



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

BLESSED WILLIAM HOWARD CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL STAFFORD

Inspection dates	4 th - 5 th December 2012
Reporting Inspector	Mr Paul Nutt
Assisting Inspector	Mrs Bernadette Morton

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	819
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mr Robert Love
School address	Rowley Avenue Stafford ST17 9AB
Telephone number	01785 244236
E-mail address	headteacher@blessedwilliamhoward.staffs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	March 2009
DFE School number	860/4607
Unique Reference Number	124455

Headteacher	Mr P Smith
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DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors. The focus of the inspection was on the effectiveness and use of the school's self evaluation of Catholic life and religious education (RE). To validate the school's self-evaluation of teaching and learning, the inspectors observed 6 full and 2 part RE lessons, one of which was with the subject leader. In addition the inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils and sixth form students to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time. They held meetings with the chair and other members of the governing body, senior staff, and the chaplain. They observed class worship and 2 year assemblies. They looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self evaluation such as RAISEonline, the development plan, a departmental review, and teachers' planning. Alongside the validation of school self evaluation, the inspectors gathered evidence about the quality of prayer life enhancing the Catholic Life of the school, evidence which will be shared with other diocesan schools.

Information about the school

Blessed William Howard Catholic High School is a smaller than average Catholic secondary school serving parishes in Stafford and surrounding areas. The proportion of baptised Catholic pupils is currently 45%. The pupils are mainly of White British heritage with 9.5% from ethnic minority households. This is below the national average as is the number of pupils eligible for free school meals and having special needs and/or disabilities. Attainment on entry is above the national average. At sixth form level the school works in partnership with 6 other providers.

Main Finding

In its self evaluation, Blessed William Howard judges itself to be a good Catholic school in each aspect. As a result of its visit, the inspection team was able to confirm this overall judgement. Since the last inspection, and more particularly in the last two years, there has been significant progress against all the identified areas for improvement, with the caveat that formative assessment procedures are still inconsistent across the department and an identified recommendation from this inspection. Key appointments have been made, and leadership displays very good capacity to continue to move things forward at pace. There is now a clear development and planning cycle. Assessment for Learning is well used in all lessons. GCSE outcomes in religious education, though still modest, are improving, though still below diocesan levels. Clear evidence suggests that the current, and future, Year 11 students will exceed these levels and outperform English within the school. Post-16 take-up has increased markedly in 2012. Learners are encouraged to take a full part in the Catholic life of the school and are fully appreciative of this involvement.

School Self Evaluation

The self-evaluation presented by Blessed William Howard Catholic High School gives a broadly accurate picture of its current situation in most of the areas considered. In both the Catholic life of the school and RE, there has been significant progress as a result of the whole school restructuring, introduced by the headteacher as a response to the school's situation prior to his appointment. In this there is unstinting support from a strong senior leadership team, sharing a clear vision and how to achieve it, as well as a governing body which demonstrates real drive and passion to ensure that the school is fully inclusive for each member of the broadest school family. There is a shared objective to consolidate and broaden the spirituality of the school, seeking to engage all children and staff, with links to families, parishes and feeder primary schools. A key element within this development is the sharp focus on mission and ethos, a responsibility managed by the deputy headteacher. A programme of whole staff consultation, training and feedback is bearing fruit and again, this focus is supported by the strong, faith-driven work of the mission and ethos committee of the governing body. A number of key appointments have been made, as the school has rightly highlighted. The RE department has a core team of good, young specialist teachers, led by a new curriculum leader, who took up post in September 2012 and shows commitment, drive and vision. New schemes of work are already being used, to match the learning

needs of the pupils and of a 2-year Key Stage 3, and changes have been made as well to provision at both GCSE and post-16. There is ongoing support for the non-specialist member of the department. The appointment of a lay chaplain from Easter brings considerable benefits and opportunities to the school, especially to the Catholic life.

