



SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the
Archbishop of Southwark and Inspection of
Denominational Education under Section 48
of the Education Act 2005

URN 118933

St John's Catholic Comprehensive School
Rochester Road
Gravesend
Kent DA12 2JW

Inspection date: 13 - 14 May 2014

Chair of Governors:	Mrs N Naughton
Executive Headteacher:	Mr T Cahill
Head of School:	Mr S Maher
Inspectors:	Mr J Carvill Mr N Fisher

EDUCATION COMMISSION
St Edward's House, St Paul's Wood Hill, Orpington, Kent BR5 2SR
Tel 01689 829331 Fax 01689 829255
Director of Education: Dr Anne Bamford

SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

St John's is a voluntary aided co-educational school situated in the Gravesend Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark and maintained by Kent Education Authority. It operates within a selective system of education where two grammar schools take some 30 % of the top ability range. The school is within an area that is above average in deprivation.

The principal parishes which the school serves are St John's, Gravesend; St Francis De Sales, Hartley; English Martyrs, Strood and St Vincent's, Dartford.

The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 42%. There are 26% other Christian denominations, 12% Sikhs and 5% other faiths.

The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 8.6% in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and 6% in the Sixth Form (General Religious Education).

The school takes pupils from 11 to 18 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 1100. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is well below the national average, while the proportion eligible for free school meals is around average (28.8%).

Around 20% of the pupils receive extra support in class, but the number with a statement of Special Educational Needs is high.

There is now an almost equal number of girls and boys on roll.

The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is 50.6% which is twice the national average, with British-Indian, British-African and Eastern European pupils being the largest ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is not the first language is 35%, which is also more than twice the national average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education

GRADE
2

St John's School has made significant and substantial improvements since the last Section 48 inspection (November 2010) and is now a very good Catholic learning community with many outstanding features.

Pupils make a very good contribution to the Catholic life of the school. They also benefit enormously from being at St John's.

Pastoral care is outstanding and pupils appreciate the support teachers provide for them. Pupils feel valued and safe in the school. Behaviour and relationships are exceptional.

Leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The Executive Headteacher and the Head of School have a very clear vision of what an outstanding Catholic school should look like and, with the support of a dedicated staff and committed governors, are working hard to achieve that status for St John's.

Members of the school community are working successfully to ensure the school's Mission Statement *'Inspired by Christ and motivated by love, we strive to be a Catholic family of faith and learning, valuing each individual as unique and fostering personal achievement for the service of others'* is a reality. Clear leadership of the outstanding Executive Headteacher and Head of School, working in close partnership with the Governing Body and senior leadership team, enables all to be valued and actively encouraged and supported to develop to the full as members of the school community committed to the common good.

Chaplaincy is good and the chaplain makes a significant contribution to the liturgical life of the school as well as the spiritual, moral and emotional development of the pupils.

The retreat programme, while improving, is underdeveloped and should be expanded to include all year groups.

Standards in Religious Education are high and pupils' progress is good. At Key Stage 3 more than half of the pupils exceed their expected levels. GCSE results have improved over the last three years and are very good. All Year 11 pupils left St John's last year with a qualification in Religious Education. AS and A level results are in line with national expectations.

Teaching is overall good and frequently outstanding. Lessons are well planned, build on pupils' previous knowledge and contain a variety of learning activities. Exercise books are marked regularly with teachers making comments on how the work could be improved. Pupils know the level they are working at and also their expected levels or grades.

The Religious Education curriculum content is relevant to and suitable for the pupils and meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory of the Bishops' Conference.

Leadership of the Religious Education department is outstanding.

The provision of worship is good. There is a good programme of Masses and assemblies. Pupils' response to the provision is also good. They are always attentive, respectful and reverent.

The pupils' participation in worship is still developing and the school should ensure there are more opportunities for pupils to be more actively engaged in acts of worship.

The school has successfully addressed all the issues raised at the last inspection and the inspectors believe it has, under the current leadership, excellent capacity to become an outstanding school.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

In order to improve further the governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Continue to develop and extend the Retreat programme to include all years.
- Continue to create opportunities for more pupils to be involved in liturgies and in chaplaincy.
- Keep the curriculum time for Religious Education under review in order to meet the Catholic Bishops' requirements.

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school

Pupils make a very good contribution to and benefit enormously from the Catholic life of St John's.

Their knowledge and understanding of the school's Mission Statement is impressive. In discussions and conversations with pupils the two words used regularly by them were 'community' and 'family' which sum up their perception of the spirit and ethos of St John's.

