

Westminster Diocese Inspection Report

Maria Fidelis Roman Catholic School FCJ

34 Phoenix Road London NW1 1TA



Date of inspection: 12-13 March 2015

A. Classroom Religious Education

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

Overall Grade I

Classroom religious education is outstanding in this school. Pupils' achievement in religious education is impressive; their progress is excellent and sustained. At GCSE, the results demonstrate that almost all groups of pupils make progress which is well above average given their varied starting points. Schemes of work are imaginative and engaging, specifying in detail the implementation of the Curriculum Directory at all stages. Overall, teaching is excellent and lessons enable all pupils to engage and to succeed. Teachers have consistently high expectations, strong subject knowledge, excellent relationships with their pupils and a confidence which inspires. Many pupils are provided with detailed written and oral feedback and know how to improve. The leadership and management of the religious education department are outstanding. The subject leader has a vibrant vision for religious education and works in a collaborative way with well qualified staff to ensure pupils achieve their best.

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 experience of Catholic life at Maria Fidelis is outstanding. Religious education is at the core of the curriculum and provided with excellent resources, staffing and accommodation. Prayer and worship are central to the daily life of the school community, promoting its distinctive Catholic ethos and providing excellent opportunities for the pupils to grow in their spirituality. There are links with the local parishes and especially with the wider diocesan family and with parents. Pupils very actively engage with the Common Good, clearly seeing the links between the Church's social teaching, care of those in need throughout the world, and the call to human flourishing. The values of the leadership of the school are firmly rooted in the ethos of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, which permeates the whole community. The governors wholeheartedly work in collaboration with the school to nurture this shared Catholic identity and are truly aspirational for the pupils.

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 2 days in school, visited 14 lessons and 2 assemblies, and carried out 7 interviews 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.

The Inspection of Maria Fidelis Roman Catholic School, Somers Town 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 Jane Goring	Lead Inspector
Mrs Sharon O'Donovan	Associate Inspector
Mrs Rose-Marie Sorohan	Associate Inspector

Description of School

This Voluntary Aided school is a five form entry school in the LA of Camden and the locality of Somers Town. The school serves forty parishes, with the closest being St Aloysius, Somers Town and Our Lady of Hal, Camden Town. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 43%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 23% and from other Faiths 31%, with 3% of no faith background. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 39%.

There are 607 pupils on roll, with 3 pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health & Care Plans (EHC). The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority 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. Two hundred and twenty nine pupils receive the Pupil Premium.

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Headteacher:	Mrs Helen Gill
Chair of Governors:	Mr Modesto Tondelli

Date of previous inspection:	1 February 2010
Previous Inspection grades:	Grade 1

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?

The department has developed very effective methods of monitoring and evaluating pupil progress and the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning is now fully embedded into the life of the school. Marking and assessment have improved but there is still a need for consistency in the quality of the feedback. Focussed intervention has been very effective in improving achievement and this, together with more opportunities for independent learning, has increased motivation and engagement and given all pupils the confidence to flourish irrespective of their starting points.

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

Grade I

The religious education curriculum in all key stages meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory and the mapping of the core content to the Curriculum Directory is exemplary. Programmes of study reflect the needs and aspirations of the pupils; they are imaginatively written using a variety of source materials. The resulting resources are of very high quality which are appealing and presented with a remarkable attention to detail. The curriculum reflects a variety of styles of learning and so creates opportunities for pupils to succeed. Examples of very good planning were seen in all lessons and there is evidence to show progression and depth of provision in the pupils' books. All schemes of work reflect a systematic study of God, the life and teachings of Jesus and the Church, and the central beliefs of the Catholic faith. The delivery of the curriculum is creative and engaging. A review of the schemes of work at Year 7 and 8 reveal a focus on GCSE style questioning and so help to improve progression between the Key Stages. The departmental team strives constantly through its resources to offer pupils as many opportunities as possible to develop their spiritual lives, building on their academic successes.

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

Grade I

Pupils' achievement is outstanding. Pupils enter the school with attainment levels which are broadly average. In Key Stage 3 and 4, all groups make rapid and sustained progress in religious education; this is seen particularly in the increasing trend of pupils attaining a Level 6 and above at the end of Key Stage 3. The gap between disadvantaged and other pupils is small. Attainment at KS4 compares favourably with that of core subjects, with an increase in pupils gaining A/A* grades, including those from other faith backgrounds.

