

**DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION
REPORT (Section 48)**

on

**THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE
SCHOOL AND RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION**

School: St Mary's Catholic Comprehensive School

Address: Benton Park Road, Benton, Newcastle
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School URN: 108534

Headteacher: Mr John Foster

Chair of Governors: Rev Denis Kellett

Lead Inspector: Ms Theresa Laverick
Team Inspector: Mrs Carmel Pinnock

Date of Inspection: 16 and 17 June 2009

This Inspection Report is produced for the Rt. Reverend Seamus Cunningham the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle Diocese, (c.f. Code Canon Law, 804, 806), and for the Governing Body of the school (Education Act 2005, Section 48). The inspection reviews, evaluates and plans further improvements in the school's witness to the Catholic faith and Curriculum Religious Education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation. The inspection schedule follows criteria set by the National Board of Advisers and Inspectors.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St. Mary's is an 11-19 Catholic Comprehensive School located in the north of the city of Newcastle upon Tyne. In September 2007 the school achieved specialist status in Humanities. In 2009 the school was placed in the Department for Children, Schools and Families' top 100 most improved schools in the UK, 2005 – 2009. The majority of the school's students are Catholic, with almost all other students coming from other Christian denominations or other faiths. Students come from a variety of backgrounds and the school serves some areas of social and economic disadvantage. A higher than average proportion of students is eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students with learning difficulties is above the national average. There has been a recent significant increase in the number of sixth form students.

FACTUAL INFORMATION

Pupil Catchment:

Number of pupils on roll: 896

Planned Admission Number of Pupils: 196

Percentage of pupils baptised RC: 50%

Percentage of pupils from other Christian denominations: 21%

Percentage of pupils from other World Faiths: 26%

Percentage of pupils with no religious affiliation: 3%

Percentage of pupils from ethnic groups: 34%

Percentage of pupils with special needs: 22%

Staffing

Full time teachers: 58

Part time teachers: 13

Percentage of Catholic teachers: 54%

RE Department Staffing:

Number of full time RE teachers: 6

Number of part time RE teachers: 0

Percentage of Catholic teachers: 67%

Percentage of teachers with CCRS: 83%

Percentage of learning time given to RE:

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| Yr7 | 10% | Yr 10 | 12% |
| Yr8 | 10% | Yr 11 | 12% |
| Yr9 | 10% | 6 th Form | 8% |

Parishes served by the school:

Holy Name, Jesmond

Sacred Heart, Gosforth

St Aidan's, Benton

St Anthony of Padua, Walker
St Charles', Gosforth
St Dominic's, Shieldfield
St Francis of Assisi, Walkergate
St Lawrence's, Byker
St Mary's, Forest Hall
Ss Peter and Paul, Longbenton
St Teresa's, Heaton
St Vincent's, Walker

Overall Effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

MAIN FINDINGS

St. Mary's is an outstanding Catholic school providing an education which enables students to flourish. The headteacher is an inspirational and transformative leader who, with the senior leadership team, has established a shared vision and common purpose amongst the school community which has led to exceptional school improvement. Inclusion is at the heart of school life and as one student said, "It is a school where everyone is accepted and valued and where faith, culture and diversity are celebrated". The school's holistic approach to education, its pursuit of excellence, its exceptional care and provision for the weakest and most vulnerable and the centrality of prayer are all testaments to its distinctive Catholic mission.

Outcomes for students regardless of their age, backgrounds, capabilities or starting points are excellent. The quality of students' learning and progress in Religious Education is outstanding. The Catholic life of the school is something all contribute to and from which all gain. Students thrive in a community where they feel accepted and empowered to discover and use their gifts and talents. They all benefit from and participate in the excellent prayer life of the school. The remarkable improvements since the last inspection demonstrate that there is outstanding capacity for sustained improvement in outcomes for all students.

Leaders and managers are deeply committed to promoting the Catholic life of the school and improving provision for Religious Education. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation lead to well-targeted planning and actions which enable improvement. Governors are highly effective in shaping the direction of the school and support the work of the staff to improve outcomes for all students. School leaders actively engage in partnerships which promote Catholic learning and student well-being. Impressive and sustained improvements evidence outstanding capacity to further strengthen the Catholic life of the school.

