

St Catherine's School

Cross Deep, Twickenham, Middlesex, TW1 4QJ

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 28-29 September 2016



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is outstanding

- The religious education curriculum is very well planned to allow pupils to grow in understanding of the Catholic faith.
- Through a wide range of spiritual experiences, including music, dance and drama, staff and pupils daily live out the school's motto of 'deeds not words'.
- Both pupils' progress and attainment in religious education are outstanding. Pupils are very proactive in their learning and collaborate very effectively with teachers to develop a scholarly ethos.
- The impact of teaching on learning is outstanding. Pupils experience a range of activities to suit differing needs. These range from vibrant, creative ways to foster religious development to calm, reflective and studious times to absorb and interiorise work already covered.
- Nevertheless, there are occasionally missed opportunities to expand the horizons of the most able pupils.
- The religious education coordinators model excellent practice and relentlessly focus on improving provision for the pupils. Self-evaluation is generally accurate. Through professional development opportunities, staff are supported effectively to advance their skills and knowledge, and the pupils' religious literacy.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- Religious education is at the centre of the school's life. Classroom provision meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. It receives high priority in the school in terms of funding, accommodation and time.
- Governors and senior leaders are very active in guiding the Catholic life of this very diverse community with a wide range of faith backgrounds. A real strength of the school is the way in which all pupils buy into its Catholic life.
- Worship and prayer are built into the daily life of the school. The week is framed by morning prayers, assemblies and, in turn, the celebration of Mass. Those of other faith traditions have well-considered opportunities to pray and celebrate festivals.
- A highlight of the work of St Catherine's is its contribution to the Common Good. Pupils and staff follow willingly the Church's call to action on justice and peace. Efforts to help others are well grounded in an understanding of the Christian message.
- Partnerships are strong across the local parishes, with the diocese, parents and other local schools. Leaders and governors leave no stone unturned to sustain and develop this Catholic school and to seek the views of all stakeholders.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection, the school has concentrated on developing further its approaches to its provision for able pupils. The availability of reference sources for pupils' use has been expanded to include post-16 materials. The school has also given a high priority to classroom religious education in ensuring teaching time is greater than that in other subject areas. The school has striven to accommodate a prayer room in its current building.

The content of classroom religious education is outstanding

The curriculum, for all phases of the school, is referenced very thoroughly to the Curriculum Directory. References are flagged carefully on schemes of work. All four areas of the Curriculum Directory are covered exceptionally well in the school's programme of study. Progression is integrated effectively into classroom practice to match the previous learning of the pupils. Religious education is very well resourced, both for classroom work and in the libraries. A particular strength of the religious education programme is the emphasis on a close study of other faiths. This is particularly successful given the range of faiths within the school. A further strong focus of the department is encouraging the pupils to see the links between learning about religion and learning from religion in the process of developing their religious literacy.

Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding

Pupils achieve excellently at St Catherine's at all ages. Results in GCSE examinations in religious education are very high with significant proportions of the pupils gaining the highest available grades of A* and A. Year-on-year, almost every pupil gains a higher GCSE grade. Not only does this exemplify the academic attainment of the girls in religious education but also the commitment of the two thirds of the pupils who are from other than Catholic faith traditions. Progress for all groups of pupils, including those with additional learning needs is outstanding. The growing post-16 provision is increasingly successful in sustaining advanced level courses in religious studies. Currently a third of the sixth form is engaged in this advanced level study. Generally, religious education in the sixth form centres on major themes such as charity and faith. Pupils progress exceptionally well in their understanding of Christianity and the Catholic faith as well as in common elements form across major religious groups.