The department has piloted and uses the Diocesan baseline criteria as a starting point in Year 7 to measure pupil progress. Pupils' work is accurately assessed and well informed by Diocesan levels of attainment at both key stages. Moderation across the department is carried out frequently to ensure consistency in grading and there is also moderation with other local Catholic schools. Pupils are enthusiastic learners and display high levels of religious literacy in lessons and in their written work.

The school prioritises target setting, robust tracking and intervention; monitoring in religious education is rigorous and frequent. Intervention strategies are used successfully by the department to address any underachievement and the impact of these is evaluated. The department is relentless in its pursuit of the best outcomes for all pupils. Marking is used regularly to check pupil progress and set targets for pupils. There is scope for further improvement in the quality of marking and time

given to reflect on feedback to ensure pupils are consistently clear about the next steps in their learning to secure progress.

All post sixteen pupils follow a core religious education programme which builds on high GCSE outcomes for religious education. The department has worked hard to ensure that the programme provides variety and challenge, and assessment outcomes are linked to AS criteria. There is evidence that there has been greater engagement with the programme by pupils as a result of this. The number of pupils opting for Level 3 courses is on par with that of other subjects. Religious Studies was the highest performing AS subject at Maria Fidelis in 2014 and pupils' attainment at both AS and A2 is good.

The quality of teaching

Grade I

Well-judged and skilful teaching and robust monitoring and evaluation contribute to sustained learning that is consistently of the highest standards. High expectations, challenging tasks, effective differentiation and a consistent focus on progress made, encourage pupils to reflect independently on their faith and to think critically. All teachers impart a deep knowledge of the Catholic faith and teach with an infectious enthusiasm and confidence. Their informed understanding of how to challenge pupils to do as well as they possibly can in religious education lessons drives learning forward at every level. There is good use of praise and affirmation and behaviour is very well managed, which promotes the desire to learn. There is evidence of challenge and of opportunities for independent learning which are grasped by the pupils. Teachers plan exceptionally well and, in response to pupil feedback, use a wide range of resources capturing pupils' enthusiasm. In the best of lessons, teaching is characterised by stimulating activities, with tasks well matched to individual abilities and punctuated by opportunities to reflect on learning; higher order questioning was particularly impressive. At the heart of pupil progress are very effective strategies in peer and self assessment which permeate lessons. Teachers also mark and assess pupils' work regularly, but diagnostic elements of marking are not consistent across the department; however, in conversations with pupils, most were able to articulate what they needed to do to move on to the next stage. Mutual respect and high quality relationships mean that the pupils are happy to say what they really felt; they are secure in discussion.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade I

The leadership and management of religious education are outstanding. The subject leader's ambition and enthusiasm for the subject inspires her team and there is a vibrant vision for religious education in which achieving the best for pupils is at its heart. The department is a cohesive, strong, supportive team where the sharing of best practice and resources are key, making the department a beacon of excellence within the school. There are effective systems to regularly monitor and track pupil progress and excellent assessment ensures that all groups of pupils make at least expected progress and frequently beyond this. There is a relentless drive to ensure that teaching in the department is of the highest quality. The subject leader has an excellent understanding of both the strengths and areas for development in religious education and there is extensive pupil feedback which is acted upon as appropriate; this results in engaged pupils who feel valued and want to be successful. Senior leaders, including governors, work tirelessly together with the departmental team and all appreciate the centrality and importance of religious education in the mission of the Church and the formation of the students.

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

- Improve the consistency of diagnostic feedback across the department
- Continue to develop pupils' skills in reflecting on the feedback given in marking.

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?

There were no recommendations in the last report. However, the school has identified that chaplaincy has improved as there is wider staff participation through the Hope group and a consequent increase in the variety of prayer.

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

Grade 1

The school meets the requirements for curriculum time in Key Stages 3, 4 and 5. Pupils spend 10% of the available curricular time in religious education in the main school. At Key Stage 5, students study core religious education for 30 hours of curricular time from the timetabled allocation. The religious education department has a generous budget, one which is in line with other core subjects. In addition, there is a similar budget for liturgy and retreats. The religious education department is well staffed with subject specialists. There are dedicated classrooms on both sites; all classrooms provide a vibrant learning environment. The FCJ sisters, governors and head teacher offer outstanding guidance in developing and reviewing religious education and chaplaincy within the school.

