



## **INSPECTION REPORT**

St Bernadette's Catholic Secondary School  
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DfE Number: 109331

Headteacher: Basia McLaughlin  
Chair of Governors: Catherine Nicholls

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Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Clifton  
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Date of inspection: 11-12<sup>th</sup> May 2016  
Date of previous inspection: November 2011

Reporting Inspector: Mr J Skivington  
Additional Inspector: Mr Frank Toner

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## Description of School

St Bernadette's is a smaller than average sized Catholic comprehensive school within the Diocese of Clifton, serving the Catholic community of South Bristol. There are currently 738 students on roll, of whom 48% are baptised Catholics. The reduced numbers of Catholic students is the result of the withdrawal of free transport. Students come from mixed and often challenging socio-economic backgrounds. Currently 28% of the school population are part of Pupil Premium. The percentage of students with EAL and from ethnic minority groups has increased in recent years, as has the number of students with a statement of special educational needs. The school is oversubscribed with very little fluctuation in student numbers.

### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Requires improvement in order to be good; Grade 4: Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

Grade 1

This is an outstanding school because:

- There are very effective formal structures, and rigorous processes to monitor and evaluate the quality of Catholic life and RE. These are highly successful and reflect the importance leadership and governance place on the constant promotion and nurturing of the school's Catholic life. A clear vision and high expectations have been very successfully communicated to the whole school community, and this has led to outstanding provision and outcomes.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding, as is their proactive involvement in the Catholic life of the school. They can discuss critically the quality of their learning with impressive insight. As a result of this feedback leadership are able the more effectively to reshape and plan continuous improvements.
- The school is highly regarded by parents, who feel the school listens to their views and acts upon them. It has a strong Catholic inclusive ethos which is open and welcoming to all regardless of faith background, and ensures that all students understand other belief systems and cultures in today's Britain.
- The quality of teaching in RE is consistently good, with much that is outstanding, resulting in outstanding progress in learning and achievement over time.

## The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

- The areas for development highlighted at the last diocesan inspection have been systematically addressed. There is now an increased student involvement in the planning, development and delivery of the school's prayer life, in tandem with an increasingly effective chaplaincy team. There is also now greater consistency of practice in the teaching, differentiated learning, and assessment of progress in RE, as well as continuous evaluation and reshaping of the syllabus at both key stages. The governing body is fully involved in every aspect of Catholic life and RE, keeping a watchful and

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challenging brief on the impact of its own, and the school leadership's, monitoring and evaluation procedures. Staff morale and commitment is very high, and the school leadership has the full support of parents and students. The school has proven and reliable capacity to sustain its outstanding quality of provision and outcomes.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Provide even further opportunities for all students to take ownership of the planning and presentation of their own liturgies and assemblies, so that they become involved animators in the prayer life of the school.
- Promote more extended, reflective writing on wider aspects of religious topics, and to improve further the substance and depth of their written responses to their teachers' challenging and formative comments.

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## How good are outcomes for students, taking account of variations between different groups?

Grade 1

All students benefit enormously from the vibrant Catholic life of the school and make a significant contribution towards its ethos of the school, not only by their excellent behaviour and care for each other, but also by their growing involvement in planning, presenting, and evaluating their prayer life. They can articulate the distinctive nature of the school and interpret its values and mission through, for example, the Excellence Wheel with its five areas of student relationship, namely Self, Other, Faith, Learning and Future, prominently displayed around the school. In a wonderfully stimulating Catholic environment, with inspirational displays, students have many opportunities to reflect on and discuss their learning and the theology behind it. As a result, students are used to thinking about their faith and are very confident in expressing their voice and opinions through verbal feedback and questionnaires. Their participation in evaluating the Catholic life of the school is key, because it enables leadership to assess more reliably the quality of its provision, and this in turn feeds into future planning and reshaped objectives. Students also take the initiative in fundraising events supporting local and global charity organisations especially through their proactive CAFOD group and the current Corporal Works of Mercy. There is a real sense of belonging – to the school, to the parish, to the wider Church and the global community, but also personal involvement. The developing chaplaincy team is playing a vital role in encouraging more students to become effective animators and role models for their peers.

Students' attainment and achievement in Religious Education are outstanding. By the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is above average with 92% at level 6c, and 73% make at least 3 levels of progress. Year 7 make particularly strong progress. Pupil Premium achievement is likewise strong with 63% making 3 levels of progress.

At Key Stage 4 GCSE results in 2015 showed 75% of students achieved grades A\* - C, which is above the national average, with 27% A\*-A. The gender gap has closed and 78% boys achieved grades A\*-C compared to 72% girls. Pupil Premium students gained 67% and SEN students 60% A\*-C. Progress is above average with 73% making 3 levels of progress, SEN 100%, and Pupil Premium students 67%. Higher achievers made over 4 levels of progress, again above the national average. RE ranks among the top performing subjects in the school and predicted grades for 2016 examinations indicates a continuing rising trend in attainment and achievement. Teachers are clearly committed to bringing about improvement across all outcomes for students. Students' behaviour for learning is outstanding and they show a genuine interest and enjoyment in the subject. They are able to discuss and reflect on their learning and are well schooled in expressing opinion and adducing reasons for opposing standpoints. They would benefit from the opportunity on occasion to write more freely and reflectively on the impact and relevance of their learning. The school through its self review has picked up this need and can demonstrate some very impressive extended, reflective writing in Year 7.

