



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

BISHOP CHALLONER CATHOLIC COLLEGE BIRMINGHAM

Inspection dates	4 th – 5 th October 2012
Reporting Inspector	Dr John Lally
Assisting Inspector	Mr Chris Martin

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11-18 years
Number on roll	1209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mr Greg Keegan
School address	Institute Road Kings Heath Birmingham B14 7EG
Telephone number	0121.444.4161
E-mail address	enquiry@bishopchalloner.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	February 2009
DFE School number	103560
Unique Reference Number	330/5413

Headteacher	Mrs Maire Symons OBE
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DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Evidence

The inspection was carried out by 2 Diocesan Inspectors. The focus of the inspection was on the effectiveness and use of the school's self evaluation of religious education (RE) and Catholic life. To validate the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation of teaching and learning, the inspectors observed 8 full or part RE lessons. In addition the inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held a discussion with students to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning. They held meetings with a governor, *staff, the school chaplain, lay chaplain and youth worker*. They observed form and year group worship and chaplaincy activities. They looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self-evaluation such as RAISEonline, the development plan, the school's analysis of lesson observations, and teachers' planning. Alongside the validation of school self-evaluation, the inspectors gathered evidence about digital learning in RE, evidence which will be shared with other diocesan schools.

Information about the school

Bishop Challoner is an 11-18 comprehensive school with 1209 students, 93% of whom are baptised Catholics. There are 261 in the sixth form, a significant increase since the last inspection. The students come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds including areas of significant deprivation. The proportion from minority ethnic groups is above average. The number of students with special education needs is about average. There is a stable staff of whom 57% are Catholic.

Main Finding

In its self-evaluation the school judges itself to be outstanding in all respects in both Catholic life and religious education. A reflective approach coupled with the very strong commitment of the senior leadership team ensures that the school's Catholic ethos is at the forefront of all to which Bishop Challoner aspires. In this, the staff, governors, and students are fully supportive and it is through the involvement of all that the school is a vibrant Catholic community. Outcomes from religious education in terms of enjoyment and achievement are very high and justify the school's judgement that the subject is outstanding in its teaching and learning, curriculum provision and leadership.

School self evaluation

Bishop Challoner is a learning community in the full sense of the term. It is never content with what has been or is being achieved. The school is always seeking to move forward through its analysis of the outcomes for pupils, the quality of its provision, and its awareness and leadership of best practice within and beyond the school. Self-evaluation is an essential tool in its drive for improvement in Catholic life as in all areas of its provision and it is a process of regular reflective enquiry which is fully integrated with its development planning. Evaluation is not an end in itself for the school, but rather a means of enabling the school to know what must be done next. Improvement planning is very thorough and tackles the core question of how the school carries out its core mission rooted in Christ, the Gospels, and the Church. Responsibility is appropriately delegated and the clear success criteria are identified to enable effective evaluation of progress.

At the last inspection there were effective mechanisms in place for the review and renewal of Catholic life. Since then extended thought has been given to the nature and quality of the Catholic curriculum within the school and how all subjects can contribute to it. Subject areas have been encouraged to reflect on how they contribute to the school's Catholicity

and have responded to the question “where can we find God and Christian values in our subject?” It is coupled with a question that is directly relevant to the pupils: “how can this subject help me to become the person God wants me to be?” To date, early in this project, most responses have identified what is done rather than evaluating the quality and moving to what more might be done or what might be done differently. It is a very secure starting point for progress in an area which few schools have yet approached. Underpinning for this work with departments is the senior leadership’s clear philosophy of Catholic education as a threefold undertaking: participation in normal Catholic activities such as prayer and liturgy and charitable action for the common good; a pedagogy which enables pupils to explore conflicting ideas, beliefs and emotions, described in the school as cognitive conflict; and, at the deepest level, education which is a holy act and which, in the context of contemporary attitudes and thought, is counter-cultural. The philosophy is more than a vision: it is in process of becoming a reality in the curriculum of the school. Vision, evaluation, planning and implementation are a coherent whole and their impact on the whole school community is evident not only in the quality of teaching and learning and the standards achieved, but in the high standards of behaviour of the pupils, their commitment to the school and its activities as a Catholic school, and their strong sense of the community of Bishop Challoner.

