

St Dominic's Sixth Form College

Mount Park Avenue, Harrow on the Hill, Middlesex, HA1 3HX

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 27-28 March 2019



Summary of key findings for parents and students

A. Classroom religious education is outstanding

- The core religious education curriculum meets the needs of the students and fulfils the criteria of the Bishops' Conference Religious Education Curriculum Directory. The schemes of work are creatively constructed making use of digital media, texts and activities to aid learning.
- At A level achievement, when measured against appropriate benchmarks, is strong. Attainment in core religious education is strong and the work seen stretches the students beyond level 2. Students excel through high expectations of teachers evidenced in lessons. Behaviour for learning was exemplary.
- In A level the teaching was consistently outstanding, with teachers demonstrating confidently high levels of subject knowledge that they communicated with skill to their students. Teaching was often characterised by clarity of instruction, good pace and resulted in high levels of student cooperation.
- The leadership of the department is outstanding with a clear sense of direction, purpose and vision. The religious education department is committed to ensuring that students achieve their potential by providing effective support and challenge in lessons.
- The department, in line with the rest of the college, conducts detailed end of course surveys with students to ascertain their experience of the courses. Students consistently highly rate the experience that they have in religious education. This is a testimony to the hard work of the religious education teachers to ensure students have as good an experience as possible in religious education.

B. The Catholic life of the college is outstanding

- It is evident that the place of religious education has a central place in the college. Core religious education receives 5% of curriculum time, as directed by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
- The experience offered by the chaplain, with other members of staff, to the student body is outstanding practice that is worthy of further promotion within the diocese, in particular to other sixth forms.
- Other opportunities for liturgy are also offered throughout the year such as exposition, the rosary and also prayer stations using different methods of prayer such as Lectio Divina and meditation. Overall, the variety of prayer and liturgical opportunities on offer provide a very rich and diverse experience for students.
- The college prepares students very well in terms of recognising the need for social justice and personal service to others. The annual sponsored walk is a key example of the college's commitment to community fundraising.
- The college has vibrant partnerships on many levels and demonstrates the outward looking vision of the principal. Parents' questionnaire responses demonstrate high levels of satisfaction with the college provision.
- The mission statement is core to the life of the college; the commitment 'to the personal and spiritual growth of all its members based on Christian values, academic excellence and high-quality pastoral care' is clearly evident. There is a very strong focus on building quality relationships between staff and students, as well as on encouraging high standards of achievement.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

The college has worked hard to address the four issues raised in the last inspection report: (i) establish a benchmark for general religious education that indicates the level of performance expected of all students undertaking and completing the programme; (ii) in addition to the existing effort and attendance performance measures, provide additional learning objectives and assessment criteria which will provide stretch and challenge for all students; (iii) further develop a support system for those non specialist teachers involved in the general religious education programme to enhance delivery and student progress; (iv) Further monitor students' and teachers' performance in order to track progress and support teachers. The evidence gathered from the inspection demonstrated that all four targets had been successfully met.

The content of classroom religious education is outstanding

The core religious education (RE) curriculum meets the needs of students and fulfils the criteria of the Bishops' Conference Religious Education Curriculum Directory (RECD). The core RE programme is reviewed annually and all schemes of work illustrate where, how and when the appropriate content from the RECD is delivered and assessed. The schemes of work are creatively constructed making use of digital media, texts and activities to aid learning. Every two years the RE programme is presented to the governing body by the head of department for review and approval. The AQA A level provision for religious studies (RS) is mapped to the RECD by being explicitly highlighted in the schemes of work. In particular, the Christianity unit for the study of religion section meets many of the strands of the RECD. Resources at A level are of a high standard and meet the needs of students by way of differentiation and format. The department provides their own course booklets to support students with a comprehensive range of information relevant to the specification. Students value these course booklets and overall highly rate the curriculum resources provided for A level.

Student achievement in religious education is outstanding

At A level achievement when measured against appropriate benchmarks is strong. Progress at A level has improved over 3 years, placing it in the higher performing subjects within the college. Attainment is strong with 25% of students achieving A*-A and 55.7% A*-B placing it above national benchmarks for RS. The college would like to increase the percentage of A* further and has highlighted this in their improvement plan. Inspectors agree that this should be a priority as well. There is a strong culture of monitoring A level student progress and through rigorous half termly tracking students who are not making adequate progress receive a comprehensive intervention programme. If students are significantly underachieving, then they attend a compulsory weekly workshop whilst they remain two grades below their target grades. This system has had a significant impact in ensuring students achieve their potential. Attainment in core RE is strong and the work seen stretches the students beyond level 2. Assessment tasks are appropriate, and students receive effective feedback. Students excel through high expectations of teachers evidenced in lessons. Students proved themselves to be enthusiastic and engaged learners. Behaviour for learning was exemplary.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

