

Report of the Denominational (Section 48) Inspection  
Carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

St Alban's Catholic High School  
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For the Catholic Diocese of East Anglia



Headteacher: Mr Dennis McGarry

Chair of Governors: Mr Paul McGrath

Denominational Inspector: Mr James Welsh

Date of Inspection: 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> December 2009

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## **Description of the school**

St. Albans' Catholic High school, Ipswich, is an 11 - 18 co-educational voluntary aided comprehensive school in the diocese of East Anglia and the Suffolk local authority. The school has specialist status in Technology and special educational needs and inclusion. The principal parishes which the school serves are: St. Pancras, St. Mary's, St Thomas's, St. Mary Magdalene's, St. Mark's, St. James', St. Joseph's, St. Felix in Felixstowe. Pupils from other faith communities are welcome in the school. There are 1000 pupils with 191 in the sixth form. Approximately 70% of pupils are Catholic. The school takes pupils from years 7 - 13. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is above average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs (including those with statements) is below average.

## **Key for Inspection Grades**

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Unsatisfactory

## **Overall Effectiveness of this Catholic School**

St. Albans is an outstanding Catholic school. The head teacher, the head of RE the Chaplain and the senior team provide inspirational leadership. Their work is suitably supported by the Governing Body. The strong sense of moral purpose emanates from the Head teacher, and is felt throughout the school. The school is a worshipping community where God is named and gospel values underpin all that the school seeks to achieve. The process of writing the mission statement reflects the inclusive nature of this community. Staff and pupils from other Christian communities and other faith communities, feel valued and respected and included in the whole life of the school. Relationships in the school are outstanding. People feel affirmed and valued. Pastoral care is a particular strength of the school. Early intervention by pastoral managers is appreciated by parents and pupils. One parent commented, "nothing is too much trouble." The school works closely with other schools and the local authority by taking pupils from other schools in 'managed transfers' 'this is a very worthy thing to do. The spiritual and moral development of pupils is nurtured by the liturgical and prayer life of the school. Standards of achievement are good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and outstanding at Key Stage 5. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes outstanding. The department is led by an outstanding subject leader.

**Grade One**

## **Improvement since the last Inspection**

Improvements since the last inspection have been considerable. At Key Stage 3, levelling has been embedded in practice. Curriculum time has increased to 8.7%. At Key Stage 4, GCSE results continue to rise, and the subject leader constantly reviews the syllabus options. ( The residuals in the GCSE results are good. ) At Key Stage 5, the AS and A2 results are outstanding. The RE department has a suite of three rooms and the Chapel. The department is well equipped with IT provision. Whole school inset has been offered on prayer and worship. Chaplaincy provision is constantly evaluated and additions and amendments made. Chaplaincy provision is a strength of the school. Community cohesion within the school is outstanding and continues to develop. Quality assurance is carried out within the performance management cycle.

**Grade One**

## **The Capacity of the School to Improve and Develop.**

The school's capacity to improve and develop is outstanding. The school's practice and ability to self evaluate are reflected in the very thorough SEF (Self-evaluation form). Staff constantly reflect on practice which is focussed on teaching and learning with a single mindedness to raise attainment. Such reflection leads to appropriate training and resources. The head teacher's vision, and commitment to distributed leadership is communicated clearly to the whole community. This is supported by a strong governing body. The school development plan encapsulates and gives form to this strategic thinking. There is an ethos of continuing improvement.

**Grade One**

## **What the School should do to Improve further**

- Continue to update the RE SEF at least annually.
- Appoint a second in Department.
- Monitor closely curriculum time for RE at Key Stages 3&4.
- Review RE provision at Key Stage 5.
- Maintain robust quality assurance procedures in the RE department.
- Continue to implement assessment for learning strategies across the department.
- Review Gifted and Talented provision in the department.

## **THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL**

### **Leadership and Management.**

Leadership and management are very effective in developing and sustaining the Catholic life of the school. The leadership of the head teacher is outstanding. Together with the senior team, the leadership and management of the school are a real strength. The head teacher provides a clear vision of what a Christian community should look like. He shares and communicates this effectively with staff, parents, pupils, governors and other stakeholders. This is reflected in the school development plan and school policies. The mission statement has recently been re-written after a considerable amount of discernment, reflection, and consultation. This leadership provides a framework within which learners' spiritual and moral development can flourish. The quality of the pastoral care of pupils is outstanding and is based on the belief in the uniqueness of each individual 'made in the image and likeness of God'

The governing body has a clear understanding of its role in the strategic direction and the mission of the school. It provides support and challenge to the school's leaders. Governors give freely of their time and expertise for the good of the school. There is a strong sense of inclusion in the school and morale is very high among pupils and staff. Pupils develop into autonomous human beings with positive self worth and a good sense of service and citizenship. The school enjoys excellent relations with the local Catholic and Christian community. **Grade One**

