



Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

INSPECTION REPORT

Sacred Heart School

Mayfield Lane, Durgates, Wadhurst, East Sussex TN5 6DQ

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DfES Number: 845 6020

Headteacher: Mrs H Blake
Chair of Governors: Father K Gaskin

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

Date of inspection: 22 May 2008
Date of previous inspection: none

Reporting Inspector: Mrs J Lenahan

Description of School

The Sacred Heart School is an independent co-educational Catholic preparatory school with nursery educating pupils from 3-11 years. It is non-selective and has a broad spread of ability amongst its 102 pupils currently on roll. The school prides itself on its academic success rate in preparing pupils for entry into independent and maintained senior schools. Its Mission Statement expresses commitment to the Catholic faith and teaches the pupils "to respect themselves and each other as part of God's wonderful creation". 61% of the teachers are Catholic, two have CCRS qualifications and one has a theology and leadership qualification. 47% of the pupils are Catholic, 46% from other Christian faiths and 7% from other faith backgrounds. There are no pupils with a SEN statement and seven are on the SEN register. The school's location is rural and the feeder parishes include Wadhurst, Rotherfield, Crowborough, Mayfield, Heathfield and Tunbridge Wells.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Satisfactory; Grade 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

The Sacred Heart is a good school with some outstanding features. The Governors and Headteacher provide strong leadership and are committed to improvement and development. Together they promote a common vision of the importance of the school's Catholic ethos and the place of religious education on the curriculum. Religious education is now a core subject at the heart of the school's vision. The quality of prayer is outstanding. Pupils' imaginative, reflective, beautifully and maturely expressed prayers are evident in displays and workbooks. The behaviour of the pupils is exemplary. Their attitude to learning and high levels of attainment is evident in their discussions, questioning and recorded work.

The main areas for future development have been rightly identified by the school as revision of the time-table, establishing policy and procedures for a programme in Education in Personal Relationships and the development of assessment.

Grade 2

Improvement since the last inspection

The school has not been inspected by the diocese previously. However, in the light of advice from a diocesan religious education advisor and staff training, the school has established a culture of change and improvement. Recent developments include setting up a monitoring system, appointing a Governor to oversee the development of religious education and the establishment of a process which reports progress to the 'ethos and curriculum committee'.

Grade 2

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

The headteacher and governors have a good understanding of their current position with regard to their strengths and areas for development. The school's Catholic ethos and the primacy of religious education on the curriculum are given due prominence in the school improvement plan. The shared vision at management level to set targets that will implement change is rightly focused on the development of the religious education curriculum, measuring levels of pupils' attainment and tracking progress through assessment procedures. The commitment of the religious education co-ordinators to lead the subject means that the school is now well placed to improve further.

Grade 2

What the school should do to improve further

- Review the time-table to increase the allocation of time to teach the religious education programme.
- Establish a policy and work schemes to teach Education in Personal Relationships.
- Implement and monitor assessment procedures and tracking system that identifies the pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding of religious education.

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the Sacred Heart is good. The recent review of the mission statement has shown the governors' deeper awareness and commitment to upholding and promoting its Catholic nature. The leadership of the headteacher exemplifies and encourages an interchange of ideas and skills that comes from her deep, inner quality of spiritual conviction in such a way that staff and pupils are included and committed to the life of the school. Her commitment to the development of worship is outstanding and this results in pupils' high level responses in reflection. The headteacher and staff foster and promote a community of care where pupils are taught a sense of right and wrong and respect for each individual in keeping with the school's mission. Close links with the parish are fostered and flourish due to the commitment, support and active involvement of the parish priest. Governors are well informed and supportive. The designated governor is active in monitoring the quality of religious education in the school and this is backed up by the involvement of 'the ethos and curriculum sub-committee' to oversee the implementation of policies and their impact on the lives of the pupils.

Grade 2

The Prayer Life of the School

Provision for prayer and worship is good with some outstanding features. Pupils are offered a wide range of opportunities to engage in reflection, prayer and acts of worship, including attendance weekly at Mass, Sacrament of Reconciliation, opportunities for devotions such as the Rosary and Stations of the Cross as well as daily acts of collective worship in key stage or class groups. Learners' response to prayer is outstanding as evidenced in the 'pupils' prayer books' in Year 5 and in Year 6 poetic reflections on the 'Kingdom of Heaven', hymn singing and wonderful musical accompaniment of their prayers. The depth of pupils' engagement in the spiritual content of the liturgies observed was outstanding. Pupils can combine their own personal needs with the significance of Christ's teaching on their lives. Processes for planning and evaluation of active worship are already in place and plans are in hand for their further development.

