

Westminster Diocese Inspection Report

St James' Catholic High School

Great Strand, Colindale, London NW9 5PE

Date of inspection: 06-07 May 2015



A. Classroom Religious Education

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

Overall Grade I

St James' provides its students with outstanding opportunities to develop their religious literacy. The curriculum, based firmly on the Curriculum Directory, is interesting, relevant and creative in engaging students exceptionally well in their learning. Students make excellent progress throughout their school careers and are enthusiastic learners. Students' performance in religious education examinations compares very favourably with their strong attainment in other core curricular subjects. Typically, teaching over time is outstanding in its impact on learning. The head of religious education manages the department exceptionally well and plans meticulously for future needs. Staff work very well together. All staff receive excellent professional development to sustain high quality provision for students. The department's evaluation of its work is accurate and feeds very well into effective improvement plans for honestly identified areas for development. The departmental team engages effectively with diocesan events, including moderation. The contribution of the religious education department to the Catholic life of the school and close working with the chaplain is excellent. The resulting Catholic ethos pervades all aspects of the students' experience. Governors work closely and very effectively with senior managers to support the department in its work to develop the students' religious literacy.

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 School mission statement "*I have come that they may have life and have it to the full*" (John 10:10), beautifully illustrates the school's understanding of its place within the community and local parish. St James' is a mission-centred school with staff and students actively seeking to serve those around them and to be true to the school's rich history of caring for those less fortunate than themselves. The charge of Pope Francis to all Catholics and emphasised by Cardinal Vincent at the School's 80th Oak celebration Mass, to be "Missionary Disciples", has found expression in the visionary leadership of the Head Teacher, the passion and enthusiasm of the Chaplain, the clear commitment of the members of the religious education department, and the support of the governing body. The students spoke eloquently of their school's distinctive Catholic identity and commitment to the Common Good, through fundraising for international, national and local charities throughout the year. The Chaplain has also worked hard to explain the theological foundations that clearly underpin the school's outreach work and concern for others, service and social justice. The partnership with feeder primary schools provides a real opportunity to sustain and nurture the members of the school community. Truly, St James is living its mission statement and '*the whole community has life and are living it to the full*'. Governors are very actively involved in supporting and challenging the school to sustain its present excellent practice and to ensure a very sound future.

Introduction

Inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. Inspectors spent two days in school, visited 12 lessons and two assemblies, and carried out five interviews with school staff, students and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, attendance at staff briefing, discussion with local clergy, a scrutiny of a sample of students' work, observation of students in and out of lessons, and examination of school documents.

The Inspection of St James' School, Barnet 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 Sheila Nolan	Lead Inspector
Fr Antony Homer	Associate Inspector
Mr Stuart Alexander	Associate Inspector

Description of School

This voluntary-aided, Catholic comprehensive school is a six-form entry in the Local Authority of Barnet, and the locality of Colindale. The school is celebrating 80 years since its foundation. It mainly serves families from parishes within Barnet, Brent, Camden and Harrow. The proportion of students who are baptised Catholics is 99.5%. The proportion of students from other Christian denominations is 0.5%. There are no pupils from other Faiths. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 51%. Eight staff teach religious education and a total of 11 staff hold a Catholic qualification.

There are 1091 students on roll, with 28 pupils with statements of Special Educational Need / Education Health & Care Plans (EHC). The proportion of students from ethnic minority groups is well above average. The number of students speaking English as an Additional Language is average. There is an above average proportion of families, eligible for free school meals, and 266 students are in receipt of the pupil premium. Currently, the sixth form has 198 students on roll.

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DFE Number:	302 5407
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Headteacher:	Mrs Niamh Arnull
Chair of Governors:	Mrs A Gartlan

Date of previous inspection:	February 2010
Previous Inspection grades:	Outstanding

Key for inspection grades:	<i>Grade 1</i>	<i>Outstanding</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?

Since the last inspection, the school has improved the students' rates of progress in religious education so that students achieve very well in examinations. The majority make faster progress than that generally expected. This sustained improvement has come about, in part, by much improved use of assessment information to check the students' learning. The department has followed closely whole school procedures so that there are careful checks on how well staff use information on students' previous learning to plan for new work and understanding, and to set longer-term targets. Both departmental and senior staff follow up students who may be in danger of achieving less well than expected, very regularly. Staff training activities have focused very effectively on improving the quality of teaching, and not least, the use of questioning to deepen understanding and support students' communication of their grasp of learning. Improvement since the last inspection has been excellent.