Pupils appreciate the care teachers provide and they feel safe and valued in the school. Pastoral care is outstanding and many pupils spoke affectionately of the many teachers who, to quote one pupil, "go way beyond what they are paid for" to do their best for the pupils. Incidents of bullying are very rare and are dealt with swiftly.

There are very many opportunities for pupils to take responsibilities. For example, there is an active School Council which, through discussions with senior leaders, has had success in improving the provision of sporting equipment. Many Sixth Form students are involved in a reading programme with Year 8 pupils, mentoring others in mathematics or supporting EAL pupils. Other responsibilities include duties as House Captains organising activities for the House or, as prefects, assisting staff in day-to-day supervision. Sixth Form pupils take the lead in raising impressive amounts of money for various charities. Many pupils from St John's take part in the annual St George's Day parade in Gravesend.

Relationships among pupils are excellent, as is their behaviour both inside and outside the school. For example, pupils behave extremely well at bus stops and are excellent ambassadors for the school. Many pupils, including those not of the Catholic faith whose experience in the school is very positive, spoke of the pride they have in their school and of the value and the benefit of being at St John's.

Chaplaincy is good. The part-time chaplain is a valuable asset to the school. He is available for spiritual, moral and emotional support to pupils and staff. He has produced an excellent prayer booklet for form tutors to use in form time and he works closely with the Religious Education department in developing and delivering the PSHE curriculum.

A good range of liturgies provide excellent opportunities for pupils to explore their relationship with God. In the organisation and planning of these the chaplain is very well supported by staff from a number of departments, principally Religious Education and music. There is an opportunity here to involve and engage pupils to a greater extent with chaplaincy, in particular but not exclusively sixth formers.

The retreat programme is improving and developing. All pupils in Years 7 and 8 are well provided for with days of recollection at Aylesford Priory and Canterbury Cathedral, while the Year 9 one-day retreat is voluntary. Senior managers are currently exploring ways the programme can be extended to all year groups, including residential retreats for sixth form students and in-house reflection days for other years.

There is an excellent in-service programme for staff working in a Catholic school. This has included an invited speaker sharing his vision of the Catholic ethos, termly addresses by the chaplain on matters of Catholic life and social teaching and senior leaders leading sessions for new staff on what it means to work in a Catholic school. All training days begin with a Mass or liturgy.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Achievement by pupils across all key stages is good.

At Key Stage 3, 76% of pupils are working at level 5 or above, with 54% exceeding their expected levels.

The GCSE results show a significant increase year-on-year over the last three years from 43% to 64% of pupils gaining A*-C grades. Every pupil in Year 11, including those entered for the short course or entry level, gained a qualification in Religious Education last year and standards in the subject are significantly higher than some core subjects, especially for the A*/A grades.

At AS level 14% gained a B grade and 93% passed, while at A level 100% passed, including a third of entries being awarded A/B grades. The retention rate from AS to A level is good.

Standards of written and oral work in the classroom are high, especially among the higher ability pupils. The quantity and quality of written work is impressive. Exercise books are marked regularly and marking is thorough. Pupils make good progress during lessons and over time, with pupils who receive Pupil Premium funding doing particularly well.

Behaviour and relationships in classrooms are exceptionally good. Most pupils enjoy the subject and all speak very respectfully of their teachers. Pupils, especially the older ones, speak confidently about their faith journey.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

Pupils' response to collective worship is very good.

In the whole-school assembly observed by the inspectors the behaviour and conduct of the pupils on entry was excellent. The song 'Everybody Hurts' playing helped create a receptive atmosphere. During the assembly pupils were attentive and respectful of each other and of the assembly leader. The message of the assembly, 'Strive for personal excellence', was positive, inspiring, clear and easily understood. ICT was extremely well used by the use of the white board showing quotes, exhortations, the words of the prayer of St Ignatius and the words of the hymn 'Amazing Grace'. The pupil-musicians accompanying the hymn played beautifully while the practice of hymn-singing by the pupils is developing. In the year assembly observed, again the behaviour and focus of the pupils was exemplary and the message clear.

In Masses pupils act as readers and servers or read bidding prayers and the school is considering commissioning Sixth Form pupils as Eucharistic Ministers.

Pupils' response to prayers in form tutor time is good. They listen reverently and respectfully to the teacher reading from the prayer booklet or other source and join in

saying The Lord's Prayer or other known prayer.

