



Archdiocese of Birmingham

Canonical Inspection Report

THE ORATORY SCHOOL

Woodcote, Nr Reading, South Oxfordshire, RG8 0PJ

Inspection dates:

13th-14th May 2019

Lead Inspector:

Janet Mellor

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS: **Good**

Catholic Life: Good

Religious Education: Good

Collective Worship: Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection: *Good*

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

This is a good Catholic school because:

- The provision for Catholic Life is effective in creating a community in which pupils feel valued and where they respond generously to others.
- Religious studies provides pupils with a firm intellectual basis to engage in the Catholic Life of the school. Pupils enjoy their lessons and progress well.
- There are many opportunities for prayer during the day and for various forms of worship during the week and at weekends. Pupils contribute well and benefit from this provision.
- Leaders, informed by the priest chaplain, are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and there is good capacity to develop effective strategies to make improvements.

It is not yet outstanding because:

- In Catholic Life, Religious Studies and Collective Worship there is a lack of incisive formal monitoring involving all stakeholders.
- Religious Studies has not yet developed a consistent assessment and marking procedure, which is based on the new GCSE examination.
- Younger pupils have a limited opportunity to plan and lead prayer and worship.
- Leaders and governors are hesitant to celebrate the strength of the Catholic nature of the school in its publicity and how it is underpinned by Religious Studies.
- The school does not yet fulfil the requirement of the Bishops' Conference that 10% of curriculum time should be given to Religious Studies in Years 1 to 5 and 5% for general religious instruction in the sixth form.

FULL REPORT

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that there is rigorous and more formalised on-going monitoring and evaluation of Catholic Life, Religious Studies and Collective Worship. This should be both included in and also inform the school's improvement planning.
- Use all available evidence to create a self-evaluation document that concisely reflects current practice in regard to Catholic Life, Religious Studies and Collective Worship. Celebrate what has been achieved and identify precisely areas that need to improve, these should then form part of the next monitoring schedule.
- Create a whole department policy for formative marking in Religious Studies, which shows pupils how to move to higher grades and informs the tracking of pupil progress by teachers and senior leaders.
- Make more explicit the Catholic nature of the school in all publicity.
- Increase provision of Religious Studies lessons in key stage 3 to the required 10% of curriculum time.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the Catholic Life of the school.	Good
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.	Outstanding
The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.	Outstanding
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school.	Good

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.**The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.**

- The school's mission statement 'Cor ad cor loquitur' (*Heart speaks to Heart*) is central to the life of the school. Pupils and staff recognise how it inspires a cohesive community where everyone is valued and respected as created in the image and likeness of God.
- The contribution of the priest chaplain to the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding. His role extends beyond specifically that of worship to all aspects of the school. He has a very high profile, is much respected and accessible to staff and pupils, considering himself to be, "the parish priest of the school".
- The school has a tradition of Catholic Life stemming from its founder, Blessed John Henry Newman. It has many religious artefacts, some of which are not fully exploited for spiritual development, for example the painting of the Flight into Egypt in St Joseph's Chapel.
- Pastoral care is a priority for staff in the school, especially since well over half of the pupils board throughout the terms and many others board during the week or at times of their parents' choice. The house system, with housemasters and housemothers, successfully provides a family atmosphere.
- The small size of the school enables staff to know pupils well and relationships are very positive. Support for those pupils who may be far away from their families, and for any pupils with needs, is coordinated and effective. Pupils appreciate the availability of staff to meet with them to discuss academic and pastoral issues. Pupils consider that their own views about the school are taken seriously and acted upon, for example in the refectory.

