



Archdiocese of Birmingham

Canonical Inspection Report

THE ORATORY PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Great Oaks, Goring Heath, RG8 7SF

Inspection dates:

28-29 June 2022

Lead Inspector:

Andrew Maund

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS:

Good

Catholic Life:

Good

Religious Education:

Requires Improvement

Collective Worship:

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection:

Requires Improvement

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

This is a Good Catholic school because:

- All pupils and staff appreciate, contribute to and benefit significantly from the Catholic Life of the school, which has a generous, robust and caring ethos at its heart and reflects the school's motto, 'Heart speaks to heart'. The values of inclusivity, faith and community are fundamental to the school.
- The subject leader for Religious Education is fully committed to improving the provision and delivery of the subject and is both inspiring and tireless in her support of her colleagues. Considerable progress has been made since the last inspection, which is convincing evidence that the school is improving this area rapidly and securely towards Good.
- The reverent and engaged attitude of most pupils and staff towards prayer demonstrates its fundamental importance at the heart of the community.

It is not yet Outstanding because:

- Current provision in Religious Education does not amount to the required 10% of the taught curriculum time, and not all aspects of the required curriculum are taught thoroughly in every year group.
- Task setting in Religious Education often limits the opportunities of many pupils, particularly the ablest, to explore deeper thinking by writing at length.
- Teacher feedback in Religious Education books does not consistently invite a further response from pupils; most pupils do not routinely respond to the written feedback offered.

- Opportunities for pupils to instigate, plan or deliver Collective Worship lack coherence and rarely extend beyond traditional approaches.
- Opportunities for pupils to lead aspects of Catholic Life are limited.

FULL REPORT

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that 10% of taught curriculum time is allocated to Religious Education in all year groups and that the curriculum is taught thoroughly to all pupils.
- Challenge all pupils, particularly the most able, to develop and extend their ideas by writing at length in Religious Education.
- Offer consistently effective written feedback in Religious Education to which pupils respond in a meaningful way.
- Enable more pupils to instigate, plan and deliver prayer and liturgy in a coherent programme and a wide variety of appropriate ways.
- Provide further opportunities for pupils to lead aspects of the Catholic Life of the school.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the Catholic Life of the school	Good
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school	Good
The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school	Good
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school	Good

CL1 The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school

- Pupils understand the school's motto, 'Cor ad Cor Loquitur', although it is limited to 'being kind' by some. Their understanding of this is evident in their behaviour, appreciation of all aspects of the school, and vocation.
- Senior pupils explained the implications of the motto as the connection between people and the sense of community that this develops, citing that as a strength of the school.
- Conversations with pupils made it clear that the concept of vocation was understood, even though the word was unfamiliar to many. There is a fundamental understanding of and appreciation for the school's patron, St John Henry Newman.
- Pupils' behaviour is generally good; they demonstrate support for one another, respect for others and themselves and are usually courteous towards each other and adults. However, pupils frequently speak over each other and their teacher in class and occasionally push in front of adults through doorways.
- Pupils generally listen well and express appreciation for what the school offers. The school is remarkably inclusive with a wide range of backgrounds, and kindness abounds. One parent commented on how quickly her children felt part of the

school, despite having arrived from America only a week before the lockdown caused by the pandemic and the introduction of online teaching in 2020.

