



Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

## **INSPECTION REPORT**

### **Barrow Hills Catholic Independent School**

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DfES Number: 125366

Headteacher: Mr Matthew Unsworth  
Chair of Governors: Mr Stephen Mulliner

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Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Bishop of Arundel & Brighton  
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Date of inspection: 26 March 2012  
Date of previous inspection: 23 February & 8 March 2004

Lead Inspector: Mr Michael Sheridan  
Associate Inspector: Mr Peter Ward

## **Description of School**

Barrow Hills is a non-maintained independent Catholic preparatory school with charitable trust status situated in the Guildford Deanery of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. The principle parishes the school serves are Our Lady of Lourdes, Haslemere, St Edmund's, Godalming, and Sacred Heart, Petworth. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 26%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 4% in Key Stage 1, 4% in Key Stage 2 and 4% in Key Stage 3.

The school takes pupils from 3 to 13 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 258. The school makes provision for pupils from local community schools and preparatory schools. The number of pupils who receive extra support in class is below average at 12.8%. The majority of pupils (around 94%) come from White British backgrounds and the remaining few (around 6%) are from ethnic minority groups.

### **Key for inspection grades**

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

## **Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school**

**Grade 2**

Barrow Hills is a welcoming and distinctively Catholic school. The school has a very strong Catholic ethos which is easy to identify. Within the school's Mission Statement it states, "Barrow Hills' ethos is that of Catholic education: Educate the whole child, find out what they do best and celebrate this in the School community. This is achieved by ensuring children at Barrow Hills: ... Grow to have strong, moral character through living Christian values..." This is seen in the excellent relationships within the school community. Pastoral care and chaplaincy are outstanding and links with parishes are strong. The quality of acts of worship is excellent with outstanding pupil participation at Masses. Community cohesion is achieved extremely successfully. Standards in Religious Education are satisfactory at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. Teaching is overall good with some outstanding features and also some features which are satisfactory. Leadership and management of the Religious Education department are satisfactory as is the Religious Education curriculum with the exception of the time allocated to the subject, which is unsatisfactory. The amount of curriculum time allocated to Religious Education was a key issue outlined in the last inspection. However, other recommendations made in the previous inspection have been met. The school's planning will address some of the issues raised below on Curriculum Religious Education. The Mission Statement is now displayed in the school entrance hall and classrooms and has been reviewed by staff and governors. It is written in language which is accessible to pupils and is shared with the whole community. Also there are now opportunities for personal prayer and private reflection offered to the pupils and they are encouraged to write their own prayers. With the establishing of robust monitoring and evaluation through the school's Faith Committee and the sound planning which has ensued from this, the school has a capacity to improve further.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

In order to sustain improvement the governors and senior leaders should:

- Review and evaluate the provision of curriculum Religious Education time as a matter of great urgency to ensure that it meets the Bishops' Conference and Diocesan requirements of 10% in Key Stage 1, in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3
- Provide targeted professional development for teachers which focuses on the effective use of the Religious Education national levels of attainment and quality delivery of the Religious Education programme
- Further develop Assessment for Learning strategies, particularly diagnostic marking which informs pupils how to progress to the next level

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## **The Catholic Life of the School**

### **Leadership and Management**

**Grade 2**

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are good and governors effectively carry out their role. The headteacher is a spiritual and reflective leader who is committed to providing a Catholic education which meets the needs of pupils in the twenty-first century. Ably supported by the leadership team, the headteacher's vision for the school is well articulated and shared with all stakeholders. He gives a high priority to continuing the development of the Catholic life of the school. The governors' Faith Committee ensures that this vision, together with the strategic direction of the school, will develop and flourish. The school has a very distinctive Catholic ethos which is easy to identify. The Catholic ethos underpins the policies and planning of the school and is experienced in the excellent relationships within the school community. The religious artefacts and displays, together with the impressive chapel and the prayer life of the school, mark the school as distinctly Catholic. Chaplaincy is outstanding. As well as co-ordinating worship throughout the school, organising and leading retreats, the chaplain acts as counsellor to pupils and staff. In this her contribution is invaluable. Pastoral care is also outstanding and the very close involvement of chaplaincy with the formal pastoral care system is to be highly commended. Within the Diocese, Barrow Hills is the first independent to introduce the Rainbows programme to support pupils who are grieving a loss, for example, through family bereavement or divorce. Links with the parishes are good and, throughout the year, the chaplain successfully arranges for five priests to come in to celebrate Mass with the pupils. The practice of three parish priests coming in to minister to the pupils' needs is very commendable. Pupils feel very positive about the school. They value the very strong sense of community and feel that any incidents of bullying are immediately dealt with. Relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and staff are excellent and pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Pupils feel safe in the school and they value the efforts staff make to ensure their safety.

