



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Inspection Report

Name of School: **The Palmer Catholic Academy**

LEA: **Redbridge**

Inspection Date: **2nd May 2018**

Reporting Inspectors: **Damian G Fox (Lead Inspector)**
Derek Kelly (Associate Inspector)

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

Type of School: **Secondary**
School Category: **Academy Converter**
Age range of pupils: **11 - 18**
Gender of pupils: **Mixed**
Number on roll: **1120**
Appropriate Authority: **The Governing Body**
Date of previous inspection: **November 2012**

School Address:
Aldborough Road South
Ilford
Essex
IG3 8EU

Tel. No. 020 8590 3808
Headteacher: Mrs A. Moise-Dixon
Chair of Governors: Mrs M. Leslie-Povoas

Information about the school

The Palmer Catholic Academy is a mixed Catholic school in the London Borough of Redbridge in the Diocese of Brentwood. The Academy serves the Catholic Deanery of Redbridge and mainly serves the Catholic Parishes of SS Peter and Paul, Ilford and St Cedd, Goodmayes. There are currently 1120 students aged 11-18. 53% of them are Catholic. 13% are from other Christian faiths. 34% are from other faith backgrounds. Students come from at least 55 Catholic primary schools.

Levels of attainment on entry are below the national average. The majority of students, 92%, are from Black and Asian ethnic backgrounds. Currently, 10% of students are on the Special Needs Register, in line with the national average. This includes 9 students with a statement or EHC plan. There are 49% of students for whom English is not the first language. 27% of students are eligible for free school meals which is above average.

There are 68 full time equivalent teachers of whom 41% are Catholic. Ten teachers hold the CCRS and six have other Catholic qualifications in Theology and Catholic Leadership. There are seven teachers of Religious Education.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires Improvement 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic School

Grade 2

The Palmer Catholic Academy is a good school with many outstanding features. Leaders, governors and managers have a deep commitment to the Church's mission in education and to the service of the students. The community proudly lives by the example of the founder, Canon Palmer, "to do all things to the glory of God and the service of all". The Chair said, "our purpose is our young people".

Governors are supportive of and are regular visitors to the Academy. They are fully informed of its strengths and work effectively with the Headteacher and staff. The Headteacher is an excellent role model, who has a clear vision for the Academy and works with governors and senior leaders to develop the strong foundations the school has for sustained growth. In the Academy's rapid improvement over recent years, leaders and governors have not lost sight of the steps that need to be taken to ensure that the Catholic life of the school remains at the heart of their work.

Students are excellent ambassadors for the impact of Catholic Education on the lives of young people. They respond willingly to the mission of service to others. Students are safe and happy at the Academy. They are proud of their achievements and of belonging to The Palmer Catholic Academy. Pastoral care is a significant strength, students appreciate the care teachers have in dealing with their concerns. Bullying is rare. When incidents do occur, they are effectively addressed. Teachers were praised for their support in and outside of the classroom. The Academy is totally inclusive of students with different strengths and challenges and offers unstinting support to their families.

There is a strong Catholic identity evident in the Chapel, religious displays in the classrooms and around the Academy. Parish-school links are strong. The Academy is fortunate to have the services of several priests who are happy to serve its staff, students and families and underlined the excellent spiritual ethos which pervades all.

What the school should do to improve further

Governors should continue to strengthen their monitoring and support of the Academy to ensure an effective transition to its new leadership.

Leaders and managers ensure that the new structure in the Religious Education Department is supported so that new initiatives are fully embedded, monitored and evaluated regularly.

Extend the leadership of Sixth Form students to encompass Chaplaincy provision throughout the Academy.

Outcomes for students

Grade 2

There has been an upward trend in outcomes in GCSE Religious Studies over the last three years from 61% to 67%. Targets for this year indicate further progress. The Academy's data highlights two specific areas for development, the gap between the achievement of boys and girls and, the gap between students with free school meals and non-free school meals. The progress made at both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 is showing improvement. Achievement of A-level students is significantly above national average. Sixth Form students said that they were well prepared for their GCSE exams last year. Teachers had high expectations with expected and aspirational grades and targets set.

The AS and A2 uptake numbers are low but the increase this year reflects the ambition of the department and Academy leadership.

Inspectors noted the enjoyment of the students during Religious Education lessons. There was a good level of engagement in learning. Behaviour was very good overall. In several lessons, students were enthusiastic and willing to contribute their ideas. They were able to articulate this in discussions with Inspectors. The philosophical debates and interactive learning helped them learn more quickly. The quality of the written work in the students' books was generally of a very high standard and clearly shows that the whole Academy focus on improving outcomes is bearing fruit. Students are proud of their work and are keen to learn.

Students benefit greatly from the many opportunities to contribute to the Catholic Life of The Palmer Catholic Academy. They know they are part of a community that lives by Gospel values. The Academy is committed to the common good. The students' sense of belonging to the Academy community is real, profound and life enhancing. Students said that there is a "genuine Christian ethos". Their relationships, including those from different backgrounds, are very strong. Relationships across the community reflect the great mutual respect people have for each other. The 'Friendship Ambassadors' is a student run body that supports the community, it is effective and has Academy wide support. One of their initiatives has resulted in refurbished benches, providing a lasting legacy of the impact of their efforts.