- Pupils act as anti-bullying ambassadors, a post for which they apply and are interviewed. In this role, they monitor pupils' concerns, either expressed verbally or placed in 'worry boxes' around the school. This system works very well indeed and is valued by pupils and staff. There are typically between fifteen and twenty such ambassadors; once appointed, they can hold this office throughout their time in the school if they wish.
- Pupils accept the responsibilities of living within a Catholic school community and, as a result, are involved in many activities which promote the Catholic Life of the school and the wider community. For example, fundraising for local, national, and international charities, including The Earth Trust, Sue Ryder and the Disasters and Emergencies Committee. There are also many examples in the past of pupils undertaking individual fundraising activities for charities, including in the last year Headway, the local Air Ambulance, CAFOD and Father Hudson's Society.
- There is a powerful sense among many pupils of respect for themselves and others as made in the image and likeness of God.
- Pupils take full advantage of the opportunities the school provides for their personal support and spiritual, moral, and ethical development, which can be seen in the warmth of the relationships between pupils and staff; this ethos is clearly lived out in all aspects of their daily life together. For example, the day before the inspection, all pupils from Year 3 to Year 8 had taken part in a 10km pilgrimage in the local area, pausing several times to reflect upon key questions. This was the second year this took place, and the pupils clearly appreciated it. As a result of such opportunities, pupils are delightfully engaging; they are open, honest, inclusive, articulate, thoughtful, kind, keen to accept challenges and have a genuine sense of growing closer to God through the community's life.
- Pupils value and respect the school's Catholic tradition and understand the need to recognise and address the needs of others less fortunate than themselves, particularly in the local community.

CL2 The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school

- The school motto clearly expresses the educational and pastoral ethos and mission of the Church.
- Staff are committed to its implementation across the curriculum and the broader life of the school. They enthusiastically participate in all activities that currently reflect the school's Catholic Life and mission. The recently formed apostolic group of committed staff has broadened the responsibility for developing the Catholic Life of the school and is highly appreciated by staff. This is evidence of its contribution to addressing areas for development identified by the last canonical inspection.
- There is also a clear recognition of the needs of others, which is addressed through such initiatives as supporting local, national and international charities. However, most of these charities are chosen by the school rather than the pupils, and the previous generosity in charitable giving is not as visibly celebrated around the school environment as it might be.
- The school is a prayerful community, with prayer forming part of class assemblies and reinforced by using prayers in lessons, before and after meals and at the end of the day, and a weekly boarders' evening prayer meeting. In the boarders' evening prayers, year group liturgy and some class registration times, prayer is heartfelt and central to the school's provision; however, in other class registration times, its inclusion is cursory and lacks conviction.

- Pupils and staff are exposed to a range of the traditional prayers of the Church, although there seems to be little progression from year to year; pupils have the opportunity to write their own prayers as part of class and boarders' liturgy.
- The school's external and internal environments reflect its mission and identity through obvious signs of the school's Catholic character; this is clear in traditional signs and symbols throughout the school. The delightful chapel is a place of quiet prayer and contemplation used by pupils in their free time and for class and year group liturgy, including Masses. 'Mary's garden' on the school grounds is also used for reflection and worship, most recently to honour Our Lady in her month of May.
- The school's founder and patron saint is a prominent presence through many statues and images throughout the school, including a fine statue on the drive into the grounds. The 'Newman Values' of gratitude, open-mindedness, honesty, compassion, responsibility, resilience, participation and courage are also prominently displayed around the school, with the logo of the Catholic School Pupil Profile visible, although pupils did not recognise the latter.
- Class prayer areas, while well maintained, might have a more prominent position in some classrooms, and not all classrooms have a fixed crucifix. Some prayer tables are excellent examples of good practice; photographs of these are shared electronically with staff on the shared area. Pupils have also made sets of class rosary beads for their prayer areas.
- There is external signage to proclaim the Catholic character of the school to the wider community, and the Catholic character and ethos of the school are obvious on the school website and in handbooks and policy documents; one example of this is that the school's mission statement and an expression of the school's Catholic identity are at the front of the Parent Handbooks.
- The behaviour policy refers to 'our Catholic values, with a heavy emphasis on respectful behaviour, as a consistent approach to managing poor conduct and consistent interventions that support staff and learners.'
- All staff members are generous, open and honest in their behaviour and attitude towards pupils, parents and visitors. They have a heartfelt affection for and appreciation of the school and all it stands for and are reflective and self-critical. As a result, the school has the highest standards of pastoral care for its pupils. This was particularly evident in the warm, family atmosphere in the boarding house and the extraordinary commitment and dedication of the boarding housemistress. A Y6 pupil, when asked to describe the school, did so as 'the perfect place for religion and kindness.'
- Many staff are involved in the Chaplaincy provision, which is highly effective in supporting and promoting the Catholic Life of the school; this can also be seen in the frequency with which the former priest chaplain, and now parish priest, visits the school.
- Pastoral programmes and relationships, sex, and health education (RSHE) are carefully planned, well taught and reflect Catholic teachings and principles; a commitment to Catholic social teaching is also evident in all aspects of the curriculum.

