

Catholic Diocese of Northampton

Interim Monitoring Visit

28 November 2019

St Michael's Catholic School

[URN 110516]

St Michael's is an all-through school catering for children from age 3-18 working across two sites. Since the last Ofsted Section 48 inspection in 2016, there have been significant developments as the school has opened a second campus catering for children from 11-18 in Aylesbury. This has been an ambitious project that has got off to a promising start, resulting in a school campus which is already heavily oversubscribed. After the Ofsted Section 5 inspection in early 2019, the school was graded as a Good school. The current headteacher took up his appointment in June 2015. There is a very strong leadership team who work across campuses and key stages extremely cohesively. Since the last Section 48 inspection, the school has appointed a new chaplaincy lead who has had a very positive impact. The headteacher comments on the pleasure of working with such an enthusiastic and cohesive staff team, who are always willing to give that extra bit for the children. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

The areas identified for improvement in the last Section 48 have all been addressed. There is a new Mission Statement and School Prayer devised by staff and children to ensure that they were accessible from Nursery to Sixth Form. Catholic life has a very high profile in the school development plan. Chaplaincy provision has developed well on the High Wycombe campus. A new chapel has been created in the centre of the school and the chaplaincy ambassadors talked about it being an exciting place for the students to spend time. The school have recognised that they need to ensure that chaplaincy is just as well supported and vibrant at the Aylesbury campus. Active faith ambassadors and children take considerable responsibility in the creation and leading of very effective assemblies and liturgies. Assessment has been strengthened and children of all ages are given regular feedback to which they can respond.

Assemblies were observed on both campuses and in both the primary and secondary phase. The themes for these assemblies are carefully planned by the chaplain helping to give a whole school focus, which during the visit week was Christ the King and the Year of the Word. Children are involved in the planning and leading of these assemblies and they are relevant and age appropriate. Across both campuses reviewers noted how respectful and confident the children were. In an assembly on the Aylesbury campus, a particularly vulnerable child felt safe enough to make an insightful contribution before his peers. Team leaders across the whole school and chaplaincy ambassadors on the High Wycombe campus especially are very keen to express their thoughts and feelings about their beliefs and to display their leadership skills through involvement in events, fundraising and prayer life. The chaplaincy ambassadors are keen to celebrate the school's diversity and have a strong sense of stewardship for their school and the world.

The reviewers observed religious education on both campuses from Key Stage 1 through to Key Stage 5. Children were confident answering questions, giving insightful answers and backing up their views with Scripture. All staff have strong relationships with their classes which has helped to develop a culture where children are encouraged to question. Where the best teaching and learning is taking place, children were being encouraged to be actively engaged through discussion with their peers. The school has developed assessment across the school and has embedded a marking policy which allows children to identify areas to improve as well as successes. Attainment in all Key Stages is at least in line with or if not slightly better than other subjects. There is every indication that standards in religious education are likely to be maintained or improved.

Further areas for improvement might include:

- To use the good practice on the High Wycombe campus to help nurture pupil volunteers to assume ambassadorial roles in faith and chaplaincy on the Aylesbury campus.
- To share good practice in teaching of religious education across key stages and campuses so as to develop a shared understanding of how to promote discussion and challenge.

The diocesan reviewers wish to thank the headteacher, staff and governors present, and especially the children, for their very warm welcome and hospitality throughout the visit.

Mark Holdsworth on behalf of the Diocese of Northampton