

Diocese of Arundel & Brighton

SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT

Report on the inspection of denominational education
under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Notre Dame Preparatory School
Burwood House
Convent Lane
Cobham
KT11 1HA

Chair of Governors	Mr Glen Travers
Headteacher	Mr David Plummer
Inspectors	Mrs Maureen Hughes Rev Dr W John Dickson SDB

Inspection date	12 June 2008
-----------------	--------------

Introduction

Description of the school

Notre Dame is an independent Catholic preparatory school for girls. It was founded by St Jeanne de Lestonnac and is strengthened by the relationship with this international order. The senior school shares the site. The Sisters represent the Trustees on the Board of Governors and are charged with maintaining the Charism of St Jeanne. The school is situated in the Weybridge Deanery of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. It serves the parish of Sacred Heart, Cobham and twelve other parishes. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 35%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to religious education is 10% in Key Stage 1 and 10% in Key Stage 2.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 350. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly average. Around 9% of the pupils receive extra support in class, though none have statutory Statements of Special Need. Forty two nationalities are represented in the school. Around a third of pupils are of White British heritage while the remainder are from overseas, primarily Korea, South America and South Africa. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is above average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

Notre Dame is outstanding in its effectiveness as a Catholic school. Challenged by the secularism of modern society, it aims to develop the whole spiritual person in an atmosphere of trust, acceptance and justice. Church, school and home work together to make this a vibrant community in which a real appreciation of individual worth is fostered. One pupil said "We know this is a Catholic school because we all care for each other and we're happy. We live like Jesus wants". Relationships are outstanding. Pupils of all nationalities and faiths thrive in response to the excellent care, guidance and support they receive. A strong commitment to prayer and spirituality underpins the curriculum and pupils are encouraged to appreciate their place in the world. Their spiritual, moral and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils benefit from consistently good teaching of religious education, and as a result they contribute to lessons with real enthusiasm and become confident learners. They achieve standards that are above national expectations. A key to the school's success is the very strong leadership and management, with outstanding direction from the headteacher.

Evaluation of provision and its impact on pupils' progress is accurate and senior managers have correctly identified assessment in religious education and the development of the chaplaincy team as priorities. Such an effective self evaluation and the commitment of all the stakeholders places Notre Dame in a strong position to build on its strengths and secure yet further improvement.

Grade 1

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

- Complete the review of the Chaplaincy Team to ensure further development of the liturgical and spiritual life of the school.
- Develop systems for formally assessing and levelling pupils' work so that individual progress can be tracked and attainment at all levels enhanced.

The Catholic life of the school

Leadership and management

Outstanding leadership and management at all levels underpin the school's distinctive Catholic identity, which is nourished by an ethos based on the spiritual patrimony of St Jeanne de Lestonnac. The governors, headteacher and senior staff all share a common view of the school's mission to promote a caring, inclusive Catholic community. They demonstrate this by working together to encourage excellence in all aspects of the school's life within a philosophy of developing the whole spiritual person. The headteacher provides inspirational leadership to a highly effective and cohesive senior management team. Their impact is apparent in the exemplary guidance and support provided for pupils in their academic and personal endeavours. The Trustees have clear oversight of the school and have successfully honoured its Catholic mission. With the Governing Body, they are committed to implementing strategies which nourish the educational pedagogy of the Foundress. Through the Lestonnac Committee, they are proactive in monitoring the Catholic life of the school and are aware of its strengths and priorities for development. Upholding the dignity of the individual is at the core of all the school does. Relationships are excellent and pupils are encouraged to see God in each other. They recognise the impact of their actions on the wider community and are kind, courteous and friendly. Their behaviour is exemplary. They benefit from outstanding systems of pastoral care. The Sisters, school nurse and all staff know the girls well and provide excellent care based on individual need. In response, the girls trust adults in the school; one said "Teachers are really kind and helpful, especially when you're in trouble. They will always help you". Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Whatever their own faith or nationality, they feel embraced by the school community, particularly in moments of difficulty. They appreciate the opportunity to participate in the school's spiritual life through prayer and discussion groups and acknowledge the strong systems of communication through weekly newsletters.

