

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

ST ALBAN'S CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Digby Road, Ipswich, IP4 3NJ

DfE No. 935/4603

URN No. 137849

For Catholic Diocese of East Anglia



Headteacher: Mr Colin Walker

Chair of Governors: Mr Paul McGrath

Dates of Inspection: 18th – 19th June 2013

Diocesan Inspector: Mrs Susan Aldous

Associate Inspector: Mrs Josephine Hammersley

Copyright

1998 Copyright – Diocese of East Anglia.

This report may be reproduced in whole, or in part, provided that the source and its date are stated. However, it may not be used, in or in connection with, a prospectus or an advertisement or for any commercial purpose.

Copy of this Report may be obtained from the Governors of the School.

Information about the school:

St Alban's Catholic High school is an 11 - 18 co-educational converter Academy (February 2012) in the Diocese of East Anglia. The school takes pupils from years 7 - 13. There are 1032 pupils with 225 in Years 12 and 13. Approximately 57.5% of pupils are Catholic and another 37% are other Christian denominations. 27% of teaching staff are Catholic. The majority of pupils are drawn from thirty four primary schools in Ipswich, including the three Catholic primary schools. 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 in Hadleigh (merged with Sudbury) and St. Felix in Felixstowe. The school has received a number of prestigious awards the most recent being the RE Quality Mark at gold standard.

Key for Inspection Grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school:	Grade 1
---	----------------

Outcomes for students, the provision for Catholic education, the effectiveness of leaders and managers at Saint Alban's Catholic High School and the capacity for sustained improvement are all judged to be outstanding.

- The school has securely maintained and built on its previous Catholic school inspection judgement of 'Outstanding' (2009) In particular:
 - **Maintaining robust quality assurance procedures in the RE department.** Formal lesson observations and less formal visits to lessons are carried out by the Head of Department. The Senior Leadership Team carries out half-termly 'Monitoring Weeks' across the school, including the RE Department, on a specific focus. Work with individual students is discussed in detail and followed up at department meetings. Work is sampled and from September 2011 homework has been set on the school's Virtual learning environment and this is monitored by the Head of Department.
 - **Continuing to implement assessment for learning strategies across the department** which has been a whole school focus as well as departmental. Termly assessments are made to level in Key Stage 3 and students know what they have to do to achieve each level, and how they can improve. In Key Stage 4 students work with the exam board marking criteria and know how to meet them. Students know what their individual targets are and how they can be achieved. They reflect on their own learning and progress.
 - **Reviewing Gifted and Talented provision in the department.** Students who are gifted and talented in Religious Education have been identified at department level and targeted opportunities are offered to them.
- School leaders, managers and governors understand their roles in sustaining and furthering St Alban's Catholic ethos, its place in the community, and its role in developing well-qualified Catholic young people. The Religious Education department takes a lead in whole school improvement and this is a real strength. This leads to innovative training to inspire Catholic life in the School community.
- There is a very thorough Self Evaluation Form which is reviewed annually.

What the school should do to improve further:

- Embed the consistency of quality written feedback across the Religious Education department so that all students clearly know how to improve their work further.
- Improve on the consistency of the mainly good quality of prayer in tutor time, including planning for pupil leadership.
- Ensure that Chaplaincy consistently offers the organisational structure that gives all pupils the full range of chaplaincy provision, including liturgical and other activities, in a coherent viable plan.

Outcomes for pupils:	Grade 1
-----------------------------	----------------

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. There have been many opportunities for the school to be representatives in the Catholic life of the diocese e.g. Pope Benedict XVI's visit and attendance at Roehampton, the visit to Walsingham of the Relics of St Therese, and the Mass at Norwich Cathedral for the opening of the Year of Faith. There are innovative and imaginative celebrations of Church events such as letting off helium balloons on the school field for the announcement of Pope Francis' pontificate. All give opportunities to see the wider Catholic Church in action.

The Mission Statement to provide an excellent education for students within a caring Christian community where all are respected, valued and supported to achieve their potential is lived out in the school. The Mission Statement is known amongst pupils as LRC 'learning, respecting, caring' which they value and gives them a sense of personal worth.

The views of students from all backgrounds are encouraged and respected. Students who have joined the school at different points can articulate the welcome they received and feel that they belong to this community.

