



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Denominational (S48) Inspection Report

Name of School: St Mark's West Essex Catholic School
Local Authority: Essex
Inspection Date: 7th November 2018
Reporting Inspector: Damian Fox (Lead Inspector)
Tom Cahill (Associate Inspector)

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005 and 2011.

Type of School:	Secondary	School Address: Tripton Road
School Category:	Academy	Harlow
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18	Essex
Gender of pupils:	Mixed	CM18 6AA
Number on roll:	987	
Appropriate Authority:	The Governing Body	
Date of previous inspection:	October 2013	Tel. No. 01279 421267
		Headteacher: Elaine Heaphy
		Chair of Governors: Mrs M Hicks

Information about the school

St Mark's West Essex School is in Harlow. It is in Essex Local Authority and the Diocese of Brentwood. The school serves the parishes of Harlow and Epping, Holy Cross & St Luke's, Our Lady of Fatima, St Thomas More, Our Lady of the Assumption, Loughton and the Immaculate Conception, Epping. There are currently 987 on roll; this includes the 6th Form roll of 158.

50.2% of pupils are from White British heritage and 16.8% are Black British with over 24.7% speaking English as an additional language. 23% of pupils are eligible for the Pupil Premium. 1.1% of pupils have an EHC plan. 23% of pupils are Catholics. 78% of pupils have a faith identity. 83% of the teachers are Catholics and four have the CCRS or similar qualification. The proportion of pupils with special needs is around the national average.

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Mark's is an outstanding Catholic school.

It provides a highly effective spiritual, moral and academic education for its pupils. The ethos of the school is deeply rooted in Gospel values and the teachings of the Catholic Church. Leaders and Governors at all levels show a genuine devotion to pupils and their families. Governors are effective in their support for Religious Education (R.E.) and the Catholic Life of the School. They are fully informed of progress and areas for development. The Headteacher is an inspirational presence in the school. She has articulated a vision for the welfare of pupils. She is supported by a highly effective team in developing the Catholic Life of the School and improving standards of teaching and learning. Outcomes in R.E. have improved significantly since the last inspection and reflect sustained progress at all levels. Collective Worship is integral to daily life. There are many opportunities for pupils of all faiths and none to pray and reflect as individuals and with others. Pastoral care is outstanding. It inspires pupils to respond respectfully and willingly to the mission of service to others. Pupils appreciate the care and high quality education they receive. Pupils actively seek to look after each other. They feel part of a family where each person is valued, respected and cared for. The school's commitment to pupils, staff and families manifestly demonstrates its central mission of service, firmly based on Gospel values. The school is totally inclusive of pupils with different strengths and offers unstinting support to their families.

What the school should do to improve further:

- Ensure curriculum time for Religious Education at all key stages is in line with the requirements of the Bishops' Conference.
- Continue to build on the improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.
- Develop formal monitoring and evaluation of the quality of Collective Worship by Governors and Senior Leaders.

CATHOLIC LIFE

Grade 1

Pupils benefit greatly from the many opportunities to contribute to the Catholic Life of St Mark's school. They live by the Mission Statement that, "each person is recognised as an individual, valued and enabled to fulfil his or her potential to the highest possible standard". Pupils feel valued as individuals and they respond with behaviour that is exemplary at all times. St Mark's has a strong and highly effective learning environment. Pupils' respect, courtesy and consideration for others reflect the impact

of outstanding pastoral care exhibited by teachers. Their dedication to the pupils is very evident. In discussions and in lessons, pupils spoke warmly of the caring and spiritual ethos of the school. Gospel values of uniqueness, compassion and forgiveness govern the pastoral life of the school. One pupil said that “somebody is always there”. Relationships across the community reflect the great mutual respect people have for each other. One pupil described the school as having a “sense of togetherness”. Pupils’ understanding of Catholic social teaching is evident in their awareness of the needs of others in the local and wider community. Fundraising for people in need is a well-established part of school life. Pupils willingly take up the many opportunities to raise funds for causes such as CAFOD, as well as holding cake sales for Macmillan cancer charity, supporting the Harrow foodbank and the Christmas shoebox appeal. Pupils raise funds for the twin parish of Regina Coeli in South Africa. All year groups have a charity week. For November, the school have a book of remembrance into which pupils write the names of the deceased for whom they want to pray. Student leadership is highly effective. Pupils in the sixth form are mature in their outlook, confident and ever aware of the needs of others. They take a lead in a range of charity and community-based projects. They often go into lessons to support the learning of younger pupils.