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

Grade 1

The religious education curriculum is fully compliant with the requirements of the Curriculum Directory and is exceptionally well orchestrated to meet the needs of the students and develop as well as possible their religious literacy. All four strands of the Directory are carefully linked to schemes of work and lesson plans in both key stages. There is a systematic study of the teachings of the Church, of the scriptures, and of the key elements of the Christian message. The study of other faiths is planned and implemented very well to match students' levels of understanding and maturity. There is a particular focus on Judaism because of its importance within the school's locality. The department is preparing well for necessary changes to the curriculum given the likely specification of new GCSE examinations.

St James', at all levels of the school leadership, including governors, displays a genuine commitment to encouraging students to think about their faith and about moral and social issues in our society. Post-16 students benefit from a programme for core religious education that builds on and develops their earlier understanding and learning of, and about, the Catholic faith. The curriculum is well supported by excellent resources and accommodation. The department has a generous budget, at least in line with the finance available to other core departments. The chapel, and the adjoining peace garden, are at the heart of the school. Resources are used creatively to ensure students experience a dynamic and thought-provoking programme of study, including the study of other religious traditions. The programme includes a substantial study of scripture and of Catholic traditional practice.

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

Grade 1

Students make excellent progress in religious education over their time in the school. As well as using previous attainment in the core subjects against which to formulate future targets, the department also uses an initial assessment developed from a diocesan initiative to identify gaps in learning and plan future work. This process has led to much improved outcomes since the last inspection. Examination results, both at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form compare very favourably with other core subjects. Overall, students' achievement is outstanding. Assessments against diocesan attainment levels are moderated carefully within the department, and at both local and diocesan level. The proportion of students gaining the highest available grades of A* and A in GCSE examination has also increased substantially since the previous inspection. At the same time, the school ensures that those who find learning difficult, achieve as well as they can. Students on the core religious education programme in the sixth form experience a high quality of provision, in line with their prior learning, and well fitted to their attainment levels. In all lessons, students engage very well with learning and develop their religious literacy exceptionally effectively. However, some students miss opportunities to further their learning even more by responding consistently to teachers' well-considered marking and guidance on their written work.

The quality of teaching

Grade 1

Teaching in all key stages is typically outstanding in its impact on the students' progress. Individual lessons are never less than good and this consistency in provision provides the students with an excellent platform for learning. Students' progress is rapid and sustained, not least because of the high expectations of the department in pursuing excellence. As a result, staff plan meticulously to support the students' learning and track their understanding very effectively. Year 11 are exceptionally well supported in their final revision for their GCSE religious education examination because of the systematic, thorough analysis of the requirements, and the robust information on students' previous learning. Similarly, Year 10 classes are ably preparing for their end-of-year examinations. Questioning is a real strength of the teaching and encourages students to reflect on their Catholic belief and practice as well as strengthening their knowledge. This good practice was seen clearly, for example, in a series of lessons on the Paschal Mystery in Year 7. The students were well engaged in their task of comparing evidence gleaned from the Old Testament with evidence found in St Mark's Gospel.

Creative resources very actively engage students in learning exceptionally well. In a Year 13 class, visual images of the Nepalese earthquake disaster enabled students to reflect on their understanding of miracles. Well-organised core religious education in Year 12 challenges students to make personal progress in their spiritual lives as well as deepening their understanding of Catholic faith and tradition. In all lessons visited, there was a genuine sense of urgency in learning and a spirit of collaborative working between staff and students, and between students. The department uses the whole-school homework procedures very well indeed to set helpful tasks. Written work in students' books is generally assessed accurately and helpful advice provided to help them improve. However, not all staff make sure that students have enough opportunities to respond actively to staff guidance. Thus, the usefulness of some marking goes untapped.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade 1

The leadership and management of religious education are outstanding. The subject leader has a very clear understanding of his role. He works closely with senior managers and the chaplain to maintain a successful and high profile provision for the students. The department upholds the school's Catholic ethos very well. At the same time, the curriculum is very well planned and thoughtful resources and activities result in high levels of engagement by the students. Strong teamwork and a desire to improve and sustain excellent teaching and learning characterise the department.

