

Catholic Diocese of Northampton

Interim Monitoring Visit

23 January 2019

St Paul's Catholic School, Milton Keynes (URN 110517)

The school has made excellent progress since the last Section 48 inspection in March 2014 during which time Jo-Anne Hoarty has taken over the headship from Michael Manley, building on his legacy and adding fresh impetus to the school's progression. Her warmth and encouragement of staff and pupils set a very positive tone in the school. Progress has been most evident in two areas: raising academic standards and in reaffirming the school's mission: St Paul's School is most definitely Christ-centred and is an active embodiment of its mission statement "Love, Serve, Do the Best that is Possible". Stretching all pupils including the most able is a key feature – evidence for its success had come in during the week that four students had received Oxbridge offers. The two suggestions for improvement from the last inspection "Continue to use assessment for learning initiatives to raise attainment" and "Further develop literacy techniques in the religious education classroom" have been comprehensively addressed. The school continues to be enriched by its outstanding School Centred Initial Teacher Training Provision. With the removal of free transport for faith schools, more children are admitted from its immediate environs, which includes areas of social deprivation. As a result, there has been a steep increase in the proportion of pupils for whom English is a second language (now 50%) and a decline in the proportion of Catholics (54%), although this trend is now being reversed through an effective outreach programme to Catholic primary schools. Turnover of staff is low reflecting the staff's love of the school and the quality of its leadership. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is very good.

The school's self-evaluation of RE and Catholic life is thorough and professional, reflecting a deep commitment to the mission of the Church and the development of its students, especially those in most need. The curriculum and co-curriculum are well planned, giving the students opportunities to develop their talents and for their faith to blossom. Reinforcement of "Gifts We Grow" qualities in the pupil profile was observed in Year 7 RE classes. There are excellent optional opportunities to further personal and spiritual growth. The school has a clear identity as a Christ-centred school. Leadership is strong and governors support the school in a proactive way. Developing its Catholic mission is the first of three key aims in the School Development Plan, which is a detailed and effective document driving progress. Such is the evident forward momentum, I have no hesitation in endorsing the school's self-assessment of Outstanding in all categories.

The school has a thriving Chaplaincy with eight full time Chaplaincy/Pastoral Assistants who perform a key role in the life of the school. Such an allocation of the school's resources speaks volumes for the priority of Catholic life in this community and the commitment of its leadership. Prayer is central to the life of the school. There is a focus on what will be meaningful and helpful to the children. Poster displays give inspiration for reflection as pupils and staff move around the school. A culture of care and service pervades the school, especially for the vulnerable. The school is outward-looking, striving to support those in need in the local community and beyond. This is not only evident in fund-raising, which is impressive; there is an emphasis on "Faith in Action" with students actively supporting projects e.g. with CAFOD – they are outstanding role models for younger children. St Paul's School provides leadership and is a hub for events and activities in the diocese.

The staff have engaged with Teaching to the Top pedagogy and this is raising standards across the school. The RE department has embraced this and is in the vanguard of the initiative. Year 11 students across all abilities were observed wrestling with Theodicy – how can evil and a loving and all-powerful God both exist? As a result of the initiative, achievement in GCSE RS is high with RS gaining the highest number achieving Grade 9 (10), Grade 8 (18) and Grade 7 (28) with pleasing value-added overall (+0.18). After a consistently high uptake of A level RS over the years, numbers had dipped recently owing to the change from four to three A level subjects in Year 12; they are now rising significantly. Results are strong. There are exciting modules in the Sixth Form General RE programme which enthuse the students. Children with particular needs are taught in smaller groups where they are taught with sensitivity and encouragement.

Areas for further improvement:

- Continue to develop creative ways of supporting children in their learning, especially harnessing support from parents, e.g. webinars and podcasts, so that parents can access them at a time which suits their work schedules.
- With appropriate support, use students to speak to audiences in parishes and primary schools in the school's outreach programme.
- Within prayer time, create more opportunities for silent reflection.

John Shinkwin on behalf of the Diocese of Northampton.