



## **DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD**



### **Inspection Report**

**Name of School:** St Mark's West Essex Catholic School

**Unique Reference Number:** 115374

**Inspection Date:** 28 May 2012

**Reporting Inspectors:** Dr Michael Sutherland-Harper and  
Mr Derek Kelly

**This inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.**

**Type of School:** Academy Trust  
**School Category:** Voluntary Aided  
**Age range of students:** 11 - 18  
**Gender of students:** Mixed  
**Number on roll:** 1033  
**Appropriate Authority:** The Governing Body  
**Date of previous inspection:** 6/2/2009

**School Address:**  
Tipton Road  
Harlow, Essex  
CM18 6AA  
**Tel. No.** 01279 421267  
**Fax No.** 01279 418220  
**Chair of Governors:** Mr P Hay  
**Headteacher:** Miss E Heaphy

**Introduction:**

The Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education (Schools) Act 2005 by two inspectors appointed by the Diocesan Bishop at the request of the Governing Body of the School.

The Inspectors acknowledge and are appreciative of the full support, co-operation and courtesy they enjoyed from the Governors, Headteacher, Staff and Students of the School both before and during the Inspection. The Inspectors wish to express their gratitude to all concerned.

**The focus of the Section 48 Inspection was:**

- Classroom Religious Education
- The Catholic nature of the School through;
  1. Worship
  2. Links with the Catholic and wider community
- Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development

**The Section 48 Report**

**St Mark's West Essex Catholic School  
Tipton Road  
Harlow  
Essex  
CM18 6AA**

**Head Teacher: Elaine Heaphy**

**Date of Inspection: 28 May 2012**

**Description of the School:**

St Mark's West Essex Catholic School is an 11-18 mixed Academy Trust school, serving the six Catholic parishes of Harlow and Epping and situated in Harlow in the county of Essex and in the diocese of Brentwood. The school is the only secondary Catholic school within a large area and the only school within the town of Harlow offering Sixth Form provision. The new headteacher was appointed in September 2011.

### **Record of Evidence Base:**

Two Diocesan Inspectors were in the school for the equivalent of two inspection days.

- The study of pre-inspection documentation including the Self-Evaluation Form/ Denominational Provision (SEF/DP).
- The observation of six lessons.
- Participation in recital of the Rosary.
- Scrutiny of students' written work.
- Meetings with the following: the Headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team, the Head of Religious Education (R.E.), the Parish Priest and other governors and a representative group of students.
- Observations of R.E. displays in the classrooms and around the school.

### **What the School does well:**

St Mark's West Essex Catholic School is a satisfactory school. Governors and staff praised the strong pastoral care, support and guidance offered by the school and which helps to make the well-behaved and articulate students into confident ambassadors for their school. The newly-appointed headteacher has a clear vision of where she wants to take the school and is working closely with her senior leadership team to continue the process of improvement which is now under way. Teachers and support staff give readily of their time to ensure that students can reach both academic and personal goals. Students have a good understanding of right and wrong and show respect for each other and adults. Students also welcome opportunities to develop their spiritual perspectives, such as through attendance at the recent Flame Congress at Wembley, and have a good perspective on other cultures and parts of the world through fund-raising for charities and links with a twin parish in South Africa. As a result, spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is another strength of the school. Students are proud of their school and welcome opportunities to contribute to its ongoing development wherever possible in order to support the emphasis on the 'Gospel values of serving others, tolerance, trust, respect, prayer and forgiveness'. The school is a multi-cultural community with each individual valued as a key part of the whole community. The parish priest makes regular visits to the school and shares the school's drive to strengthen good links with the local community and parish. He and his fellow governors know the school well, are supportive of its efforts and have embraced the challenge of moving it forward. The school is adding some additional review dates to its clear development plan. Together with an increasing rate of improvement and the united approach of the senior leadership team, rising expectations indicate that the school has a good capacity for further improvement.

Students are proud of their school and ready to recommend it to others. Offered a choice, they would all elect to come to the school again. Students are adamant that bullying is rare and that problems of any kind are quickly resolved because there is always someone

to talk to and who will listen to your point of view with respect and understanding. The school is looking to appoint a chaplain to continue the development of student support and reinforce its efforts to reach out to students. Provision for prayer, collective worship and the liturgical life is satisfactory. Prayers are said in form rooms and there are Rosary and liturgy groups but these are at present adult-dominated. Further discussion with students is planned on how to promote attendance at these sessions so that uptake matches the enthusiasm students bring to some of the other faith events during the calendar year.