Pupils' response to the school's collective worship, sacramental and prayer life is outstanding. Prayer observed in registration involved some staff and some pupils' participation. Pupils know what is expected of them and are well behaved, calm, attentive and reflective. Pupils or staff choose a prayer for Tutor Time from a school prayer book written by pupils. Pupils carry the St Alban's school prayer card and it is used. In observation of one year 8 class, pupils had written plays about St Alban and these were brought together by their teacher into a dramatic production to be performed on the Saint's day. Opportunities for more imaginative prayer and pupil participation in tutor times are sometimes missed, and this should be an area for development. The beginnings of Acts of Worship are not always marked with the sign of the cross. The assembly observed was carefully planned and well-resourced. Pupils are used to singing regularly. All pupils asked were able to articulate a spiritual point they had taken from the assembly. Pupils respond with respect and take the varied opportunities offered to develop their own spirituality.

Pupils are confident learners and benefit from the creative nature of Religious Education lessons. Most learners make good progress, some make outstanding progress. Levelling is becoming more firmly embedded at Key Stage 3 and 4. RE has improved significantly over recent years taking pupils targets upon entry into school to grades above expectation. Pupils respond very well in RE lessons. They enjoy their work, are confident learners and the majority of pupils are keen to achieve. Behaviour of pupils in and out of class is outstanding. Relationships in the school are outstanding. Pupils feel affirmed and valued. Pupils enjoy the subject and recognize the importance and relevance of it.

Key Stage 3 pupils almost invariably make at least the recommended two levels of progress. In KS4 performance at GCSE has consistently improved year on year and standards in 2012 were very high with 81% achieving A*-C. This was an increase of 2% on the previous year.

At KS5 the A2 level the results were very good, with a positive residual of +0.6 meaning that only 27% of schools did better compared to pupils' ALIS grades. This is very good value added. While AS results were less good (residual of 0.1), they were still positive.

Leaders, Managers and Governors:	Grade 1
---	----------------

The Interim Headteacher has been in post for eight weeks and though not Catholic fully contributes to the Catholic character of the school and supports it. The senior leadership team has recently been restructured and two of its six members are Catholic, the acting deputy head and the Head of RE. It is therefore all the more important that the Governing body continues to support the school in regard to its Catholicity and rigorously challenges and supports leaders and managers.

Governors ensure that the School Improvement Plan sets priorities for improvement and that school targets for Catholic life and Religious Education are both achievable and sufficiently challenging to drive improvement. Governors monitor and receive reports at least annually on the achievement in Religious Education and are knowledgeable of the work of the school, including strengths and weaknesses. Governors are very active participants in the life of the school. There is a link governor appointed for each subject area and the link governor for RE, Fr John Warrington, meets with the Head of RE as required to discuss developments and plans for the department. As a result there is an ethos of continuing improvement.

With reference to Religious Education the Catholic Education Self Evaluation provides a concise analysis of departmental strengths and clearly identifies areas for improvement and plans to implement progress. The leadership and management of the department is outstanding. The Head of Department has a clear understanding of the educational mission of the Church and the school's role in it and provides incisive and inspirational line management.

Provision for Catholic Education:	Grade 1
--	----------------

Prayer and collective worship observed was good and central to the life of the school. The Head teacher believes that it sets the right tone, touching the Catholic ethos and spirituality at the beginning of each day. The staff pray together in briefing, using both the school prayer written by a pupil and other prayers. The lay chaplaincy co-ordinator, Allan Kelly, and priests from the local parishes play their part in enriching the Catholic life of the school. In particular Fr John Warrington initiated a weekly voluntary Mass which is growing in popularity. The sacrament of reconciliation is made available during Lent and Advent. Pupils know and like Allan and know how to access chaplaincy, dropping in to his office. They find him easy to talk to and are certain of a positive response. The retreat programme is well established over many years and all students speak enthusiastically of their experiences of the Castlerigg Retreat in year 8, seeing it as a highlight of their time at St Alban's. The school is fortunate in its sacred space and the chapel can be used by pupils and staff for silent prayer. While the intention is to have regular form masses, as well as marking of feast days, special events and reflection days, the chaplain has not consistently offered the structure that gives pupils appropriately organised provision which has meant that they have not all happened this year.