CL3 How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school

- The strength of the Catholic Life of the school is a testament to the commitment of the headmaster, senior leadership team and subject leader for Religious Education. The appointment by Bellevue Education (the governing body) of a school improvement governor demonstrates their clear and ambitious vision for the school and drive and commitment to achieve it. Her experience and generous but rigorous

approach to monitoring, evaluation and development is moving forward most effectively. This is evidence that the second and third recommendations of the previous canonical inspection are being addressed.

- School leaders clearly demonstrate a public commitment to the mission of the Church and are generally well regarded as models of Catholic leadership by both staff and pupils.
- The school has a variety of means of engaging with most parents and carers, particularly in the use of a weekly bulletin, which is greatly appreciated. As a result, parents and carers have a good understanding of the school's mission and are supportive of it, as evident in discussions with parents.
- The provision for the Catholic Life of the school is acknowledged as a leadership responsibility; there is clear evidence of monitoring and evaluation of the Catholic Life of the school by leaders and governors, which demonstrates that the school has addressed the first recommendation of the previous inspection in this regard, also placing it at the forefront of the school's development plan.
- This is to lead to improvements that clearly impact developing and maintaining the Catholic Life of the school.
- The apostolic group is considering effective succession planning regarding the school's Catholic Life, particularly as the current Headmaster is moving to another post at the end of this academic year, leaving only one Catholic senior leader.
- The school does not use the standard Catholic Education Service contract of employment, but the school's generic letter to offer employment includes a reference to supporting the Catholic ethos of the school as a condition of employment.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The quality of Religious Education	Requires Improvement
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education	Good
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education	Requires Improvement
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for Religious Education	Requires Improvement

RE1 How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

- Pupils are generally very engaged in their Religious Education classes. Many start school from a low baseline but most, from their varied starting points, make progress in each key stage and meet expectations.
- Most groups of pupils, particularly those with special educational needs, are also making progress comparable to the progress of other pupils.
- Pupils clearly understand and appreciate the broader implications of Religious Education teaching for their spiritual and moral development.
- Most pupils, relative to their age and capacity, are religiously literate and engaged young people; most show genuine interest in the subject and clearly enjoy opportunities to discuss and reflect spiritually, ethically, and theologically.
- In some lessons, teachers provide opportunities for reflection on the demands of religious commitment upon pupils' everyday lives.

- Pupils generally concentrate well and have a desire to improve. Pupils enjoy tackling challenging activities and respond well to opportunities which extend their learning, although such opportunities are limited. Consequently, behaviour in lessons is, in most cases, good, although there is a prevalence of low-level disruption and a lack of focus in some classes.
- As indicated by teacher assessment, pupil attainment is good and on a par with their achievement in other curriculum areas.
- The quality of pupils' class work is good; their written work is generally well presented and thorough, but they rarely respond in writing to the feedback offered to their work.
- Standards of presentation in written work are generally on a par in their literacy books.