The school’s evaluation of the outcomes and provision from religious education is accurate and reliable. In addition to effective and perceptive analysis of examination performance, a series of lesson observations were undertaken by senior leaders to see how pupil progress can be demonstrated within a single lesson and establish the impact of the school’s investment in inset programmes and coaching. The observations were based a combination of the criteria of the diocesan and s5 inspection frameworks. The findings are wholly consistent with those from the inspection. Judgements about teaching and learning in the review were accurate and soundly evidenced. While the analysis of the findings did not directly make recommendations, the expectations of the school about teaching and learning were very clear. Feedback on individual lessons to teachers did indicate areas where improvement is needed especially in moving good lessons to outstanding. Within the department the focus of the subject leader is more on planning than evaluation and he has not so far been involved in formal evaluation of teaching and learning in the department and has not undertaken work scrutiny other than that which is implicit in the moderation of assessment work. Through moderation and the analysis of performance data, he knows how well the department is doing, but extending the scope of monitoring to lessons, book trawls, and the curriculum will bring greater insights as a basis for planning. A new approach to departmental evaluation has been adopted recently where performance of the department is evaluated against modified Ofsted criteria. It is a positive move forward which encourages a broad but detailed evaluation of RE. As a reflective enterprise supported by data analysis and senior leadership feedback from monitoring it is effective. At times the basis for the judgements is not clear as the scope of the department’s own monitoring procedures is limited. Leadership is excellent, but monitoring and evaluation by the department is good.

The capacity of the school for sustained improvement to its Catholic life and religious education is exceptional. Secure reflective practice, shared fully with governors whose knowledge of the school is outstanding, and excellent forward planning go hand in hand with inspirational leadership from the headteacher and other senior leaders. The inspiration permeates all with leadership roles from the head of spiritual life to the lay chaplain and youth worker and, not least, to the student members of the chaplaincy committee.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

Outcomes from religious education at GCSE are well above both diocesan and national averages at both A*-C and A*-A grades while those at Advanced Level are broadly consistent with the national average. Attainment in Key Stage 3 is excellent: the pupils rise very well to the challenges of philosophical and theological thought to which they are consistently exposed, develop very secure skills of independent learning, and engage fully with and enjoy their learning. They make good progress through Years 7 and 8 and excellent progress in Year 9. This excellence is maintained through Key Stage 4.

Pupils and sixth form students value the Catholic character of the school highly. They contribute strongly to the common good within and beyond the school, and they engage with and grow in their spiritual, moral, and vocational understanding. They are prepared to take responsibility in a range of ways, as, for example, through the chaplaincy group which provides outstanding leadership for the student body. Some take individual initiative as with the sixth form eco project to establish a peace garden which will be dedicated to the memory of a former student. Through RE in particular, pupils engage with complex questions of meaning and purpose in a more structured way than is the norm. The recent programme to encourage departments to consider questions about where God is found in their subjects and pupils to think about what God is calling them to be is beginning to strengthen across the school the work that the RE department has carried out for long.

Response of the pupils to the provision for collective worship is outstanding. They are ready throughout the school to plan, organise and lead worship as well as participate with enthusiasm in a variety of ways. While the chaplaincy group provides leadership across the school, pupils in each class have and accept willingly the opportunities provided for them to plan Masses and other liturgies and to develop understanding of and explain the theme of the Mass which they plan in their form groups. Their participation and planning are made possible by the high quality of the provision for worship by the school and, in particular, the head of spiritual life, youth worker and lay chaplain working closely with the priest chaplain. The chaplain is very active and, in addition to the usual liturgies, offers catechesis to pupils on developing and sustaining a personal relationship with God.

The last inspection referred to the effective and charismatic leadership of the headteacher. This remains true, but the distinguishing character of her leadership is to enable all with any responsibility or potential for leadership to develop and exercise it to the full. Bishop Challoner is strongly led by all in senior and middle leadership roles but with the drive of the headteacher giving them clear purpose and direction. The governors are fully informed and involved in all aspects of the leadership of the Catholic life of the school which they defend robustly. They, in close association with senior leaders, are fully committed to the mission of the school which motivates it as a teaching school supporting others, both Catholic and other maintained schools, and sponsoring a diocesan school as an academy. Its support of that school over several years is bringing about a radical transformation of the education it provides.

Teaching in religious education is good or better in almost all lessons, but in respect of its long term impact it is outstanding. Planning is shared and provides equality of experience across all classes. Excellent use is made of new technologies and fosters interactive learning and the development of independent learning. Staff are well trained and provided with many opportunities for professional development including coaching within the school. Questioning skills are strong and formal assessment contributes very effectively to pupils' progress in learning and attainment.

¹ As the quality of the school self-evaluation has been affirmed, the judgements in this section of the report conform to those of the school.

Curriculum provision in religious education is very effective in engaging pupils in the subject from their start in the school. It begins from philosophical ideas and, through the strong subject knowledge and skills of the teachers, moves to a thorough grounding in and understanding of Catholic beliefs and practice. In this, as in other subjects in the school, pupils have excellent opportunities to develop their spiritual, ethical and vocational awareness. The RE curriculum is not static but develops appropriately with self-evaluation findings as in the decision to abandon early GCSE entry which was judged to be affecting the Key Stage 3 curriculum and attainment at GCSE negatively in some measure.

The school judges itself to be outstanding in its outcomes, leadership and provision for Catholic life, collective worship, and religious education. The inspection confirms the reliability of these judgements.

Recommendation

Develop the leadership of religious education further by involving the subject leader fully in monitoring the department and extending his range of monitoring activities.