



# Archdiocese of Birmingham

## Section 48 Inspection

### **ST GREGORY THE GREAT CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

### **Part of the Dominic Barberi Multi-Academy Company**

Cricket Road, Cowley, Oxford OX4 3DR

---

Inspection date 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> October 2016

Reporting Inspector Janet Mellor  
Assisting Inspectors Paul Nutt  
Maureen O'Leary

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

---

Type of School	Academy
Age range of students	4 – 7 and 11-18 years
Number on roll	1367
Appropriate authority	Board of Directors
Chair of Governors	Dr Pita Harris
Telephone number	01865 749933
E-mail address	stgregory@dbmac.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	October 2011
DFE Secondary phase Number	931/4145
Unique Reference Number	139528
<b>Headteacher</b>	<b>Mrs Marcella McCarthy</b>
Previous inspection:	1
This inspection:	3

---

DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



## **Evidence**

- The inspection was carried out by three Diocesan Inspectors.
- The focus of the inspection was the quality, leadership and impact of the school's provision for Catholic life, collective worship and religious education (RE).
- The inspectors observed teaching across 13 RE lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with students to evaluate their understanding of Catholic life, worship and the impact of teaching on their learning over time.
- Meetings were held with two governors, including the chair of the academy committee, the headteacher and senior leaders, the primary head of teaching and learning, the person in charge of Catholic life (PICCL), the subject leader, priest chaplain and acting lay chaplain, as well as other teachers holding responsibilities for pastoral work and progress data.
- The inspectors attended two year group assemblies and a primary praise gathering, tutor time, staff briefing and staff Taizé prayer.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of documents including teachers' planning, the data about students' attainment and progress, RAISEonline, the school's self evaluation, and the development planning.

## **Information about the school**

- The school is situated in the parish of St Edmund of Abingdon and St Frideswide and serves several other parishes and a wide area of Oxford. There are currently 1367 students on roll.
- The school is working towards 'all-through' status and 206 students are currently in Reception to Year 3.
- There is a much higher percentage of ethnic minority students than the national average.
- The percentage of Catholic students is currently 34% overall, with 18% in the primary phase, and 37% in Years 7 to 13.
- The proportion of students who are disadvantaged is above the national average.
- The percentage of students with special needs is below national average overall, though there are a number of students with physical disabilities. However, the percentage of students with special needs or disabilities in the primary phase is above the national average.
- On entry to Reception class and also to Year 7 the attainment of students is significantly below the national average.
- Since the last inspection the secondary phase has become an academy as part of the Dominic Barberi Multi-Academy Company and opened the primary phase of the school. There have been new appointments to the posts of headteacher, head of the RE department and primary head of teaching and learning. The priest chaplain has been working with the secondary phase since 2011.

## **Main Findings**

- Catholic life overall in Years 7 to 13 is good. There is a range of provision which encourages a development of Catholic virtues and in which chaplaincy plays a key and outstanding role. Most students start the secondary phase with a limited knowledge base but grow in respect for religion and in an awareness of the

importance of religion in their lives. Catholic life is well monitored and evaluated so that planning is based on a realistic appreciation of previous experience.

- Catholic life in the primary phase is developing and requires improvement to be good. All primary staff are supportive of the Catholic values of the school. Pupils enter the primary phase with very limited knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith. Catholic life from Reception to Year 3 is beginning to be monitored but this needs to be more strategically planned and evaluated.
- Collective Worship in the secondary phase is well planned and teachers are supported in leading prayer. Students from early years to Key Stage 5 develop an awareness of the importance of prayer. Throughout the school there is respect for the quiet moments, although not all join in. There is careful planning for Masses and evidence that they are becoming focus points in school's life.
- Collective worship in the primary years has been firmly established by the primary phase leader. Staff's knowledge, skills and confidence in this area are now being developed.
- Senior leaders are very mindful of their role to uphold the Catholic foundation of the school, though they recognise the difficulty of recruiting RE teachers and primary teachers, particularly Catholic staff. In the secondary phase training for those staff without experience of working in a Catholic school has enabled progress to be made in the understanding of the Catholic faith and its practices, and there is very good support for initiatives to enhance students' spiritual development through the work of the chaplains. The primary lead for teaching and learning recognises that there is a need for increased support in her area.
- Pupils in the primary phase make expected progress in RE, given their limited subject knowledge on entry to the school. Attainment in RE is broadly in line with diocesan expectations.
- Students now make much more rapid progress in RE in Years 7 to 9 but strategies which began in the last academic year did not result in improvement in GCSE outcomes from the previous year. In 2016 GCSE attainment in RE was still well below both diocesan and national averages. Forensic tracking of students' progress is now possible through a new data system which is being well managed centrally in the school.
- In the sixth form outcomes at A level RE are very good. The high quality of teaching and the challenge of the curriculum, as well as the caring and supportive environment, lead to high achievement.
- The sixth form General RE course enables students to engage in informed discussion and to develop key skills in preparation for study in higher education. It is valued by students, though the course has suffered from staffing issues and by no means all of the students complete the extended project work.
- There is now a permanent appointment to leadership of the secondary RE department and a commitment to team work with less fluctuation in staffing. However, at the time of the inspection a formal evaluation of last year's development plan had not been made, and consequently planning for this year was not yet documented.
- Students in the secondary phase make good progress in their moral development and in their awareness of vocation because there is very positive provision in these areas. Progress in spiritual development is also good, with many students starting the secondary phase at a low base.

## THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

- The Catholic life of the secondary phase is a clear priority and since the last inspection planning for its development has been given a central position. This has resulted in significant progress within the context of large numbers of students with no stated religion, as well as those from other world faiths and other Christian churches. The core values of wisdom, justice, integrity and compassion are evident in the way in which the secondary phase leaders approach immediate tasks and long-term strategy.
- Provision for Catholic life in the secondary phase is extensive and comprehensive. Those responsible for planning show an innovative and inclusive approach which is much appreciated by students and impacts on their lives.
- The monitoring and evaluation of Catholic life in the secondary phase takes the form of surveys and feedback from staff, students and parents. The secondary phase therefore knows its strengths and areas for development. There is an overriding wish to improve and to respond to suggestions, particularly evident in the development of staff training for leading prayer and the creation of a virtual prayer group for parents.
- The primary head of teaching and learning is focused on developing a good Catholic ethos and she sees its improvement as a priority for the expanding primary phase. All primary staff have embraced ways to develop this fundamental aspect of school life and this is reflected in the compassionate care which they offer to pupils.
- At present there are not adequately strategic or robust systems in place to monitor and evaluate the Catholic life of the primary phase. As this part of the school grows, the senior leadership of the secondary phase (who are responsible for the Catholic life of the primary school,) need to take a far more active role in supporting the primary head of teaching and learning in this area.
- The school's new status in the Dominic Barberi Multi-Academy Company (MAC) has led to increased co-operation with its Catholic feeder schools though as yet there has been no increase in the number of Catholic students entering the secondary phase in Year 7. The opportunity to develop to an all-through school from Reception to Year 13 for the provision of Catholic education has not yet shown signs of success with numbers of Catholics entering the Reception class declining significantly.
- Collective worship in secondary assemblies was seen to be of a high standard with students behaving respectfully and listening to the well-paced input on the motivation for and effects of bullying. There was excellent reference to biblical stories combined with the use of the heritage of religious art, and time for quiet prayer. The establishment of a routine of assemblies for whole year groups rather than for mixed age groups is clearly a priority but student participation is limited.
- Tutor group collective worship in the secondary phase was sampled during the inspection and the variety of approach, including *lectio divina*, reflected the in-service training given to teachers. In the smaller forum of form time prayer there are a range of ways in which students actively participate, including in discussion. The decision to ring the Angelus bell so that the whole secondary phase could pray together was well supported, particularly since senior leaders had responded to the

request for earlier timing at the start of the lesson, and for practical support. Senior leaders and the pastoral team monitor the times of prayer and staff speak of a very supportive context for their work.