However, pupils' active participation in assemblies and form prayer is currently somewhat underdeveloped and the school should explore ways to provide opportunities for more of them to play a more active role.

How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils

Leaders and managers are outstanding at promoting, monitoring and evaluating the Catholic life of St John's.

The school is distinctively Catholic as evidenced by the many religious icons around the school and in the classrooms, the prominence of prayer in lessons and the many liturgies and assemblies. The excellent relationship among and between pupils and staff is testimony to the strong Catholic ethos that pervades the daily life of St John's.

The Executive Head and the Head of School both have a very clear vision of what Catholic education should be and what an outstanding Catholic school should look like. In this vision they are very well supported by able and hardworking staff and a committed and dedicated governing body.

The Head of School has a very strong and visible presence around the school. He is very approachable and has an open-door policy to any member of the St John's community. Inspectors spoke with a range of staff – reception, administration, maintenance, catering, learning support and teaching – and all view the leadership team with great respect. Staff morale is very high. There is a very positive and purposeful atmosphere in the school. The result is that students thrive and value the school's distinctive ethos.

The senior leaders are strongly supported by an active and able board of governors who know their school, its strengths and challenges, very well. Many of them make regular scheduled focused visits to the school, attending liturgies and pupil performances, meeting with staff or pupils. They successfully monitor the spiritual wellbeing of the school by requiring an annual report on the development and promotion of the Catholic ethos as well as through their visits, observations and discussions.

The School Improvement Plan is ambitious and challenging. Of its ten action points the first one is focused on maintaining, promoting and developing the Catholic life of the school and is based on the school's Mission Statement. Likewise the school's policies reflect the Mission Statement, Church teachings or Gospel values.

The school organised a highly successful Sion Mission week in November 2013. Pupils and staff spoke highly about the week's activities as helping them to develop or deepen their religious experience. Organising and funding the Mission emphasises the importance governors and leaders place on developing the community's spirituality.

Links with local parishes are very good. There are two priests on the governing body and the local parish priest is a weekly visitor to the school where he celebrates Mass, visits Religious Education lessons or is available to meet pupils and staff. The school has also very good links with feeder Catholic primary schools, with staff from Religious Education, Physical Education and Music departments sharing good practice. St John's hosted the Diocesan Youth Conference in July 2013 when over 300 young people from schools across the Diocese celebrated their faith. The Religious Education staff support the confirmation

classes at St John's Church.

The pupils are very aware of the poor, the marginalised and vulnerable. Their support for charities is very impressive considering the context of the school and the current economic climate. For example, the school has links with The Sacred Heart School in India and raised £1,200 for emergency rice aid in 2012 and £1,400 for school buildings in 2013. In addition pupils organise fundraising activities during Lent, which includes sixth form students taking part in sponsored 'sleep outs', in order to raise money for the local homeless charity, Emmaus.

The school's self-evaluation is thorough and accurate and shows that the leadership team and governors have an excellent knowledge of their school.

How well leaders, governors and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education and plan and implement for improvement to outcomes for pupils

The leadership and management of Religious Education is outstanding.

The Acting Head of Department is well supported by an experienced member of the senior leadership team. Together they have an excellent understanding of the educational mission of the Church and the place of Religious Education in supporting it.

The department is fully staffed by hard-working, dedicated and committed teachers and there is an embedded culture of affirming and supporting each other through encouraging a collegiate approach to planning and sharing resources.

There is an excellent programme of monitoring teaching and learning, resulting in good practice being recognised and acknowledged and issues identified and addressed. For example, this has led to a significant improvement in the pace of lessons and differentiation of resources for pupils of different abilities.

The department, like the school as a whole, is rich in pupil data. Excellent use is made of this data to identify underachievers as well as pushing all pupils to achieve and maximise their full potential. As a result, there is a robust system of tracking, target-setting and, where necessary, intervention strategies such as after-school classes or Saturday morning lessons.

Examination results are thoroughly analysed by teaching group, ethnicity and gender and the results used to improve planning and teaching.

The schemes of work have been reviewed and updated to ensure they meet the needs of the pupils. There are regular departmental meetings to ensure consistency regarding teaching and assessment. Exercise books are monitored regularly to ensure that marking is up-to-date and provides helpful feedback to pupils.

Religious Education makes a significant and valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development.

The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education

The quality of teaching and learning is now, overall, very good and is frequently outstanding. No lesson observed during the inspection was judged less than good.