- The Catholic Life of the school benefits greatly from the work of the theology department. Lessons are often linked to spiritual, moral and vocational issues, for instance, in lessons on issues of forgiveness and repentance, and the work of a priest.
- Behaviour around the school as well as in class is excellent. Pupils care for each other and are very helpful, calm and polite. They respond well to the rewards offered for positive behaviour and are appreciative.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of the recently introduced behaviour policy, with its clear strategies to give coherence and consistency to sanctions throughout the school. In preparation for this, there has been a determined effort by senior leaders to encourage open and honest discussions, including in-service training for staff, which is linked to Newman's teaching, and seeking pupils' opinions.
- Amongst all teachers there is a clear sense of how their subject contributes to Catholic Life. This results in, for example, informed discussion about the ethical aspects of thalidomide in chemistry, a consideration in drama of the relevance of medieval mystery plays for teaching about the Catholic faith in present times, and the nature of civil rights and the moral concepts surrounding warfare in history. Music tours include Catholic venues, such as St Patrick's Cathedral in New York.
- The pupils benefit greatly from the programme of Days of Recollection, which have been created as a result of careful evaluation of the former retreat programme by the priest chaplain. Spiritual development is encouraged through organised visits to Harvington Hall, the Birmingham Oratory and Oscott College. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on the witness, past or current, of those giving their lives to the service of God in the Church, and this forms part of the school's emphasis on the development of vocational awareness, including the religious life and the priesthood.
- Over the past few years the school has reflected on the privileges that staff and pupils enjoy on the beautiful 100-acre site set in the Chilterns. There has been a determined and wide-ranging strategy to encourage fund-raising and charitable work, led principally by a committee of senior pupils who offer inspiration and support, with the help of a staff coordinator. Pupils have a developed sense of service to others.
- Pupils support charity initiatives enthusiastically. Their current charities, the British Lung Foundation, and the local Reading charity for the homeless, LaunchPad, were chosen by them because of concerns for those who suffer in ways they do not. As an act of solidarity, a sleep-out of older pupils raised about £2,000. Younger pupils in St Philip's House make a particularly impressive effort. The third charity, always Catholic, is chosen by the chaplaincy, and the school has joined in with the 'Red Day' initiative of Aid to the Church in Need.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about environmental issues and link them to social justice following the teaching of Pope Francis in Laudato Si.
- Service to the nation has long been a tradition of the school particularly through the connection with the Welsh Guards, and through the Combined Cadet Force. Service to local community is promoted through the developing Thursday afternoon co-curricular projects, such as assisting in primary schools and visiting the elderly. This has successfully developed a culture of giving of time to others, as well as fund-raising.
- There is involvement in the political life of the nation through the debating society, and sixth form lectures. Recently a leading Catholic politician came to speak about the challenges to his faith, which he encounters in his work as a Member of Parliament. The school's provision successfully encourages its senior pupils in this way to become thoughtful and well-informed citizens.
- Opportunities for visits abroad encourage pupils to witness the universality of the Catholic Church. A recent rowing trip to Spain included a day pilgrimage to the

shrine of St James at Compostela. Small numbers of pupils take part biannually in a pilgrimage to Lourdes from the Westminster diocese.

- The school's facilities for sport are highly appreciated and enjoyed by pupils. The pupils have regular access to a wide range of sport including rugby, swimming and hard tennis. The school emphasises the importance of health and physical fitness. Social and sporting events are often organised through the house system, promoting a sense of responsibility and community.
- Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) has developed with new leadership, and planning is in hand for formal timetabled lessons covering a range of topics including statutory areas. This will replace the current tutorial programme.
- Relationships and sex education (RSE) is now framed within a new policy, and a qualified practising Catholic medical doctor has been employed to take charge of the teaching. She is responding to issues which concern the pupils. There is planning for feedback at the end of lessons so that there is good monitoring and capacity for improvement. At all stages in the development of this provision the Catholic Education Service has been consulted.
- Pupils of other faiths are well integrated into the school. Provision is available for prayer rooms if required.
- Links are being developed between the school and others in China and South Korea. This will enable pupils to have close links with the far east. The school is also introducing the study of Mandarin, in addition to French and Spanish, which bring other European cultures into the lives of the pupils. There is respect for the home countries of those pupils from abroad, for example a collection was held spontaneously for those affected by events in Sri Lanka showing care for the homeland of one of the pupils.
- The school is eagerly awaiting the date for the canonisation of its founder, Blessed John Henry Newman, and planning its own celebrations as well as participation in wider events in the diocese.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school.