The school is distinctly Catholic. The range of icons and images reflect the spiritual nature of the school. They are blessed to have a Chapel that has a prominent place at the heart of the school. It is situated in a busy area and is permanently open. Pupils show great respect for the Chapel. It is used regularly by members of the whole school community. Chaplaincy belongs at the heart of school life and is an important part of daily life. The Chaplain is building on the excellent work of her predecessor by ensuring pupils of all faiths have opportunities to be part of the worshipping family. The Chapel is effectively used for prayer and weekly spiritual activities such as making a crucifix or a rosary in October. During the inspection, pupils were engaged in making Diwali candles. There is a strong sense of teamwork which, with local priests from the Deanery, enables a broad range of liturgical opportunities to be offered including Mass, private and community prayer and also retreats. The Deacon described the school as “Catholicism in practice”.

The Governors are fully committed to promoting the Catholic Life of the School. There is an unwavering moral purpose to their work. They are proud of the school that is built on faith, love and compassion. Their evangelism ensures an impressive level of inclusion that serves the school and local community. Governors said “everybody deserves a smile”. Staff buy into this vision and are excellent partners in the school’s mission. They welcome students who may not have other sixth form opportunities. Students expressed gratitude and appreciation for the chance to learn and live in a calm, caring environment. Governors meet regularly with the Headteacher and provide appropriate support and challenge. They are fully supportive of the Catholic life of St Mark’s, realised in their attendance at liturgies and their financial support for the development of the Chapel and the Catholic identity of the school. Support for families and pupils who face social and financial challenges is outstanding and reflects the vision of service by school leaders. The self-evaluation of the Catholic Life of the school is a coherent reflection of their awareness of the strengths of the school and its areas for development. Governors should be commended for the policy of meeting with every new family before their children join in year 7. This ensures that the values and expectations of St Mark’s as a Catholic school are firmly established and accepted by parents and pupils of all faiths and none who attend the school. The Headteacher has a significant impact on the Catholic ethos of the school. Her commitment to the welfare and education of staff and pupils is evident in the high level of mutual respect and care throughout the community. She is continually searching for ways to sustain the growth of faith. Before decisions are made, the Headteacher asks, “Is this the right thing for a Catholic school?” For several years, the Headteacher has invited monitoring groups of headteachers to visit the school and discuss their findings and recommendations for further improvement. The monitoring group for the Catholic perspective will visit this year to discuss ways of making further progress in sustaining and developing the Catholic Life of the School. The Headteacher is supported by Senior Leaders and staff who serve as role models for pupils in the way they support pupils of all faiths and strengths. Pupils spoke warmly of teachers who are always there for them.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Grade 2

Outcomes in R.E. have improved significantly since the last inspection. Levels of attainment on entry are broadly in line with the national average. From their varied starting points, pupils make good progress, some make outstanding progress. A majority of disadvantaged pupils have exceeded their expected levels of progress. Higher ability pupils achieving grade 7+ in R.E. was 93.7% last year. It was significantly above the school average. Pupils have outstanding attitudes to learning. Discussions with them and lesson observations show that they enjoy the lessons and are proud of their learning. Behaviour and engagement in lessons was exemplary. Evidence shows that Pupil Premium pupils have improved further since the last inspection. For example, those achieving grade 7+ at GCSE, were higher than the overall school average.

Lesson observations and reviews of student work during the inspection confirm the school's judgement that teaching is good with outstanding features. Teachers have a high level of confidence and expertise both in terms of their specialist knowledge and their understanding of effective teaching of Religious Education. Pupils' attitudes to learning are a significant strength. As a result, behaviour is excellent and there is a high level of engagement in learning. Marking and feedback has improved rapidly since the last inspection. There is consistency across the department in the approach to assessment. There is a three week marking cycle with teacher, self and peer assessment. In line with the school's planning, this is constantly being reviewed and further developed. Assessment is a strength of the department. Moderation is within the department. The Head of Department has also liaised with other departments regarding assessment. As a result, teachers have improved their understanding of measuring attainment and progress and produce accurate, evidence-based data. There is an assessment every half term followed by self and peer assessment. This involves redrafting work. For example, in GCSE lessons, there was a clear whole class analysis of how to improve the "D" mark question. Pupils were given an opportunity to redraft or amend part of their answers. Pupils' exercise books show a high level of consistency of marking and pupil feedback and pupils take great pride in the presentation of their work.

