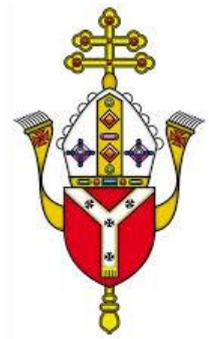


Westminster Cathedral Choir School

Ambrosden Avenue, Westminster, London, SW1P 1QH

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 27 June 2019

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils



A. Classroom religious education is good

- The school has considered the wider religious education curriculum across all key stages. It is based on and mapped to the Religious Education Curriculum Directory.
- Typicality of teaching across the school is good.
- Pupils are religiously literate and can articulate their knowledge and understanding of religion purposefully.
- The head of religious education has contributed significantly to ensuring that religious education is at the heart of the curriculum.
- Good systems are evident in the planning of schemes of work, delivery of its content to pupils and the assessment against the standards framework.
- School leaders' vision for further improvement in religious education continues to be embedded and will result in high quality teaching and the monitoring of pupils' progress, moderation and assessment across the school.
- Governors are knowledgeable about the school's vision for religious education and challenge leaders to ensure the highest expectations.

Classroom religious education is not yet outstanding because

- Pupils are not sufficiently challenged in lessons nor in the feedback in their books.
- There are limited opportunities for pupils to show independence in their approach to learning and to take responsibility for their learning outcomes.
- There are not yet sufficient opportunities where the curriculum is linked to the liturgical year.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The school meets the requirement of the Bishops' Conference for pupils to receive 10% curriculum time for religious education.
- The pupils truly appreciate their close proximity to the Cathedral and the school uses every opportunity to promote excellence through traditional worship, reconciliation and prayer life.
- Parents are supportive of the school, one commenting, 'WCCS is a beacon of excellence'.
- The school achieves their aim to emulate the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'we believe that the Catholic faith has 'only to be known, to be loved' in an authentic way.
- The Catholic life of the school permeates all aspects of the school and is seen distinctly in the values and spiritual development of pupils.
- Pupils' involvement in the liturgical life of the school continues to improve especially with the life of the Cathedral parish.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are exemplary and there is a clear culture that embodies the school's aim 'to transmit the Catholic faith with joy and fidelity.'
- The school encourages strong links with parents and governors to develop their experiences of being part of a universal Church.
- Pupils at the school clearly live their school motto 'Boys praise the Lord' and their excellent behaviour is exemplified in the school's Golden Rule: 'Do to others that you would have them do to you'.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

The school has developed a more consistent approach to assessment, using the Diocese of Westminster 'Standards Framework' as a foundation. In Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, the progress of each pupil is tracked using a robust system to ensure all pupils aim to meet the target set for them, and to track progress towards success in the Common Entrance examination. In Key Stage 1, pupils are assessed less formally using ongoing weekly assessment materials. The school has developed a wider range of resources, for example, the use of sacred art, to challenge and inspire all pupils. The head of religious education has been instrumental in seeking opportunities to work across deaneries and independent schools to develop her expertise.

The content of classroom religious education is good

The curriculum, planned and mapped to the Religious Education Curriculum Directory, follows a different scheme in each key stage and, although effective, currently lacks the underpinning of progression within the liturgical year. The use of sacred art has been embedded well to complement the religious education (RE) curriculum and the content of work related to other faiths. The pupils clearly enjoy sacred art and were keen to discuss projects they had worked on, including rosaries and Cathedral mosaics.

Pupil achievement in religious education is good

Pupils make good progress as they move through the school and their attainment in religious education is as good, and in some areas, better than core subjects; this is especially evident in Common Entrance results. The most significant progress is seen in Key Stage 3 where the continuity of the 13+ Common Entrance Examination religious studies examination (Syllabus B, Roman Catholic Tradition) syllabus yields excellent results. Pupils' attitudes to learning are generally positive and this has a positive impact on the progress they make. Pupils are articulate in discussing their religious knowledge, one describing their Catholic education saying, 'We believe in Jesus Christ, our Saviour, who died for us so we give thanks to God.' Achievement is better when lessons in RE are less didactic. As pupils move up the school, increasing opportunities for discussion and collaboration are accommodated and therefore achievement is more significant. In one lesson on the crucifixion, one pupil explained very articulately the 'triple cross – of minds, heart/lips, heart/love' as an important symbolic gesture before the Gospel. Across Key Stage 1 and 2, there tends to be an overuse of worksheets, often with limiting lines, which stifle pupil's creativity and independence. Lessons in this area of the school are predominantly teacher-led which can result in pupils becoming bored. In discussions with pupils, they said their most memorable lessons were those which incorporated role-play, art and opportunities to engage with videos instead of the teacher telling them information or reading from the 'brown textbooks.' The pupils rarely engage in ICT in RE and would relish the opportunity to do so. Pupils enjoy RE assessments and this supports them in personal target setting and monitoring their own progress. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive and they have a sound understanding of key religious vocabulary. Pupils keep a record of their results in an assessment sheet, at the front of their exercise books. They evaluate their own progress and set their own termly targets, alongside their teacher's individual targets. All boys have a progress tracker for their own use and for meetings with parents.