- The school development plan is framed by Canon Law, and documentation has appropriate referencing to relevant documentation.
- School leaders are effective role models for pupils and support the Catholic Life of the school.
- Most of the monitoring and evaluation of Catholic Life is informal and is carried out by the priest chaplain. He is diligent in this work and his conclusions lead to improvement. The need, for example, to provide opportunities for community work for pupils below the sixth form has been recognised and plans for work with the Society of St Vincent de Paul are beginning.
- Detailed reporting and discussion of forthcoming events take place at fortnightly meetings between the headmaster and the chaplain. Although outcomes of these meetings are not formally recorded, they form an essential part of planning for the Catholic Life of the school, and the accountability of the chaplain to senior management.
- The school promotes the Catholicity of the school in its publicity, including the prospectus and website. However, school leaders and governors should ensure that, in all school marketing, their public commitment to the mission of the Church to provide Catholic Education is made more explicit and is given greater prominence.
- The school has very effective pastoral systems, including meetings of housemasters and tutors. Pupils feel safe and cared for, and they too care for each other. This is the practical application of the motto 'Heart speaks to heart'. New software is

successfully used to monitor pastoral concerns swiftly and effectively, so that pupils can receive support as needed. This includes any reports of unsatisfactory effort in academic subjects.

- The school is planning to admit girls in 2020. Governors see this as a way of preparing pupils to work together as men and women and to develop the recognition by men of the talents and skills of women. In preparation for co-educational status, the female boarding house is planned to be named 'Wootten' after Newman's first appointed 'Dame', Mrs Frances Wootten. This is in line with the existing houses, named after his male colleagues. This change will help the school respond to the frustration of girls from the Prep School, who have previously been unable to move into the senior school with their male peers.
- Governors recognise their responsibility for Catholic Life and their role is on the whole supportive. They receive an annual report from the chaplain. This gives a summary of his work during the year and provides issues for discussion. A sub-committee has recently been set up to monitor pastoral and co-curricular aspects of the school more effectively, including Catholic Life.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The quality of Religious Education.	Good
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.	Good
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.	Good
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.	Good

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.

- Pupils enjoy Religious Studies and speak positively about its impact on their faith. They respect their teachers, are engaged in lessons and make good progress. Pupils are religiously literate because teachers require them to use vocabulary accurately. Teachers are well qualified, skilled and set high standards for recall and for the development of knowledge and skills. They use questioning to very good effect and work is well paced.
- Classroom teaching is at least good and there are some outstanding features. It is varied, challenging and of a very high academic standard. Classrooms are well equipped. There is good lesson planning, and very effective and innovative use of resources, including religious art. During the inspection, one teacher, working with younger pupils, used a local weekly parish bulletin to analyse the work of a priest in terms of the seven sacraments. The work raised many searching questions about the functioning of a parish and priestly vocation. Pupils are engaged in learning and enjoy working in pairs and groups.
- Teachers train pupils in examination work by framing writing tasks in the form of GCSE questions and by explaining the marking system. This begins at an increasingly younger age and there is evidence of lengthy pieces of work supporting the requirements of GCSE responses.
- Because of the small class sizes, pupils receive close attention and teachers are able to plan for individual needs. Pupils with English as their second language receive overall specialist support, but their integration into lessons may rely on mutual support, for example two French-speaking pupils in the same class. They are given

access to computer translation facilities, but this does not enable them to engage fully with the lessons.