RE2 The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education

- Teachers generally plan lessons linked to the pupils' current level of achievement, although there is very little differentiation by task except for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
- Tracking of skills within and across year groups is not consistent. As a result, while most pupils are engaged in their lessons and learn well, progress is not as rapid as it might be.
- There is not as much challenge for the most able as there might reasonably be. One example of this observed by inspectors was a 'cheat sheet' provided for all pupils, listing the names of the apostles in a Year 5 class when the teacher had asked them to write down the names of the apostles they could remember using a mnemonic.
- Teachers are reasonably confident in their subject knowledge. They feel very well supported by the subject leader, who has worked tirelessly to bring the curriculum into line with the requirements of the diocese and the curriculum directory. This is evidence that the fifth recommendation of the previous canonical inspection is being addressed. However, there were also clearly gaps in some teachers' subject knowledge, which are being subconsciously passed on to pupils.
- Teachers employ various appropriate teaching strategies, engaging most pupils throughout lessons.
- Good questioning was observed coming from teachers, but not all pupils were routinely included. On occasions, tasks were too open-ended, drastically limiting the learning. For example, some pupils who were asked to dramatise a Bible passage appeared to find the task too much of a challenge and responded with immature behaviour.
- Teachers only involve pupils in a limited way in evaluating how well they achieve; this inhibits good progress. While 'target walls' are included in the back of pupils' books to assess how well they are achieving, the inspectors found little evidence of these being used.
- Teachers offer some supportive verbal and written feedback, but this is not consistent, and there is little evidence of pupils responding to the written feedback. Some of the teachers' feedback reflects a literacy focus rather than one of Religious Education, thus limiting the capacity for progress provided to pupils.
- Some teachers' time management requires improvement to ensure good learning takes place. In most classes, the management of time was weighted heavily towards adult-led work and the pace of work was further slowed by less challenging activities because some teachers do not adapt tasks to meet the needs of the pupils in their class.

- A range of good quality resources is provided to improve pupils' learning. Achievement and effort are celebrated routinely, leading to good motivation levels.

RE3 How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for Religious Education

- Whilst leaders have worked to ensure that the subject will be allocated 10% of curriculum time from September 2022, it does not currently do so.
- The subject does have full parity with other core subjects in terms of professional development, resourcing, staffing, and accommodation.
- The subject leader for Religious Education and school improvement governor regularly monitor progress in Religious Education; however, the skills achieved, and progress year-on-year are not clearly tracked. As a result, evaluation and follow-up are not as rigorous or focused as they could be. Nevertheless, the school improvement governor has an excellent understanding of levels of attainment in the subject and its areas for development.
- The subject leader for Religious Education has also welcomed support from the Birmingham Diocesan Education Service on many occasions and in several ways. She has subsequently made many developments to the school's provision of Religious Education since her appointment.
- The subject leader for Religious Education has a clear and inspiring vision for teaching and learning and a very good level of expertise to enable this vision to be secured. She shows outstanding commitment to the development of her colleagues and their support in the classroom; this results in increased confidence in those colleagues.
- Leaders ensure that Religious Education is planned to meet pupils' general needs and secure reasonable coherence across the key stages and phases; however, closer monitoring of planning for the different needs of specific pupils is needed to promote more significant progress, particularly by the most able.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

The quality of Collective Worship	Good
How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship	Requires Improvement
The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school	Good
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship	Good

CW1 How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship

- Acts of Collective Worship generally engage pupils' interest and inspire a response while making the message relevant to their own lives.

- Most pupils act with reverence, and many are keen to participate in school Collective Worship. However, the atmosphere can be a little noisy and unfocused occasionally, and not all pupils participate readily or enthusiastically.
- Singing at the Year 3 to Year 8 Mass was generally joyful, and there was a sense of quiet reverence during the distribution, although not from all pupils.
- Pupils have the opportunity to prepare and lead acts of worship, but these are not always linked to the Church's liturgical year, seasons and feasts.
- The experience of living and working in a faithful, praying community positively impacts the spiritual and moral development of all pupils, irrespective of their ability or faith background. The impact of this is seen in the way pupils participate enthusiastically in boarding house prayers and liturgy and their inclusive attitude to one another.