The RE department's teaching is seen as a major strength of the college. In A level the teaching was consistently outstanding, with teachers demonstrating confidently high levels of subject knowledge that they communicated with skill to their students. High expectations and challenging questioning provided students with the basis for success. Lessons were characterised with quality resources

that supported all learners. In a lesson on the implications of multi-faith societies for Christian thought the students were supported in their learning through well-chosen resources that encouraged critical reflective thinking. In core RE lessons the Year 12 course is delivered in regular weekly classroom lessons. Here teaching can be inspiring. In a lesson examining the purpose of prayer in the Christian tradition, students critiqued the attributes of the God of classical theism in relationship to any potential logical problems with prayer. Students responded very well to the philosophical challenge of the task and demonstrated high levels of engagement in the lesson. Teaching was often characterised by clarity of instruction, good pace and resulted in high levels of student cooperation. The core RE programme in Year 13 is delivered in a lecture style, using a mixture of outside speakers as well as using internal college staff. The experience of students could be improved through greater participation. The larger group lecture style has some strength in terms of preparing students for potentially large lectures experienced at university, however the depth of learning is potentially weakened through a lack of individual engagement that can be experienced in a classroom. In joint lesson observations between inspectors and college staff, there was clear agreement about what was seen, demonstrating that the college's judgements about the quality of teaching in RE are secure.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education

is outstanding

The leadership of the department is outstanding with a clear sense of direction, purpose and vision. The RE department is committed to ensuring that students achieve their potential by providing effective support and challenge in lessons. There is a very strong understanding of the centrality of religious education in the mission of the Church and the distinct way in which it is lived out in a Catholic sixth form college. The department is supported well by the leadership team and link governor, providing challenge and encouragement. The RE programme is regularly reviewed by the governing body with a report and presentation to the 'Catholicity and Curriculum' committee. There are highly effective systems for both monitoring student performance as well as staff. The lesson observation cycle is essentially a supportive process that involves a number of different types of lesson observation including peer observation to develop skills and share good practice. There is a culture of collaboration in the RE department as staff can access each other's online resources which are also accessible to students. This is also seen in the regular moderation and standardisation meetings that ensure standards of marking are consistent across the department. There is a commitment to regularly reviewing and updating teaching material in order for them to be of excellent quality. Effective support is provided to new staff and all staff benefit from opportunities to further develop their own professional practice. The department, in line with the rest of the college, conduct detailed end of course surveys with students to ascertain their experience of the course. Students consistently highly rate the experience that they have in RE. This is a testimony to the hard work of the RE teachers to ensure students have a as good an experience as possible in RE. The leadership team and governors offer outstanding support for RE and take an active part in reviewing the place of RE in the life of the college.

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

- Improve the Year 13 Core RE experience for students in order to increase individual engagement.
- Improve the top grades (A*-B) for Religious Studies A level.

B. The Catholic life of the college

What has improved since the last inspection?

In the previous inspection, two targets were set. Firstly, to develop monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure that the provision of prayer and liturgy opportunities meet students' spiritual needs, this has been fully met. The second target was to monitor and evaluate the work and impact of the chaplaincy to enhance the quality of what it offers the students. The current chaplain, with the support of others, provides a coherent and sophisticated provision of a very high standard.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

It is evident that the place of religious education has a central place in the college. Core RE receives 5% of curriculum time, as directed by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. The status of RE is also evidenced in the commitment to staffing; there are nine dedicated members of RE staff including three members of the senior leadership team and the chaplain. The budget for RE is very generous and the standard of classroom accommodation is good.

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

is outstanding

The experience offered by the chaplain, with other members of staff, to the student body is outstanding practice that is worthy of further promotion within the diocese, in particular to other sixth forms. The commitment to worship and prayer is very strong. Students have a daily act of worship in their first lesson of the day; staff are supported with a range of quality resources from the chaplain. There is scope to develop the prayer life of the college by sharing the outstanding practice of prayer that is demonstrated by some staff. For example, a number of staff led exemplary morning prayers with their students, engaging them at a level appropriate to their age and capacity, by skilful presentation of a focus and drawing students into spiritual dialogue. The chaplain has a coherent programme of activities and events that are clearly based upon the liturgical year, with scripture providing the bedrock for all experiences of prayer and reflection. Mass is a regular feature of the chaplaincy provision with whole college voluntary Mass on key feasts as well as weekly voluntary Mass offered every Friday. The college is well supported by local clergy. Through the core RE programme, classes are used to help support preparation of the Mass. Student participation is high in voluntary Masses and other liturgies, an example of this was in response to a recent global terrorist attack, students helped to prepare a voluntary liturgy that took place in the chapel during a break time that well attended. Assemblies are not a weekly feature of the college; however when they are held there is student involvement and these are based on scripture. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is offered to students both in Advent and Lent as is the Catholic tradition. Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation is offered in college and the chaplain liaises with the students' home parish, so that they are able to receive the sacrament in their respective parish. Other opportunities for liturgy are also offered throughout the year such as exposition, the rosary and also prayer stations using different methods of prayer such as Lectio Divina and meditation. An alternative prayer room for students who are not Christian is provided and is appreciated by students. All staff meetings within the college start with a prayer. Overall the variety of prayer and liturgical opportunities on offer provide a very rich and diverse experience for students.