- The school has made great strides forward in raising the profile of the annual Mass for St Gregory's day when the whole school comes together with the deanery clergy. There is evidence of the enjoyment experienced by the students and of the increasing reverence with which they approach the Mass. Weekly Masses for tutor groups are prepared with the help of the lay chaplain, and the lack of experience of Mass for many of the students is recognised.
- Collective worship in the primary phase requires improvement to be good. Routine moments of prayer and collective worship have been firmly established during the school week. The primary head of teaching and learning and the chaplain are now supporting staff to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence when leading prayer in class and whole primary phase collective worship. The primary phase is making good use of diocesan resources and the Wednesday Word to plan collective worship and progress is being made in its provision and quality.
- Collective worship for Reception to Year 3 is planned for the whole academic year and includes the celebration of Mass, whole school gatherings and a May procession with the crowning of Mary. The school is progressively developing its provision for collective worship as it expands and the pupils grow in age.
- Mass in the primary phase is regularly celebrated in the primary school building and occasionally in Grey Friars Church or in the secondary phase chapel for house masses. This has provided pupils with valuable experience and knowledge of the church and chapel. Pupils are growing in their understanding and appreciation of the celebration of the Eucharist.
- The primary phase is currently developing their support for the parish based sacramental programme, as the school's first group of pupils prepare to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion. The school's lay chaplain is also providing guidance for staff about teaching these sacraments.
- Prayer spaces in the primary years have been thoughtfully established and work well in aiding pupils' spiritual development. Staff have been trained in their construction and use, with the result that they are highly valued places of calm where pupils can sit quietly and reflect.
- Each class in the primary phase has a prayer area which displays cloths of appropriate liturgical colours and relevant artefacts. The children use these areas as a focus for their own spontaneous prayers during the school day.
- Children are provided with an opportunity to reflect on the Sunday Gospel during whole primary phase gatherings on Monday mornings, which are led by the primary head of teaching and learning. As a result, pupils' understanding and appreciation of the word of God and its relevance to their own lives are developed.
- Most pupils in the primary phase readily take part in prayers and collective worship, although a minority of pupils fail to see the relevance of these activities to their own lives. Pupils are increasingly taking an active role during prayer times and liturgy by writing and reading prayers. Pupils lead grace before meals at family style lunch each day. Pupils now need to be given opportunities to plan prayer and collective worship.

- The spirituality of the staff is well supported by the Taizé prayer group as well as Mass on training days and prayer during briefing.
- The majority of secondary students develop a keen sense of right and wrong during their time at the school. They are able to engage in a growing complexity of ethical issues which spring from assemblies, tutor group time and work across the curriculum in a range of subjects. They have the ability to bring arguments from other areas to their work on ethical issues in RE.
- The pupils in the primary phase are given opportunities to develop morally through the use of the 'Golden Rules' which are focused on each week in circle times. They have an understanding of right and wrong actions and how they impact on others.
- Vocational awareness amongst the secondary students is strong. During the inspection a student interviewed was able to define vocation as a 'charge from Christ'. For the vocation days, the secondary phase draws on the range of religious orders in Oxford as well as other speakers and agencies, and this enables students to begin to think about their way forward in life.
- Vocational development of primary pupils is currently appropriate for the age of the pupils but will require more detailed planning as the pupils move through the school.
- Primary pupils have an understanding of service to others through providing refreshments for older members of the parish and their participation in local litter picks. The school council also decides who and how the primary phase supports people locally, nationally and globally. Pupils have contributed very generously to a number of charities.
- Secondary students grow in an understanding of the role of religion in their lives, and in an awareness of their role within the community of the school. They relate well to the chaplains and enjoy the discussion groups. They develop well in their ability to write prayers and respond to those in need. Sixth formers returning from a retreat were inspired to develop an input to reconciliation services which is recognised by those present as an outstanding contribution to the spiritual life of the school. Responsibility within the community is further exemplified in the mentoring of younger students, including those in the primary years, by their older peers. This has helped to alleviate the recognised disadvantages of the school's decision to move from vertical to horizontal tutor grouping.
- The secondary phase Catholic life working party of staff makes a very good contribution to the development of provision for the students. It is made up of staff from across the curriculum who are keen for their subject specialism to share in enhancing spiritual and moral development, and also of staff with pastoral roles, for whom the caring and merciful teaching of Jesus Christ is an inspiration and guide.
- Underpinning all the work for the Catholic life of the school is the excellent work of the chaplains. Their 'open door' policy is a key feature of pastoral support and their enthusiasm, approachability and reliability form huge rocks on which the cohesion and strength of the school is founded.

## **LEADERSHIP**

- Leadership of the Catholic life is good overall in the secondary phase but requires improvement to be good in the primary phase. The headteacher leads by example and has developed a *Laudato Si'* initiative which has resulted in recognisable care

for the common home of the secondary phase buildings. There is a clear and effective leadership and management structure including the deputy principal, the pastoral and Catholic life teams, the priest chaplain and the three lay chaplains, which results in an energetic approach both to witnessing to the Christian faith and to the realisation of Catholic teaching in the community. The excellent leadership of the previous PICCL, her commitment and understanding of the process of developing Catholic life, have clearly set a high standard for current initiatives.