Much of the quality of teaching in RE is outstanding. Judgements showed parity with the school's own quality assurance systems through including one paired observation with the Head of Department who is confident of her team's performance in lessons and of their ability to teach at an outstanding standard generally. Every full time RE teacher was observed

teaching and each key stage was included in the observation schedule. Of the 5 observations undertaken, in 2 lessons, teaching was considered good with outstanding features and 2 were deemed outstanding. In the outstanding lessons there is clear evidence of progression. Pupils are actively involved in their own learning. In particular, the teaching and learning observed in a year 9 group and a year 12 class was innovative and challenged the pupils to explore difficult concepts with confidence at their appropriate level. The RE department mainly takes place in a suite of 3 rooms, making a learning environment that allows for both celebration of pupils' work and stimulating and interesting displays in corridors and classrooms. The department is well resourced. Pace and challenge are appropriate, and the use of power point, smart boards and IT enrich the lessons and aid learning. Relationships between teachers and students are very positive and, along with the use of a wide range of teaching styles and strategies, contribute to students being motivated and interested in their work. Pupils with learning difficulties are supported well. The Higher Learning Teaching Assistant of a pupil with ASD said, 'This is the lesson where he thrives.' Entry level is available for those who cannot pass GCSE. Regular assessment tasks ensure that most students are aware of the level they are working at and generally know what they need to do to improve. At Key Stage 4, use of past exam questions aid learning. As a result pupils make outstanding progress.

Assessment of pupils' work observed included peer and self-assessment. In the work scrutiny there was considerable evidence of creativity in teaching and learning. This was across the department. Teachers' skill is demonstrated through a strong commitment to teaching Catholic belief and religious literacy. The books sampled showed some evidence of diagnostic marking and the range of assessment techniques is developing. Some good examples of peer assessment were seen in lessons and pupils are being encouraged to develop independent study skills. Where pupils' books are marked regularly, the best examples give helpful and precise advice on how to improve their work. However, this good practice is not consistently applied and as a result students are not always afforded the opportunity to act on their teachers' comments. The subject leader will need to ensure that there is a consistent approach to assessment across the department.

The Religious Education curriculum is effectively planned to meet the needs of students at differing stages. The Religious Education curriculum also meets all the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. The content provides for a deep and systematic study of God and the teachings of the Church, the life of Jesus, central beliefs of the Catholic Church and how these relate to faith and life. Religious Education curriculum at St Alban's makes a very significant contribution to the spiritual and moral development of all students, as does the school's Sex and Relationships Education programmes which are delivered through Religious Education in accordance with Catholic teaching.

EAST ANGLIA DIOCESAN SCHOOLS' SERVICE

*Director of Schools' Service: Mrs. Julie O'Connor The White House, 21 Upgate,
Poringland NR14 7SH Tel: 01508 495509 Fax 01508 495358*

Email: joschools@east-angliadiocese.org.uk or ssc@east-angliadiocese.org.uk



24th June 2013

Dear Pupils

Section 48 Inspection St Alban's Catholic High School

Last week I was in the school with Mrs Hammersley and we greatly enjoyed our visit to your school. During the two days we were with you we talked to quite a lot of you. We appreciated how welcome you made us feel. You told us how happy you are at school and how proud you are of it. It is clear that your Headteacher and his staff have worked with you to improve your school and are making it a great place to be.

The focus for our visit was to look at your learning in Religious Education and the Catholic life of the school. Most of you make very good progress in RE. The exam results in RE are excellent and you told us that you have good relationships with your teachers which helps you to do so well. I have asked that they use comments in your books to point out to you how to do even better.

While we were at the school we attended your year 7 assembly and some tutor group morning assemblies. Some of you were participating, even singing. We saw that you want to be more involved in acts of worship and have great ideas of your own about how to get across the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. We have asked that Mr Kelly makes sure you get as many opportunities as you can to take part in the Catholic Life of the school. We particularly hope you enjoyed your St Alban's day celebrations.

Everywhere we went we saw you behaving well and there was a calm and purposeful atmosphere in your classrooms. You should be very proud of yourselves.

Yours Sincerely,
Mrs Susan Aldous
Section 48 Inspector