

INSPECTION REPORT

ST. BEDE'S ROMAN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL AND SPECIALIST SPORTS COLLEGE

Livesey Branch Road Blackburn BB2 5BU

Inspection date April 2010

Reporting Inspector Mr. A. Slade

Inspection carried out in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School Catholic Secondary

URN 119793

Age range of pupils 11-16

Number on roll 1019

Appropriate authority The governing body

Chair of Governors Mr. C. Beresford

Headteacher Mr. D. Callaghan

Head of Religious Education Mrs. A. Nuttall

Date of previous inspection March 2007

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades 1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3 = Satisfactory 4 = Inadequate
Overall effectiveness of the school	1	
Leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school	1	
The quality of Collective Worship	2	
Achievement and standards in Religious Education	1	
The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education	1	
The quality of the Religious Education curriculum	2	
Leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education	1	

The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Bede's Roman Catholic High School and Specialist Sports College is an 11-16 voluntary aided school serving the Blackburn and Darwen parishes of St. John Vianney, St. Peter, Sacred Heart and St Edward, St Joseph, Sacred Heart and Pleasington Priory. The planned admission number is 195 (recently revised) and there are 1019 pupils on roll of whom 1014 are Catholics. It is heavily oversubscribed. The proportion of pupils qualifying for free school meals is 9.9%. 269 are identified as having special educational needs and 30 have a statutory statement of special educational need. Most pupils have English as their first language but represent a full range of socio-economic backgrounds from a catchment area of relative deprivation. Attainment on entry is average. 44 of the 71 teachers (62%) are Catholics.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Bede's is an outstanding Catholic school. Its Mission Statement, states that "St. Bede's is a Roman Catholic community that seeks to follow the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. In partnership with home and parish, we aim to encourage Christian development". The statement is firmly entrenched in all aspects of the school as a Catholic institution. There is a realistic recognition of where pupils are in their faith journey but also a deliberate and successful prioritisation of Catholic life and Religious Education in the school's management and policies. These apply especially to the quality of worship, the provision of high quality staffing and excellent resources for both. There is a determined and enthusiastic leadership shown by the headteacher, the senior leadership team and the governors.

Improvement since the last inspection

The three issues arising from the last Section 48 inspection in March 2007 have been addressed. Steps have been taken to monitor and evaluate the Catholic nature of the school. The appointment of a chaplain is part of this process and the governors are well-informed and actively involved. Greater opportunity for prayer has been created, a prayer room has been established and there is a new prayer manual to assist in the provision for daily prayer. Curriculum time allocated to Religious Education in Key Stage 3 has been reviewed, and, whilst it remains at only 8%, steps have been taken to improve delivery-time and residential retreats are a key supplement.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is outstanding. This is because the development plan of the school shows a deep awareness of the current situation, with a special emphasis on the religious life of the school, and a clear strategy for improvement. The same is true of the plans for the Religious Education department. The school's self-evaluation form is a high quality document.