Where teaching is outstanding teachers use a wide variety of learning activities in which pupils are fully engaged and on task. Teachers challenge pupils to engage the higher order thinking skills through excellent questioning techniques. Pupils are confident with key concepts like, for example, 'omniscience', 'omnipotence' 'omnipresence' as seen in a Year 7 lesson on the arguments for the existence of God.

Peer and self-assessment is well established in Religious Education lessons across all key stages. Differentiation is well embedded in lessons. For example, in a Year 11 revision lesson an excellent example of materials adapted to suit the different abilities was seen. In other lessons, for example, a Year 9 lesson on Martin Luther King, specific tasks were tailored to suit the ability level of individual pupils.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and work. Pace and timing in lessons are very good while lessons are very well planned and build on pupils' previous knowledge. Relationships between pupils are outstanding and they treat each other with courtesy and respect each other's views and opinions. In most lessons there is a positive purposeful atmosphere.

Where lessons are less than outstanding this is mainly because the lesson objectives are somewhat unclear or where the lesson is too teacher-led, resulting in the pupils being, mainly, passive learners.

All lessons start or end with a prayer. Pupils know their expected level or grade, their current level of progress and what they need to do to improve.

Written work is thoroughly marked with the teachers making good use of praise and writing comments showing pupils how they could improve their work. Frequently teachers' marking supports literacy development, for example, misspelling is corrected as are grammatical errors.

Occasionally failure by pupils to complete or correct written work, as directed by the teacher, is not followed up.

The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning

The content of the Religious Education curriculum is relevant and very suitable to the pupil profile and meets their needs as well as meeting the requirements of the Curriculum Directory.

The Key Stage 3 programme is built on 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' and ensures continuity for those pupils who come from Catholic primary schools. However it does assume a Catholic background which is not the case of all pupils at St John's. To help bridge this gap in some pupil's knowledge the chaplain works closely and successfully with the Assistant Headteacher to facilitate extra classes for some pupils in teaching and

explaining the Catechism to improve their understanding of basic Church teaching.

At Key Stage 4 pupils follow the Edexcel specification and are offered the 'Religion and life based on Roman Catholic Christianity' and 'Religion and Society – Christianity & Sikhism' options. These are relevant and suitable for the pupils at St John's. Visits to the local Gurdwara reinforce learning and enhance the pupils' religious experience. The department should try to extend the visits to other places of religious interest or significance.

At AS and A level students follow the Philosophy and Ethics course, while the General Religious Education course for the rest of the sixth form is based on the approved NOCN programme. Here the students undertake a study of spirituality, theology, ethics, questions of life & death and religious practices & traditions. It is complemented by an additional St John's pioneered community service module. This module, which is being used as a model of good practice by other schools, includes students mentoring younger pupils, running events for primary school pupils and visiting senior citizens.

The curriculum time for Religious Education is now 8.6% across Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and, although there has been a significant increase at Key Stage 3 from 6%, the time overall is still slightly below that recommended by the Bishops' Conference (10%).

The subject is well resourced with very good ICT facilities and an adequate budget. Accommodation, with its open-plan teaching areas, is challenging for both pupils and staff and pupils do extremely well to concentrate as well as they do in these circumstances.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

The quality of collective worship provided by the school is overall good.

The programme of Masses include a welcome Mass for Year 7, a leavers' Mass at the end of the school year and a whole-school Mass on the school's feast day. Other Masses or liturgies are arranged by the chaplain during Religious Education lessons as well as a service for all pupils on Ash Wednesday. The school is fortunate in having the local parish priest available and willing to lead and celebrate liturgies when needed. Local priests visit the school during Lent to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with pupils.

There is a good programme of assemblies with each pupil attending an assembly twice a week, for example a whole-school and a year assembly. On the other days the pupil will have prayer time in her/his form group.

The quality of prayer in form tutor time is now generally good with form tutors using the excellent prayer booklet provided by the chaplain and providing opportunities for pupils to say a prayer together.

However, in general the quality of the acts of worship could be improved by providing more opportunities for more pupils to take an active role. The school should encourage assembly leaders and form tutors to ensure pupils have moments to reflect or pray in silence.

Having a focal feature, for example a lighted candle, would also help emphasise the sacred nature of the act of worship.

The school has a large number of pupils with a Catholic Eastern Europe background. The chaplain conducts special sessions of The Rosary for these pupils in order to aid their spiritual development, which is very much appreciated by them.

All staff briefings begin with prayers and there is a liturgy at the beginning of all in-service days. The chapel is available to staff and pupils all day and is well used for private prayer or reflection.