Students understand that the Catholic life of the Academy is about living out the Gospel with Jesus at its heart. They value Catholic traditions and clearly understand that they are all called to serve and seek justice for those less fortunate. Charitable fundraising is an integral aspect of Academy life. This is evident through the time and effort the students put into their charitable endeavours, specifically CAFOD, St Mungo's, Christmas Hampers and other charities close to their hearts. For example, Year 11 have recently looked to fundraise for Down's Syndrome. Students have also taken part in collaborations with other local Catholic schools in which they either fundraise or are part of a wider Catholic community.

The Academy is fortunate to have a beautiful Chapel that is regularly used for group and individual prayer. The stained glass windows were presented by a former pupil and parent. The prayer garden is being renovated as a prayerful and reflective space. SS Peter and Paul's Church have created a Prayer garden to which the Sixth Form students have contributed artwork. The Academy makes an annual pilgrimage to the grave of its founder, Canon Patrick Palmer. They also have an Irish themed lunch to celebrate.

Students actively live the core values within and outside the Academy. They are regular ambassadors at events, including World Youth Day, Flame Congress and have attended Pilgrimages abroad.

An established and well used 'Brentwood Catholic Children's Society' counsellor helps to support students as part of early identification of vulnerable students as well as in response to a time of need. The Academy also offers parenting support groups for those with anxious children.

Students display a spiritual reverence and a dignified respect in Collective Worship at all levels and on all occasions. They participate actively in both year and main school assemblies and every lesson begins with the Academy prayer. The Chaplaincy team is made up of students of all ages and they confirm they are

becoming more involved in preparing liturgies throughout the year. Sixth Form students said that their profile had been raised as good role models. An area for development is the increase in liturgy leaders in each Form and giving the Chaplaincy team greater responsibility for preparing and leading acts of Collective Worship.

Students are confident in asking for support with special Masses for individuals in the Academy community who suffer serious illness or a bereavement. They are welcome to offer their own intentions and are at ease when at prayer.

Student participation in retreats, class Form and whole Academy Masses and liturgies is reverent, respectful and engaged.

The Inspector joined a Year 11 class that held a prayer service in the Chapel, led by the students on the theme of 'Creation and Stewardship'. All students participated respectfully and prayerfully in this spiritual event which incorporated time for private reflection.

Academy priests confirmed that students were actively involved in liturgies as readers, servers and musicians. They added, "prayer and worship is reverent and a strength of the school".

Leaders and managers

Grade 2

Leadership throughout the Academy is good. Leaders, governors and managers demonstrate a strong commitment to the Church's mission. Governors understand their role in monitoring and developing the Catholic life of the Academy and, are passionate about maintaining and strengthening its spiritual ethos in order to ensure the school continues to be inclusive of everybody. One governor said that families are "front and centre of everything we do". The Headteacher demonstrates this with her personal faith, the spiritual growth of the whole community is central to her work. She leads staff induction days on the distinctive nature of a Catholic school. The Director of Spirituality is very experienced and brings his own deep faith to his work. The Catholic Life of the Academy and the opportunities for prayer and worship are excellent.

The Academy has been on a journey over recent years but the vision for its Catholic life has not been lost. It is a praying and worshipping school. There are appointed governors for Religious Education and Spirituality who have begun to visit regularly to monitor and evaluate the work of the Academy leaders. The inaugural staff retreat held at Our Lady of Lourdes, Wanstead, will become an annual event.

The Chaplaincy continues to be an integral part of the Academy, providing weekly prayers and reflections and working closely with the student Chaplaincy group. It provides many opportunities for prayer and for giving pastoral support to the younger students. Senior leaders and the Head of Department work closely with the Chaplain to develop the Catholic life of the Academy. Staff INSET days begin with Collective Worship and Liturgy, with many members of staff taking an active role.

Leaders, governors and managers are fully committed to improving standards in Religious Education. The school's self-evaluation was honest and realistic. Leaders are aware of the Academy's current level of progress and attainment and, understands its next necessary steps to ensure continued sustained improvement. Inspectors noted the impressive progress made over the last three years. The link governor is visiting lessons more regularly. The new leadership and departmental structure is already having an impact on the overall grades 9-4 targets for this year.

Three newly appointed teachers of Religious Education have joined the two established members of the teaching staff. The department has a new Head of Department. She is a knowledgeable and passionate leader who is developing a cohesive and effective team of teachers. There are strong foundations and the Academy has detailed plans to ensure rapid improvement in the future. Capacity for improvement has grown significantly since September 2017. Inspectors are confident that there is good capacity to sustain the growth in outcomes in the teaching and learning of Religious Education.

New schemes of work are in place and having an impact in all key stages. GCSE targets this year should show a marked improvement on previous years.

