



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Inspection Report

Name of School: Grays Convent High School

LEA: Thurrock Unitary Authority

Inspection Date: June 12th 2018

Reporting Inspector: Damian G Fox (Lead Inspector)
Judy Strong (Associate Inspector)

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

Type of School:	Secondary	School Address:	23 College Avenue
School Category:	Voluntary Aided		Essex
Age range of pupils:	11 – 16 years		RM17 5UX
Gender of pupils:	Girls	Tel. No.	01375 376173
Number on roll:	584		
Appropriate Authority:	The Governing Body	Chair of Governors:	Tayo Oseni-Alexis
Date of previous inspection:	June 2013	Headteacher:	Penny Johnson

Information about the school

Grays Convent High School is in Thurrock, a unitary authority in Essex, in the Diocese of Brentwood. The school serves the Catholic Deanery of South West Essex and the Catholic Parishes of St Thomas of Canterbury, Grays; Our Lady Star of the Sea, Tilbury; St Joseph's Stanford Le Hope and Holy Cross in Ockenden. There are currently 584 students aged 11-16 but the school will be full in September 2018. 27% of pupils are Catholic. 44% are from other Christian faiths. Students come from at least five Catholic primary schools.

Levels of attainment on entry are in line with the national average. The majority of pupils are from minority ethnic / Black African backgrounds. Currently, 6.75% of pupils are on the Special Needs Register, below the national average. This includes 0.8% of pupils with a statement or EHC plan. There are 42.21% of pupils for whom English is not the first language. 21.63% of pupils have been or are eligible for pupil premium which is above average. 9% of pupils are eligible for free school meals.

There are 37.36 full time equivalent teachers of whom 46.5% are Catholic. Six teachers hold the CCRS and five have other Catholic qualifications in Theology and Catholic Leadership. There are four teachers of Religious Education, three full time and one part time.

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic School

Grade 1

Grays Convent High School is an outstanding Catholic school in every respect. It provides a highly effective holistic education for its pupils. It is deeply rooted in Gospel values and the teachings of the Catholic Church. Leaders and managers at all levels show a genuine devotion to pupils and their families. They are dedicated to treasuring the legacy of the Sisters of La Sainte Union. The Head Teacher is an inspirational presence in the school. She is strongly supported by Senior Leaders who work as a highly effective team in developing the Catholic Life of the school and improving standards of teaching and learning. Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and demonstrate excellent leadership in all areas. Standards of teaching and learning are outstanding as a result of highly effective leadership. Outcomes for all pupils at GCSE in Religious Education are in line with the school's overall results, which themselves are significantly above national the average.

There is a tangible Catholic ethos that is recognized and appreciated by parents, staff and pupils. The Parish Priest acknowledged that the Church's teaching is instilled in pupils and that the excellent pastoral care is supportive of the range of backgrounds and faiths. Morals and values are integrated into daily life. One Governor described the school as "a little jewel". Pupils recognize and appreciate the education and care they are given by their teachers. Parents overwhelmingly agree and strongly agree that the school has created an ethos in which their children can learn and live as independent young women who will make a positive difference to their communities. Chaplaincy is a significant strength. The Chaplain is highly regarded by pupils for her devotion and work in ensuring prayer and collective worship are at the heart of daily life. Staff and pupils are guided and supported on their own faith journey.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure 10% of curriculum time is allocated to Key Stage 3 Religious Education.
- Embed the robust assessment process at Key Stage 3 to provide good foundations for GCSE.
- Continue to develop teachers' skills in applying new assessments at Key Stage 3.

Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic life of the school and derive huge benefit from attending Grays Convent High School. The school is the embodiment of "Faith in Action". Pupils understand and live by the motto of the La Sainte Union community, "*Nous Sommes un avec Dieu*" and their vision "to empower each other to live life to the full, embodying God's love in the world". Comments pupils made to inspectors demonstrate the positive impact of the ethos of the school. They know they are part of a community that lives by Gospel values. Pupils confirmed they are respected and cared for. The high level of inclusion, regardless of faith and background, is an outstanding feature of the school. Pupils are welcomed and given the confidence to learn and serve to others. One pupil said, "nobody is left out". They feel totally included in learning and prayer. The call to serve is evident throughout the life and work of the community. Pupils were happy to talk about how they actively seek to support one another and about being part of a family where everyone is valued, respected and cared for. Peer mentors play an important and valued role in the community. Their impact is evident in the harmonious community where pupils are instrumental in addressing each other's concerns and looking out for everybody. Relationships are excellent and there is a high level of mutual respect. Behaviour throughout the school is exemplary. Pastoral care systems are excellent and ensure pupils live and learn in a safe place. For example, pupils put their concerns into the "Worry Box", knowing that they will be addressed quickly and confidentially. The school has a distinct Catholic identity. The statue of Our Lady is prominently placed at the front of the school. The reception area is always a visual reminder of the faith with displays throughout the year that reflect the major feasts. At the time of the inspection, the display reflected the month of the Sacred Heart and the links with the school. Chaplaincy representatives make a significant contribution to the school. Pupils enjoy their responsibilities that include planning Masses and assemblies and ensuring the Chapel is an uplifting and prayerful space. As one said, they represent the religious side of the school. When asked why they enjoy their work, one described the representatives as "Missionaries of God" who are there to support those who are troubled. Pupils understand that others have greater need in the local and wider community. They fundraise for CAFOD and their sister school in Tanzania, as well as other charities that represent local and national areas of need such as Mary's Meals, Anchor House and St Luke's Hospice. These activities give the pupils a practical focus to their Christian mission of service and ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities towards the needs of others regardless of their own circumstances. £35 000 has been raised in recent years. Pupils also organize their own activities to raise money. During the inspection, the Year 7 assembly celebrated the success of individual pupils who raised £357 without prompting by or support from teachers. Year 11 pupils have an annual 24 hour sponsored fast for CAFOD. This year they raised £1700. It is a time of togetherness in a spirit of prayer and reflection. The school is excellent at empowering pupils to take on responsibilities. Pupil leadership is a strength of the school and contributes effectively to creating an environment in which pupils know they are safe and cared for. Older pupils are excellent role models. In each year group there are four anti-bullying representatives. One pupil said, "we are a pair of eyes on the playground". Parents overwhelmingly support the school and appreciate what it offers. One parent expressed her gratitude to the school for "going out of its way" to help her daughter. Parish links are excellent. The Parish Priest described them as a strength of the school and said there is mutual benefit from the school and parish working together. The Head Teacher is a Eucharistic Minister and a catechist for the children's liturgy. Pupils serve at Mass in several local parishes. The school is frequently mentioned in the parish newsletter.

Standards in Religious Education are outstanding and in line with school outcomes which are above the national average. Results in Religious Education improved from 77.5% A*-C last year to 85% in 2017. The number of pupils meeting or exceeding their expected levels rose from 64.5% last year to 75.7% in 2017. This reflects the ambitions teachers have for each pupil. High expectations show the determination of staff to help pupils achieve at least expected outcomes in Religious Education. Challenging targets are set. Pupils respond positively to the challenge and grow in self confidence because of the encouragement and praise they receive from teachers. Various groups of pupils achieve at least age related expected levels of progress with some exceeding. For example, the gap between pupil premium and non-premium pupils

narrowed from -20.5 last year to -6.7 in 2017. Outcomes for pupils of other faiths is impressive and reflects the inclusive spirit of the school and excellent teaching that allows pupils to flourish. Pupils displayed good, and in some cases, outstanding standards of religious literacy. A wide range of pupils who met inspectors said they enjoyed their lessons and spoke warmly about the challenge and support their teachers give them. One pupil described lessons as inclusive. In lessons pupils were encouraged to question and search for answers and reasons. Behaviour for learning is outstanding. In the lessons observed across the key stages, pupils were attentive and actively engaged. They collaborated very well with others in their learning. Pupils affirmed the support teachers give them within the classroom. Their written work is generally of a high standard. Most pupils take pride in their work and are enthusiastic about learning.

Pupils play a pivotal role in collective worship. They said that they are actively involved in preparing Masses and assemblies. They affirmed that they enjoy participating in and leading across a range of acts of worship from the celebration of Mass to private prayer in the chapel and on retreat. They are trained as readers by the Chaplain to ensure understanding of the text and a meaningful delivery at Mass and in assemblies. All pupils prepare and lead a Year group assembly weekly. Each class prepares a Mass once a year. Pupils volunteer to read and offer bidding prayers, participate in the offertory procession and publicise the Mass with displays. Chapel representatives in each form take a leading role and involve pupils in choosing readings, hymns and prayers. In the assembly and Morning Prayer, inspectors observed pupils responding with respect and reverence. They were engaged regardless of their faith background. The Year 7 assembly was excellent. Pupils led it with prayers and readings. An example of an elderly married couple was effectively used to help them understand the power of love and the meaning of love in the gospel. The experience of prayer has a visible effect on the confidence and ease with which pupils spoke of their faith. They said that daily prayer is a way of life and that there is no embarrassment in praying and offering their own intentions. The Parish Priest confirmed that pupils participate with great reverence and are active in preparing and participating in acts of worship.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

The school's self-evaluation was fully endorsed by inspectors in all key areas.