- The monitoring and evaluation of Catholic life in the primary phase is developing but senior leadership and governors need to ensure that formal monitoring and evaluation of Catholic life are systematically planned and rigorously carried out.
- The primary head of teaching and learning is deeply committed to the Catholic mission and values of the school but she has not received adequate support from the senior leadership of the secondary phase or from governors to develop her skills and knowledge in this crucial area.
- Governors have insisted on the inclusion of Catholic life as an agenda item at their meetings, demonstrating their commitment to the realisation of the mission of the school. They now need to refine ways of both supporting and challenging the secondary phase in this area. They also need to demonstrate a full awareness of the standards of RE within the school, and to compare realistically the outcomes with other diocesan schools and with attainment in other subjects which require literacy skills.
- Governors' knowledge and accurate evaluation of the Catholic life, collective worship and RE in the primary phase requires improvement. Governors have recognised that they have not given sufficient time to consideration of the development of the primary part of the school, and have successfully recruited governors with primary experience in order to help to rectify this.
- Governors have found it difficult to recruit to teaching positions in RE, and do not attend interviews for RE posts. Where staff have been appointed who are not Catholic or have no experience of Catholic schools, the head of department and primary head of teaching and learning have a leading role in on-going support in their relevant phases. Governors need to monitor and support this aspect of their work.
- Judgements about Catholic life and collective worship in the primary phase are generally accurate but the formal processes for reaching these detailed judgements need to be refined. The increased involvement of the secondary senior leadership team and governors is highly recommended.
- The primary head of teaching and learning has been active in visiting other Catholic schools in order to observe outstanding practice in Catholic life and collective worship. This is to be commended and encouraged for future school improvement.
- Secondary phase development planning is thorough and follows a careful procedure but the delay of setting precise targets for Catholic life, as well as for RE, until the whole secondary phase plan is complete, has meant that the way forward for the current academic year was not immediately clear in September. An analysis of the impact of the delay, as well as of the lack of precision in targets would enable the secondary phase to evaluate whether its approach is leading to a lack of focus at the start of the academic year.
- Leadership has recognised the need for a whole secondary phase approach to assessment and data recording, and a package is now in place, managed by a

senior leader. Training for staff has enabled progress in embedding the structures. A permanent appointment to the post of head of department has recently been made and there is a robust commitment to the systematic monitoring strategies which enable a more detailed analysis of progress across the year groups.

- Resourcing for special needs in the secondary phase is focussed upon specific areas and does not include in-class support in RE. However, the excellent nurture group facility enables integration into mainstream after a period of transition.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

- The secondary phase has made a clear analysis of the GCSE results in RE over the past three years. There has been a decline of 9% overall in A\* to C grades during that time, and the gap between male and female attainment increased in 2016 to 29%. Students with low attainment on entry to the secondary phase are also achieving far less well in GCSE than three years ago. In 2016 there was a slight narrowing of the gap between attainment of those for whom the secondary phase receives extra funding and those for whom it does not. The need to address issues in formal planning is urgent in order for the secondary phase to improve results to the level of similar diocesan schools with an almost whole cohort entry.
- The new head of department of RE in the secondary phase shows a high level of commitment to her role, especially to the new assessment systems. She offers support to colleagues and is well supported herself by the previous leader, now in senior management. The more rapid progress of students in Key Stage 3 is due to the rigour of assessment and the challenge of the new curriculum. The new data system has been adopted very positively by the RE department.
- The standard of teaching in the secondary phase is mixed, ranging from outstanding to requiring improvement to be good. The team approach generated by the head of department enables weaker and less experienced teachers, as well as those who are not subject specialists, to benefit from the bank of resources and strategies which is available. Differentiation was seen to be effective in enabling lower ability students to make progress.
- Students' engagement in lessons in the secondary phase is mostly good though there are some who are less focussed. In these cases strategies are thoughtfully employed to encourage greater attention to the work. In some lessons greater challenge leads to more progress, for example in Year 9 where the development of the input about the ontological argument for the existence of God included philosophical discussion in groups.
- The secondary phase has recognised the need to accelerate learning of two classes of the highest achieving students in Year 11 in order to work towards A\*- B grades. In these groups progress was seen to be rapid with students having very good recall of prior learning and an ability to manage their work independently. Outcomes from these groups last year showed a 3% rise in top grades and there was a rise in the uptake of the A level course.
- Marking of students' work in the secondary phase is inconsistent. At best there is very productive dialogue with students following staff feedback, and a very good use of the coloured pens according to stated procedure. The policy for the presentation of work is not always implemented rigidly and this leads to issues of untidy work. Some of the students are very clear about their progress and how they can improve but the new tracking system is as yet in its infancy and is not yet fully embedded. The department has worked hard to produce the appropriate 'can do' statements for assessments without the National Curriculum levels and is in a good position for

further development, provided that moderation of assessments leads to accuracy of judgements.

