Year 11. The school is to be commended for these excellent results. At A Level the department is extremely successful at recruiting students; nearly 40% of all students in the sixth form study A level Religious Studies. This is indicative of the success at GCSE and the excellent relationships that have been carefully nurtured in Key Stages 3 and 4. At AS students' attainment and progress is in line with expectation and at A2 there is room for improvement with regard to the higher grades.

The quality of teaching

Grade I

The quality of teaching is very good which results in pupils making outstanding progress. During the inspection some outstanding and very good lessons were seen which supported the schools own judgements about the department. Typically, teachers have high expectations and strong subject knowledge. Teacher planning is very good and lessons are characterised by having very clear learning objectives. In an A Level lesson on 'conscience', students made very good progress because the lesson was structured with excellent resources to allow learning to flourish. In a lesson on the Hindu belief in reincarnation there were high levels of engagement throughout the lesson and effective questioning enabled pupils to make rapid progress.

Members of the religious education department are strong witnesses to the Catholic faith and through their excellent relationships with pupils are effective in drawing them into the Catholic life of the school. Pupils have very positive attitudes about their experience in religious education lessons as they feel their teachers truly care for them and want the best for them.

Pupils generally receive effective written feedback, and in some cases outstanding practice was seen, particularly at A Level and Key Stage 4. Where teaching was less effective, the pace of learning slowed and the level of challenge was not as great as it might be. In some cases pupil progress was inhibited by lack of specialist subject knowledge. There is scope for higher levels of consistency across the department so that all pupils receive parity of experience.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade I*

The leadership and management of the religious education department is outstanding. The head of department has an excellent vision for the department which is grounded on establishing the right relationships so that the best can be achieved from each member of staff and each pupil. The head of department provides excellent support to the team of committed religious education teachers who make a very good contribution to the Catholic life of the school. There has been a recent staffing turn over and this has presented challenges in maintaining consistent high standards. The head of department has an excellent understanding of the strengths and areas for development for the department. The department development plan accurately identifies areas for development that the inspection has borne out, one being the need for greater consistency. There are clear systems and structures to monitor the curriculum and there are effective tracking systems in place that trigger intervention strategies that teachers use to ensure all pupils make progress. The head of department has good links to the governing body, only recently making a very well received curriculum presentation to the full governing body. A testimony to the strength of this outstanding department is that in recent years a significant number of former students have gone on to become religious education teachers and are working in the diocese.

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

- To further develop the consistency across the department so that pupil's enjoy parity of experience.
- To further develop excellence in teaching and learning by expanding the department repertoire of strategies to challenge pupils.

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?

The previous inspection said the school should formalise systems to monitor and evaluate the quality of collective worship. This has not been fully addressed and there is scope for a more formal approach which could help the school to identify its strengths and areas for development in a more organised and effective way. Currently there is an informal approach to monitoring and evaluating.

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

Grade I

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum is very good. The school meets the requirements for pupils to receive the weekly entitlement of 10% curriculum time in Years 10 and 11. However in Year 7, 8 and 9 pupils do not receive their weekly entitlement; they receive 8% curriculum time. Therefore to become outstanding the school will need to address this issue. While the previous inspection did not identify this concern, this matter is now a requirement. Key Stage 5 pupils receive their 5% entitlement through a weekly lesson. The budget for the department is very generous in relation to other core departments. The accommodation of the department is very good given the constraints of the building. The leadership team and governors provide excellent support and guidance to the department and ensure that religious education has a high prominence in the school.

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

Grade I*

The experience of Catholic worship is outstanding. Prayer and worship are at the heart of the school and are part of all school celebrations. The celebration of the Eucharist is a central part of the life of the school. Weekly Mass is held in the school chapel on a Friday lunchtime, which is prepared by different classes. There are also whole school Masses at various points during the school year, notably the birthday of Mary Ward the foundress, in January. Liturgical events and daily prayers throughout the school reflect very well the rhythm of the Church's calendar. The religious education department drives the prayer and liturgy of the school. The department work closely together to ensure that all pupils have a positive experience of the prayer and worship life. During Advent and Lent, prayer and penitential services take place in the chapel. Also during these seasons there are specific assemblies organised that open up the key themes of Christmas and Easter. The assemblies that were seen by inspectors very effectively encouraged students to reflect deeply on the theme of remembrance through carefully selected Scripture passages, prayers and personal reflection. There are excellent opportunities for students to be involved in preparing for prayer, assemblies, prayer services and Mass. A pupil meditation group, which explores different types of prayer is led by the local parish priest. Pupils are given many opportunities to take on the responsibility for assisting with the liturgy through being a religious education prefect and being commissioned as extra-ordinary ministers of Holy Communion and altar servers. The school has recently refurbished the chapel to an excellent standard, another example of the commitment to making prayer and worship a central feature of the school.