Students' progress is monitored carefully, and recorded centrally, along with the other core subjects. Very well supported by the senior team, the department strives to ensure that the quality of teaching is the best it can be. Continuing professional development is excellent and well matched to teachers' stages of development, both for the department and the whole staff. The subject leader has an excellent understanding of the strengths and areas for development within religious education. There is also a very clear grasp of the need to look ahead and ensure that the department is well placed to manage many of the expected changes in the examination specifications. Religious education is a lead department in the school.

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

- In order to sustain its present excellent practice and develop even further, the department should consider how to make sure that students have regular opportunities to respond to teachers' feedback on their written work.
- Take forward plans to build the resources and information needed to manage effectively the new GCSE requirements, particularly the detailed knowledge of other world religions.

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?

Since the last inspection, the school has sustained the many excellent features of its Catholic life. Additionally, governors have established a committee to review and evaluate the Catholic life of the school. All students now attend an annual retreat within the school day. Opportunities for reflection are many and varied, enhanced by pilgrimages to Walsingham, for example, and other chaplaincy events, including a 'deep learning day'. Staff also participate in retreats and pilgrimages.

The catholic ethos at St James' Catholic High School is vibrant and has become even more explicit since the last inspection. The School mission statement *"I have come that they may have life and have it to the full"* John 10:10 beautifully illustrates the school's self-understanding of its place within the community and local parish. The charge of Pope Francis to all Catholics, emphasised by Cardinal Vincent at the School's Oak 80 years celebration Mass, to be "Missionary Disciples" has found expression in the visionary leadership of the Head Teacher, the passion and enthusiasm of the Chaplain, the clear commitment of the members of the religious education department and the support of the governing body. Such a vision for the school has encouraged the flourishing of the whole community of learners and the formation of its members. Students and staff are very proud of their school's long history and reputation for social action. St James' Catholic High School continues to build on the vision of the foundress, Mother Rose Niland OP through the values it seeks to instil in all the members.

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

Grade 1

Religious Education is at the heart of the school and receives 10% of curriculum time at Key Stage 3 and 4, and 5% of curriculum time at Key Stage 5 as required by the Bishops' conference. The department is fully staffed with eight specialist teachers and occupies a suite of six designated teaching rooms. The headteacher is the senior link to the department, illustrating its very high profile in the life of the school. The departmental budget enjoys a slightly higher balance than other core subjects. The governing body is updated regularly about students' progress as well as departmental planning, via written and verbal reports each half term. One member of the department is involved in the school's 'Outstanding Teacher Programme' and another is currently pursuing a Doctorate. Such ongoing professional development coupled to the collaborative approach to planning and supervision means the department has a high profile within the school.

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

Grade 1

The experience of worship enjoyed at St James' Catholic High School is outstanding. The liturgical year forms the basis for all school worship. The daily prayer, year team-led assemblies, the weekly Eucharistic service, the time for Eucharistic Adoration, the annual retreat days and pilgrimages, and the May morning Rosary all sustain the Catholic ethos of the school and encourage that life of discipleship so desired by Mother Rose Niland and Pope Francis. The Chapel has been recently redecorated and a Peace Garden established, offering a tranquil space for reflection and private

prayer at the very heart of the school. Jewish and Muslim members of staff regularly share experiences of their faith as part of the core religious education curriculum. Assemblies enable all to reflect and learn from one another's experience. Members of other Christian denominations have also felt encouraged to share in the staff prayer. Such public celebrations nurture the cultural and religious diversity of the school community and help to dispel false understanding and prejudice. Students' spiritual and moral development is enhanced through careful presentation and opportunities for prayer and reflection throughout the year. The local parish priest spoke eloquently of the warmth of welcome experienced by the parish from the school and the commitment to mutual working together. This relationship is growing rapidly and enhances greatly the faith of the two communities. The Chaplain and the chaplaincy team reflect upon events and liturgical celebrations and are creative in identifying new opportunities that support the spiritual formation of the students. The chaplaincy Blog is a great teaching tool and offers a vibrant place for staff and students to reflect upon issues of climate change and to celebrate the diversity of the school's members. The annual round of pilgrimages and Retreat Days and 'Deepening Days' encourage students to reflect upon their lives of discipleship and their faith commitment. The school is currently looking at writing with students a community prayer and devising a school prayer book. In celebration of the school's foundation anniversary, staff and students composed a new school hymn, "Veritas", recorded by students and staff at a professional recording studio. Staff briefing and year-led worship celebrate the school's history and distinctive Catholic identity.