Grade 2

How effectively does the school / college promote community cohesion?

The school's promotion of community cohesion is good. Within the school, all the pupils feel valued and are encouraged to develop their talents and appreciate the talents of others. Care and sensitivity to the faiths of all the pupils, whatever their background, is well developed in that all the pupils are invited to share and participate in liturgical and extra liturgical celebrations. The school promotes appreciation and awareness of other non-Christian faiths and is developing a more systematic programme in line with the Bishops' requirements. Outside the school there is active involvement in the life of the parish through the weekly attendance at the parish Mass. In the wider community, the school plays a significant role in village celebrations and participates in the 'Charter Pageant' and 'Scarecrow Competition'. Pupils are involved in charitable initiatives such as the choir entertaining the elderly at Weald Hall Nursing Home, 'Harvest Soup Bowl' donations for the homeless and providing books for children in underdeveloped countries. The pupils and parents are active in supporting charities both local and international and make generous contributions annually to those in need, amongst which are CAFOD and the Good Shepherd Appeal.

Grade 2

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

The achievement of pupils is good. The pupils find their lessons interesting and are able to remember and explain the outcomes of their work. Attainment of pupils is high in both key stages. They have high level of knowledge both of Bible texts and the life of Jesus. Their oral skills are particularly well developed and they express their knowledge using religious vocabulary with confidence and accuracy as observed when they discussed aspects of Pentecost, the Trinity, and the conversion of Saul. Year 6 pupils demonstrated how they can relate Gospel values when they discussed the importance of the Resurrection for Christians and its real life application. The behaviour of the pupils is outstanding and they display a positive attitude to learning. The pupils' spiritual and moral growth is substantially enhanced by their knowledge and understanding in religious education. This is most in evidence in the spiritual dimensions of their reflections in their workbooks and personal prayers which demonstrated higher order thinking skills.

Grade 2

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Teaching and learning in religious education is good with some outstanding elements. The teaching meets the needs of the pupils very well, providing challenging and varied tasks. Pupils experience a rich learning environment, where teachers exude a confidence in their subject knowledge and use probing questions to promote reflection and enhance understanding. Teaching plans identify pupils with special learning needs and these are well supported in the small classes where individual attention can be paid. Differentiation in lessons is mainly by teacher input and is not, as yet, incorporated into lesson plans. Tracking of attainment and pupils' progress is at the early stages of development. Assessment procedures are being developed and the school is now well placed to compile a levelling system to measure attainment and incorporate a continuous assessment strategy for learning policies and practice in religious education.

Grade 2

Quality of the Curriculum

The school fulfils the requirements of the Bishops' Curriculum Directory following the programme 'The Way, The Truth and The Life'. This involves the story focus on knowing the life of Jesus and pupils clearly appreciate a good knowledge for their discussions. The curriculum encourages pupils to progress in their learning and build on previous attainment, which results in them frequently asking higher level fundamental questions. The 'Questions for Jesus' booklet in Year 2 is an example of how the teachers encourage the pupils to think and one pupil was heard questioning the teacher, "Why is Mary not part of the Trinity?" Curriculum contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural development is strong. It provides opportunities for pupils to discuss moral and social issues such as prejudice, equality and human rights. The programme for teaching pupils about the major world faiths is in place but needs to be further developed to include all age groups. A systematic programme for Education in Personal Relationships, including Sex Education, needs to be developed as a priority in the school. Provision of curriculum time falls short of expectation. The impact of this means that pupils have limited time for written work and also there is a shortfall in the opportunities to incorporate ICT and cross-curricular links into the religious education programme.

Grade 3

Leadership and management of Religious Education

The leadership and management of religious education is good. The newly appointed headteacher and co-ordinator have modelled a clear commitment to managing and raising standards in religious education, stemming from their own inner spiritual awareness and faith. In their short time in post, they have formulated and implemented a major revision of the policy of school worship. Their self-evaluation accurately reflects the school's strengths and areas for development in the curriculum. The development of assessment and levelling is a work in progress. Policy and practice are in place to ensure equal opportunities for all. The school has actively promoted the recruitment of Catholic staff to ensure that its ethos is maintained. The quality and range of resources to support the teaching of religious education is good and the school appreciates the proximity of the parish church for active participation in worship and the opportunities to become involved in parish life. A programme for staff training has been established as well as closer working links with the diocese. The school should use its membership of CISC (Catholic Independent Schools Council) to give extra support to the headteacher in leading the school.

Grade 2