Teaching in Religious Education successfully promotes purposeful learning, enjoyment, outstanding progress and rising standards. Robust assessment systems and comprehensive academic guidance facilitate students' progress. However, learning would be further enhanced by more consistent application of the marking policy. The Religious Education curriculum at all key stages is coherent, relevant and challenging and meets students' needs and interests. The quality and range of provision for Collective Worship is excellent. Overall, the school's provision for Catholic education is highly effective and the capacity for continued improvement is outstanding.

What the school needs to do to improve further

- ensure that the marking policy in Religious Education is applied consistently so that students know what they need to do to improve.

PUPILS

How good outcomes are for pupils, taking particular account of variations between different groups

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The learning and progress of students in Religious Education at all key stages is outstanding. The vast majority of students enjoy their learning as demonstrated by their enthusiasm and interest. Students with particular learning needs achieve exceedingly well. Attainment at Key Stage 3 is good, standards are rising and progress is outstanding. The introduction of a modular GCSE course at Key Stage 4 has contributed to an exceptional improvement in standards with a 10% increase in A* and A grades over 3 years. In 2008 most students in a greatly enlarged entry cohort achieved a GCSE grade, with the majority gaining A*-C. All groups of students exceeded their targets. The predicted A*-C pass rate for Religious Education in 2009, based on secure data, is for a further significant rise. At Key Stage 5 standards are also good and rising. Students make excellent progress in relation to their starting points and capabilities. There has been a very impressive take-up rate at AS and A Level in the past 2 years and the majority of students achieve A or B grades. Indications for 2009 are that students will exceed their target grades. In General Religious Education almost all Sixth Form students gained a qualification in 2008.

Students make an outstanding contribution to and also benefit enormously from the Catholic life of the school. They gain a great deal from the wealth of opportunities the school offers to deepen their spirituality. They value and respect the Catholic tradition of the school and a key feature of everyday life is the way they live out the Gospel call to service and respond to those in need, both within school and in the wider community. Students are encouraged to share their gifts and talents. They use these in a variety of ways to shape activities with a religious character, such as devising fund-raising activities and preparing yearly conferences for partner primary schools on 'Fairtrade'.

The vast majority of students say they are interested in and inspired by the meaningful Acts of Worship they experience and respond with sincerity and thoughtfulness. Particularly through the excellent support offered by a large chaplaincy team they are acquiring skills in planning and leading a variety of types of worship and do so with confidence. Large numbers of students take up the many opportunities for voluntary prayer and all students of all faith backgrounds choose to attend a yearly retreat day. Student feedback regarding these experiences is overwhelmingly positive. Students of other faiths are at ease and act with integrity when praying in the Catholic tradition with fellow students and appreciate the opportunities to do so.

LEADERS AND MANAGERS

How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the school

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Promoting the Catholic life of the school is given the highest priority by leaders and managers and stems from the headteacher who delivers a session on ethos to new staff at the beginning of the school year. This focus underpins the holistic view of the development of students taken by the leaders and managers and is central to the positive climate of the school. The work of chaplaincy is monitored by the deputy head and the head of spirituality and leads to improved opportunities for students. The highly successful School Mission in January 2008 and subsequent activities gave a high profile to the Catholic life of the school. Commitment to Catholic life underpins the holistic view of the development of students taken by the leaders and managers and is central to the positive climate of the school.

The head of Religious Education implements systematic monitoring procedures within the department which are part of an effective whole school system of monitoring and evaluation. Strong links with the headteacher and senior leadership team ensure that school leaders are involved in the efficient monitoring and evaluation processes. This systematic approach results in improved outcomes for students as evidenced by the greatly improved examination results at all key stages.

Raising achievement in Religious Education and developing the Catholic dimension of the school are clear priorities for governors. They provide strategic leadership, support and challenge to the headteacher and meet their statutory and canonical responsibilities well. They play a key role in improved outcomes for students through their active participation in the monitoring and evaluation of the school. Governors share their skills and experience in a variety of ways. For example, setting up a partnership with Building Futures East to provide practical training leads to qualifications for Year 10 and 11 students. Recruitment of high quality teachers and leaders and the creation of an innovative post to develop spirituality have had a positive and significant impact on the Catholic life of the school.