- The timetabling of mixed ability classes in RE in Years 7 to 9 generally prohibits moving students across groups but in Years 10 and 11 some regrouping is possible. Governors have been involved in discussion about mixed ability teaching, but the inflexibility in Years 7 to 9 may be a reason for a reappraisal of timetabling arrangements.
- The secondary RE department has recognised the need to supplement the main RE curriculum with some fundamental teaching about Catholicism, so that those from backgrounds other than Catholic are not disadvantaged. Topics discussed in the fortnightly lessons include saints and inter-faith dialogue, and the lessons are seen as strengthening the bridge between the academic work of the department and the Catholic life of the school. As this has only just started it has not yet been evaluated, but it is appreciated by students.
- The curriculum has emphasis in Year 8 on inter-faith work. Students learn about a range of world faiths which enhances mutual respect. This is supported by the Interfaith Week at the school, when faith leaders in the city are invited to the school. There has been positive feedback from, for example, the Muslim leader.
- The secondary RE department is carefully resourced with appropriate textbooks for the new GCSE. PowerPoint presentations include key words as an attempt to improve literacy, which is regarded as a main focus for improving standards.
- Sixth form teaching was seen to be very challenging and learning is rapid. Students in Year 12 are able to engage in ethical debate and compare the approach of various philosophers. The subject knowledge of the teacher as well as skill in developing understanding are contributing in a major way to very successful outcomes at A level.
- RE within the primary phase requires improvement to be good. The primary head of teaching and learning is a reflective practitioner and has generally identified the major strengths and areas for development within RE. She has put in place targeted support for staff who have no, or very little, experience of teaching in a Catholic school. This has included providing model and team teaching.
- The primary senior leadership team has also been part of the whole secondary phase monitoring cycle, working with the chaplaincy and secondary team to carry out some joint lesson observations and learning walks. However, as the primary phase grows, the senior leadership of the whole school, (who have responsibility for RE in the primary school), need to take a far more active role in supporting the primary head of teaching and learning in achieving good standards of provision and outcomes for pupils in RE.
- Pupils' progress and attainment in the primary phase is regularly monitored both formally and informally. The primary head of teaching and learning recognises that staff need more experience of external moderation to assess pupils accurately against diocesan expected standards. Currently, evidence from lesson observations and work scrutinies suggest that pupils make the expected progress in RE given their starting points and some make good progress.
- Those groups of children who need to make more rapid progress in RE have been accurately identified. This information is regularly shared with teaching staff to inform future planning.
- The primary phase is currently developing the role of an RE subject lead. At present, the primary head of teaching and learning is RE subject lead but as the primary phase grows in number this will not be sustainable.
- A real strength of the primary phase is their development of teaching strategies that engage pupils with little experience of, or interest in RE. *Godly Play* has been successfully introduced with the support of the lay chaplain as well as *Messy*

*Church and Building Faith Brick by Brick* which pupils greatly enjoy. This engagement now needs to be channelled to develop pupils' understanding of religion and their learning from religion, within the context of the Catholic faith. Pupils have too few opportunities, especially in their writing tasks, to develop their thinking skills in RE.

- The primary phase RE curriculum follows the diocesan scheme of work *Growing and Learning as People of God*. However, in the early years' curriculum the learning intention is sometimes focused on the early learning goals and not on the RE scheme of work. The teaching of some topics, such as the harvest, needs to be developed so that there is progression in learning for all pupils and that repetition of tasks and questions are avoided.
- The primary phase promotes the formation of future teachers in Catholic schools through its facilitation of Year 10 & 11 childcare students and Newman University students.
- It would greatly benefit from further collaboration with primary schools who have a high standard of RE to improve provision and outcomes for all pupils.
- All statutory requirements regarding RE in the whole school are met.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve the school should:**

- Ensure that the annual review of Catholic life and RE includes evaluation and drafting of improvement plans at the end of the year so that finalised formal plans can be in place for the start of the new academic year.
- Develop the senior leadership and governors' formal monitoring and evaluation of Catholic life and collective worship in the primary phase.
- Improve the quality of primary collective worship in order to enhance pupils' spiritual development.
- Develop more student involvement in the delivery of collective worship in the secondary phase once firm routines are established with the whole year group structures.
- Raise the standards and teacher expectation of primary pupils' attainment in RE.
- Embed the secondary phase new assessment and data tracking systems, ensuring also a consistency in marking and moderation throughout the department.
- Ensure that the Governing Body has a clearer focus on challenging standards in RE at GCSE level.