There is more intervention to support students who are in danger of underachieving, with extra booster classes having been introduced this academic year.

Assessment procedures based on the new Edexcel syllabus are developing as the new course specification is rolled out. Teacher feedback and target setting informs students and enables them to reach the next level. The Religious Education department adheres to the academy marking policy of assessment and feedback.

Provision

Grade 2

Overall, the quality of teaching is good with some examples of outstanding practice. Lessons that were at least good were characterised by teachers' excellent subject knowledge and by using a variety of styles that engaged students throughout the lesson. There were well planned tasks at a lively pace with examples of good questioning. Year 11 revision lessons were effective in focussing on higher mark questions. Students demonstrated a good understanding of what was required to achieve higher grades and felt well prepared. Key Stage 3 lessons engaged students by linking Scripture to real life. For example, the importance of the Holy Spirit was explained by discussing Confirmation and the qualities needed for daily life. Consequently, concentration was sustained and progress was made. However, there were examples where higher ability students would have benefitted from more challenging tasks. Students clearly enjoy Religious Education and behaviour was excellent.

Recruitment of new staff this year has significantly improved the capacity for continued improvement in the quality of teaching. The Religious Education Leader provides an outstanding example in giving support and is committed to challenging all students.

Challenging the higher ability students appropriately is a priority for the Academy. For example, in Year 9 classes, the GCSE exam framework has been used so that students can complete fully, the higher mark questions. Standardisation is achieved at Key Stage 4 by all assessments being moderated by someone other than their class teacher. The impact of this is excellent sharing of good pedagogical practice and a guarantee that all students' experiences are equal and independent of individual teachers.

The assessment and tracking of student progress is now more rigorous and robust. Additional training and collaborative work with the Director of Religious Education and a sister Catholic school is leading to consistency and accuracy in tracking and monitoring progress. The Academy acknowledges that developing consistently accurate assessments will help teachers give more focussed support and challenge as appropriate.

Key Stage 5 follows a new specification and is currently taught by two members of staff. Schemes of work and resources are being developed and improved upon as the course runs for the first time. Tracking of Key Stage 5 students shows learners are predicted to make their expected grades.

All classes receive at least the full allocation of the 10% of curriculum time for Religious Education. The school ensures the curriculum covers the programmes of study set out in the Directory. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is currently being redeveloped to follow 'People of God'. In Key Stage 4 the department teaches Edexcel - Catholic Christianity (50%), Judaism (25%) and Ethics and Philosophy (25%). Teachers ensure that lessons are both informative for the exam but also challenging beyond it, to enable the students to apply their beliefs in practice in modern moral situations.

The chosen programme at AS and A2 level is currently 'Eduqas'. Students study Philosophy of Religion and, Religion and Ethics, with Christianity as the chosen religion. Each year, students have additional resources via access to emails from teachers regarding the resources for next lessons, as well as revision material and access to at least six other textbooks to supplement the course requirements. The school has introduced a new programme of 'drop-down days' for General Religious Education that serve as reflective days of study and prayer. Students are given opportunities to discuss moral issues in the context of Church teaching but which they face daily.

The impact of the curriculum in its wider sense is excellent. Throughout the Academy the many displays reflect the deep commitment of the school to its Catholic identity and students' learning. These include examples of students' work and relevant exam material such as GCSE and A-level key words. The curriculum is enriched by the many opportunities for charity work throughout the year such as for CAFOD and Haven House for terminally ill children.

Collective Worship is a great strength of the Academy. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) on different types of prayer was given by the Chaplain to all staff in January 2018 to further enhance prayer across the Academy. Each day and each lesson begin in prayer which includes the Academy prayer that is known by all staff and students. The Chapel is the Spiritual centre of the Academy. It is a beautiful place and is used daily for small group and individual prayer. Mass is celebrated weekly on Friday. Each Form class has the opportunity to attend these Masses throughout the year. School Masses are also celebrated on Holy Days of Obligation, Easter and the Founder's day. Year 11 and Year 13 celebrate a leavers' Mass.

Retreats form the core of the Catholic life for the students. This rich and vibrant provision offers students opportunities for sustained spiritual experiences that enable reflection on the importance of Christ in their lives. Year 7 have a residential retreat at Walsingham House which, is well attended and a time for students to bond. Year 8 visit Aylesford Priory. Years 9-13 have in-house retreats led by the Lay Chaplain. Additional leadership residential courses are offered to Key Stage 4 students.

Morning assemblies and Form times are led by Liturgy leaders and Pastoral staff with daily prayers, which are linked to the liturgical calendar. Every year group has a weekly assembly, with Forms taking turn to lead these, inspectors observed an excellent Year 9 assembly which, was linked to 'The Beatitudes', portraying courage in choosing to do the right thing. Heads of Year share Chapel time with a Form class each morning, to provide a more intimate form of Collective Worship in addition to assemblies.

The inspectors wish to record their gratitude to the Headteacher, staff and students for their gracious welcome and hospitality.