

The Palmer Catholic Academy

URN: 137088

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Brentwood

27–28 November 2024

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

Catholic life and mission (p.3)

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission

1

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

1

Collective worship (p.7)

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

1

The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference

Yes

The school is fully compliant with any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop

Yes

The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection

Fully

1

Compliance statement

- The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' conference.
- The school is fully compliant with the additional requirements of the diocesan bishop.
- All areas for improvement outlined in the previous diocesan inspection have been addressed in full.

What the school does well

- Leaders are tenacious and driven to ensure every child is supported to reach their full potential.
- The wide variety of student leadership within the school creates an atmosphere where the Catholic faith is lived out with joy and reverence.
- The progress made by all groups of students at GCSE religious education is most impressive.
- Staff provide the highest levels of pastoral care and support, and there is an explicit and concrete commitment to the most vulnerable.
- The religious education department is well led with a clear vision and the expertise to secure that vision.

What the school needs to improve

- Enable students to articulate the principles of Catholic social teaching underpinning the wide range of charitable activities which exist within the academy.
- Empower more students to formally evaluate their prayer and liturgy presentations.
- Introduce a range of ways of praying across the school including prayer requests and silent reflection.

Catholic life and mission

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

Catholic life and mission key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

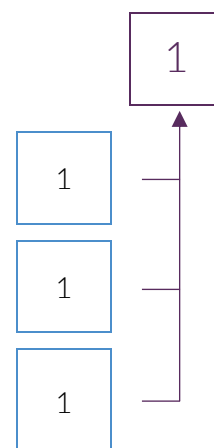
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school



The Palmer Catholic Academy mission 'to the glory of God and the service of all' is truly lived out and embraced by students and staff. Students are happy and safe, knowing they are loved and cared for as unique individuals. The charism of the school is greatly influenced by its founder, Canon Patrick Palmer. His presence is not only observed in framed photographs, relics and personal artefacts but is also felt in the kindness, politeness and generosity of students all around the school. The link has been further enhanced by a donation to the school from his great-niece of a haunting portrait of St Maximilian Kolbe with Auschwitz in the background. Her painting is now prominently displayed in Kolbe house. The school intends to review the choice of house saints when the planned rebuild of the school begins. A more diverse selection of saints will strengthen the inclusivity of the school. In conjunction with the chaplaincy, students raise awareness and fundraise for a variety of charities including Cafod, the Brentwood Catholic Children's Society, Christmas hampers for local food banks and parishes, Shelter, Crisis, Telco and Haven House Hospice. Students are good at applying Catholic social teaching. The school needs to further develop understanding so that students are aware of the principles behind their charitable actions. They highly value the chaplaincy provision and are very proud to represent the school in leadership roles from Year 7 through to Year 13.

The staff are exemplary role models in their relationships with each other and the love and care they show for students. The example is set at the top and the headteacher provides authentic Catholic leadership which filters down through the school. A member of staff said, "The academy practices what it teaches. I am proud to be a part of it". The school's positive approach to behaviour management means that they are aware of the needs of every student and innovative approaches ensure that no one is left behind. The school has taken some outstanding steps to

make sure everyone is able to attend school, including travel support for families who have had to move out of the area for accommodation. Pastoral care is outstanding. This was reinforced by a parent who commented, "The school is amazing at supporting my child educationally and emotionally. The pastoral support is ... carried out with God's love at the centre". The embedded culture of welcome in the academy means that the school celebrates the presence of those from various cultures and belief traditions. The school provides a venue for Muslim students to fulfil Friday prayers as well as a special prayer room. A parent said, "My child is able to carry out his Muslim faith without any issues and I am happy about that". The school uses the Ten:Ten programme for RSE lessons and students spoke enthusiastically about drop-down days that were also provided.

Parents commented on how their children's faith journey had been supported by the school community. One parent said, "Students are able to develop academically, spiritually and morally. The school provides a very good Catholic education for my children". The school puts into practise the Church's preferential option for the poor by ensuring that resources are used effectively to support those in greatest need. Leaders are committed to supporting staff new to the school. Staff commented on the induction they received to enable them to participate in, and contribute to, the Catholic life of the school. One stated, "Students and staff are provided with opportunities to reflect on what practices can be improved as well as providing regular training to all staff on the importance of our ethos and to enhance the Catholic life of the school". Leaders and governors have a dynamic relationship with the diocese. They are enthusiastic in their response to diocesan initiatives while also putting themselves at the service of the diocese in a variety of ways.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

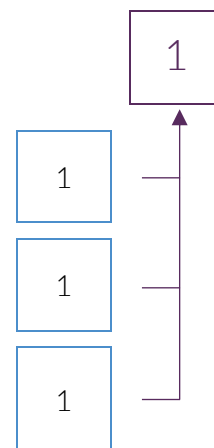
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for religious education



Students at the Palmer Catholic Academy are developing excellent knowledge, understanding and skills. As a result, consistently good progress by knowing more, remembering more and doing more, when measured against the planned curriculum, is made by students each year. Fully focused in all lessons observed, students repeatedly spoke about how they enjoyed religious education. A parent commented, "Religious education has always been enjoyable for my child as the lessons have been delivered in a fun and effective way". Such is the enjoyment of learning in religious education that students have set up their own debating club where they tackle the ethical and philosophical issues of our times. Attainment in religious education surpasses other core subjects at Key Stage 4 and all groups of students make significant progress. The department consistently gains the highest number of grade 9s across the school. At Key Stage 5 A level results are weaker and this is a focus for the department going forward. Students are able to use key terms effectively, demonstrating strong religious literacy. In an outstanding Year 10 lesson students took on various roles including a teacher's aid, lesson outcome monitor, class judges and oracy monitors. In an excellent A level lesson on Free Will students were able to relate the learning to everyday experiences and build on prior learning.

