



Westminster Cathedral Choir School

Ambrosden Avenue, SW1P 1QH

Date of inspection: 23rd January 2014

A. Classroom Religious Education

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

Overall Grade I

The religious literacy of the pupils is very good and they are becoming aware of how their Catholic faith affects their daily living. Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons especially when discussing their own ideas and opinions and when undertaking practical activities to consolidate their learning. Pupils display a growing depth of thought which impacts very well on their spiritual and moral development. All staff are fully committed to the very high profile given to religious education and willing to undertake training to improve their skills. There is evidence of very good planning of learning. Lessons have clear objectives and success criteria which enable pupils to effectively assess their own learning and so know how to improve. The school's self evaluation is achieved through regular monitoring and provides evidence of an accurate awareness of the strengths of the department.

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

Westminster Cathedral Choir School is an excellent Catholic school with some outstanding aspects. The committed leadership of the headteacher and senior staff is highly effective in maintaining and developing the school's Catholic identity, and in impressively fostering pupils' growing awareness of their Catholic faith and their understanding of how to live this out in their lives. Given the relationship with the Cathedral, it is not surprising that prayer and worship have a strong central role in school and the quality of liturgical prayer is exceptional. The pupils' spiritual and moral development is outstanding and this is reflected in pupils' excellent behaviour and very positive attitudes. Governors offer strong support in developing and reviewing the quality of the Catholic life of the school. Relationships within the school community are outstanding as is the pastoral care provided to support individual needs. The school does not yet meet the requirement for 10% curriculum time for classroom religious education.

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 1 day in school, visited 6 lessons, attended Mass, 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 Westminster Cathedral Choir School 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
Mr Daniel Keane	Associate Inspector
Fr Antony Homer	Associate Inspector

Description of School

The school is an independent school with one form of entry in Year 3 and two forms of entry from Year 4, in the locality of Westminster. The school serves parishes across central London. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 78%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 16%, from other Faiths 1% and of no faith background 5%. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 69%.

There are 168 pupils on roll, with no pupils with statements of Special Educational Need. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is below average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is well above average, as the school is highly international. The school is both boarding choir school for 28 choristers of Westminster Cathedral and a day school for 140 day boys.

Telephone:	020 7798 9081
e-mail address:	office@choirschool.com

DFE Number:	213/6197
URN Number:	101166

Headteacher:	Mr Neil McLaughlan
Chair of Governors:	Mr John Gibbs

Date of previous inspection:	20 th January 2009
------------------------------	-------------------------------

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

- Develop further systems for Assessment for Learning – partially implemented.
- Provide opportunity for senior staff to study further in Catholic Education and Theology – action has been taken by key members of staff
- Draft a sex education policy based on explicit Catholic principles – implemented
- Review its use of 'Alive to the World' to ensure the Catholic underpinning is evident – implemented
- Review the approach and extent of coverage of teaching about world faiths – implemented.

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

Grade I*

Religious education is at the heart of the school and is well supported by the leadership team and valued by members of staff across the school. The curriculum meets all the requirements of the Curriculum Directory; the four strands are clearly identified in the schemes of work and links to 'Faith and Life' programme, used across the school, are very detailed. These highlight ways in which the needs of the pupils can be met with imagination and creativity and so aids both long term and short term planning, ensuring that topics are revisited and developed appropriately as pupils move up the school. There is regular monitoring of the curriculum, of teacher planning and of the assessment of pupils' work. The resource base is being updated to reflect curriculum developments and the diversity of the pupils.

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

Grade I

Pupil achievement, attainment and progress in religious education are very good. Pupils are above average ability on entry, make good progress and, by the end of their time in the school, standards are high. In Year 8, the boys take the Common Entrance Religious Studies (Syllabus B) examinations for entry into independent selective schools across the country. There has been a gradual increase in the number of boys achieving the highest grades and, in 2013, 75% of the pupils attained an A grade. Lessons observed provided evidence of motivated pupils who are attaining a very good standard in knowledge and understanding of religion and are developing an ability to reflect on meaning. However, opportunities for these high achievers to extend their understanding were not always fully exploited, and pupils could take more ownership of their learning. Tracking of progress is robust and forecast grades have been accurate measures of the final outcomes; the school's own data suggest that pupils are on track to make very good progress. The school continues to review the use of the Diocesan Levels of Understanding.

