



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD



Inspection Report

Name of School: The Palmer Catholic Academy

Unique Reference Number: 137088

Inspection Date: 12 November 2012

**Reporting Inspectors: Dr Michael Sutherland-Harper
and Mr Derek Kelly**

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

**Type of School: Academy Converter
School Category: Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils: 11 - 18
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 1257
Appropriate Authority: The governing body
Date of previous inspection:**

**School Address: Aldborough Road South
Ilford, London, IG3 8EU
Tel. No. 020 8590 3808
Fax No. 020 8597 5119
Chair of Governors: Rev. Martin O'Connor
Headteacher: Mr Frank Maguire**

Introduction:

The Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education (Schools) Act 2005 by two inspectors appointed by the Diocesan Bishop at the request of the Governing Body of the School.

The Inspectors acknowledge and are appreciative of the full support, co-operation and courtesy they enjoyed from the Governors, Headteacher, Staff and Students of the School both before and during the Inspection. The Inspectors wish to express their gratitude to all concerned.

The focus of the Section 48 Inspection was:

- Classroom Religious Education
- The Catholic nature of the Academy through:
 1. Worship
 2. Links with the Catholic and wider community
- Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development

**The Section 48 Report
The Palmer Catholic Academy
Aldborough Road South
Ilford, London, IG3 8EU.**

Head Teacher: Mr Frank Maguire

Date of Inspection: 12 November 2012

Description of the School:

The Palmer Catholic Academy is a larger than the average-sized voluntary-aided Catholic academy situated in Ilford in the London borough of Redbridge and in the diocese of Brentwood. The academy draws its pupils from 12 Catholic parishes and some 48 feeder primary schools.

Record of Evidence Base:

Two Diocesan Inspectors were in the academy for the equivalent of two inspection days.

- The study of pre-inspection documentation including the Self-Evaluation Form/ Denominational Provision (SEF/DP).
- The observation of eight lessons.
- Participation in an assembly.
- Scrutiny of students' written work.
- Meetings with the Headteacher, senior staff, the Head of Religious Education (R.E.), pastoral staff, the Chair of Governors and another governor and the School Council.
- Observations of R.E. displays in the classrooms and around the academy.

What the School does well:

The Palmer Catholic Academy is an outstanding Catholic school which strives, in the words of its visionary headteacher and in reflection of the academy motto, 'to create a harmonious and caring ethos, embracing the cultural diversity of our school community and to do everything to the glory of God and service of all'. The calm sense of purpose, centred on care for the individual and each other, is apparent from the moment visitors enter the academy and observe its purposeful atmosphere. The academy's work is closely focused on Gospel values but also respects the rich cultural diversity which students bring to the academy as they work together effectively with each other and with staff.

The curriculum has been carefully planned to ensure the highest possible quality continues in the outstanding provision of the Catholic education on offer, for example, by having smaller numbers in each class at Key Stage 3 when students first enter the academy. Students have excellent opportunities to participate in a growing range of activities related to their faith, such as retreats for all years, an annual Lourdes pilgrimage recently initiated with the support of the chair of governors and training for liturgy leaders also linked to the current Year of Faith. Academy managers at all levels are offered training on Catholic leadership programmes. There are close links with other Catholic schools to ensure that transitions into and out of the academy are seamless. The high quality education on offer is exemplified by rising attainment in Religious Education. The well-qualified, experienced department has a high and increasing profile in the academy due to its successful record of results.

Steps to promote improvement since the last diocesan inspection are outstanding. The position of Religious Education at the centre of the academy has been strengthened by its excellent promotion of equality for all. The inclusive nature of the academy community has led to a seamless mix of the many cultures and different faiths which enrich learning at the Palmer Catholic Academy. It is mirrored in current Sixth Form development, with interesting Reflection Days and increased entry to top universities in this country as students become more aspirational and determined to reach the top grades. The academy is looking now at ways to develop an innovative programme of General Religious Education for students in the Sixth Form to stimulate a healthy dialogue with their Catholic faith. Opportunities for students to take an increased role in leading such improvements are growing.

Strong leadership and support from the headteacher, who is passionately committed to development of the learning community and works closely with all managers and governors, has ensured that heads of department have clear plans for the development of their subject, as is the case in Religious Education. Experienced and knowledgeable governors, well led by the perceptive chair of governors, know the academy community well and contribute many and varied skills as they challenge it to move forward. Strong pastoral support systems include effective support by a chaplain, senior learning mentor and a counsellor from the Brentwood Catholic Children's Society. These systems are also reinforced by strong links with the diocese, with whom the academy is working to ensure seamless succession planning and development of young leaders with a clear understanding of the principles of Catholic education. Parents and carers are kept abreast of all that is going on by colourful newsletters and therefore have chances to contribute to progress. Success is celebrated and the growing confidence it brings about means that the academy has an outstanding capacity to make further improvements.

Provision for prayer, worship and the liturgical life are good and improving. Crucifixes in all classrooms provide a focal point for prayer which occurs during the day in form groups and in all Religious Education classes and includes prayers for the present Year of Faith. The chapel is well-maintained, well-used and supplemented by attractive prayer corners in some classrooms. Mass is held regularly on Friday in the chapel and in the local church with special assemblies to highlight the liturgical year. All other faith groups feel at ease and comfortable in the academy because of the respect in which students hold each other. The academy is now looking at ways to facilitate student planning and leadership of liturgical celebrations, including through music provided, to supplement the good work done by liturgy leaders.

The academy provides the expected religious education curriculum, using the Icons programme, recommended by the Bishop of the diocese, and examination board syllabi. The academy meets both the national and diocesan requirements for the allocation of curriculum time for taught Religious Education. Visual resources and information and communication technology are used increasingly well to ensure that students are engaged by learning. Booster lessons are given to reinforce skills where appropriate. Opportunities for students to take the lead in lessons are increasing as student confidence grows.

Achievement is good and rising. Good behaviour is the norm in all lessons and around the academy. Lessons are conducted with good pace and challenge and therefore result in improving exam success rates in Religious Education at GCSE and A levels. Staff are looking at ways to ensure that increasing numbers of students reach the very highest grades consistently, that lessons are seldom teacher dominated and that all students can reinforce their written and spoken work by providing opinions and clear reasons for those answers.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Students are carefully tracked and monitored to avoid any underachievement and are expected to take an increasing lead in reporting back about what they have learned. Students are engaged in lessons because they respect each other and adults, work well together and want to succeed. The academy sees a rising profile for students in lessons as one way to turn all teaching from good to outstanding.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. In addition to the strong focus on matters spiritual, the academy seeks to develop student imaginations and a sense of the wonder of the world around us. Students have a clear sense of right and wrong and benefit from a rich and vibrant cultural mix in the academy founded on a bedrock of mutual respect.

What needs to be improved?

- **Increase opportunities for students to take a lead in lessons. Challenge them to indicate why they have chosen their answers and how they have reached their conclusions, which would facilitate access to the very highest grades.**
- **Develop the roles all students can play in planning and leading liturgical and other events in the academy to reinforce their strong work as ambassadors for their academy.**

The Inspectors endorse the areas identified by the academy for improvement in the Section 48 Self-Evaluation Form.

The Palmer Catholic Academy is an outstanding Catholic school. Results are improving as part of its 'can do' culture. The Catholic ethos is central to the life of the academy and carefully developed by an experienced and caring staff team, reinforced by the best in current practice.