The quality of teaching is good

The quality of teaching across the school is good. Teachers create a positive climate for learning and, as a result, behaviour is exemplary and pupils are eager to participate in lessons. Teachers have a strong subject knowledge and are committed to delivering a good standard of religious education.

There are inconsistencies, however, in the demands made on the younger pupils and those higher up the school who are preparing for Common Entrance and whose attainment is noticeably stronger as a result of more ambitious challenges. In Key Stage 1 and 2, using 'driver' words from the 'Standards Framework' instead of 'Can I' statements as the focus for each lesson will provide pupils with increasingly open-ended responses. Across the school, teachers' response to written work does not always extend children's thinking and there are insufficient opportunities for extended pieces of writing, especially in the lower part of the school. In some classes, pupils are not always clear about what they need to do next to improve their work and, in some cases, opportunities for developed writing were limited by pre-determined differentiated tasks. In the strongest lessons observed, pace of delivery ensured pupils remained engaged through opportunities given to discuss open-ended questions and discuss challenging topics.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education is outstanding

The leadership of religious education in this school is outstanding. This is primarily as a result of the RE lead's ambitious approach to the highest expectations for all staff and pupils. She has a committed approach to working with the diocese and other schools within the deanery and beyond to ensure moderation is becoming increasingly robust. The school's own self-evaluation (SEF) is accurate in identifying the need to, 'explore further training opportunities for the RS department, especially using diocesan CPD.' Structures in place to assess RE as a subject are strong, especially in Key Stage 2 and beyond. In Early Years and Key Stage 1, assessment is more informal although there are systems in place to track pupils' progress. The governing body is committed to the progress the school is making in developing RE, especially with the links which continue to be forged within the deanery and diocese.

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

- Provide sufficient challenge consistently across the school both in lessons and in feedback to pupils in books.
- Explore increasing opportunities for pupils to show independence in their approach to learning to ensure they begin to take responsibility for their learning outcomes.
- Review the curriculum and consider underpinning this with stronger links to the liturgical year.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

10% of curriculum time is now given to religious education, as required by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Retreats are being planned into the curriculum. Year 8 have a retreat incorporated into their post-Common Entrance timetable and Year 7 have a leadership retreat annually with the school chaplain. Pupils plan and participate in class assemblies, however, opportunities for pupils to plan and deliver informal acts of worship are sometimes missed.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

10% of curriculum time is devoted to the teaching of religious education across all key stages every week and the RE department is the biggest in the school. RE is given a high status in this school and benefits enormously from its outstanding links to and collaboration with Westminster Cathedral. The school's SEF rightly identifies the strength of RE within the school due to the fact that the academic deputy headteacher and head of pre-prep both teach RE; this ensures that the RE department is strongly represented at senior level. The school also now has a new RE governor to ensure a strong link between the governing body and the RE department. In the parental questionnaire, one parent commented, 'As parents, it is a joy to see my son learn about Catholic life and thrive in this wonderful school and environment every day.'

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

is outstanding

Prayer and worship are experienced in a unique way at Westminster Cathedral Choir School (WCCS). The traditions and ceremony of services within the Cathedral are embedded in the prayer life of each pupil's experience. In our discussions with pupils, some of them choristers, they spoke with great affection about the celebration of Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation open to them at the Cathedral. They clearly do not take this for granted and are particularly encouraged by various roles offered to them, for example reading at Mass, altar serving or participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the Cathedral's crypt. The pupils celebrate Mass on a weekly basis and this is valued by the pupils. In a discussion with them, one said simply that 'Mass is a small Easter.' Assemblies are used to enhance pupils' understanding of Catholic life and parents value the opportunity to be part of this celebration. Pupils sing enthusiastically in assemblies and are also given opportunities to sing during RE lessons. It was a privilege to hear some of the choristers sing during a Year 6 lesson on the purpose of music in worship which developed their understanding of Marian hymns. Classrooms have appropriate and engaging focus areas and displays around the school are evidence of the rich experience of Catholic worship. Displays included outstanding reminders of the Catholic life of the school, for example, drawings and explanations of Westminster Cathedral, Marian art, a display board linked to assemblies and charities and Adoremus, following the National Congress on the Eucharist. Pupils offer prayers of intercession to the school's patrons, Our Lady of Westminster and St Gregory the Great, with great reverence.