Teachers demonstrated very strong subject knowledge and used it to good effect to support learning. A wide range of activities were observed in lessons and in books including extended writing tasks, mind maps, paired discussions and memory tasks. Good individual feedback is given and students' responses are often quite detailed. All religious education lessons are taught in mixed-ability classes. This has led to high quality resources that are challenging, engaging and suited to students' abilities. Teachers make good use of data, and progress is tracked by the use of termly assessments. They are wholly committed to the value of religious education and are aware of the impact their lessons have on the moral and spiritual development of students. As one parent said, "We are so thrilled to have found a school for our son that encourages moral and spiritual growth. He has been challenged, comforted and cared for in a way that highlights Christian values and human kindness". Teachers use questioning skilfully to elicit articulate

responses and students are able to ask pertinent questions of their own. Students appreciate the acknowledgement and praise the department awards them for outstanding effort and achievement. Staff firmly believe progress and increased aspirations stem from the affirmation of students' work.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that the school is effectively using the new *Religious Education Directory*. The support of the Good Shepherd Catholic Trust has been invaluable as the academy remained open while extensive strengthening works were carried out over the last two years. This has meant that face-to-face lessons could continue and as a result learning in religious education was not disrupted. The department works closely with the special needs team and consequently produces excellent differentiated materials to support students in lessons. Religious education has parity with other core subjects in terms of resourcing, professional development, and accommodation. Professional development is a priority and a strength in the department with frequent opportunities to participate in high level quality training aimed at improving subject knowledge. The subject leader sets the example for the rest of the department with inspirational teaching and excellent relationships with her students. She expects and gains the highest standards from students and they in turn have the utmost respect for her.

Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

1

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship

1

1

The school engages students deeply and leads them to full participation in the prayer life of the academy. Students are respectful and attentive when prayers are said during form time, religious assemblies and at the start of every lesson across the school. An observed assembly made links between Catholic social teaching and the Christmas hamper appeal. The theme of forgiveness was also explored through the Parable of the Prodigal Son and the opportunity for students to avail of the Sacrament of Reconciliation when the local clergy visit during Advent. However, there was a lot of information delivered, and perhaps the use of images with short bullet points would have made the presentation more impactful. The variety of prayer and liturgy on offer includes weekly Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, voluntary Mass every Friday morning, the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Advent and Lent, and a special commissioning service to acknowledge and celebrate the work of the student chaplaincy team. Students spoke of their pride and joy at belonging to the many ministries including lectors, altar servers, liturgy prefects, chapel prefects, choir and sixth form leadership team. The sixth form leadership team have delivered and evaluated their prayer and liturgy presentations. The self-evaluation process now needs to cascade down to the younger students' presentations so that they too can identify what went well and what can be improved.

The school has a carefully planned calendar for prayer and liturgy. The school year starts with a welcome Mass for new parents and at key points in the year the school comes together to both celebrate joy and express grief in moments of sorrow. A parent stated, "My son enjoys going to church with all his year group. He feels strengthened and refreshed after every Mass". Every lesson and every staff meeting begins with a prayer. In fact, an interview with sixth formers began with a student requesting to start the meeting with a prayer of her choice. Staff are role models for students in their respectful presence and active participation in prayer and liturgy.

They are fully committed to the school's prayer life and the school has provided a great deal of support for teachers to help them to pray with students. A parent pointed out, "The teachers take seriously their role in moulding my child to be a good Christian and a good student". There is a flourishing partnership with the two local parishes and the feeder primary schools connected to the Good Shepherd Catholic Trust. This was highlighted by a parish priest who pointed out that his church had over 40 altar servers, the majority of whom attended Palmer Catholic Academy. The recently formed school choir has been growing from strength to strength and makes valuable contributions to school Masses and other services. The role of the chaplain is greatly appreciated by staff and students within the school. Her input has led to clear improvements and appropriate development in liturgical formation.

Key staff have a clear understanding of how to prepare prayer and liturgy. Masses are celebrated on holy days of obligation and the Sacrament of Reconciliation is available at appropriate times during the year. Staff value the professional development provided by the school and are confident leading collective worship including those who are not Catholic. For many staff it provides them with an opportunity to reflect and deepen their own faith. One commented, "Working at this school has helped me to build a relationship with God and understand the importance of spirituality, even in education". Leaders and governors ensure each year group receives a retreat, either internally or externally at venues such as Tyburn Convent, Abbotswick, Aylesford and Westminster Cathedral. The trips are part-subsidised by the academy to enable all students the opportunity to attend. There is also an annual staff retreat which is funded by the governors. Each year the school acknowledges the life of the founder by visiting the grave of Canon Palmer at St Patrick's cemetery in Leyton. Leaders, including governors, are respectful of those of other faiths and none. This was confirmed in the staff survey with 100% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, "The school has a strong culture of welcome to those who do not belong to the Catholic faith".

Information about the school

Full name of school	The Palmer Catholic Academy
School unique reference number (URN)	137088
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	3174800
Full postal address of the school	The Palmer Catholic Academy, Aldborough Road South, Seven Kings, Ilford, IG3 8EU
School phone number	002085903808
Headteacher	Paul Downey
Chair of local governing body	Marian Leslie-Povoas
School Website	www.tpc.academy
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	The Good Shepherd Catholic Trust
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	May 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	2

The inspection team

Dermot O'Neill	Lead
Josephine Erokwu	Team
Angela Podmore	Team

Key to grade judgements

Grade	England	Wales
1	Outstanding	Excellent
2	Good	Good
3	Requires improvement	Adequate and requires improvement
4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and in need of urgent improvement