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

Grade 1

The Student Council representatives spoke eloquently of their school's distinctive Catholic identity and commitment to the Common Good through fundraising supporting international, national and local charities throughout the year. The school has recently developed a link with a school in Ghana, helping fundraise for the construction of a new building, in memory of a former student. The school has been involved with CAFOD, campaigning and fundraising for over thirty years. The school's CAFOD climate bloggers share updates about projects and initiatives. During Lent, the school supported the Catholic Children's Society Crisis fund. Every family had a collection tube or box and through almsgiving supported this appeal. Students also attended the Good Samaritan Mass with the Cardinal in Westminster Cathedral. The school also supports the Colindale food bank each month through the collection of non-perishable items. Sixth-Form students also help local senior citizens with their technology skills in an after-school club, and have regularly volunteered at a homeless shelter. Older students serve as mentors to younger students by running a number of social events and supporting learning through the reading programme. A number of students in Years 9 and 10 are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh programme, supported by staff of the school and the Chaplain. Volunteering and teamwork are clearly seen as hallmarks of student life at St James' Catholic High School. The Chaplain has also worked hard to explain the theological foundations that clearly underpin the school's outreach and concern for others, service and social justice. Overall, students flourish at St James'.

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

St James' Catholic High School is outstanding in the creative relationships it enjoys with parents and local parishes. The school has an excellent relationship with the Diocese, Deanery and local parishes. Diocesan Bishops regularly celebrate Mass in the school for significant festivals. Local parish priests celebrate Mass each week in school as well as supporting the governing body and staff of the school. The clergy of the Deanery, during the seasons of Advent and Lent, visit the school to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. The Chaplain is also Head of Year 7 and in this pastoral role visits prospective students in their primary schools. This liaison greatly supports the transition process from primary into the secondary school. St James' actively engages with its Catholic feeder schools through the mentoring programme, Spelling Bee, literacy and drama workshops, as well as through religious education moderation. The school also enjoys a strong relationship with a neighbouring secondary school Finchley Catholic High, sustained through joint staff training and senior team meetings. Governors attend all Diocesan training, the Head Teacher attends the Head Teachers' conferences, and the subject leader and the chaplain regularly attend meetings and any training offered by the Diocese. The chaplain is also currently studying a module of remote learning through the Maryvale Institute.

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

Grade I

The leadership of St James' Catholic High School is outstanding in promoting the Catholic life of the school.

The school mission statement "*I have come that they may have life and have it to the full*" (Jn 10:10) sustains every aspect of the school's life and is displayed in all classrooms and on all school documentation. The words also form a beautiful welcome in the school reception area. Cardinal Vincent Nichols reflected upon John 10:10 with the school community during the recent 80th celebration of the school's foundation. There are excellent systems in place for the monitoring and assessment of worship and its effectiveness in nurturing the formation of students. Those staff from other faith traditions feel secure and supported in participating and sharing fully in the Catholic ethos of the school. The regular staff briefing allows for the whole of the teaching body to express their faith and to share with colleagues. The leadership of the headteacher, subject leader, chaplain and link governor is visionary and highly effective in supporting and encouraging all members of the school community. Parents views are regularly collected through questionnaires and issues acted upon. Communication with families and local parishes is secure.

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

- Extend the now established retreat programme to include an invitation to parents and carers to share the experience with their children.
- Explore taking students back into their former primary schools to support the transition process into Year 7 and further enhance working relationships with feeder schools.
- Explore sharing students' musical and dramatic gifts within the Deanery perhaps as a showcase or seasonal reflection to develop the partnership of the school with local clergy and the community.