Leaders and managers are outstanding in the way in which they develop partnerships in order to promote Catholic learning and well-being. Students benefit significantly from working with, for example, the Youth Ministry Team which strengthens the already excellent links with local parishes, partner primary schools and the other secondary schools in the city. Partnership with International House focuses particularly on the school's duty of care to educate those who may be disadvantaged by providing support for students who have

English as an additional language. This is one example of the many partnerships from which students benefit considerably.

St. Mary's is a diverse community united around a central goal and a shared vision of inclusion where all members, of all faiths or none, live, grow and learn together harmoniously. Leaders and managers work to ensure that within and beyond school students are given the opportunity to work with, learn from and form friendships with those from different backgrounds. Collective worship celebrates and reflects the religious diversity within the school and leaves room for each person to express their own identity and values. Religious Education provides opportunities for students of faiths other than Christian to share their beliefs and values while the study of other faiths enables them to grow in mutual understanding and respect.

PROVISION

How effective the provision is for Catholic education

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Good quality teaching combined with students' purposeful learning in Religious Education leads to outstanding student progress. Good subject knowledge is applied consistently to challenge and engage students and a variety of teaching styles and good quality resources, including ICT are used effectively to support learning. Teaching assistants are appropriately deployed and as a result, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with English as an additional language also make outstanding progress. In lessons all students have a clear understanding of what they are expected to achieve and the more able are suitably challenged. Marking celebrates success but detailed feedback explaining to students how they can improve their work is not given consistently.

The Religious Education department implements a robust assessment system resulting in appropriate guidance being offered to students. Students' progress is further facilitated by interventions arising from systematic analysis of information. Staff and students agree aspirational targets at the start of the school year and progress towards these is tracked and reviewed regularly. The senior leadership team, in its determination to continue to raise standards, participates in monitoring the progress of individuals and groups. This coherent programme of monitoring, analysis and academic guidance is key in the raising of achievement in Religious Education.

The Religious Education curriculum is enriched through imaginative curriculum design which results in motivated and enthusiastic learners. It fully meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference and contributes significantly to students' spiritual and moral development. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is creatively adapted and students find the use of 'key questions' engaging. At Key Stage 4 the modular examination facilitates a much greater success rate at GCSE and builds upon the prior knowledge and experience of students. At Key Stage 5 the subject has a very impressive take-up rate and students find the curriculum thought-provoking. Provision for General Religious Education in the Sixth Form is appropriate and well received.

Collective Worship is at the heart of school life and a key part of every important school celebration. Whilst retaining its Catholic character, worship is inclusive and takes into account the diversity of faith backgrounds, aptitudes and ages of students. It makes a significant contribution to the liturgical formation of the community. Prayer, liturgy and worship are well planned, prepared, monitored and evaluated, resulting in Collective Worship provision which ensures variety, depth and scope. Large numbers of staff and students share their skills in the preparation of worship, using for example, dance, drama, art, music and ICT. This leads to creative, enriching and imaginative Acts of Worship.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1 **Outstanding** Grade 2 **Good** Grade 3 **Satisfactory** Grade 4 **Unsatisfactory**

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| Overall effectiveness | 1 |
| The school's capacity for sustained improvement | 1 |
| How good outcomes are for pupils, taking particular account of variations between different groups | 1 |
| • how well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education | 1 |
| ❖ the quality of pupils' learning and their progress | 1 |
| ❖ the quality of learning for pupils with particular learning needs and/or disabilities and their progress | 1 |
| ❖ pupils' attainment in RE | 2 |
| • the extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school | 1 |
| • how well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship | 1 |
| How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the School | 1 |
| • how well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan improvement to outcomes for pupils | 1 |
| • how well leaders and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for RE and plan for improvement to outcomes for pupils | 1 |
| • the extent to which the governing body provides effective challenge and support for the Catholic dimension of the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory and canonical responsibilities met | 1 |
| • how well leaders and managers develop partnerships with other providers, organisations and services in order to promote Catholic learning and well being | 1 |
| • how effectively leaders and managers promote Community Cohesion. | 1 |
| How effective the provision is for Catholic Education | 1 |
| • the quality of teaching and purposeful learning in Religious Education | 2 |
| • the effectiveness of assessment and academic guidance in Religious Education | 1 |
| • the extent to which Religious Education curriculum meets pupils' needs | 1 |
| • the quality of Collective Worship provided by the school | 1 |



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