The Trustees have established a long lasting legacy of Catholic education. The school's leadership treasures this legacy. They demonstrate a deep commitment to the mission of the Church and LSU in education. Leaders and governors maintain the balance between school improvement and Catholic distinctiveness. It is a school that learns, prays and cares. One Governor said, "we can evangelise". The Governing body plays an active role in supporting and developing the Catholic nature of the community. The leadership ethos is one of service to the pupils to enable their spiritual, social and moral development through Christ's love. This is evidenced through their commitment to recruit high quality, committed Governors and teachers to enhance Catholic life. They are immensely proud of the pupils. One summed up their vision as wanting to ensure "every child is given the utmost opportunity to succeed beyond 16 and become people who will make a difference". Governors are very aware of the strengths of the school and the areas that need development. They ensure they are well informed about the Catholic life of the school through regular visits, especially by the Chair and the link governor. The development of the Catholic life of the school is explicitly set out in the school improvement plan. They give strategic direction to the school through a positive blend of challenge and support. The Head Teacher is outstanding and is passionate about ensuring a positive impact of Catholic education. She has successfully articulated her vision to Governors and senior leaders who support this vision with professional dedication. The Head Teacher is strongly supported by the Senior Leadership Team. Together they work highly effectively in the context of the Catholic Life of the school. High priority is given to promoting the centrality of the school's Catholic ethos and ensuring it is a living reality. This is evident among staff who serve as role models of prayer and respect. The Head of Department and the Chaplain ensure the practice of the faith through acts of worship is meaningful and

allows every pupil to play a part. The mission was described as “reaching out to others”. The staff development programme reflects key principles relating to Catholicity and spiritual development. The academic year begins for staff with a ‘Blessing of Hands’ to bless their service and commitment to pupils and to each other. New staff are fully inducted into the Catholic life of the school and receive training on how to lead prayer that is reverent, respectful and reflective. This is constantly modelled by Senior Leaders, teachers and the Chaplain. A staff retreat is being introduced this year. Pastoral care is excellent. School leaders have established effective systems to serve all pupils, especially those with additional needs. A Governor said that the school was outstanding “but is even better now”. The Parish Priest has a strong presence in the school and provides effective support to staff and pupils.

Religious Education has a very high profile in the school. Lesson observations and discussions with pupils show it has a profound impact on their moral and spiritual development. Outcomes in Religious Education reflect outstanding leadership at all levels. Sustained improvement in standards in Religious Education demonstrate excellent subject leadership and effective collaboration between leaders at all levels. There is a clear management structure that includes a link governor who oversees the development of Religious Education by carrying out regular learning walks and work reviews. Governors have an excellent understanding of the strengths of the school and areas for development. They are proud of the school’s achievements and are determined to support the school in its work of continuous improvement. They are well informed about the standards of teaching and learning through the link governor’s feedback, Head Teacher’s reports and visits to the school. Meetings coincide with assessments which ensure outcomes are discussed regularly throughout the year. There is a relentless search for ways to support pupils in their learning. The link governor’s regular meetings with the Head Teacher add to the robust scrutiny of the effectiveness of the school. Leadership of Religious Education is outstanding. The Head of Department has a high level of expertise and a clear focus on how to improve teaching and learning. The level of consistency across the department reflects a strength of his leadership. Teachers have confidence in his ability to lead and sustain continued improvement. He has established effective monitoring and assessment systems. There are termly assessments at Key Stage 3, including an extended homework project, and half termly at Key Stage 4. There is a robust and forensic analysis of data that informs further planning and ensures the right challenge and support is given to pupils. Flight paths are used as an effective and visual way of showing progress that pupils and parents can easily understand. Appropriate strategies follow that address areas of concern so that each pupil is given every opportunity to learn. There are cross-departmental discussions to identify pupils who are not performing consistently in Religious Education or who may be exceeding expected targets. Moderation of assessments with other Catholic schools confirms that in-house assessment and moderation are accurate. Lesson observations and learning walks are used to identify areas for development for staff. Regular formal and informal meetings combined with an open-door policy ensure they are well supported. The Relationship and Sex Education policy has been reviewed and updated in line with the diocesan and DFE requirements. This has been ratified by the governing body.