## **The Prayer Life of the School**

**Grade 1**

The headteacher, school chaplain and head of Religious Education work extremely well as a team to ensure that prayer and collective worship is central to the life of the school. The outstanding contribution which the chaplain makes to the prayer life of the school is seen in the richness in the quality of liturgies held in the school's impressive chapel. The chaplain works in consultation with three parish priests in the area to provide a well-structured and comprehensive programme of Masses, assemblies and liturgies which greatly enriches the spiritual and moral development of pupils in the school. The Eucharist is celebrated by the whole school to mark holy days of obligation and selected feast days in the liturgical calendar. Mass is also celebrated in the chapel, before the start of the school day, on the first Tuesday of each month for those who are able to attend. The parish priests celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation in the school during the seasons of Advent and Lent whilst the school supports the parishes in preparing their pupils for First Confession and First Holy Communion.

During the inspection, a whole-school Mass to celebrate the feast of the Annunciation of the Lord took place in the chapel. The pupils actively participated as servers, cantors, readers and choristers and joined the priest in making the celebration of the Eucharist a truly joyful occasion for the school community. The singing of the cantors was exceptional and animated the congregation of pupils and adults into responding in kind. The quality of the worship was outstanding, as was the contribution made by pupils during the Mass. The school encourages the pupils to ground themselves in prayer. The chaplain has produced an excellent book of prayers to which pupils and staff may refer. The styles of prayer include the new translation of the Mass, the formal prayers of the Church and contemplative prayer. Opportunities for quiet reflection are provided during the school day, as was evidenced on the inspection day during an assembly which focused on the Annunciation of the Lord. The chaplain's input was centred on the event of the Archangel Gabriel announcing the good news of the Lord's impending birth. She aroused pupils' thinking with a sense of awe and wonder by saying, "If they knew what was going on, people would have held their breath!" Pupils confirmed that they start the day with prayer in the morning and finish with prayer at the end of the school day. Grace before meals is prayed at the start of each of the sittings during lunch times. A strength of the school is the weekly Parents' Prayers liturgy, commencing at 8.30 each Thursday morning, giving parents the opportunity to participate in a liturgy of the Word and Holy Communion, together with prayers of intercession. One parent commented, "Our Chaplain has a very strong presence in the school and has enabled many opportunities for private worship as well as collective. The fact that the children and parents can pray whilst there is Exposition of the [Blessed Sacrament] is a bonus on Thursday mornings before school. [It is] a place of calm and reflection." The chaplain organises a day Retreat for Year 8 pupils each summer term at venues such as the Friary in Chilworth and the Holly Barn at Wintershall. For parents, she also arranges a five-day Retreat in Assisi, Italy together with a Retreat for mothers at the local convent. As a result of the above, personal and collective worship makes an excellent contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils and cements the positive relationships within the school community.

## **How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?**

**Grade 1**

The school is outstanding at promoting and achieving community cohesion. Diversity in the school is valued and celebrated. The school actively seeks ways to ensure respect for cultural and faith differences. This it achieves through such initiatives as the link with a school in Burkina Faso where pupils are kept informed of developments via a skype connection in the chapel. Links with the local school for the blind are very strong and reciprocal visits are made by pupils from each school. The school contributes to the life of the local community through events such as the distribution of Harvest goods to senior citizens, with pupils in Year 3 visiting

three residential homes, talking with and singing songs to the residents. As a result, pupils learn to respect difference. Through the Religious Education programme, pupils have a good understanding of and respect for the faith traditions of the wider community. Guest speakers are welcomed into the school from worldwide organisations, such as CAFOD, enabling pupils to learn about life in developing countries. Such good opportunities encourage pupils to develop their moral, social and cultural thinking. Well focused behaviour polices promote behaviour which supports community cohesion. Pupils respect each other and reconciliation is seen as a living practice. The result is a very happy school, where all pupils, including those with additional needs, are confident and know that their voice will be heard. A thriving School Council facilitates the development of decision making and leadership skills as pupils learn the fundamentals of democracy. They gladly accept responsibility, as older pupils spend time with the younger ones during playtime. The School Council suggested that the school should adopt an eco-approach in order to reduce its carbon footprint. As a result, a project to plant ten extra trees in the school was championed by the School Council and they enlisted the help of some parents to enable them to complete this task. The school is generous in its charitable giving in supporting, amongst a wide range of projects, Linden Lodge School for the Blind, Children in Need, Macmillan Cancer Trust, CAFOD and St Benoit's School in Burkina Faso. Consequently, all of the above serves to give pupils' an understanding of working for the greater good of mankind locally, on a national scale and worldwide.