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

Grade I*

The commitment and contribution to the Common Good is outstanding. The call to human flourishing is at the heart of the school's mission statement and is consistently promoted through the school values. The programme of assemblies and religious education curriculum ensures that pupils have an effective theological basis for understanding the call to serve others. The school provides an excellent range of opportunities for pupils to develop and celebrate their gifts and talents, for example, the school promotes effectively the annual Diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes with many students taking part each year as helpers. Students are given many opportunities to develop their own leadership skills; in particular, the school runs an excellent internal system of leadership awards. Each year Loreto schools in England focus on a number of themes related to their core identity as schools established by Mary Ward. These themes have resulted in various activities that help pupils and staff to re-focus on the school's mission and values. In particular, a successful week of activities on the value of joy provided an excellent opportunity for pupils to develop and celebrate their gifts and talents.

Being part of the Loreto chain of schools, the school is well placed to exploit the international connections and pupils are well placed to consider and act upon issues of justice and peace across the world. There is a justice and peace group in school that is coordinated by a Loreto sister. This group highlights issues of concern to the whole school so that pupils have a good understanding of why they are fundraising. Lent and Advent are the key times when pupils are given responsibility to select and run activities to fundraise, for example, during Lent one year group raised almost £2,000 for the Loreto Mission in Southern Sudan.

The school has a very strong PSHE programme that, coupled with an excellent pastoral care system, ensures that pupils' wellbeing is paramount. Pupils feel that they are cared for and that staff go out of their way to help them. The special needs department has an excellent profile in the school and the SENCO has a very strong understanding of the contribution the work of the department makes to the Catholic life of the school. This is an area of outstanding practice.

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 I*

The school's key relationships with parents, parishes, other Catholic schools and the Diocese are outstanding. The parents' questionnaire revealed very high levels of support and trust in the school. The local parish priest is the school's chaplain and a member of the governing body. There are outstanding links with the parish and the school regularly uses the parish church for Mass. Other local clergy support the school for reconciliation. The religious education department has supported the Diocese by taking part in a national religious education pilot scheme for Year 7. The head of the religious education department regularly attends meetings organised by the diocese and there are good links between religious education staff and diocesan officers. The sixth form core religious education programme has a catechetical unit which involves students from Loreto College going into 12 local Catholic primary schools to teach religious education to younger pupils. The school has excellent relationship with other Loreto schools through the Loreto English Education Network which provides support to the school, as well as a vehicle for the school to support other Loreto schools. The headteacher has a key leadership role in the Loreto English Education Network.

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

Grade I*

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. The headteacher has high ambition for her school and instils in staff and pupils the desire to strive for excellence. She is highly respected and with her leadership team is passionate about promoting a school that 'stretches hearts as well as minds' and as well as promoting the values of truth, joy, justice, freedom and sincerity. 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. The school's development plan clearly identifies key priorities to further develop the Catholic ethos; however there is scope for more effective use of self evaluation tools to help the school clearly identify its strengths and areas of development. The annual staff induction retreat held in York (the birth place of the founder of the Loreto schools), provides an excellent experience for new staff to be introduced into the aims of Catholic education and the charisms of Loreto schools. This is an example of outstanding practice. Across the school each department has a keen understanding of their role to promote and uphold the tenets of the Catholic faith. The governors of the school make a significant contribution to ensuring Loreto College is a very good 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.

A very strong feature of the Catholic identity of the school is evident and punctuated by the religious artwork and statues throughout the school buildings. The governors, parents, staff and students' high levels of awareness of the role that Mary Ward has played in the forming of the ethos of the school and this is reflected in the names of the tutor groups representing the virtues of freedom, joy, justice, truth and sincerity. The girls are all clear in their enjoyment of their time at Loreto, they like 'being different from other schools, since we base everything on our faith.'

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

- Implement the bishops' requirements, so that all pupils in Key Stage 3 have their weekly entitlement to 10% classroom religious education.
- To further develop, formalise systems to monitor and evaluate the quality of collective worship.