

Our Lady's Convent High School

6 – 16 Amhurst Park NI6 5AF

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 4 – 5 May 2017

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils



A. Classroom religious education is outstanding

- The curriculum for religious education meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. It is planned meticulously to ensure that pupils have excellent opportunities to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith as they progress through the school.
- The impact of teaching on the pupils' achievement in religious education is outstanding. From typically below average starting points, pupils of all faiths make excellent progress in their learning about Catholic faith and practice.
- Sixth-form provision for religious education for all students is creative and inspiring.
- Classroom religious education has a high status in the minds of the pupils. Pupils from all faith traditions find their experience of the religious education classrooms stimulating and among the highlights of their studies.
- The subject leader for religious education and her team offer excellent role models for the pupils. The department works exceptionally collaboratively and is very well led and managed.
- Self-evaluation is honest and systematic. Any issues are tackled robustly. Innovation is well researched and managed.
- The link governor for religious education, new in post, has already begun to monitor and evaluate the work of the department.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- Religious education is given high priority within the curriculum. The provision meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference for curriculum time and resource allocation has parity with other core subjects at each key stage.
- All pupils, whatever their traditions, participate fully in the Catholic life of the school.
- There is a richness to the many opportunities for pupils to experience Catholic practice and tradition. However, the planned daily prayer in form time is not practised consistently well in all classes and current opportunities for some traditional practices are not fully in place in this academic year.
- The school's contribution to the Common Good is second to none. Pupils flourish at Our Lady's Convent High School and their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is good.
- The Church's call to action for justice and peace is very well understood. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the theological underpinning of their charitable efforts.
- Partnerships are strong across the range of links. The school does very well to manage many relationships with a large number of parishes and Catholic schools. It is well centred in the work of the Diocese of Westminster and strives to make sensitive links with other local faith groups.
- Governors work well with the school to support its Catholic ethos. They are also able to challenge the school when needed. Self-evaluation is robust and accurate.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

At the last inspection, the religious education department was asked to develop the scheme of work further to include a historical perspective on the development of the Church's teaching and traditions. The department has responded well and, to this end, the department has made the school's Servite tradition explicit in the Year 7 curriculum. The impact of secularism on the interpretation of scripture and social teaching has been orchestrated at both Key Stage 4 and in advanced level courses. The early Church Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon are studied to show the links with Creed in its present form. The scheme of work has been audited to clarify opportunities for dialogue with other major faiths, particularly Judaism. Additionally, the department has worked on developing aspects of progression, particularly when exploring higher level thinking through extended writing.

The content of classroom religious education is outstanding

The tailor-made programme of study that runs throughout the school is mapped very carefully to the content of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. The referencing includes the diocesan attainment levels and extends to the departmental common assessment tasks, to the GCSE examination content, and to the core religious education programme for Years 12 and 13. Resources are very well considered and used very creatively to extend pupils' religious literacy within and outside of the classroom. The scheme of work is comprehensive, building very carefully year on year. Developments since the last inspection have been innovative and creative with elements of Church history, Servite involvement in the school in the Year 7 curriculum, and opportunities for higher-level thinking to increase the levels of religious literacy are built into the programme of study for each year group. The study of other faiths is thorough and far-reaching. The Key Stage 4 curriculum follows the diocesan recommendation to study the Judaism option within the GCSE examination. The religious education curriculum also reflects well contemporary issues and culture and engages the students' interests whilst always remaining faithful to the tenets of the Catholic faith. This is particularly so with regard to the core non-examination religious education programme in the sixth form. The scheme of work allows for the creative evaluation of the students' learning and religious development. It serves the academic and theological interests of post-16 students very well so that they understand the importance of living out their understanding of the Biblical underpinning of their actions. Students studying advanced level courses also follow the core religious education programme.

Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding

From typically below average starting points overall, the pupils make excellent progress in religious education, peaking in above average GCSE examination outcomes and exceeding the pupils' achievement in other core areas. Students at post-16 make at least good progress from their individual starting points, including in the core religious education programme. The school collaborates with other local Catholic schools in the use of baseline assessments, given the challenges of managing an intake from over 50 feeder schools. There is no common starting point. The Year 7 curriculum builds a new 'faith school experience' to develop the pupils' religious literacy which it does very successfully. The religious education department assesses the pupils' achievement very thoroughly through the diocesan attainment targets but also using an interim tracking system in line with the core subject assessments. Pupils' rates of progress speed up the longer that they are in the school. Pupils are involved in evaluating their progress in religious education alongside that of the staff. Pupils engage particularly well in their learning and communicate their reflections and understanding very openly in discussions with staff, often through digital media. The high

expectations of staff, alongside the scholarly ethos within the religious education department, mean that pupils' grow in confidence in using religious vocabulary and the language of narrative. The religious education department ensures that pupils' outcomes are moderated thoroughly, both internally and in conjunction with other schools. The 'patchwork assessment project' for the core religious education programme in the sixth form is organised very well so that students can exceed the levels of typical accreditation.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

The impact of all aspects of teaching on pupils' learning and progress over time is excellent at each key stage of the school. Methodology within the department is well judged to match the needs of the pupils. This was clearly seen in a Year 8 lesson on the pupils' understanding of the Church. Starting from the perception of individuals, teaching was carefully orchestrated to develop the concepts from that of the Church as a building to that of the Church as a community. Time is well used in all lessons, including in the Year 11 revision sessions for the impending examinations. Visual materials and other resources aid learning very effectively as in the case of the 'philosophy wall'. Pupils, including those from other faiths, report that of all their lessons, they most enjoy those in religious education. Teaching is characterised by collaborative learning, genuine care and knowledge of the pupils and by a scholarly ethos in the sixth form. Feedback to pupils is regular and helpful in both their academic and personal development. Skilful questioning is very well used to deepen pupils' understanding of their work. Homework, in many forms, is a genuine support to pupils' learning and personal growth.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education

is outstanding

The leadership and management of religious education are outstanding. In discussions with pupils, they commented on how departmental staff witness the deep involvement of the department in the Church's educational mission. A collegial working ethos characterises the department team alongside an innovative and enterprising culture that leads to real creativity in meeting the pupils' needs. Highly effective systems are in place to monitor, track and ensure pupils' progress in religious education as well as genuine commitment to make the day-to-day practice of the department ever better. The head of department provides an excellent model for staff and ensures that there are well-considered opportunities for professional development. Departmental self-evaluation is exceptionally thorough and accurate. Issues are clearly identified and steps taken to address any shortcomings. Departmental staff go out of their way to go the extra mile to support the school's Catholic ethos.

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

- Explore ways in which to gain external accreditation for the innovative core religious education programme in the sixth form and ensure that all of the tasks within the pilot programme afford opportunities for students to exceed the levels of existing accreditation

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

At the last inspection the school was asked to widen the leadership opportunities for the older students. With strong support from the senior leaders, the sixth form leadership team has embraced further responsibilities. For example, they take lead roles in the charity work of the school. Pupil volunteers from all year groups present assemblies in primary schools as part of the transition and partnership work with local Catholic primary schools. There are young Servite leaders in each form. Year 12 and 13 students assist in delivering the Year 7 two-day retreat. Additionally, with the completion of the new chapel, a weekly Mass is celebrated in school. The new chapel also provides excellent opportunities for teaching to consider items associated with liturgical celebrations. The religious education departmental staff have been able to explore and practise meditation in this sacred space.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

Religious education is allocated 10% of curricular time at Key Stages 3 and 4, and 8% of curricular time post-16. The place of religious education at the heart of the school is exemplified by the siting of the chapel in the new building. The chapel reaches throughout every floor of the school and is an oasis of peace, open to pupils at all times. Pupils from other faiths are able to pray there as well as their Catholic peers. Resources, accommodation and staffing are on a par with that of the other core subjects despite the restrictions of the school's budget. A senior leader oversees the school's Catholic life and a governor is linked to the religious education department and staff are well supported in their professional development.