There is a thriving parents' society which organises a number of events, such as an annual Hog Roast day and a Quiz and Curry evening, to raise funds to support the school and selected charities and also to promote an even greater sense of community within the school. Parents have a high regard for the school and greatly value its distinctive Catholic ethos, which pervades all aspects of the school's provision. One parent commented, "We cannot be more pleased with the moral and spiritual guidance provide by this wonderful school. The children and parents are encouraged to celebrate all that is best in Catholic education." Parents are kept well informed of events and the Catholic life of the school through an attractive and informative website and a high quality annual magazine called 'The Chronicle'. The overwhelming majority of parents have a very positive view of the school. In a recent survey one parent wrote, "There is a strong sense of community and welcome in this school. I feel blessed that my child is part of this school", whilst another observed, "As a parent I always feel welcome and included (even though I am not a Catholic), which is something I have never felt to such a degree at any other school."

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## **Religious Education**

### **Achievement and Standards in Religious Education**

### **Grade 3**

Attainment in Religious Education compares favourably with the standards achieved in the English Common Entrance examinations. In the school, Religious Education is one of the highest achieving subjects in these examinations. At present, there is a lack of reliable assessment data at all key stages because teachers are not secure in their use of the national levels of attainment which are employed in the vast majority of Catholic schools in England and Wales. Most pupils make acceptable progress and gain knowledge understanding and skills at a satisfactory rate but standards in pupils' books are not as high as expected because the coverage of work is limited by the amount of curriculum time allocated to the subject. Consequently, compared to national expectations, the progress in pupils' levels of attainment in Religious Education is distinctly inhibited. The inspectors agree with the school that this is an area which should be vigorously explored by the governors and senior leadership team. Pupils are confident and articulate in discussions and respond to teachers' questioning, demonstrating

good understanding. Pupils also demonstrate their religious literacy by the care and sensitivity they extend to one another and their generosity when raising money for those in need. Their work is well presented. They use a variety of skills gained from other subjects across the curriculum, including literacy, drama, art, history and information and communications technology (ICT). During the inspection, most pupils indicated that they enjoy Religious Education.

## **Teaching and learning in Religious Education**

## **Grade 2**

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Very good teaching is characterised by expert knowledge of Religious Education, high expectations, excellent class control and good planning which caters for all abilities. The very positive relationships which exist between teachers and support staff have a positive impact on pupil attainment. Opportunities for prayer are built into most lessons and this helps pupils to make the link between faith and life. During the inspection some lessons observed were outstanding, some were very good and some satisfactory. Where lessons in the school were judged to be good or better the pace was brisk with an effective balance between teacher and pupil input. Those teachers acted as facilitators for learning and were extremely knowledgeable about the subject content. When appropriate, they employed learning support assistants both productively and to great effect. They ensured that the support staff were aware of the nature of the lesson and its content so that they could more readily support pupils with additional needs within the context of the planned objectives. In these lessons, teaching is well informed, confident, engaging and precise because of the teachers' expert knowledge. In an outstanding lesson on the Easter Story in a Key Stage 1 class, the teacher facilitated pupils' learning through skilful questioning about the Easter Story which was presented to them on a slideshow presentation. The teacher asked pupils to discuss with their talk partner the most important part of the story, giving the reason for their selection as they fed back to the class. This activity was followed by pupils contributing to a 'mind map' of the Easter Story on the electronic whiteboard. They were then asked to write the Easter Story independently. During the plenary, two pupils shared their stories with the class and their contributions were appropriately affirmed by their peers at the end. Differentiated support material matched pupils' abilities to great effect and the teaching assistant was well deployed, giving effective individual support to each pupil in her care. In an equally outstanding revision lesson in Key Stage 3, the teacher expertly used the multimedia capability of the interactive whiteboard using a 'You Tube' clip and a 'snowball' activity for pupils to prepare materials for a revision booklet covering areas such as vocations, Advent, charity and the parable of the Good Samaritan. Key facts and issues for each area were recorded in a style of diagram chosen by each group of pupils. They included a 'mind map' and block diagrams of varying designs which were passed on to the next group to add further ideas within a prescribed time limit. Pupils were engaged, on task and stretched by the activity. During the lesson one pupil commented, "I enjoy RE because my teacher makes it interesting and helps me to learn." Members of his group strongly concurred with his viewpoint. In lessons judged to be satisfactory, the pace of the lesson was not as brisk and the Religious Education content was not as secure as those observed in the best lessons. However, the technical aspects of the three part lesson were well executed and pupils will benefit greatly from the planned in-service training and the sharing of good practice so that all teachers become more confident in their subject knowledge.