- Analysis of attainment over the last three years shows that a high percentage of those entered for GCSE Religious Studies have gained a pass grade. From 2016 to 2018 there was a sharp decline in the proportion of pupils taking the examination. However, this year, almost all pupils in Year 11 have been entered for GCSE Religious studies, in line with diocesan expectations. This commitment to GCSE entrance for all pupils needs to be maintained.
- Assessment in Religious Studies currently lacks consistency. How teachers assess pupils' work varies in quality. In house assessment is not robust enough and does not seem to securely reflect final GCSE grades.
- In the last few years, pupils' attainment at GCSE shows a considerable improvement in the grades achieved compared to their trial examination grade. Although this appears as very good progress for many pupils, it is unclear how seriously the pupils applied themselves to the trial examinations.
- The style and impact of marking varies across the department. Teachers mark regularly, mostly making good use of praise, but it is not sufficiently effective in improving pupil progress because teachers rarely give targeted formative comments that challenges pupils to move forwards. However, the small classes allow pupils to receive informed and frequent verbal feedback.
- Pupils who spoke to the inspectors were unsure about their potential and predicted grades and some are not highly motivated to aim for the top grades.
- Currently, a considerable portion of the GCSE examination syllabus, St Mark's Gospel, is taught after the trial examinations. This restricts overall class revision time and should be reviewed.
- Presentation of work up to GCSE level is often quite poor. Teachers do not insist on pupils following instructions to underline titles and date their work. There is inconsistency in correcting spelling and grammar, despite the standard of English being identified as a major concern when pupils' work was monitored in 2017.
- The department has opted for the PreU course in the sixth form because of the level of study that exceeds A level, and pupils meet the challenge very well. There is low uptake, since the school suffers from strong competition at this stage from other sixth form providers. However, since 2016, there has been a 100% pass rate and several top grades, with some pupils making very good progress. Pupils from the school have proceeded to study theology in higher education.
- Students in the sixth form greatly value the general religious instruction course. It has been devised and taught by the chaplain and is attended by all pupils in small groups. The aim is to develop skills and knowledge for in-depth understanding and debate post GCSE, in preparation for further stages of education. It covers a wide variety of issues, for example about Catholic social teaching and the Catholic faith and the fine arts. It has a highly academic input, with excellent reference to Vatican documents and theological writing.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

- Senior management of the school have been more robust this year in asserting the status of Religious Studies as part of the core curriculum of this Catholic school through the insistence on 100% entry for GCSE in line with diocesan requirements.
- The prospectus for the school does not include details of the Religious Studies aspect of the curriculum. Pupils are photographed in many aspects of their school life but there is no indication of learning about the Catholic faith.

- The head of theology is an excellent role model. He works closely and effectively with the chaplain. As a result, Religious Studies, Catholic Life and Collective Worship are very well integrated. As a priest with extensive subject knowledge, he promotes through his work and that of his departmental colleagues, the vision of Blessed John Henry Newman for an educated laity.
- Governors have a good understanding of the role of Religious Studies in the curriculum, but they are not generally well skilled in analysing progress data and receive only the reports of public examination results. They have taken part in learning walks and the chair of the academic committee completes book trawls. Recently, two new governors have been recruited who live locally and have professional experience of working in schools, thereby filling a recognised gap in the governing body's expertise.
- Changes in senior management over the past few years have brought greater expertise in monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum. This enables effective strategies for the improvement of standards of teaching and learning to be implemented. The need for more rigorous assessment in Religious Studies is beginning to be fully recognised. The school has the capacity for this to be achieved, but it needs to be a clear target in the departmental development plan.
- Departmental planning is produced, which identifies some key issues for improvement. There is some evidence that it is based on the department's forensic analysis of examination results. However, priorities in the plan are not expressed in a determined language to move forward, with detailed actions, precise time scales and success criteria.
- Senior management are engaged in a programme of monitoring of teaching and learning. However, it is not clear how this informs departmental self-evaluation and planning.
- The head of department is fully engaged in assuring high standards in the classroom and supports colleagues very positively in effective lesson planning.
- The school does not yet fulfil the Bishops' Conference requirement for 10% taught Religious Studies in key stage 3 and 5% general Religious Studies for all sixth formers.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

The quality of Collective Worship.	Good
How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.	Good
The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school.	Good
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.	Good

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school.

- The provision for Collective Worship is varied and extensive. The chaplain is keen to consider the most appropriate times in the school week for acts of worship. He provides for daily Mass, Friday vespers and times of adoration, as well as other liturgies according to the times of year. The school follows closely the liturgical calendar of the diocese.