More students actively participate in assemblies, liturgies and tutor time prayer. There is a drive to raise this involvement by developing further the skills of planning and presenting their own liturgies. They participate willingly, for instance in serving or reading at Mass, or monitoring collective worship, and more are growing in confidence to play a leading part. This is not lost on others: students themselves in conversation remarked on the greater impact of collective

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worship when it is fronted by their peers. The weekly voluntary Mass in the school chapel is well attended by a wide range of students. The invitation to participate is inclusive- all are invited to take part regardless of faith background - and they do. They are increasingly taking up the challenge of planning and evaluating prayer and liturgy themselves, and could be encouraged more to use their initiative. The school is aware of this and has made it an objective in the school development plan.

## **How effective are leaders and governors in developing the Catholic Life of the school?**

### **Grade 1**

Governors and leaders work very successfully together to ensure that the promotion of the school's Catholic life is at the centre of its strategic direction. This is immediately evident to any visitor to the school and is the result of constant review and improvement. The whole school community is enveloped in a stimulating, very Catholic environment, which adorns the building in order to educate and challenge everyone to reflect on their Faith and how they can live it out in their daily lives. Provision for staff induction and INSET which further develops an understanding and commitment to the Church's mission in education, is strong. New teachers to the school are very well supported. Links with the diocese are effective and all Bishop's Conference requirements fulfilled. The chaplaincy is making a real impact on the prayer life of the whole school community, and despite the long term absence of the newly appointed lay chaplain, its effectiveness is assured thanks to the excellent inspiring leadership of the school chaplain and the interim lay chaplain.

Self-evaluation of the school's Catholic life is of a high order, robust, challenging individuals to be objective and ambitious about what can be developed, as well as being clear and concise about achievements. Inset days primarily reflect on how the school can better nurture and promote the Catholic identity of the school and RE. The Catholic life audit involves all staff and subjects. Middle leaders are developing into excellent animators in promoting the school's Catholic ethos. Typicality reviews are held regularly to test, for instance the compliance, quality and impact of the tutor time collective worship. The Year of Mercy has been successfully planned together with the students themselves, and has a high current profile. Even the use of Twitter is harnessed to reach out and evangelise the wider community. The head teacher's vision is successfully and very effectively communicated to all levels of the school community with outstandingly effective outcomes. Regular feedback surveys ensure that the views of students and parents inform future planning. Links with parents are especially strong. The school is highly regarded by parents, who consider it to be excellent in its provision and Catholic ethos.

Governors ensure close oversight of Catholic life and Religious Education through a very effective hands-on involvement in school life through committees. There are frequent paired visit recorded on pro formas so that governors can keep themselves fully briefed and up to date. There is a clear record of their analysis of reviews and reports and what feedback was given in terms of questioning, challenge and action to be taken. They have undertaken an internal review of their own structure and effectiveness, and are keen to understand and become active participants in current Catholic education issues and diocesan deliberations. Together with the diocese and the head teacher they are a knowledgeable and critical group who hold the school to account through processes, which are rigorous, robust and reliable.

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## How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Grade 1

Teaching is consistently good over time with much that is outstanding, and leads to outstanding progress across both key stages. Teachers are knowledgeable and have a strong rapport with the students. Outstanding leadership of the subject ensures appropriate support, resources and training, through lesson observations, learning trails and work scrutinies. Learning is outstanding because teachers teach for meaning, and as a result, students not only have a secure factual knowledge, but a deepening understanding of the theology behind what they are learning and its relevance to their own lives. The feedback from students on what helps them to learn better enables teachers to adapt their teaching strategies to more precisely meet their students' learning needs.

Assessment processes are secure and reliable, and result in improved learning over time, because individual students and groups are identified and teaching is more accurately tailored to their learning needs. Vital to this process is the constant check for accuracy especially in referencing levels of attainment. The marking of students' work is well embedded and effective, providing them with clear, formative comments. Its effectiveness and fruitfulness, however, depends equally on the quality and depth of the students' response and the time and care they take.

The Religious Education curriculum meets all Bishops' Conference requirements and is responsive to diocesan guidelines. It is constantly reviewed and updated, or re-shaped as in the recent introduction of the new Edexcel GCSE syllabus. The curriculum is broad and balanced, with a rich provision for students' spiritual, moral and vocational development. This is reviewed on a faculty level and an audit of SMSCV has been completed. Provision is strong and all faculty areas own and contribute to this aspect of school life. Staff are aware of the Catholic perspective and bring these into discussions. Students are able to reflect on the faith story of other religions. Annual visits to a local synagogue, gurdwara, mosque and protestant churches are arranged for Year 8. Positive feedback from students has shown that the Sex and Relationships programme has helped them to make connections between faith and life, and to understand why the Church hold these teachings. There are numerous opportunities in the curriculum for students to participate in the prayer life of the school, including Masses, whole school liturgies, assemblies, chaplaincy, and retreats, which the students enjoy and appreciate.

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## Summary of Parental Questionnaires

There were 108 parental questionnaires returned. All were positive in their views of the school, highlighting a strong sense of inclusion, Catholic ethos, inspiring leadership, respected in the local community, praise for the inspiring head teacher, caring staff and strong moral Christian values. Some typical responses to the question 'Why did you choose this school' included:

'The core values and community spirit of the school enhances the children's experience'

'The way the school includes all abilities and encourages the children to aim high and supports them in ...excellent pastoral care'

'The ability to meet the needs of all my children who as individuals possess different skills, attributes and ability, as well as interests. All were motivated to succeed and give of their talent'

'Although a Catholic school, the diversity of faiths is apparent. Seeing my child in an environment with different faiths and cultures is a good experience for a balanced, accepting and understanding future'