Outcomes in GCSE RE have been modest over the last 6 years. A*-C attainment has been consistently below both national and diocesan levels, and compared poorly with English and a range of other subjects within school. This is not a satisfactory picture for a Catholic school. Attainment of the top grades (A*-A) has been especially low. However, the upward trend seen in 2011 has been continued in 2012, and, although the overall picture remains broadly the same, internal tracking and recording suggest strongly results for the next 2 years that will indicate significant improvement on overall percentages and favourable comparisons with English. Take-up post-16 (5 or 6 students per year) and outcomes have been low. There are, however, 17 AS students in Year 12, and the department is determined to retain 60% into Year 13, whilst improving attainment percentages. The experience and enjoyment for the subjects demonstrated in upper school student voice groups augur well that this picture could be replicated or bettered in future years. Students of all ages have been able to articulate key elements of learning and enjoyment in group discussion and many have talked confidently about broader applications into their own lives. Leadership in school is aware of the disparities in performance between boys and girls, and active consideration is being given within the department to responses to this.

Provision in RE is good in many respects. Internal judgements indicate that the quality of teaching is good overall, with elements of outstanding, judgements with which the inspectors concur. Lessons are well planned, with appropriate ranges of teaching styles and learning opportunities, differentiated by strategies other than outcome. IT is well used for a range of purposes. Relationships are good, encouraged by the use of sensitive but challenging questioning. Students feel comfortable and confident to take part, ask questions and express opinions. The level of enjoyment is high, which ensures that behaviour is seldom an issue. Teachers use assessment for learning strategies well. Books are regularly marked, with good use made of the SWANS sheets. However, in the majority of cases there is little formative comment or exemplification to guide future learning. This is an area for development. The disparities between boys' and girls' achievement also requires attention to narrow the gaps that currently exist.

The Catholic life of the school is a developing strength. Mission and ethos have already been mentioned as strong and effective features of the school's journey of restructuring. A new mission statement is currently being developed, which will have greater significance and impact in the school today. This should be ready before Easter, and its prominence around the school, linked to a higher profile for artefacts, will bear witness that this is a Catholic school. The role of the priest chaplain, with a very full schedule of responsibilities in his parish, is somewhat limited at present to the celebration of Mass, but he is anxious to become more fully available to all in a wider pastoral involvement, and identified ways in which this might be done. There would clearly be significant benefits to the liturgical and prayer life of the school.

There were many clear examples of the place of collective worship during the inspection, occasions which were prayerful and thought-provoking and indicated very real involvement for groups of students to lead and contribute to the selection of subject matter, preparation and delivery in a range of ways, including music and drama during assemblies. Opportunities for prayer and reflection during lessons were less evident, which the school may wish to consider. Equally the chapel could be more widely used and identified as the centrepiece of the school's Catholic life. The appointment of the lay chaplain has been hugely significant to the Catholic life of the school. During his 2 terms he has supported the range of aspects in school, developing a role and relationships that engage interest and attention across the school. Students speak with enthusiasm about their opportunities to become involved, and feel supported and encouraged. This is clearly the case with the chaplaincy team. Opportunities to go on retreat have increased considerably across year groups, and class groups prepare and lead on school weekly Masses on a rota basis. A virtual village has been developed to give a focus and continuity to charitable works. Students are very keen to become involved and to talk freely about this initiative, which is prominently situated at the front of the school. A team of 6 has been set up, including members of the RE team, to prepare a

weekly PowerPoint for use in form time. These presentations are linked to the Year of Faith and the YOUCAT resource which can then be further explored elsewhere. The Apostle's Creed is also used during this form time. Significant progress has been made in the school, and there are clear plans to move to the next stage of the vision. It would be beneficial if the priest and lay chaplains could collaborate on this future course.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

Outcomes for pupils in RE have improved and continue to improve. Progress has been good. At Key Stage 3 attainment remains stable and consistent, with 66% achieving Level 5 or above in 2012. The achievement of pupils with Special Educational Needs was good. At Key Stage 4 significant improvements have been made over the past three years, with A*-C reaching 64% in 2012. There is work to do, but, with a full and experienced team, there is significant capacity for improvement. Performance at Key Stage 5 has been inconsistent, but all students at A2 achieved a pass grade.