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

is good

The pupils at WCCS respect one another and have a strong sense of their Catholic identity. One pupil commented, 'we are supposed to be stewards of creation - we need to do things collectively.' The school raises significant amounts of money for a number of charities, including 'Eye Hope,' 'The Cardinal Hume Centre' and 'The Passage.' On the day of the inspection, pupils in the pre-preps

were given the opportunity to hear from a doctor of ophthalmology with links to the 'Eye Hope' charity. They were delighted to see how the money they had raised was used to buy an eye-scanning machine in Tanzania. The school is still developing its understanding of the call to 'human flourishing' in its broadest sense. Pupils still need to be given a wide range of opportunities to develop and celebrate their gifts and talents both in school and also in the wider world at large. The majority of fundraising events are planned by parents and staff, and the pupils have said that they would like to have more input into engaging with the Common Good and to be of service to others. This was also the view of some of the parents via the parental questionnaire. Pupils in Year 8 spoke with great affection about the school and discussed how they could use the moral lessons they had learned as they continued on to their respective schools. They recalled parables such as 'The Lost Sheep' and 'The Prodigal Son' as guides in their spiritual journey for life beyond WCCS.

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 links with Westminster Cathedral are exceptionally strong and the school engages in a very spiritual way through participation at Mass, Reconciliation, Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The school's choristers also play a pivotal role in supporting the life of the Cathedral. Cathedral clergy are well represented on the governing body; they are very supportive of the school's involvement in the Cathedral and, together with the vice chair of the governing body, were very complimentary of the RE lead's commitment to shaping the Catholic life of the school. Partnerships with parents were exemplified in the good return of diocesan parent questionnaires during the inspection. On the whole, parents were very positive about classroom RE and the Catholic life of the school and some comments included, 'You couldn't hope for a better Catholic school' and 'I want to mention the links with the Cathedral which provides the boys with so many opportunities. My son has been serving a weekday Mass these last few years and has built very valuable relationships and furthered his spiritual life. I am extremely grateful to the school.' The collaboration with the diocese continues to improve due to the commitment and dedication of the head of RE. The school have been working closely with the diocesan RE advisor and taking appropriate advice and direction. Increasing links with deanery schools and the diocese are proving to be very helpful in encouraging the school to witness and share best practice.

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

is outstanding

The head of RE, together with the headteacher, are fully committed to ensuring all pupils have an enriching and spiritually uplifting Catholic experience. They are fortunate to have strong links with Westminster Cathedral and yet do not take this for granted, availing of every opportunity for the pupils to be involved in a variety of ways. The school's mission underpins every part of school life and is articulated clearly by staff and pupils. Governors speak highly of the work achieved by the head of RE in terms of establishing stronger links with the diocese and within the deanery. The voice of the pupils articulates clearly how much they enjoy being at WCCS and how they will continue to grow in their faith as they move on to their respective secondary schools.

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

- Pupils should be more aware of the theology underpinning the actions which are inspired by the Common Good and understand more fully the Christian sacrifice asked of them.
- Pupils still need to take greater ownership of preparing and leading collective worship on a regular basis.

Information about this school

- The school is a two form independent Catholic prep school for boys aged 4-13, in the locality of Westminster.
- The school serves the parish of Westminster Cathedral.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 73%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 24%, and from other faiths is 1%. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 63%.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 1.
- There are 7% pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 15 have individual education plans.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is above average.

Department for Education Number	2136 197
Unique Reference Number	101166
Local Authority	Westminster

Type of school	Independent
School category	Preparatory
Age range of pupils	4-13
Gender of pupils	Male
Number of pupils on roll	226
The appropriate authority	Governing Body
Chair	Mr David Heminway
Headteacher	Mr Neil McLaughlan
Telephone number	020 7798 9081
Website	www.choirschool.com
Email address	office@choirschool.com
Date of previous inspection	January 2014
Grades from previous inspection:	
Classroom religious education	Very good
The Catholic life of the school	Very good

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.

- 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 13 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended 2 assemblies and a number of 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 Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

Mrs Monica McCarthy

Lead Inspector

Mrs Geraldine Pears

Associate Inspector

Mrs Ruth Sykes

Associate Inspector

Information about inspection

The purpose of Diocesan inspection is to report to and advise the Archbishop on the quality of classroom religious education and the Catholic life of the school. The inspection report is also used to inform parents and carers, and the wider Catholic community. Inspection provides an opportunity to support, challenge, evaluate and promote the work of Catholic schools. It also assists schools in the work of self-evaluation and improvement, and enables the Diocese to celebrate with schools their sense of identity and their strengths as Catholic schools.

Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

This report is published by the Diocese of Westminster and is available at:

<http://rcdow.org.uk/education/schools>

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