What the school should do to improve further

- Monitor and evaluate the quality of all form-time assemblies.
- Give consideration to the establishment of a formal chaplaincy team.
- Keep under review the curriculum time allocated to Religious Education in Key Stage 3 to bring it up to 10% in line with the recommendations of the Bishops' Conference.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. The Mission Statement is central to school life and aspirations. It states that “St Bede’s is a Roman Catholic community that seeks to follow the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. In partnership with home and parish, we aim to encourage Christian development”. There is a very overt personal and professional commitment to ensuring that the school is run as a Catholic community. The implementation of policies to reflect this priority has been very successful and is seen in matters such as the appointment of a lay chaplain, the excellent provision of rooms and resources for the teaching of Religious Education and the generous allocation of money to enhance the quality of collective worship. Other school policies, such as those relating to bullying and sex education, reflect the Catholic nature of the school. The governors have an equal commitment to these policies, especially through the chair who has clear and realistic perspectives on what is needed. The Catholic ethos is prioritised in school planning. There are strong links with local schools and parishes, including SVP work, and the school is a major contributor to the Blackburn and Darwen Inter-Faith Forum. These are good examples of the school’s contribution to community cohesion.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship is good with several outstanding features. This is because the school provides high quality liturgical services and opportunities covering the whole of the liturgical year and the life of the school. The recently appointed lay chaplain has had a major impact and has produced a prayer booklet, with an easy to use format, covering the whole year. The booklet is used by all staff but it would benefit them and the school if a system of monitoring and evaluation of form period assemblies were to be introduced. The school is looking at ways to widen the repertoire of available prayers. The chaplain is assisted by a group of enthusiastic pupils and teachers and the time is now ripe for considering the more formal establishment of a chaplaincy team and its role. There is a good policy statement on all aspects of collective worship. Prayers are said at staff briefings. Local priests are very actively involved in providing a range of services including school Masses at key times of the year, especially the Welcome and Leavers’ Masses and the weekly Masses during Lent. They are also involved in the “Crossroads” Masses. During the inspection a high quality year assembly involved many pupils and included the use of IT but no music. The once-a-month Eucharistic service in the prayer room was well attended and provided a very thoughtful and prayerful occasion with pupil-led readings. Many departments contribute to the worshipping life of the school. In addition to the dedicated and beautiful prayer room there is an altar facility in the assembly hall. There is access to the prayer room at breaks and lunchtime for those who want peace and quiet or a place of comfort. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 can attend a residential retreat at Castlerigg Manor, Keswick. Pupils spoke very highly of its value in stimulating and deepening their religious faith. Some school-leavers visit Lourdes. The “Crossroads” programme is very successful through the links with local parishes and celebrations of religious services linking Islam and Christianity. It is by these means that collective worship makes a large contribution to the school’s work for community cohesion.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education are outstanding. In Key Stage 3 pupils make good progress relative to their ability. This progress is monitored rigorously. The GCSE results in Religious Education show that in 2007 65% of candidates obtained Grades A* to C, rising to 70% in 2008 and to 75% in 2009. Almost all candidates obtained Grades A* to G. There has been an increase in numbers entered for the GCSE Short Course. Overall, these results are above national average, contain significant “value added” and are amongst the best in the school. There has been a one-off discrepancy in the results obtained by boys compared to girls and this is being closely monitored. The system for supporting charities is very imaginative. Each year group supports an overseas charity with a local connection, for example “Christians in Palestine” is linked through a local parish priest who is a Canon of the Holy Sepulchre. Similar approaches link the school with an education programme in Cambodia, an orphanage in Ethiopia and a Mission in Kenya. CAFOD (including the sale of Traidcraft chocolates) and the Diocesan Rescue Society are also generously supported as are other emergency and Christmas-time charities. The charity work is an important and successful aspect of the school’s work in promoting community cohesion.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The inspector agrees with the school's judgement that the quality of teaching and learning in curriculum Religious Education is outstanding. The department is systematically line-managed. The planning for teaching is systematic, assisted by the weekly planning meetings which are well used for the whole range of tasks within the department. The lessons observed during the inspection were outstanding because the teachers ensured that pupils made real progress in their knowledge and understanding of a range of issues, including the meaning of Pentecost, Muslims and the Qur'an, the meaning of multi-faith society and belief in God. These sometimes difficult topics were taught with verve, confidence and in a very lively fashion. The friendly but purposeful tone of the lessons was conducive to learning. Teachers use a variety of styles and make good use of information communication technology. There is an exceptionally strong team of well-qualified teachers, with a deep concern for the progress of pupils. There is a variety of material to suit the needs of pupils of all abilities. The marking scheme, which incorporates targets and levels of attainment is rigorously used and fully known by pupils. Pupils' behaviour is very good, with high standards of co-operative work. Pupils themselves are enthusiastic about their lessons. As one stated, "the Religious Education teachers dare to do what no-one else does" - a comment supported by others. There is very good display work in classrooms and in public areas.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Overall the quality of the Religious Education curriculum is good with several outstanding features. This is because the Salford Diocesan syllabus has been fully implemented and adapted in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4 the Edexcel syllabus has been used for several years and it enables pupils to explore and learn about Catholic issues such as marriage, wealth and poverty, war and peace. Whilst pupils are encouraged to think these issues through for themselves there is an acute awareness of Catholic teaching on these matters. There is a determination to ensure that pupils learn these topics for their personal development and not simply as a means of passing examinations. The recommendation from the bishops' of England and Wales that 10% of curriculum time be given to Religious Education is fully observed in Key Stage 4 but only 8% is allocated in Key Stage 3. However, pupils in Years 8 and 9 have the opportunity to attend a residential retreat where they can explore religious issues in greater depth. The curriculum includes a study of aspects of other Christian faiths and world religions, particularly Islam, Hinduism and Judaism thus making a major contribution to community cohesion. The department is involved in the personal, health social and citizen Education programme. In these ways, the department makes a significant contribution to the pupils' moral, cultural and spiritual development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school considers that the leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education are outstanding and the inspector agrees. This is because there is a very obvious and shared determination to give priority to the work and aims of the Religious Education department and to implement them. The determination has been successfully implemented in the management of the department by all - headteacher, senior management, head of department and governors. The head of department is well informed and enthusiastic and it says much for the running of the department that continuity has carried on during the head of department's maternity leave. Her work is greatly assisted by her strong, well qualified team working within a well-structured department. Excellent team work is aided physically by the fact they teach in a suite of four adjacent rooms and have an office. The time set aside each week for planning is used very constructively and systematic internal moderation of teaching takes place. The excellent facilities and resources are a tribute to the headteacher's successful efforts to obtain them. Technology is very well used and the second-in-department is now developing further use of the VLE (Virtual Learning Environment). The department's improvement plan demonstrates a clear determination to improve standards and to work within the school's policies and priorities. Departmental documentation is very thorough. The governors are fully aware of the work of the department and give active and well-informed support, especially through the well-informed, dedicated and enthusiastic chair who has very clear and realistic ideas about the role of Religious Education in a Catholic school.