Pupils' involvement in the Catholic life of the school and collective worship is good. All year groups are offered an opportunity to go on a residential retreat. A form Mass is carried out for every tutor group. In preparation pupils spend a week, in form time, saying prayers in the chapel with the lay chaplain. Pupils contribute to whole school Masses in a range of ways, including altar serving. A chaplaincy team, and charity group led by sixth formers, are very active. Charity work is made more meaningful through staff and pupil liaison. A virtual village, linked with CAFOD online, has been set up and very well received by pupils. Peer to peer ministry is good, and a young leaders programme involves sixth form students assisting with morning prayer, Masses and primary school visits.

Evaluation and monitoring of the Catholic life of the school is good, with the involvement of the senior leadership team and all other staff and excellent support from the governing body. A mission and ethos committee meets every half term, chaired by a foundation governor. A working group, chaired by the deputy, has been set up to act upon suggestions. Monitoring and evaluation is effective across the whole school and is a strong feature within the RE department.

Teaching of RE is successful in promoting purposeful learning. The learning and teaching within RE is aided by having three specialist teachers. Evidence of teachers using a range of teaching tools is apparent from learning walks and lesson observations. The head of department is coaching another member of the department who is not specialist trained. Assessment techniques are used effectively and pupils are regularly updated on their progress. The development of pupils' spiritual, moral and vocational development is well supported through topics that are age and stage specific.

Recommendations

- Identify best practice for written formative assessment and feedback, and embed within the department's marking procedures
- Develop opportunities for prayer and quiet reflection in lessons
- Identify appropriate interventions to raise attainment in GCSE examinations
- Grow the chaplaincy team towards student "ownership" of liturgical life, taking leadership, and enhancing collective prayer

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



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December 2012

Dear Parents and Carers

**Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of Blessed William Howard Catholic High School,
December 2012**

I am writing this letter to share with you the findings of the diocesan inspection of your children's school. Diocesan inspection now explores in detail the school's own view of itself as expressed in its self-evaluation. For this reason, much of the report is more technical than used to be the case. You are still entitled to have a copy of the full report should you want one and it will be available on the school website or by request from the school office.

The school is a good school with a very good Catholic ethos, which supports very positively the spiritual development of the pupils. Through a relevant curriculum and very good relationships, they are supported in their spiritual, moral and vocational development and encouraged to question and express themselves with confidence. The school is a positive Catholic community which embraces all as valued individuals and offers many opportunities for the pupils to make a positive contribution to its life and work. The headteacher, his leadership team, the governors and all who have responsibilities for Catholic life and RE judge the school accurately and plan very effectively for its continuing success.

Religious education is already benefiting from the recent appointment of a new leader and team of strong, skilled subject teachers. Teaching is good; pupils enjoy their lessons and know how to improve their work. The departmental team has clear plans to improve the levels of attainment, especially GCSE, and there is clear evidence already of a positive impact on pupils' progress and outcomes.

We have recommended that the school should continue its plans for development, offering more specific examples for individual improvement and enhanced opportunities for pupils to become more involved in leading its liturgical life.

Pupils and sixth form students clearly enjoy what the school has to offer, and contribute very well to its life and ethos. They all benefit greatly from this engagement, and were keen to share their enjoyment and understandings with the visiting inspectors. Behaviour is very good, and everyone demonstrates care and consideration for others. It was a pleasure to inspect the school and we were welcomed by staff and pupils alike. The pupils are a credit to the school and their families and those who care for them.

Yours sincerely

Paul Nutt
Diocesan Inspector