- The school has a small chapel that allows for smaller group Mass and liturgy, and a much larger chapel for whole school assemblies and Masses. Both are well ordered and provided with appropriate artefacts and a pipe organ. The smaller, St Joseph's Chapel, is open all day and is situated on a main thoroughfare for the pupils. It is used for those seeking a quiet moment for personal prayer.
- In their house bases each day, there is morning prayer led by staff or senior pupils. The prayers are mostly taken from the school's prayer book. During Religious Studies lessons, prayers from the tradition of the Church are mostly said together. Pupils know a range of Catholic prayers.
- The weekly assembly is led by the headteacher and contributed to by the chaplain. During the inspection, the statue of Our Lady was crowned, following an explanation of the day's feast of Our Lady of Fatima. Senior pupils read prayers and there was excellent participation in the singing of the final hymn. The school has been careful to select a group of hymns that engage the boys.
- Pupils behave with great reverence during prayers and acts of worship. There is a very strong respect for the liturgy and traditions of the school. Younger pupils take turns serving at Mass, and therefore have an opportunity for close involvement in liturgy. There is a steady number of pupils being presented for the Sacrament of Confirmation each year. The chaplain consistently celebrates Mass early each morning. However, there is very low attendance by staff and pupils.
- Younger pupils are keen to read and lead prayer and their opportunities for leadership should be extended. Pupils make good use of the facility provided in St Joseph's Chapel to submit prayer requests on cards pinned to a display board. These are combined by the chaplain into intercessions at the Mass. Pupils show an awareness of the power of prayer.
- The chaplain engages well with the local parishes and attends deanery meetings. As a result, the school has developed good relationships with local clergy. They visit the school to assist the chaplain when needed and are especially supportive with celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation. Pupils respond well to these opportunities for confession.
- Photographs around the buildings witness to the joyous whole school acts of worship, such as the Corpus Christi procession and visits of bishops, including the Archbishop.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

- The chaplain has a wealth of experience of organising Collective Worship. He constantly thinks of ways to make the worship accessible to the pupils and to develop their engagement. He adheres closely to the diocesan ordo and teaches about the day's feasts and celebrations.
- Monitoring of Collective Worship is largely done by the chaplain, who seeks the opinions of pupils and staff in conversations and discussions. This enables him to evaluate the impact of Collective Worship and to make improvements.
- Evaluation of Collective Worship is thorough but informal. In the school's self-evaluation document, it overlaps with the evaluation of Catholic Life and therefore does not currently provide sufficient clarity for focused action planning.
- The headmaster and senior leaders are very supportive of the chaplain and keen to rely on his considered judgements about the quality of Collective Worship. They are very supportive and contribute at senior management level to evaluation and future planning for liturgical events, but there is no formal schedule of monitoring.

- House staff promote prayer through the daily act of worship. They create an atmosphere conducive to the dedication of the day to God, in thankfulness and in mind of those less fortunate.
- Collective Worship has overall very high status within the day and pupils treat it seriously. Prayers are a natural feature of daily life for all the pupils, extending to the evenings for those who are boarders.
- Governors attend acts of worship when possible and verbally feedback to the chaplain or the headmaster.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Unique reference number	123282
<i>This inspection was carried out under canon 806 of Canon Law.</i>	
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Independent
Age range	11-18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on roll	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Matthew Stilwell
Headteacher	Joseph Smith
Telephone number	01491 683500
Website address	www.oratory.co.uk
Email address	enquiries@oratory.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	31 st January – 2 nd February 2011

INFORMATION ABOUT THIS SCHOOL

- This is an independent school near Reading in South Oxfordshire.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils is currently 51%.
- The percentage of disadvantaged pupils is well below national average.
- The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average.
- The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic origins is below the national average.
- The percentage of pupils with English as an additional language is below the national average.
- Since the last inspection there have been changes in the senior leadership including the headteacher and in the leadership and composition of the governing body.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION

- The inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors – Janet Mellor and Sarah Hatfield.
- The focus of the inspection was on the impact, quality and leadership of the school's provision of Catholic Life, Religious Education and Collective Worship.
- The inspectors observed teaching across eight Religious Studies lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils to evaluate their understanding of Catholic Life, the impact of Religious Studies teaching on their learning over time and their experience of Collective Worship.
- Meetings were held with the chair of governors, the headteacher, the head of the theology department, the priest chaplain, the deputy headteachers with pastoral and academic responsibilities, housemasters, the co-ordinators of PSHE, RSE, and charity work, as well as a group of teachers of a range of subjects across the curriculum.
- The inspectors attended two morning Masses, Collective Worship in three houses, and a whole school assembly. They observed pupils' behaviour by walking around the school.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation, data about pupils' attainment and progress, the whole school and theology department development plans, teachers' planning and records of events in the school pertaining to Catholic Life and Collective Worship.