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

is good

There are many opportunities to celebrate the Eucharist and there are a variety of other planned experiences such as exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, retreats, pilgrimages and other events throughout the liturgical year. Assemblies follow the scriptural themes of the Mass on the previous Sunday as well as links with other national events. A Year 9 assembly, for example, linked the life and work of St Peregrine with the coming 'mental health week'. The school is sensitive to the needs of the pupils from other than Catholic faith traditions. The school does its best to ensure that pupils have good opportunities for such as the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the reception of ashes at the beginning of Lent, and an awareness of the liturgical calendar. Pupils take part in preparing liturgy and worship and join the chaplain in a small prayer group. Despite this excellent provision, daily opportunities for prayer are not deeply embedded in practice in the daily form-time prayer. Other aspects of traditional Catholic practice, although typical in the past, have not been given emphasis in the current year. This is partly because of staffing circumstances and the restrictions of a small school. Likewise, the daily prayer opportunities have not been evaluated thoroughly.

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

is outstanding

The school's contribution to the Common Good is second to none. Pupils flourish at Our Lady's Convent High School and their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is good. The Servite values imbue daily practice in the interactions between students and staff and there is deep respect between all members of the school community. The Church's call to action for justice and peace is very well understood. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the theological underpinning of their

charitable efforts. In discussion, a pupil commented that 'faith without action is dead'. Opportunities to serve begin in Year 7 with extended commitments to the school community through, for example, Servite leaders and environmental prefects. As pupils mature, they extend their reach to include such as work locally for the homeless shelter, projects in primary schools, food bank collections and fundraising for Cafod and Fairtrade. Older students have links with a woman's cooperative in South Africa and support the work of those working in AIDS prevention and care. Others fund projects in Kolkata through the Hope Foundation, and help street children to access health, education, protection from abuse and child trafficking. The post-16 students, as part of their core activity, are deeply involved in local, national and international projects. The ethics of the market place and the moral issues in society are regularly examined and studied in the light of Catholic teaching.

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 school's relationships with key partners are excellent. The school straddles two deaneries with its local parish in a deanery other than that of the school. The school has links with over 50 feeder primary schools and 35 parishes. It works closely with the local Jesuit parish so that the pupils celebrate whole-school Masses in the parish church. Staff also do their best to keep in touch with the other parishes. Links with parents and carers are strong with the school reaching out to those of other faiths. The school works closely with the diocese with staff attending conferences and training opportunities. The school was founded over a century ago by the Servite Order and until 2016, the Servite sisters were the trustees; links with the Servite community are still strong and the school strives to preserve the values and legacy of that community. Of the many parents who responded to the school's questionnaire, close to 90% responded positively.

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

is outstanding

The school lives out the mission statement of 'Shaping Tomorrow, Inspired by Faith'. School improvement is rooted in the school's Catholic Servite values. They underpin the moral imperative that sits at the heart of all work in the school. The school's leadership is fully committed to the Church's mission in education and does all it can to offer this very mixed community a rich experience of a Catholic way of life. Self-evaluation is generally accurate and detailed. There are strong systems in place to induct new staff and ensure that all members of staff and pupils uphold the school's Catholic ethos. Governors contribute well to support the Catholic ethos of the school. Senior staff agree, however, that more is required to evaluate the daily prayer opportunities during tutor groups.

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

- Engage with staff and sixth-form students so that there is a core group able to take forward the provision of further opportunities for daily prayer for pupils.

Information about this school

- The school is a four form entry Catholic girls' school in the locality of Stamford Hill, Hackney.
- The school serves a number of parishes including St Ignatius, Stamford Hill, Our Lady of Good Counsel, Stoke Newington and St Francis de Sales, Tottenham.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 71%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 22 % and from other faiths is 4 %. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 45 %.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 7.
- There are 14 % of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom three have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well above average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is well above average.
- There is a well above average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 351 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (45 %).

Department for Education Number	201/4601
Unique Reference Number	100282
Local Authority	Hackney

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Female
Number of pupils on roll	741
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Karen Sims
Headteacher	Ms Justine McDonald
Telephone number	020 8800 2158
Website	www.ourladyshackney.sch.uk
Email address	officeadmin@ourladyshackney.sch.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	25 April 2012
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 12 lessons or part lessons were observed and three learning walks took place.
- The inspectors attended two assemblies and 10 other 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.

Mrs Sheila Nolan	Lead Inspector
Mrs Trisha Hedley	Associate Inspector
Ms Angela Podmore	Associate Inspector
Miss Catherine Bryan	Associate Inspector
Miss Winnie Greer	Associate Inspector

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