The work of the Chaplaincy Team has strongly enhanced the care and support of pupils and their families and is currently under review to ensure it continues to meet their needs. Through the work of the Sisters, strong links have been established with the local parish. The parish priest is a regular and welcome visitor to the school.

Grade 1

Quality of provision for personal and collective worship

The school has a tangible Catholic life in its welcoming and prayerful atmosphere. One parent wrote "The Catholic ethos of the school permeates all aspects of its life, from the daily prayers, liturgies and Masses to the way children are encouraged to behave with Christian principles". All staff model the development of a personal prayer life which matches individual faith. Pupils are encouraged to grow in their understanding of prayer in its many forms and many feel confident engaging in reflective and spontaneous prayer. The older pupils are offered opportunities to do this in the chapel during break times. They are given a prayer book on entry to the school and quickly learn the traditional prayers of the Church. The good practice observed, of weaving prayer into the plenary session of religious education lessons, should be extended so that the girls can make a connection between what they have learnt and their personal aspirations. Although there is no systematic programme for collective worship, assemblies generally reflect current concerns and interests, while following the liturgical year and communicating the Lestonnac values. In both assemblies observed, links were made between Gospel values and the pupils' own lives. The Infants were asked to consider the care of others through an enthralling rendition of the story of Moses, while the Juniors were encouraged to develop their spiritual essence and "Hold out a hand to help others". The quality of the music and the enthusiastic response of the pupils, together with a strong element of praise for success in all areas of school life, turned both occasions into very joyful celebrations. The parish priest celebrates Mass in the chapel at the beginning and end of every term and believes this makes a significant impact on the spiritual life of the community. The quality of the preparation for these Masses and for the many liturgies reflects the importance the school places on the Eucharist. The whole curriculum nurtures pupils' spiritual and moral development by offering many opportunities that inspire a sense of wonder in God's creation. Their response, particularly through art and music, is outstanding.

Grade 2

Community Cohesion

The Governing Body is committed to community cohesion and ensures that policies and practice within the school reflect this pledge to serve the common good. Pupils come from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and all are welcome in this very inclusive school. The leadership team clearly relates this inclusiveness to their understanding of St Jeannne's spirituality. The strength of this spirituality enables pupils of other faiths to share their own insights and deepen their personal beliefs.

Pupils for whom English is an additional language are very well integrated into every aspect of school life and their presence enriches this racially harmonious community. Diversity of all kinds is celebrated. Pupils pray together easily and share their personal thoughts and aspirations. They understand that people have different beliefs and that these are to be respected. During a lesson on being a "Good Christian", pupils of other faiths were invited to be a "Good Person" through the story of the Good Samaritan. Visits to such places as the Weybridge Synagogue aid this appreciation of difference. The school has very strong links with the wider community, both local and global. It works alongside other Company of Mary Our Lady groups internationally, giving pupils a broad view of their place in the world. The girls are involved in many sports and music tours, and by their considerate behaviour promote the mission of the school. They appreciate that many are less fortunate than they are and support a range of local groups, such as the hospice and the old peoples' homes. The school shares its beautiful grounds and facilities with the parish and the Deanery Confirmation candidates.

Grade 1

Religious education

Achievement and standards

Attainment on entry to school is varied. Many pupils are above average in their abilities, while some have language and communication difficulties due to being at the early stages of learning English. All feel welcome, settle quickly and flourish in this caring, Christian environment. By the end of Key Stage 1, they reach standards in religious education that often exceed national expectations. Good progress continues throughout Key Stage 2 so that by Prep 6, pupils achieve above average levels of attainment. This is clearly reflected in their written work, which is well presented, carefully marked and shows a range of recording skills. According to teacher assessment, attainment in religious education broadly matches that in other curriculum areas, particularly literacy. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are outstanding and they are able to engage in higher order discussions, thinking ethically as well as spiritually and theologically. They reach good levels of religious literacy. Their knowledge of the life of Jesus and of Catholic religious practice is of a very high standard. They are able to empathise with others and know how the Gospel message impacts on their own lives. Even the Reception pupils know that "We are all part of God's family and everyone is welcome in the church".

