



Diocese of Westminster

INSPECTION REPORT

St Philip's School

6 Wetherby Place, London SW7 4NE
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DCSF Number: 207/6104

Headmaster: Mr Harry Biggs-Davison
Chair of Governors: Mr John McIntosh OBE

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Archbishop of Westminster

Date of inspection: 4th December 2007
Date of previous inspection: none

Reporting Inspector: Mr A F Clark

Description of School

St Philip's is a small independent Catholic Preparatory school educating boys from the ages of 7 to 13. It prepares the boys for the Common Entrance exams to Public schools, especially Harrow, Ampleforth, St Benedicts and Worth. It was founded by Mr Tibbits in 1934 who was invited to set up a boys' preparatory school in the area by the Fathers of the London Oratory as there was a need for such a school. It has had only one headmaster, Mr Atkinson, between Mr Tibbits the first headmaster who died in 1967 and Mr Harry Biggs-Davison the present headmaster, an old boy of the school and in post since 1990. It is owned and managed by the St Philip's Trust, whose object is firstly to promote the Catholic religion and secondly to educate pupils in pursuance of the first object. The Chairman of Governors is Mr John McIntosh OBE. There are currently 106 boys on roll, 85% of whom are Catholic. There is a staff of 10 fulltime and 7 part time, 65% of whom are Catholic. Three staff teachers have degrees in theology or other Catholic studies. The school has close links with the Oratory Church in the Brompton Road.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

St Philips gives its pupils an excellent rounded Catholic education which prepares them well for the schools they go on to. It shows and lives the vision and charism of St Philip Neri and the Oratorian Fathers. Its liturgical and prayer life develop habits and attitudes which give a remarkable maturity and articulate confidence to the boys in their faith. The headmaster, who is outstanding, leads the school in an inspirational manner. He is committed both to maintain the received traditions of the school and to respond to the needs of the pupils in the twenty-first century. Through its close links with the London Oratory and, in particular, because of the school's Schola which sings regularly there, the liturgical and spiritual life of the Catholic Church is shared effectively with the pupils. The Religious Education teaching is well structured and ensures the pupils know their faith and can speak of it with confidence.

Grade 1

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

The school has monitoring and tracking arrangements in place to ensure that improvement and development is kept under review and taken forward. The weekly staff meeting, the regular meetings of the headmaster with the Chairman of Governors, with the Chairman of the school's Parent Association, and the brief daily contacts with parents, all give the school feedback which is taken forward promptly and appropriately. The School Council will shortly be in place allowing pupils to contribute to the improvement process. St Philip's is a small school and there is constant swapping of suggestions and ideas. During the inspection a boy took the trouble to write a four page essay on the iniquity of collective punishment, drawing on Greek and Roman sources, in response to a small classroom incident. The headmaster and the class used the interchange very constructively

Grade 1

What the school should do to improve further

- Review pupil assessment in Religious Education with a view to incorporating the NBRIA Levels of Attainment in line with the developments in Common Entrance papers.

- Track the cross curriculum components in each subject area to determine their contribution to the 10% Religious Education provision expected by Bishops' Conference.
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The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of St Philip's is outstanding. The small staff is united in providing a curriculum permeated with a Catholic ethos. The style of the school is one of friendly openness and there is good communication. The school is faced with the challenge of limited space (it is housed on five storeys in a house in West London) and optimising the use of this space requires close cooperation. The headmaster both exemplifies and encourages a constant interchange of ideas and information in such a way that staff and pupils are included and committed to the life of the school. The Governors are fully supportive of the headmaster, enabling him to maintain the continued development of the school as a community steeped in Catholic values.

Grade 1

The Prayer Life of the School

The close relationships between the headmaster, the head of religious education and the chaplain mean that there is an integrated approach to the liturgical and prayer life of the school. Morning assembly always includes the structured and prayerful Act of Worship, which has different prayers for each day of the week. This is always followed by a brief thought for the day by the head of religious education, usually developing into a question and answer couple of minutes about a saint or a theme relevant to the day. The qualities of St Philip Neri after whom the school is named are well known, his humaneness, his hospitality, his gentleness. The school chaplain, an Oratorian Father, communicates this tradition effectively both in prayer and in his classroom teaching. Grace is said before and after meals and often lessons start with a prayer in the classroom. The school goes to the Little Oratory chapel of the Brompton Oratory Fathers a number of times each term for Mass, joined by a number of the parents. Confession is offered termly and boys are prepared for First Holy Communion in Year 4 and for Confirmation in Year 8.