Curriculum time is 8% at KS 3 and KS 4. The school is committed to addressing the allocation so that it meets the requirements of the Bishop's Conference. The programme for KS 3 is based on 'Icons' and 'The Way, The Truth & The Life'. The GCSE programme is Edexcel, Catholic Christianity and Judaism. Leaders and Governors are ambitious for the continued improvement in the standards of teaching and learning. They have made a commitment to reinstate a link governor for R.E. as soon as possible. They are informed about standards through the Headteacher's reports to the curriculum committee. Their determination that all pupils achieve the best they can is very evident. There is capacity for R.E. to be outstanding. Governors and Leaders know where they want to be and understand what they need to do to be outstanding. The Headteacher is a motivating force within the school. She is committed passionately to promoting the pivotal role of the R.E. department in this outstanding Catholic school. This was evidenced during interviews with her and Governors. She ensures that the quality of teaching and learning is monitored rigorously through the Associate Headteacher as well as the Senior Associate Headteacher, who is the line manager for R.E. The Associate Headteacher works closely with the Head of Department to monitor and evaluate progress and then do comparative studies with other departments to ensure assessment is accurate and that appropriate support and challenge are provided for pupils. It also identifies areas for development in targeting pupils who are underachieving.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Grade 1

Pupils respond with great reverence and respect when participating in the many opportunities to pray together. They affirmed that they are at ease at prayer and that people respect those of other faiths. No pupil feels excluded from prayer and worship. Pupils of other faiths are given the opportunity to celebrate their faith. For example, during the inspection, the hall was decorated with Diwali lights and in the adjoining chapel pupils of different faiths were making Diwali candles. During Lent, there was an opportunity for pupils to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Deacon confirmed that many of those who could not go for the Sacrament went to him for their own private conversation. The response

of pupils was such that it took nearly the whole day. The assembly on Remembrance seen during the inspection focussed on how the Commonwealth provide so many of their citizens to the armed forces. 6th forms students were involved in leading and delivery. They were highly respectful and engaged. More opportunities for students to reflect quietly would further enhance Collective Worship. Pupils were described as the best line managers because they often lead on ideas such as the 'Remembrance Tree'.

Provision for Collective Worship and prayer is very inclusive. Pupils in years 7 and 12 have retreats with the Brentwood Youth Service who come to school for two days each year. Each year group has a day set aside for a retreat. It is a day of prayer built on the theme of strengthening relationships within the school. There is Mass every Friday and in line with the Church's seasons. Mass is also celebrated on special occasions such as the Year 7 'Welcoming Mass', the Year 13 'Leaver's Mass' and St Mark's Feast Day. Photographic evidence of the many celebrations throughout the year shows the school's commitment to providing high quality acts of Collective Worship. There is a weekly spiritual activity in the Chapel such as making crucifixes and stained glass windows. Inspectors were given pocket rosaries that pupils had made in October. The liturgy group contributes significantly to the quality of Collective Worship. They plan and lead prayer throughout the year. When asked why they wanted to be in the liturgy group, one pupil said it was to "Show who we are". Another said, "We are a religious school". Collective Worship includes everybody. For example, at the end of the year 9 period for reflection and retreat, on Ash Wednesday, there was a descriptive Mass. Mass was celebrated with commentaries throughout to help pupils understand the various stages of the Mass. Links with deanery parishes are excellent and mean that the effective Parish Priest is supported in providing spiritual and liturgical opportunities for pupils. The Chapel is a significant part of the provision for prayer and worship. It is strategically placed at the heart of the school and is open to pupils throughout the day.

Leaders and Governors are deeply committed to the growth of this Catholic school. They have ensured that prayer and Collective Worship are an integral part of each day. Governors visit the school regularly and are proud of the way pupils come together and show respect for each other. They should now establish a more formal monitoring and evaluation process to ensure the quality of prayer and worship is consistently outstanding and to make themselves aware of where further developments are needed. The Headteacher is passionately committed to building a totally inclusive Catholic community. Chaplaincy constitutes a strength of the school. It is line managed by the Headteacher. The chaplaincy team was appointed this year. They are enthusiastic about their role in developing the quality of Collective Worship and improving the effectiveness of the pupil liturgy group. The effectiveness of the main person in the chaplaincy team was affirmed by Governors, staff and students. Her enthusiasm for building on the excellent work of her predecessor is impressive. She is highly respected by the liturgy group who have responded with pleasure to her leadership. The Headteacher is aware that the main person in the chaplaincy team has commitments as a teacher of R.E. and offers strong support to allow her to develop chaplaincy provision further throughout the school.