Assessment of learners' work is regular and consistent and affirmative marking is clearly present across all key stages. During the inspection, diagnostic marking, which informs pupils how they might improve their work, was not as evident in the majority of books sampled. This will improve with the planned professional development for teachers in the subject. Learning objectives are well matched to the full range of the pupils' needs. Group assessment was witnessed in some of the lessons observed and features alongside self-assessment in the school's assessment policy and schemes of work. Teachers challenge pupils to think spiritually,

ethically and theologically, and to become aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life. Parents receive regular information about the curriculum and their own children's progress through parents' meetings and target setting for all pupils in Religious Education.

### **Quality of the Curriculum**

**Grade 3**

The curriculum time allocated to Religious Education, currently standing at 4%, is significantly below the Bishops' Conference and Diocesan requirements of 10% at all three key stages. The department follows the Bishops' Conference Curriculum Directory guidelines, using 'The Way, the Truth and the Life' Religious Education programme in Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and in Key Stage 3. In Years 7 and 8, pupils also follow the syllabus for the Common Entrance examination. The topics of the Religious Education programme are mostly covered but the curriculum time allocated to the subject militates against sufficient depth and breadth of learning opportunities for pupils in the school. This was seen in some of the teaching of the subject and in the majority of the books scrutinised during the inspection. Staff make good use of ICT to promote learning and cross curricular links are evident. Sex and relationships education is taught throughout the school and is set in the context of the Church's teaching and values. This has been discussed with parents and ratified by the governors. World religions are explored with a greater understanding of and respect for people of other faiths as a central aim. Guest speakers from, for example, the Hindu community, visit the school to enrich pupils' understanding of other faith communities. Consequently, the Religious Education curriculum makes a contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils.

### **Leadership and management of Religious Education**

**Grade 3**

The head of Religious Education is an innovator and works hard to support his colleagues in delivering the Religious Education curriculum. He is an outstanding practitioner who leads by example. The head of department has a clear vision for teaching and learning in the subject which will provide pupils with opportunities to develop understanding of and make connections with the teaching of the Church. He took up post in the Autumn term 2011, and is line managed by the headteacher. After only a very short time, they are starting to address some of the teaching and learning priorities through consultation with their colleagues. Accordingly, they are in the process of developing plans which are already in place to raise attainment in the subject, especially at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, where form tutors teach Religious Education to their respective form groups. These plans will enable skilled practitioners in Religious Education to support teachers of the subject through targeted professional development. The inspectors believe that the targeted support should include the effective use of the Religious Education national levels of attainment. The school should also prioritise providing form tutors with support in acquiring greater expertise in adapting and delivering 'The Way, the Truth and the Life' Religious Education programme to meet the needs of the pupils in their care. This will have a significant impact on pupil achievement and standards in Religious Education as the programme becomes further embedded. Although these are relatively early days, the head of department has a clear vision of and enthusiasm for what needs to be done to secure Religious Education as a core subject in a Catholic school. These aims will only be realised as the school addresses the level of resourcing and amount of curriculum time allocated to the subject. Teachers of Religious Education in the school are hard-working and dedicated staff who are capable of implementing and delivering the steps necessary to support pupils in achieving higher academic standards throughout the key stages. Standards in Religious Education are monitored through the governors' Faith Committee. There is a link governor who supports and monitors the development of the Catholic ethos and Religious Education and is a member of this committee. The department receives a budget significantly lower than English and mathematics and this, along with reviewing the curriculum time set aside for the subject, is an

area which needs to be addressed by the governors and the senior leadership team with great urgency. Once these measures are realised, they should lead to rapid improvements and also address one of the key issues carried over from the previous inspection. This will greatly benefit the progress of pupils in Religious Education. Morale in the school is high and very good links exist with parents. There is a positive outreach to parish clergy. The leadership's commitment to make further improvements in curriculum Religious Education signify that Religious Education will have an even greater impact on pupils' spiritual and moral development. The headteacher and head of department attended a Catholic Independent School's (CISC) conference in the Autumn term on 'What is Catholic Education?', the content of which is informing the school's planning. This is a significant development as is the school's evolving links with the Diocesan Schools' Service.