Grade 1

How effectively does the school / college promote community cohesion?

The pupils are prepared for a multicultural, multifaith world through an openness and appreciation for diversity which is evident through the teaching in all subjects and links that the school has. For example a number of pupils and parents sponsored and set up a link with a school and health centre in Cambodia and take a keen interest in its progress. The pupils know that through their baptism they are called to be 'priest, prophet and king' in the world. The school has good links with a number of local Catholic primary schools and they are open to pupils from them participating after school activities. The choristers and other groups from the school are involved with local charitable enterprises and initiatives, sometimes organised by the borough. The school and parents involve themselves in fund raising and practical help for local and national causes. Through curriculum subjects such as history and geography as well as religious education the pupils are taught about the faiths and customs of communities across the world.

Grade 1

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Religious Education commands a central place in the curriculum of the school. It is supported by many aspects of school life, including the Schola, serving at Mass some Sundays each month at the Brompton Oratory, and especially the style of the school where debate and discussion of issues involving the Catholic faith and everyday matters are common. The pupils are able to articulate clearly both the teaching of the Catholic Church and their views on issues and challenges arising from it, both in their own lives and in the life of the community and world. The interactive approach in one part of the daily morning assembly where questions are asked of the boys promotes the enthusiasm and confidence they have in their religious knowledge. In the course of pupil interviews during the inspection, pupils were knowledgeable and able to respond clearly on many moral and religious issues.

Grade 1

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Teaching and learning in Religious Education is very good. All the lessons seen were outstanding. It is clear through pupil interviews that the teaching they receive is inspiring. The enthusiasm and curiosity of the pupils is harnessed and they are only too keen to share with whoever will listen what they have learned. The styles of teaching and the variety of methods used at different times are numerous so that pupils experience a rich learning environment. Homework is regularly set and marked. The attempt to ensure Religious Education lessons are stimulating and inspiring is successful, especially through the use made of classroom debates and spot quizzes. The use of ICT is being extended in Religious Education, supplementing the use of audio and video tapes already in hand. Proper differentiation is achieved through careful review on age appropriate and individual learning plans which a number of pupils have. The school involves parents in their son's Religious Education, especially when their son is being prepared for the Sacraments of First Communion or Confirmation.

Grade 1

Quality of the Curriculum

The pupils follow a school produced Religious Education programme appropriate to its nature as a Catholic preparatory school. This programme conforms to the Curriculum Directory of the Bishops Conference. Resources such as 'The Way, the Truth and Life' are used as additional material to support the teaching programme. The early year's emphasis is on knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures, the Creed and the Sacraments. In the later years the focus is on preparing pupils for the Common Entrance Religious Studies examination paper (Roman Catholic syllabus.). This paper conforms to the Curriculum Directory. Results have improved over the past three years. 90% pupils achieved A-C in 2007 (compared with 78% in 2005 and 83% in 2006). The school timetables on average 6% curriculum time for Religious Education. However, there is Religious Education teaching in the question and answer sessions at morning assembly, in English, History and Geography. The school should track the cross curriculum components in each subject area to determine their contribution to the 10% Religious Education provision expected by Bishops' Conference. There is careful monitoring and assessment of Religious Education through termly tests and annual exams. The school should review how Levels of Attainment in Religious Education could support developments in the Catholic Common Entrance examination (Catholic syllabus). The library needs to be reviewed in terms of its function and purpose regarding books and materials relevant to Catholic Religious Education and restocked in the light of its purpose.

Grade 2

Leadership and management of Religious Education

The experienced head of Religious Education provides excellent leadership in the teaching of Religious Education. He works closely with the headmaster and the chaplain and sets clear direction to the improvement and promoting of high quality Religious Education. He is involved closely with the monitoring and assessment of the subject. He is directly linked into the established system of performance management throughout the school through regular lesson observation and work scrutiny. All of the four teachers who deliver Religious Education observe each others' lessons. As well as ensuring that he is abreast of current developments in Religious Education, he is also involved in the links of the school with the Brompton Oratory, managing the arrangements for the boys to serve at the altar on Sundays. His close knowledge of the life and charism of St Philip Neri enables him to contribute significantly to the character of the school and its close links with the Oratorian Fathers. Given the nature of the school accommodation no subjects other than science and IT have specialised room provision. However the learning resources and accommodation available to the teaching of Religious Education is generous. The head of the department has the time and resources needed to organise school trips and visits which enhance the teaching of Religious Education and the school's spiritual mission. The bi-annual school trips to Rome and in particular St Philip Neri's house there are a case in point.

Grade 1