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

is outstanding

The college prepares students very well in terms of recognising the need for social justice and personal service to others. Students speak with pride about the college's fundraising activities for

local, national and international causes, for example through the support for The Cardinal Hume Centre, the Catholic Workers Farm and Mary's Meals. The annual sponsored walk is a key example of the college's commitment to community fundraising. Students are given opportunities to reflect on ethical and moral issues linked to wealth and poverty, notably through activities that support Cafod. The end of the RE programme culminates in 'Fairworld' Week where students are encouraged to take an active part in serving the poor. There are many opportunities for student leadership through for example peer support, peer RE teaching, student mentoring and faith leadership. The core RE programme helps students to develop a strong understanding of what it means to serve, as one student commented 'it is what you do at St Dominic's!' The college effectively celebrates student gifts and talents, which in turn demonstrates a commitment to human flourishing. There are well established links with Italian and American schools that demonstrate the college's commitment to international outreach. Students are given opportunities not only to grow in terms of their personal faith journey but also to develop as leaders through a wide variety of opportunities such as members of the Chaplaincy group. A key way in which the college encourages service is through the commitment to the Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes; in the last few years over 150 students have taken part in the pilgrimage, its impact being students developing their own faith.

The partnership with parents, college and parish, and collaboration as an integral part of the diocese through its relationship with the diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

is outstanding

The college has vibrant partnerships on many levels and demonstrates the outward looking vision of the principal. Parents' questionnaires reveal high levels of support and satisfaction. Attendance at parent-student-staff consultation evenings is very high, and the recently established 'Parents' Forum' is having a good impact in fundraising but more importantly further developing partnerships with the college and parents. There are very good links with the two local feeder secondary schools and links with the deanery are strong. There are very good relationships between the college and the diocese, staff participate in the services offered as well as some college staff providing services to the diocese in a number of ways.

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

is outstanding

The mission statement is core to the life of the college; the commitment 'to the personal and spiritual growth of all its members based on Christian values, academic excellence and high-quality pastoral care' is clearly evident. There is a very strong focus on building high quality relationships between staff and students, as well as on encouraging high standards of achievement. The principal, with the support of the staff, has worked hard to create a vibrant and successful Catholic sixth form college that is heavily oversubscribed. An example of excellent practice is the weekly email that the principal sends to all students each week that includes a reflection on the Sunday readings from Mass that day or on another liturgical theme; these emails are acknowledged by students as an effective way to make them feel part of the community. The college's self-evaluation form was coherent and accurate and as a result inspectors agreed with all the judgements made within it. The governors are committed to excellent Catholic education and provide effective challenge and support. There are good systems in place for staff induction; however, this is identified as an area for development so that new staff engage more deeply with the values and vision of the college. The culture of welcome at the college is demonstrated by the students, they are polite, courteous and kind.

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

- Further develop the induction process for new staff to allow for deeper engagement with the Catholic life of the college.

Information about this college

- The college is a Catholic sixth form college in the locality of Harrow that recruits approximately 700 students per year.
- The college serves the parishes of the Harrow Deanery as well as other parishes further afield.
- The proportion of students who are baptised Catholic is 40.8%.
- The proportion of students who are from other Christian denominations is 12.6% and from other faiths is 46.5 %. The remaining students are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the college is 29%.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is four.
- There are 13% of students in the college with special educational needs or disabilities of whom four have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is above average.
- The number of students speaking English as an Additional Language is average.
- There is a below average rate of families claiming free meals.
- 150 students receive a bursary grant (11.3 %).

Department for Education Number	3108600
Unique Reference Number	130443
Local Authority	Harrow

Type of college	Sixth Form College
College category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of students	16 - 19
Gender of students	Mixed
Number of students on roll	1,319
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Patrick Freely
Principal	Mr Andrew Parkin
Telephone number	020 8422 8084
Website	www.stdoms.ac.uk
Email address	stdoms@stdoms.ac.uk
Date of previous inspection	14-15 October 2013
Grades from previous inspection:	
Classroom religious education	Very good
The Catholic life of the college	Outstanding

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out (i) under the requirements of the Canon 806 and (ii) in accordance with the Framework for Diocesan Inspections 2015 approved by the Archbishop of Westminster.

- The inspectors would like to thank the governors, principal, staff, students and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection.
- During the inspection eight lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended a number of acts of worship.
- Meetings were held with college staff, students and governors.
- Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of student's work, observation of students in and out of lessons and examination of college documents.

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

Mr Matthew Dell	Lead Inspector
Ms Winnie Greer	Associate Inspector
Mrs Florence Collins	Associate Inspector
Miss Asha Sidhu	Associate Inspector
Mr Stuart Alexander	Associate Inspector

Information about inspection

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

Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

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

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

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