The provision of Catholic education is satisfactory. Results in Religious Education have risen at GCSE and are predicted to rise further this summer. They are also improving at Sixth Form level with the provision of well-attended extra revision classes a feature seen during the inspection and part of the school's strategies to raise achievement levels. The school is looking at ways to provide additional challenge and further opportunities for students to take a lead in developing and promoting the school. As part of the steps to promote improvement, lesson planning shows an increasing match of work to student abilities and use of timed activities which in turn is leading to rising expectations. Improved tracking and monitoring procedures and staff training on the uses of data are helping to embed this process. However, there is still some inconsistency at departmental level in the quality of presentation expected of students' work and in the development of independent learning opportunities.

Senior leaders and managers are working carefully to ensure that Religious Education (R.E.) remains at the heart of the school's work. The department delivers courses in line with the expectations of the diocese, bishops' conference and Catholic Education Service. The school meets both the national and diocesan requirements for the allocation of curriculum time for taught R.E. Provision follows the diocesan programmes. Standards in R.E. are rising. The departmental development plan is linked to the whole school improvement plan but the contribution of the department to promoting and reinforcing the Catholic life of the school is less well-defined than its role in subject delivery. The school is looking at ways to develop the input of students and middle managers in this process. Attainment tasks in schemes of work for Key Stage 3 are being rewritten and the department is reviewing its work following an accurate survey of provision by the deputy headteacher. Sharing of best practice is still at an early stage of development as is the work of the head of department in monitoring and evaluating provision to ensure that the quality of learning and expectations are consistently high enough to continue the trend of improving results. Consultation with students to check on their perceptions of the quality of learning is also at an early stage of development. Effective lesson planning does not consistently include an indication of the role of homework in advancing learning. Departmental display is poor and does not highlight students' work to exemplify the standard expected. The variety of display across the school is especially strong in visual and art work but is inconsistent in highlighting the role of R.E. in the school. Visits and visitors enhance student experience and understanding whenever they occur.

The quality of teaching and learning in R.E. is satisfactory and improving as a result of whole school work in these areas and the close support being given to the department by

senior staff. Staff have good subject knowledge. Teachers make secure use of the overhead projector and of questioning skills to advance learning. In the lessons seen in the Sixth Form during the inspection, focused questions and clear expectations ensured that students made good progress. Good relationships with the teachers meant that students also had the confidence to extend their learning by active involvement in the lessons. Elsewhere in the school, some lessons are teacher dominated. Expectations of what students will achieve in these lessons, and how much they will contribute, are inconsistent as are opportunities for students to take the lead in lessons. Students are often passive learners who wait for the teacher or support staff to come round to them to check on progress rather than actively asking questions to advance their learning. Not all students are clear about their targets in R.E. Although marking is regular and there are many encouraging comments, marking does not always clearly indicate to students how to improve their work and take it to the next level. Display in R.E. classrooms is of a poor standard with little student work on display to exemplify the standards students should aspire to reach in presentation and content. The range of resources used to promote and develop the subject is limited and does not always reflect students' own experience or the ways in which they are likely to engage with the subject as a result. It is better in Sixth Form lessons and in good revision classes offered for current Year 11 students. Some opportunities to link the work of the department more closely to the school's core values and mission statement are missed because the links are inconsistently reflected in departmental display. Cross-curricular links between R.E. and other subjects are at an early stage of development. Elsewhere in the school, boards and displays are regularly changed during the year and are characterised by good use of art and photographs to demonstrate the range of activities in which students participate.

The students are good ambassadors for the school and a living example of their faith. Their sense of being a valued part of the school community is due to the strong and personalised pastoral care on offer and has led to a keen desire on their part to contribute even more to the school and its forward progress. The determination and focused vision of the new headteacher, and the support offered by her team, bode well for the journey forward.

### **What needs to be improved?**

- **Raise the quality of teaching and learning through consistent and clear expectations of what students are expected to achieve, including via further display of best work. Ensure that monitoring of progress quickly identifies any areas of student uncertainty so that these can be promptly rectified. Increase opportunities for students to take the lead in lessons and thereby develop their confidence in this subject area because they can also give reasons and opinions which support their arguments.**
- **Ensure that students are clear about their targets, that progress is regularly reviewed with them and that all marking and assessment provides students with clear guidance about how to improve their work and reach the highest levels.**

The Inspectors endorse the areas identified by the school for improvement in the Section 48 Self-Evaluation Form.

St Mark's West Essex Catholic School is a satisfactory school with a good capacity for further improvement. The school knows its students well. Well-thought-out care, guidance and support and good spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding are strengths of the school.