The quality of teaching

Grade I

At KS2 and KS3, teaching is consistently very good. Teachers have high expectations and excellent subject knowledge. They successfully engage learners and deepen their understanding. Lesson time is managed very well and a good pace is maintained with a variety of tasks such as questioning, discussion and opportunities for answers to be considered, formulated and celebrated. Transitions

between different sequences in the lessons were seamless. Where outstanding teaching was seen, lessons used creative and innovative activities, targeted questioning and there was evidence of higher order thinking. Pupils are keen to study Religious Education and engage enthusiastically with the lessons. Pupils receive constructive feedback in key concepts; they know what they have achieved and what needs to improve. Assessment is in place, with diagnostic comments, and peer assessment was evident. Academic planning is submitted for scrutiny to the Deputy Head which ensures quality and consistency across the department. There are excellent relationships between teachers and pupils, creating a learning environment where the pupils feel safe to express their views; pupils have a good awareness of the demands of being a Christian in today's world.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade I

The leadership and management of the Religious Education department is very good. There is a strong commitment to promoting high quality Religious Education. Organisation and teamwork are excellent with clear planning and development aimed at continual personal excellence. There is a sense of common purpose with good practice shared informally. All staff are supported well and there is a feeling of shared responsibility for the work. Regular departmental discussions focus on improving teaching and learning through the development of an increased variety of resources, although there is a need for further development in assessment for learning. Classrooms provide a stimulating visual environment for learning. There has been significant investment in ICT, which has enriched the opportunities for varied teaching styles and so tailoring more closely the pupils own learning requirements.

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

- Develop further the range of assessment methods including peer assessment and ensure consistency of assessment across the department.
- Develop further a wider range of resources to ensure lessons remain engaging and challenging for all pupils. This might include using sacred art as a focus for illustrating biblical stories.
- Seek opportunities to work with similar schools to develop expertise as a Catholic centre for excellence.

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?

- Expand the variety of prayer experiences to include more meditative and ex tempore occasions. - this has been partially implemented in that there has been some development in the variety of prayer styles but this work should continue.
- Look to providing further opportunities for chaplains and other Cathedral staff to be involved with Catholic aspects of the school's life – Cathedral staff are now regular visitors to the school

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

Grade I

There is a generous budget for religious education which exceeds that of English and Maths. The number of Catholic staff is high and accommodation is attractive and fit for purpose. The Governors and the school leadership offer outstanding support to Religious Education which plays a central role in achieving the mission of the school. Religious Education receives 7.5% of formal curriculum time across the Key Stages. However, the amount of time allocated to religious education does not meet the requirement of 10% curriculum time as requested by the Bishops' Conference.

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

Grade I

The experience of Catholic worship for the whole school community is very good with some outstanding aspects. The inspection team found that prayer and worship are central to the life of the school and a key part of every school celebration. The close relationship with the Cathedral clergy and especially the Chaplain enables an authentic encounter with the rich liturgical traditions of the Catholic Church and the observance of the Liturgical Year. The School in partnership with the Cathedral act as custodians of a rich treasury of liturgical music which shapes the life of the whole school community. The beauty and quality of the music and the solemn Liturgical celebration greatly enhances the encounter with the divine for both the pupils of the school and all those who attend the Cathedral. Pupils spoke well of their own interior lives and the opportunities for prayer and reflection in the daily life of the school. Inspectors also took note of the various opportunities the school offers for the regular preparation and celebration of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion. However, there are missed opportunities for the boys to experience less traditional forms of worship and for them to be more involved in the planning and delivery of assemblies and other acts of worship. The Liturgical music of the school has been rightly identified as a treasure to be shared with the wider Church and the establishment of the Outreach project is a witness to this conviction.

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

Grade I*

The school's commitment to the Common Good is outstanding. Within the school system there is real respect and support for every individual child, both day pupils and borders. The behaviour of the pupils is excellent, evident through their warmth and confidence with which they engage with each other, with their teachers and with visitors. School Council pupils at both key stages have a very good understanding of moral issues and there is a sense of reaching out into the community. Pupils are expected to develop their considerable gifts and talents and to be service to others; the way in which they do this is inspirational and is evident in the pupil participation in musical outreach work with local schools and their support of the Cardinal Hume Centre. The pupils clearly understand the theology which underpins their service to those less well off than themselves. The choristers sing in the wards of St Thomas' Hospital before Christmas and there is support for a variety of charities. Moral issues, ethics are discussed in the light of the teaching of the church.

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*

Partnership is a vibrant and central part of the school's mission in practice. The school has exceptional links with the Diocese through its unique position and service to the Cathedral. Both staff and Governors access diocesan training and share good practice with other Catholic independent schools in London. The school has excellent relationships with parents who value deeply the contribution the school makes to the faith development of their children. This is borne out through the very high number of parents who responded to the questionnaire, agreeing and strongly agreeing with all aspects of the school's Religious Education and Catholic provision. The example set by the parents volunteering at the Cardinal Hume Centre in partnership with the school was a delight to witness.

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

Grade I*

The leadership of Westminster Cathedral Choir 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 Cathedral 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. The 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?

- The leadership of the school should increase the curriculum allocation for Religious Studies to be in line with the 10% requirement of the Bishop's Conference.
- The school could increase the opportunities for all pupils to make an annual Retreat either in house or away. This might include opportunities for some less traditional worship.
- The school could further enhance the participation of pupils in the planning and delivery of Assemblies and informal acts of Worship, building in a regular review of the hymns and prayers used looking to create more personal reflections.