CW2 The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

- Collective Worship is central to the life of the school, and prayer is included in all school celebrations. Praying together is part of the daily experience for all.
- Adult-led Collective Worship has a clear purpose, message, and direction, with reference to the Church's liturgical seasons and the Catholic character.
- However, not all class-based worship includes basic features, such as referring to the prayer area, lighting a candle, using music, or making the Sign of the Cross, resulting in a lack of consistency and a lack of designation between registration time and prayer time.
- In some class and year group worship, prayer is punctuated with discussion work and question-answer sessions, meaning that the atmosphere is not conducive to a spiritual raising of the heart and mind to God.
- The planning of Collective Worship is given high priority, as is its resourcing and monitoring by school leaders. This results in an experience for pupils and staff that is almost always engaging and referred to positively by all community members.
- Relevant staff have a good understanding of the Church's liturgical year and are enthusiastic about ensuring pupils have high-quality experiences of the Church's liturgical life. Feast Days of the Church and Solemnities appear on the school calendar as a focus. There is also a Staff Mass at the beginning of the year.
- Opportunities are provided to facilitate attendance by other adults associated with the pupils and school, such as Carol Services, Masses for Ash Wednesday and Corpus Christi, a First Communion Mass, a Good Shepherd Mass in Oxford and an End of Year Mass, as well as for boarders to attend Sunday Mass in the local parish. However, boarders also enjoy Sunday Masses offered in the school chapel.

CW3 How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship

- Leaders clearly know how to plan and deliver quality Collective Worship, having an excellent understanding of the Church's liturgical year. The subject leader for Religious Education provides a helpful weekly prayer sheet for class teachers, which is much appreciated, particularly by non-Catholic staff.
- Collective Worship is always accessible to the pupils in a traditional context.
- Leaders and governors regularly monitor and evaluate Collective Worship as part of their self-evaluation process.
- All additional requirements of the diocesan Bishop regarding Collective Worship are fully implemented.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Unique reference number	123286
Local authority	Oxfordshire
<i>This inspection was carried out under Canon 806 of Canon Law.</i>	
Type of school	Preparatory
School category	Independent
Age range	2-13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	353
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Wade
Headteacher	Robert Stewart
Telephone number	01189 844511
Website address	www.oratoryprep.co.uk
Email address	office@oratoryprepco.uk
Date of previous inspection	March 2019

INFORMATION ABOUT THIS SCHOOL

- The school is of average size for schools of its type. It has links with the local parishes of Our Lady and St John, Goring-upon-Thames.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils is currently 20%.
- The percentage of disadvantaged pupils is significantly below the national average.
- The school has 16% SEND pupils.
- The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic origins is below the national average.
- The percentage of pupils with EAL is below the national average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

- Two diocesan inspectors carried out the inspection: Andrew Maund and Ben McArdle.
- The focus of the inspection was on the impact, quality, and leadership of the school's provision of Catholic Life, Religious Education and Collective Worship.
- The inspectors observed teaching in nine Religious Education lessons from Reception to Y8 to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The inspectors completed work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils to evaluate their understanding of Catholic Life, the impact of Religious Education teaching on their learning over time and their experience of Collective Worship.
- Meetings were held with the School Improvement Governor, Pat Clayfield; the Parish Priest, Fr Kenneth McNab, who is also formerly the school priest chaplain; the Headmaster; the Religious Education Subject Leader; the Apostolic Group, who are a group of staff working to develop the Catholic Life of the school; the Boarding Housemistress; the Head of Junior Prep (Reception to Y4); two parents and a mixed group of Catholic and non-Catholic members of staff.
- The inspectors attended four acts of class Collective Worship, a school Mass on the Feast Day of SS Peter and Paul, and Year Group Liturgy delivered by pupils from Years 3 and 4. They undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of the

presentation of the Catholic Life of the school in the school environment and pupils' behaviour.

- The inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, data about pupils' attainment and progress, school performance data, the school development plan, the Religious Education action plan, governors' minutes and records of the monitoring and evaluation of Religious Education, Collective Worship and Catholic Life.