Pupils in the preparatory phase also learn very well, developing their religious literacy and scriptural understanding from year to year. They are very well informed about the traditions and customs of others. The school's motto, 'deeds not words', permeates all of its work. The pupils understand at their own level how their learning about religion influences their daily understanding. As a result, pupils in both the primary and secondary phases of the school take great pride and care in their work in religious education. They are exceptionally articulate in how they express their understanding of the work in hand. In the early years, children make fast progress and rapidly gain confidence in using religious language and in pursuing learning. Accurate moderation of work at all levels, both internal and external, is built into the school's assessment cycle.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

At St. Catherine's, pupils flourish because of the secure, caring ethos of the school. The overall culture of the school translates seamlessly into the classrooms. A major strength of the school, engendered through the warm working relationships within the school community, is the willingness of the pupils to express their ideas, doubts and explanations without anxiety. Thus, the learning of

the pupils is impressive as evidenced by their oral responses and grasp of the language and narrative of the Catholic faith. Teaching at St Catherine's is more than the sum of its classroom parts. Pupils have a wrap-around experience that leads them to learn exceptionally well. Drama, music, art and narrative are superbly used to round the pupils' experience of their study of religion. This was clearly seen in the early years work on Noah's Ark. Nevertheless, despite the excellent work to challenge the most able, there are occasionally missed opportunities to pick up on pupils' queries and comments and so extend their thinking even more.

The leadership and management of religious education

are outstanding

The religious education coordinators work very well together across all phases of the school. Teamwork is excellent so that staff share in the vision for religious education across the school. The team are guided to develop the pupils' learning skills as well as subject knowledge from the preparatory phase up to the sixth form. Professional development opportunities are well managed, allowing time for school-planned and individual training. Nothing less than the best will do and staff respond very well to the school's expectations of setting its work at the heart of the Church's mission. Very effective systems and structures are in place to regularly monitor, track and ensure that the pupils make rapid progress in religious literacy. Leaders' impact on developing the quality of teaching is highly effective. There is a clear understanding of the need to constantly refresh the department's work and develop the resources and guidance to the staff teaching religious education. As a result, not only staff but pupils also value highly the work of the religious education department.

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

- Pay even greater attention to the readiness of the most able pupils to develop further their religious understanding.
- Share the exceptional practice of the early years throughout the school.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

Most importantly, since the last inspection, and for this current academic year, the school has allocated 10% of curriculum time to religious education up until the sixth form. Thereafter, pupils experience 30 hours of general religious education. To date, the school's limitations on space and finance have prevented the establishment of a prayer room, an issue from the last inspection. However, the intention to provide an indoor space for prayer that complements the outside prayer garden remains in place.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

Religious education is a very high priority in this diverse school community. All pupils, irrespective of their faith traditions, are expected to participate in the full curriculum and in the school's Catholic life. At the same time, sensitive opportunities are provided for pupils from other faith traditions to pray and celebrate major festivals. The school now ensures that all pupils have the required time allocation for classroom religious education. Religious education permeates every aspect of school life. Accommodation for religious education is now at the heart of the school and includes an additional classroom in the new building. School leadership, including governors, at all levels is adamant that the school, as a priority, is a thriving Catholic community and that religious education is at the forefront of this drive.

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

is outstanding

The experience of prayer and worship is a central feature of daily life at St Catherine's. All pupils attend whole school, house, and phase assemblies regularly. Daily prayers are part of the start of each day, and each class has enjoyable opportunities to learn and sing prayers and hymns. Pupils willingly take on the responsibility for morning prayers, for assemblies according to the theme of the liturgical calendar. In this they are well supported by staff and by the local clergy. The school has its own hymn, written by staff and pupils. There is a weekly rolling programme of attendance at Mass in the local parish of St James as well as liturgical celebrations for major liturgical feasts and events. Pupils support the parish in all of its major celebrations. Among the highlights of the numerous prayer opportunities is the 'prayer before exams' programme. The Year of Mercy, the school's anniversary of its foundation by the Sisters of Mercy, and the feast of St Catherine of Siena are just some of the prayerful, celebratory activities that pupils experience. Besides formal prayer times, pupils are able to reflect calmly, pray privately, experience the sacraments, including making First Communion and Confirmation. During Lent, pupils have opportunities within the school day for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

