

May 2015

Diocesan Education Service,
Don Bosco House,
Coventry Road,
Coleshill,
B46 3EA

Dr D Casserly,
St Paul's Girls' School
Vernon Road
Edgbaston
Birmingham, B16 9SL

Dear Dr Casserly,

Section 48 Monitoring Inspection: Thursday 30th April 2015

Thank you for the very warm welcome which you, your staff and students gave to the Assistant Inspector, Mr Rob Hall, and to me, when we inspected your school on 30th April. We are grateful also for the range of information and analysis which you provided both in advance of the inspection and during the day, and for the time given by staff, chaplains, pupils, parents and governors.

The inspection was a "light touch" monitoring inspection because religious education (RE) and the Catholic life of your school were judged at the last inspection to be outstanding and because it is now five years since the last section 48 inspection at your school. The purpose of the inspection was to assess the quality of the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning for RE and Catholic life. In order to make this judgement we read school documents, including an extensive self-evaluation document, interviewed senior leaders, chaplains, governors, parents and pupils, did joint observations of parts of seven RE lessons, and attended collective worship with a tutor group and a year group assembly. In addition, we gathered evidence of the outstanding practice of the school in terms of the development of vocational awareness.

As a consequence of your own evaluations, you judge your school to be outstanding both in the quality of RE and of Catholic life. We are pleased to endorse this judgement which is wholly accurate.

The self evaluation of RE is thorough and comprehensive, enabling the school to move forward. There is a fundamentally genuine drive to assess the quality and impact of provision and to plan for improvement on the basis of the results of the evaluation. There has been a pronounced development in the consistency of the marking of pupils' work and in the use of ICT which emerged as areas for improvement in the last inspection. The RE department has made great strides in embracing whole school initiatives in assessment and data tracking. The impact of these developments is shown in reflection and action, for example in the creation of rigorous common assessment tasks and a change in syllabus for GCSE. Evaluation is open to innovation and the department moves forward confidently on the basis of its analysis. Despite generally very high attainment and progress of pupils in RE as compared with national and diocesan averages and with other subjects within the school, there is no spirit of complacency. The annual cycle of monitoring of results, evaluation and forward planning and review is integrated into the work of the department and is very well supported and challenged by senior leaders, including the data manager. The decline in top grades at A2 level in 2014 compared with previous years has led to a range of strategies including specific training in data management at this level and pastoral support of pupils. Predicted grades for this year show that actions have already been very effective.

The overall quality of teaching in RE is judged by the school to be outstanding and this is also accurate. The judgement is based on wide evidence, including regular detailed monitoring, scrutiny of pupils' work and tracking the impact of teaching through progress and outcome data, though the full potential of the data remains to be exploited. The head of department and her team constantly strive to improve the already high standards. Teachers support one another, sharing strategies and resources. Pupils are engaged in their learning and their behaviour is excellent. Detailed lesson planning centres on aspirational targets and ways to ensure progress and successful outcomes for all. Teachers are open to the excellent professional expertise of the special needs co-ordinator. The use of ICT is embedded in lesson delivery and the department is now considering ways in which that can be enhanced. Formative assessment plays a key role in learning, however although marking includes target setting, teachers do not always check and acknowledge that these have been implemented. Pupils grow in skills of self

assessment and this plays a key role in examination courses. As pupils progress through summative assessment they track their own progress towards their target GCSE grade. The skilful integration of assessment into the 'flight path' through the curriculum enables a strategic approach which the department is able to use as a monitoring tool. Pupils know that teachers have confidence in their ability to achieve because they have a rigorous and positive approach in lessons. They enjoy RE and understand its value for their spiritual and moral development, as well as for their growth in becoming thinking citizens in 21st century Britain, able to argue their point of view with respect, knowledge and integrity. They value the study of other faiths and the RE department is therefore currently considering how this can be extended. Pupils of other faiths are fully integrated and are confident to speak about their beliefs in discussions.

The school judges its Catholic life to be outstanding and this is very clearly accurate and reliable. Provision for Catholic life is extensive and is carefully evaluated. The chaplaincy improvement plan links into pastoral work and the curriculum, and feeds into whole school planning. The chaplains have reflected carefully on ways to enable pupils to become familiar with the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a regular feature of their lives and evaluated implementation. A review of the spiritual life of the school conducted in 2014 with pupils and with input from governors was meticulously analysed and has led to form tutor training in supporting prayer. It provided clear evidence that the school is caring and inclusive, and that it fosters a sense of service to the wider community. Pupils richly benefit from opportunities for Mass, retreats, visits and pilgrimages, notably to Lourdes. The school is open to their initiatives, for example after the recent mission with the Sion community a pupil chaplaincy group was formed. Decisions about charity fund raising arise from pupils' presentations of their suggestions and averages £17,000 per year. Parents express commitment to the values of the school, speaking of the 'natural and unforced piety' of the school community. School leadership sees Catholic life firmly as a whole-school issue so that all teachers have a Catholic life performance target. Pupils pay tribute particularly to the inspiring example of the headteacher, and staff appreciate opportunities for spiritual renewal including the annual revisiting of the mission statement at the start of the year. The school benefits from its foundation by the Sisters of St Paul, and their enduring commitment and support, the availability of the large and beautiful chapel, and the vibrant work of the chaplaincy team who call additionally upon a range of priests, religious and lay people to fulfil tasks which have been identified in self evaluation. This includes for example priests who support the branch of the Air Training Corps, and Filipino religious who work with pupils to enhance music at the Filipino Mass.

The monitoring of collective worship is extensive with clear expectations and efficient feedback leading to improvement. Pupils are empowered from their first year at the school to lead collective worship both in their forms and on a wider scale. They grow in confidence, as seen in a Sixth Form assembly where the pupils enabled inclusive participation in prayer. The school day is punctuated by opportunities for prayer, including the Angelus, so that pupils know how to pray and develop in their relationship with God. Moral development focuses on examining consequences of actions and pupils recognise that they are developing skills in forming a moral framework to their lives. Because of the constant presence of priests and religious in the school, and of the link with Oscott seminary, pupils are at ease with the concept of giving one's life to God. The school ensures an awareness of how vocation can be lived out in other ways, and teachers go the extra mile to support pupils in achieving their goals. They are encouraged to make links across the curriculum for example the study of slavery in geography, history, RE and English.

The governing body has a wide range of skills and experience and is fully active in the self evaluation process. Pupils are able to assess their own growth in virtue, confidence and self-esteem. Teachers, governors, parents and pupils are united in assessing the promotion of British values as successful and emanating from the Christian values of the school.

In order to assist the school in its excellent work, the following targets are appropriate:

1. Monitor pupils' implementation of targets set for them in teachers' marking
2. Ensure that action plans are clearly prioritised with specific success criteria

Yours sincerely

Janet Mellor