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

Grade 2

Prayer life and collective worship are clearly at the heart of the school. There are regular acts of worship, including year group Masses and whole school Masses where pupil participation is encouraged, and they respond with appreciation and respect. Assemblies are impressive and pupils approach them as a chance for reflection. Morning prayer makes creative use of technology and this can be an effective way of overcoming the problems which arise from staffing a split site school. Opportunities for more imaginative prayer and for greater pupil participation in planning of the liturgy could be developed and would be enthusiastically embraced by pupils; there is a deep spirituality in many of the pupils at Maria Fidelis. There are annual retreats for the pupils and other opportunities for reflection are encouraged, especially in Advent and Lent; pupils appreciate these occasions to develop their spirituality. This is an inclusive community and those of other faiths play a significant part in the prayer life of the school; all pupils feel comfortable in sharing their faith and this is a very powerful message.

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

Grade 1

The school's commitment to the Common Good is outstanding. Pupils and staff share the same vision and understanding of the call to 'human flourishing' and there are excellent opportunities for pupils to celebrate their gifts and talents. The rewards system in the school acknowledges the good efforts of pupils with trips and 'own clothes' days. There are numerous opportunities for pupils to

develop their gifts and talents, such as the philosophy and creative writing clubs. Academic mentors from leading universities work with sixth form pupils. The school also has links with a boarding school where pupils have had residential opportunities.

The parental support system has created an excellent partnership between parents and the school. Staff and pupils are both committed to and contribute to the Common Good which is centred within the ecclesial dimension of this school. Respect and value for the individual is central to all aspects of the life of the school and it is evident that the FCJ's vision of schools as 'communities of personal and academic excellence' is lived out daily at Maria Fidelis. Pupils are very confident in the community they describe as 'like a large family' while at the same time giving them hope and aspiration.

Pupils are sensitive to the needs of different groups in society. The sixth form organise a Christmas party for local pensioners and go into care homes to invite them personally. The school is a lead partner with London Citizens, and Year 11 have run a 'Safe place project' and three current sixth formers have all received Citysafe Champion awards. Year 11 and 13 both help out at Age UK. Pupils who participate in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme fundraise for the St Mungo's homeless charity for their service activity. The house system in the school is responsible for charity collections for charities like CAFOD and SVP. There are Charity Months throughout the school year. Refreshments are organised on consultation evenings by parents in order to raise money for Macmillan. Recently a new system of 'Maria Fidelis guardians' has been set up which is a buddy system to help build inclusivity.

The chaplaincy is now organised by the Hope group which emerged from a recent FCJ conference, focusing on developing the FCJ values in their schools. It comprises a group of volunteer staff who work together to prepare liturgies and charity events. They are also working to develop links with feeder schools, parishes and parents.

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

There is a very strong commitment among senior leaders and staff to the school's mission as a Catholic school within the Diocese of Westminster. Leaders and managers at all levels, along with governors are regularly involved in diocesan events. Priests from the feeder parishes are increasingly invited into school, thus developing deeper relationships with the whole local community. Staff regularly attend diocesan training and the religious education adviser is a welcome visitor to the school. The school participates in moderation meetings with local Catholic schools. Partnership with parents is very strong, particularly through the pastoral system and the parental questionnaire showed that parents were appreciative of the contribution by the school for the continuing faith formation of their children. They strongly agreed that the school is both welcoming and supportive, whilst being empathetic to their concerns. There was also strong agreement in how the school supports both the progress of their children and the quality of its provision as a Catholic school.

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

Grade I

The leadership of Maria Fidelis Catholic School is outstanding; the headteacher is inspirational and the leadership team have high aspirations for the school as a Catholic community and a passion for school improvement. The spirituality of the FCJ community is woven throughout the whole school and manifests itself in shared vision of the leadership team; this then permeates the school community at all levels. Pupils have a strong sense of legacy and feel that they are part of the

community – all have a contribution to make and feel valued. The Governing body understands its strategic role and is effective in carrying out its duties.

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

- Continue the work of the Hope group, creating an even greater variety of prayer and worship, especially through pupil participation in planning of liturgy.
- Progress further the active engagement of pupils in supporting those in need by developing projects over time and in greater depth.