



4th April 2014

Diocesan Education Service,
Don Bosco House,
Coventry Road,
Coleshill,
B46 3EA

Ms R Maguire,
St Joseph's Catholic College,
London Road,
Stoke-on-Trent,
Staffordshire,
ST4 5NT

Dear Ms Maguire,

Section 48 Monitoring inspection: Wednesday 2nd April 2014

Thank you for the very warm welcome which you, your staff and students gave to the Assistant Inspector, Miss Louisa Craig, and to me, when we inspected your college on 2nd April. We are grateful too for the extensive range of information and analysis which you provided both in advance of the inspection and during the day, and for the time given by staff, the priest chaplain, pupils, and by governors.

The inspection was a "light touch" monitoring inspection because your college was judged at the last section 5 inspection to be an outstanding college and because it is now five years or more since there was a section 48 inspection at your college.

The purpose of the inspection was to assess the quality of the college's self-evaluation and improvement planning for religious education and Catholic life. In order to make this judgement, we read college documents, including a comprehensive self-evaluation, interviewed senior leaders, chaplains, governors and pupils, observed parts of five lessons, attended two tutor group morning assemblies and examined a sample of pupils' written work. In addition, we gathered evidence of the outstanding practice of the college in terms of its outreach locally and internationally.

As a consequence of your own evaluations, you judge your college to be outstanding both in the quality of RE and of Catholic life. We are pleased to endorse this judgement which is wholly accurate and securely based on effective evaluative processes.

The evaluation of RE is accurate because it follows a clear and thorough process. Although there are exceptionally high levels of attainment, there is no spirit of complacency. End of year evaluation is combined with meticulous analysis of the summer examination results at the start of the next year. The department's work and impact are analysed against national criteria, leading to detailed departmental improvement planning. There is a pervading will to prioritise so as to gain a clear focus for progression and this year aspects of attainment are key issues, especially identified areas in GCSE and AS level. Tracking of progress of each pupil against ambitious targets ensures that there is constant monitoring and that support can be given where appropriate. The judgement that this focus has so far been successful is accurate. Current levels of achievement indicate that the aspirational targets are being met and assessment is accurate. Departmental improvement planning is regularly reviewed with senior leaders enabling a whole-college perspective to be generated within the motto of 'aspire for more'.

The college's judgement that the quality of teaching is outstanding is also wholly accurate. It is based on scrupulous monitoring. The passion, expertise, determination and commitment of RE staff explain why pupils make excellent progress and enjoy RE so much. Pupils are overwhelmingly positive in their evaluation of RE lessons and the opportunities which the subject provides for mature discussion of spiritual and ethical issues. They praise the skilful ways in which varied tasks are planned so that they understand how their learning is progressing towards targets. The department's focus on study skills, including familiarity with the Bible, the development of self-confidence and reasoned argument is clearly bearing much fruit. Pupils are able to apply ethical principles to current topical issues and to articulate the teachings of the Catholic Church. The college rightly views the excellent attitudes to learning and outstanding behaviour as evidence of high quality teaching.

College self evaluation states that the department needs to develop more consistency in marking in Key Stages 3 and 4, indicated also in the diocesan review of 2013. We found examples of excellent practice



with target setting and effective written dialogue between teacher and pupil, but some inconsistency is evident. In the Sixth Form marking is rightly seen to be high quality with the use of detailed feedback sheets for essays. Pupils are given ample information about mark schemes and criteria for levels, so that they are able to assess their own work. They know their 'working at' grade and how to improve. Staff absence and a year without a permanent head of department have brought about some difficulties for the RE teachers who have worked hard to compensate especially with examination classes. Close evaluation of the curriculum has led to a change in the GCSE syllabus, but emphasis on the roots of the Christian faith have been maintained through the choice of Judaism as a focus for Year 11. There is a clear recognition of the need to monitor and evaluate this innovation.

The college's judgement of its Catholic life is that it is outstanding. Catholic life is clearly the very heartbeat of the college. Its paramount concern is with performance in relation to its aims as a Christian community in the Catholic tradition and as a Christian Brothers' Foundation. The core values have been developed into a concise document to which all involved in the college, including governors, parents and pupils have contributed. They are based, as is overall improvement planning, on the Eight Essentials of Edmund Rice Education. Extensive documentation indicates detailed monitoring and evaluation, and constant careful planning for improvement, though this is not yet available as a comprehensive overview. Pupils state that they richly benefit from opportunities from the huge range of exciting and ambitious projects, and from the worship, retreats, visits and charitable activities. The college leadership sees Catholic life resolutely as a whole-college issue so that all who work at the college have a Catholic life performance target, enabling them to be drawn into activities. Leadership is relentless in ensuring that the ethos is paramount. There are countless displays with high quality photographs and pupils' work evidencing this. Whilst RE is clearly an inspirational and fundamental part of the Catholic life, the aims of the college are carefully reviewed across the curriculum and all aspects of pastoral provision.

Collective worship is closely monitored and the drive for improvement is well supported. Planning for the weekly form Mass enables pupils to work together with the lay chaplain to prepare the liturgy, and pupils speak with enthusiasm about the opportunities for them to contribute and use their talents, in particular at the whole college Mass for St Joseph's Day. Evaluation by the chaplain enables refinement of arrangements and improvements through the Chaplaincy Committee, and additionally through the newly formed Strategic Chaplaincy Group which includes senior leaders and governors. Its impact in developing comprehensive planning of provision for Catholic life is scheduled to be evaluated at the end of the year.

The spiritual and moral development of pupils and their awareness of vocation are monitored in detail through questionnaires about the impact of provision, and through the ability of pupils to express their views verbally. An extensive and generous outreach programme grows out of evaluation. The recognition of the need to develop closer links to parish communities has resulted in invitations to local parish priests to lunch in college with their pupil parishioners. Many activities provided by the college are regarded by pupils as life-changing, for example the annual visit and contribution to community work in Sierra Leone which enables pupils to see their own opportunities in a global perspective and to develop a sense of service in their chosen careers. The college therefore maintains the high profile of this venture, along with other events, such as the 'Encounter' retreat, organised by and for pupils in the Sixth Form. The Sixth Form community work reaches out to many local institutions, such as hospitals and the hospice. Being at the forefront of education development the college supports other schools and many education projects, including teacher training in Africa as part of the visit to Sierra Leone. Parental involvement and feedback is firmly secured, and the pupils make a strong contribution to evaluation and planning through the School Council.

In order to continue this excellent work, the following targets are appropriate:

1. Ensure consistency in marking in KS3 and KS4
2. Develop documentation to bring together the wide-ranging evaluation of Catholic life
3. Establish strategies for the rapid integration of the new head of department

Yours sincerely

Janet Mellor
Diocesan Inspector