Grade 2

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Teaching is consistently good. Lessons are typically lively and full of pace and challenge, so that pupils are motivated to learn. Teachers display a secure knowledge and understanding of the religious education programme and have coherent expectations of outcomes. They plan their lessons well, and share clear learning objectives with their pupils.

They create warm, supportive relationships, often revealing their own thoughts and experiences to promote an excellent climate for learning. Pupils say they enjoy religious education lessons because “teachers make them fun”. Sensitive questioning allows pupils to extend their thinking and encourages them to seek further information. A good range of teaching strategies is employed so that they are continually engaged. “Talk partners”, drama and role play are used to reinforce the learning, and “Freeze framing” was seen being used to good effect as the pupils related the story of the Good Samaritan. Care is taken to match the activities to the abilities of the pupils, though the more able would benefit from opportunities to use higher level skills and to evaluate their own learning. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution because they understand how to address the particular needs of those experiencing difficulties. Informal assessment is developing well and teachers use a range of strategies to ascertain individual attainment. The senior management team has correctly identified the need to develop a more formal system of assessment, so that individual pupil progress can be tracked and under-achievement at all levels can be addressed. This should identify and extend the more able pupils.

Grade 2

The religious education curriculum

The school has developed a rich curriculum, based on “The Way, the Truth and the Life” programme and underpinned by the Charism of St Jeanne. It builds on the experience of home and ensures relevance for the pupils, no matter what their individual faith or belief. It relates to the school community and takes account of cultural diversity, ensuring that all pupils have equal access. Very good planning enables teachers to build progression into the programme so that pupils can consolidate and build on their learning. Around 10% of taught curriculum time is devoted to religious education but it also extends into all the school does throughout the day, making it a living experience. The curriculum is further enriched by the many visits and visitors to the school. Both strongly support community cohesion by encouraging an understanding of diversity and difference. Staff and pupils gain enormous benefit from the pilgrimages and foreign trips with the quite outstanding choirs. The many after-school activities also enhance provision, by offering pupils opportunities to develop their individual talents and to be fully engaged in the life of the school. The programme for personal, health and social education promotes pupils’ well-being. It contributes to their spiritual and moral development by encouraging them to recognise the rights and responsibilities of the individual and the whole community. It prepares them well to deal with the sensitive issues of life. Pupils respond well to the curriculum. They say “No-one is bored. There’s so much to do!”

Grade 1

Leadership and management

The governors, Sisters, headteacher and senior managers provide clear direction for religious education and ensure it has a high profile in the school.

This is evidenced by its inclusion in the School Development Plan, where “To stretch out a hand to serve in a way that is always new” is identified as an on-going priority. The curriculum committee, and particularly the co-ordinator, keep religious education under constant review and are committed to raising standards and developing personal spirituality. The co-ordinator ensures policy matches practice, by actively monitoring the quality of teaching and learning through lesson observations and book scrutinies. Her constructive feedback has a positive impact on teachers’ practice and ensures their continuous development. She is in an ideal position to know what is required to raise levels of attainment in religious education and is working with the teachers on a system of assessment and moderation of pupils’ work. It is evident that a strong team of people shares responsibility and works cohesively on the wider aspects of religious education. At the moment, the composition of the Chaplaincy Team is under review, to ensure it continues to meet the needs of this vibrant community. The management of religious education is dynamic, innovative and a strength of the school. All staff are very well supported in their teaching. They regularly undergo “Lestonnac training” to keep the mission of the school in the forefront of their work. They happily embrace the Catholic ethos of this lively, inclusive school.

Grade 1