### **The Sacramental and Prayer Life of the School**

Prayer and worship are part of the very fabric of the school. The school is clearly a worshipping community with the Eucharist and prayer at the centre. Mass is celebrated regularly. Considerable thought has been given to the school's response to masses on Holy Days moving to the nearest Sunday, and the impact on the school as a worshipping community. The school is fortunate in the availability of clergy to come in to school to say mass and hear confessions. The sacrament of reconciliation is made available during Lent and Advent. The service observed during the inspection was very prayerful, carefully planned and resourced, and sensitively led. It was age appropriate and took account of pupils from different faith communities. The chaplain makes an outstanding contribution to collective worship and the sacramental and prayer life of the school. Her dedication, and selfless giving of her own time to the role are impressive. There are a variety of opportunities for staff and pupils to pray. At staff briefing each day, prayer is led by a number of staff who consider it a privilege to be involved - a quote from a non Catholic staff member. Prayer is said during registration when there is no assembly. The department has prepared an excellent school prayer book as a resource. Pupils respond well to this opportunity to pray and tutors feel supported by the subject leader and the chaplain in making provision for prayer. Collective worship makes a powerful contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. **Grade One**

## **How well the School promotes Community Cohesion**

The school includes all staff and pupils in its prayer life and worship. People of other faiths feel included and valued. Concern is shown for the well being of all pupils. Pupils are aware that they are part of the 'body of Christ.' Inclusion is a shared vision in the school. Outside of school, pupils are given opportunities to work with other community groups and render service. Throughout the liturgical year, pupils seize the opportunity to do charitable work in the wider community. The school constantly promotes respect for other cultures, beliefs and value systems. The school premises are used by the community and the Open University.

**Grade One**

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

### **Achievement and standards in Religious Education**

The standards achieved by learners are high, given their attainment on entry.

Most learners make good progress, some make outstanding progress. Levelling is becoming more firmly embedded at Key Stage 3. Robust comparisons will be able to be made with other subjects. At Key Stage 4, 68% of year 11 gained a C grade or above. This reflects an upward trend and is an improvement on years 2007 and 2008. Significantly, in year 10, 73.5% of the cohort gained a C or above. Residuals for 2009 year 11 cohort are very pleasing. Considerable thought has been given to examination boards and class groupings. They are continually under review. At Key Stage 5. AS and A2 results were excellent and reflect clearly on the expertise of the subject leader. Pupils enjoy the subject and recognize the importance and relevance of it. They are confident learners and benefit from the creative nature of lessons.

**Grade Two**

### **Quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education**

Teaching and learning are good and often outstanding. Lessons are carefully planned using prior attainment to inform the planning process. There is clear progression in evidence. Lessons are well structured involving a variety of teaching styles and activities. Pupils are actively involved in their own learning. The use of power point, smart boards and IT, enrich the lessons and aid learning. There was considerable evidence of creativity in teaching and learning. This was across the department. Pupils respond very well in RE lessons. They enjoy their work, are confident learners and wish to succeed. Pupils with learning difficulties, are supported well, and the subject leader liaises closely with the SEN (Special Educational Needs) department. Teaching Assistants are used constructively in lessons and give valued support. Teachers have high expectations for pupils and pupils are inspired to see the relevance of their learning beyond the classroom. Parents are kept well informed of their children's progress in RE.

**Grade Two**

## **Quality of the Religious Education Curriculum**

The curriculum in RE fulfils the requirements of the Diocese and the Curriculum directory for Catholic schools. At Key Stages 3 & 4 8.7% of curriculum time is dedicated to RE. At Key Stage 5 general RE is delivered through critical thinking and general studies.

Religious education is at the heart of the school curriculum. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on God's call in their daily life. The skills of knowledge understanding and evaluation (appropriate to age) are developed and build on clear progression. Pupils are able to think spiritually, ethically, and theologically. Skills in literacy and IT, together with those in reading, writing, listening and speaking are developed in lessons. Schemes of work provide for the study of God, the teachings of Jesus and the Church. These are augmented by the chaplaincy programme. There is a constant striving to make RE relevant and significant in the lives of pupils. Students study other faiths, and speakers are invited in to the school to give presentations. At Key Stage 4 a syllabus change in year 11, will include an in-depth study of Islam

Pupils feel confident to express their own views on religious topics and know that they will be respected. They are aware of the sensitivity needed to study other faiths. The RE curriculum makes a strong contribution to the spiritual and moral development of learners. They respect other cultures and faiths.

**Grade One**

## **Leadership and Management of Religious Education**

The leadership and management of the department is outstanding. The subject leader has a clear understanding of the educational mission of the Church and the school's role in it. She ensures that the department is central in its contribution. She heads a strong team of dedicated staff. Staff are supported extremely well, and there is an excellent esprit de corps. There is a constant focus on teaching and learning and the raising of standards. The department is very effectively managed. The RE SEF is very thorough, comprehensive and the judgments are accurate in almost all areas. The subject leader and the department constantly evaluate their work. Quality assurance procedures have been put in place; every department member is observed teaching, work scrutinies are carried out, and there are departmental reviews by senior management. The subject leader works closely with the data manager analysing attainment and standards. The departmental handbook is up to date and is a valuable tool. All policies are in place. The department models good practice for other departments. The subject leader works very closely with the chaplain and the result is outstanding chaplaincy provision. Sensitive and creative planning and resources really help to deepen learners' spiritual and moral development. Learners blossom in the department. The subject leader has forged excellent relations with parents, parishes, and the diocese. There is a strong sense of inclusion in the department. Leadership of the department is excellent.

**Grade One**