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

are outstanding

The school's commitment to the Common Good is outstanding. Pupils flourish at St Catherine's. They have excellent opportunities to develop and celebrate their gifts, be they in the creative and performance arts, sports, or the academic field. Individuals are valued, and know that they are. The personal development of the pupils is exemplary, helped by the excellent pastoral care. The pupils clearly understand that their privileges bring major responsibilities for others, and that they are called to serve those less fortunate than themselves. There is a very clear understanding of the underpinning of their actions by the Church's call to justice and peace. Pupils respond to those in

need locally, nationally and internationally. They offer practical help to communities in Malawi, Morocco, and Peru, for example. Food banks, refugee support, 'The Women at the Well' project among many others, all benefit from the generosity of the pupils, both in time and fund-raising. Senior pupils are also generous in their support for younger children in the school so that they also learn by example.

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

are outstanding

St Catherine's School has excellent links with parents. Of the 180 parental questionnaire returns, almost all were very positive. Parents have very good opportunities to engage with the school through social and other formal celebrations as well as liturgical events. There is a wealth of information in the fortnightly newsletters and on the school's website. Despite excellent efforts to facilitate parental communication, a few still do not think this is smooth. Inspectors found no evidence to substantiate any concern. The school has excellent links with the local parishes. The school gives very good support to the adjacent parish of St James. Parishioners and parents are always welcome at the school Masses. School staff attend all First Communion and Confirmations wherever possible, in the local parishes. Priests throughout the deanery are invited to attend the end-of-year Mass. The school participates in diocesan training and follows all diocesan recommendations on the Curriculum Directory as well as the new GCSE examinations and advanced level courses. Staff are also part of the annual moderation of work within the diocese.

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

are outstanding

The school's mission statement, 'non verba sed facta', expresses very clearly the school's understanding of itself as a Catholic school. There is undoubted evidence of school leaders', including governors', commitment to the Church's mission in education. Outstanding leadership enables pupils and staff, of whatever faith tradition, to experience a rich Catholic life. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and reflects leaders' very clear understanding of the strengths and areas of the school that require further development. New staff are very carefully inducted into the Catholic life of the school and are very well supported in their tasks by the religious education coordinators, the chaplain, and by senior leaders. Governors mostly have long connections with the school, and share in the strategic leadership of the school with great energy, far-sightedness, and the best interests of this Catholic school. They are well in touch with the views of parents, staff and students.

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

- Take forward plans to train more pupils to be altar servers at Mass and to train post-16 students as Eucharistic ministers.

Information about this school

- The school is an independent, all-through Catholic school in the locality of Twickenham, West London.
- The school, situated in the parish of St James, serves families from a range of parishes and a range of independent and state schools. Many pupils come from the localities closely adjacent to the school.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 35%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 33% and from other faiths is 23%. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 47.5%.
- One pupil in the school has a statement of special educational need but 74 pupils in total are registered as having special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is average.
- No families claim free school meals.

Department for Education Number	318/6008
Unique Reference Number	102936
Local Authority	Richmond

Type of school	All-through
School category	Independent
Age range of pupils	3-18
Gender of pupils	Female
Number of pupils on roll	406
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Edward Sparrow
Headteacher	Sister Paula Thomas
Telephone number	020 8891 2898
Website	www.stcatherineschool.co.uk
Email address	admissions@stcatherineschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 April 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 as well as a learning walk.
- Meetings were held with school staff, pupils and governors, the parish priest and the chaplain.
- 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 Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

Mrs Sheila Nolan	Lead Inspector
Mrs Rose-Marie Sorohan	Associate Inspector
Mrs Ruth Sykes	Associate Inspector
Mr Stuart Alexander	Associate Inspector

Diocesan inspection has four grades:

- outstanding
- good
- requires improvement
- causing concern

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