Provision

Grade 1

Lesson observations and reviews of pupils’ work by inspectors confirms the school’s self-evaluation and observations that teaching is always at least good and often outstanding. Priorities for improving teaching come from a detailed review of observations by peers three times a year with Learning Support staff, other departments and within the Religious Education department. Pupils make progress above the national average because well-structured lessons are delivered in ways that are engaging and well-paced. This reflects a high level of consistency across the department that ensures all pupils learn. A range of Assessment For Learning techniques are effectively used within lessons to assess progress and to inform further planning. Evidence shows teachers differentiate effectively and demonstrate excellent subject knowledge. Challenging questioning techniques and appropriate levels of challenge were seen in the lessons inspectors observed. Peer learning and assessment was very effective in one lesson where pupils

worked together and challenged each other to develop a piece of work up to grade 9 standard with discreet teacher support. The outcome was an extended higher mark answer. Consistent assessment and progress tracking are significant strengths of the department. For pupils in all key stages, progress is reported four times a year to parents. Information is measured against the school's targets for each pupil. Moderation within the department enables teachers to identify pupils who need support or further challenge. Teachers share ideas on how to provide more effective teaching. Pupils confirmed that they enjoy lessons because of the range of methods teachers used and by providing opportunities for individual study. They appreciate the support teachers give them.

Curriculum time is 10% at Key Stage 4 and 8% at Key Stage 3. The school is committed to addressing the allocation so that it meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. At Key Stage 3, the school follows the ICONS programme with aspects of the Way, the Truth and the Life. The curriculum is enhanced further by in-house resources to ensure pupils can access learning at their own level. The study of the identity of Jesus and how he is revealed as the Son of God in Mark's Gospel has been introduced into the Year 8 curriculum to ensure that the gospel narrative is known and understood. Pupils study discipleship and the titles of Jesus. The school follows the GCSE Edexcel specification. There is an established programme of the study of Other Faiths. Year 7 pupils visit a Sikh Temple. Year 8 pupils study Islam and benefit from the experience of pupils of that faith. Judaism is the second religion in the GCSE.

The quality of provision for personal prayer and collective worship is outstanding. Praying together is part of the daily experience for pupils. As a result of the excellent work of the Chaplain, there are many opportunities for pupils to attend acts of collective worship. The Chaplain provides a daily powerpoint for form teachers with scripture, reflections and prayers. The provision of materials enables staff and pupils throughout the school to begin each day in prayer. Inspectors observed this in several rooms and were impressed by the prayerful atmosphere in them. Pupils led the prayers. The termly prayer book, a collection of traditional prayers and a selection of pupils' prayers, adds to the provision. Pupils in the Chaplaincy Team are empowered to plan and lead acts of worship. They are given a checklist to help them prepare assemblies. They are enthusiastic about their responsibility. It is open to all. Pupils in Year 11 often arrange their own prayer meetings and Bible study sessions. The Chapel is regularly used for liturgical worship and Masses. This provides both staff and students with an opportunity to pray and reflect. There is a well attended weekly Rosary club. A noted feature of the school's provision is the first Mass for new pupils. Pupils in Years 7 celebrate a welcome Mass at the start of the year. Every girl becomes involved through drama and music. After Communion, there is a playscript about the history of La Sainte Union in Grays to establish the legacy of their charism at the outset. It concludes with the Hail Mary said in French. Pupils in Year 11 end their school life with a Mass of thanksgiving and celebration. High quality assemblies are delivered by senior leaders, teachers and pupils. They offer staff and pupils opportunities to reflect on and develop their faith and spirituality. The Chaplain provides a bank of assemblies to support all teachers and to give them confidence in delivering assemblies. The retreat programme is a feature of provision throughout the school. Pupils in Year 7 visit Aylesford Priory. The Walsingham House retreat team visit the school to work with pupils in Year 8 and Year 10, whilst CAFOD visit to work with pupils in Year 9. Pupils in Year 11 have a sponsored 24 hour fast in the school to fundraise for CAFOD and to have a period of prayer and reflection. Links with the major feeder parishes have been established. Priests from these parishes have visited at key times to celebrate Mass or to offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Lent and Advent.