

INSPECTION REPORT

School: St Matthews Roman Catholic High School

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Headteacher: Kevin Hogan

Chair of Governors: Canon Alan Denny

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Salford
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education
Act 2005

Date of inspection: March 2011

Date of previous inspection: March 2008

Reporting Inspectors: Anthony Pearson & Colin Mason

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades
Overall Effectiveness of the School	2	
Capacity for Sustained Improvement	2	1 = Outstanding
Outcomes for Pupils	2	2 = Good
Leadership and Management of Catholic Life of the School	1	3 = Satisfactory
Effectiveness of the Provision for Catholic Education	2	4 = Inadequate

Information about the school

St Matthews is a larger than average 11-16 voluntary aided high school for girls and boys. It has specialist status as a Technology College. Approximately 95% of the pupils are baptised Catholics and most are of White British heritage. The proportion with special educational needs and the proportion with a statement of special educational need are both below average. Over a quarter of pupils are eligible for free school meals which is significantly higher than average. The school serves parishes in the north east of Manchester and a parish in nearby Oldham. It is regularly oversubscribed. 57 of the schools 70.4 full time equivalent teachers are Catholics

Overall Effectiveness

Grade 2

St Matthews is a good and improving Catholic school which has many outstanding features. The Headteacher clearly articulates the vision succinctly expressed as “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God” in making sure that its commitment to Gospel values permeates its daily life. Leaders and managers throughout the school, backed by a highly effective governing body, are committed supporters of this ideal and work hard to translate it into a reality. The Catholic ethos is at the heart of development planning and self-evaluation. Pupils very effectively understand and articulate the Catholic mission and ethos of the school. They recognise the centrality of its excellent provision for prayer life and have the capacity to take even more responsibility for planning as well as participating in it. Pupils respond well to the wide range of opportunities to be involved in charitable activity and other forms of Catholic Action. Links with the local Catholic community are strong and the school makes an outstanding contribution to social cohesion in its local community and increasingly through very well developed links with schools and communities in Europe and Asia. Although still below those in other core subjects, standards in Religious Education are rising and achievement improving because of overall good teaching and the positive impact of highly effective new departmental leadership, well supported by a committed team of colleagues

Capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

Previously recognised outstanding aspects of the school’s performance have been maintained particularly in relation to provision for collective worship and in the effectiveness of leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school. The commitment to translate the school’s mission into a reality is securely based on a broadly accurate appreciation of its strengths and what is required to improve further. However, initial use of new Diocesan evaluation procedures has resulted in overestimation of its success in a few areas. Provision for the Catholic life of the school and curriculum Religious Education are well resourced backed up by judicious staffing appointments. Provision in curriculum Religious Education is improving because of the positive impact of

new departmental leadership. Consequently, the school is well placed to continue to improve.

What the school needs to do to improve further

- Raise overall standards and improve pupils' achievement in the GCSE in Religious Studies.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to be involved in planning for the prayer life of the school.
- Continue to support teachers' understanding of and commitment to the school's Catholic mission through its programme of in-service training.

How good outcomes are for pupils

Grade 2

Pupils respond well to the wide range of opportunities for prayer, reflection and liturgical experiences which the school provides. Over 600 pupils voluntarily take the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Lent and Advent and reasonable numbers attend the regular "Open Chapel" times available for prayer and reflection during lunchtimes. Pupils demonstrated both respect and reverence in the two House assemblies as well as during morning prayers in two Form groups which were observed during the inspection although opportunities to enhance the quality of these experiences for pupils were not always seized by their teachers. However, pupils speak in generally positive terms about their experiences of the Form Prayer programme and recognise the way in which it helps them to make sense of complex aspects of life. There is a good sense of shared experience expressed, for example, in the way that teachers were able to reflect on their own commitment to "Lenten Pledges" which strongly encouraged pupils to persevere with their own challenges. Pupils also willingly participate in the regular opportunities provided to celebrate Mass as a class and in other smaller group settings. A younger pupil remarked that "being in Chapel with my class makes me feel happy and safe" Pupils very effectively understand and articulate the Catholic mission and ethos of the school and recognise the centrality of its prayer life. They feel valued and appreciate the many opportunities provided to serve others in the school and beyond, for example as prefects, through the "Crossroads" initiative or through participation in very wide range of charitable activities which occur. However, they also feel that they could do even more in planning for and taking more active roles in some aspects of collective worship. They respond well to the programme of retreats which the school provides. Younger pupils particularly enjoy their experiences at the Marist centre which they recognise contributes well to their personal and spiritual development.

The vast majority of pupils in Year 11 are entered for the GCSE in Religious Studies. Over recent years pupils' performance has been below that in other core subjects. Although nearly all candidates obtained at least a pass grade in 2010, only around half were at the higher A*-C level. However, assessment information for pupils currently in Year 11 indicates that performance is likely to improve because of the positive impact of recent changes to curriculum organisation, procedures to monitor progress and more sharply focussed teaching strategies. In addition, the gap between the performance of boys and girls is narrowing to less than that found nationally. Evidence from the lessons observed and samples of written work shows that throughout the school all groups of pupils are now making good progress. Their knowledge and understanding of Catholic belief and practice deepens as they move through the school. Older pupils use this and their knowledge of scripture well to analyse relevant moral and social issues. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are good and pupils of all abilities are keen to take part in the interesting learning activities provided by their teachers. They have both the interest and confidence to consider difficult questions such as "Who is God?" Pupils' learning experiences contribute strongly to their good spiritual and moral development.

How effective the provision is for Catholic Education

Grade 2

The quality of the curriculum for Religious Education is improving and currently meets pupils' needs well. Local and national Bishops' Conference requirements are met. Well selected GCSE units of work provide a good challenge for pupils and have contributed to better engagement of boys in particular leading to improvements in their overall performance as have well devised new setting arrangements. Recent changes to the curriculum for pupils in years 7-9 have meant that they are now better prepared to meet the demands of future examination work. The success of this was evident in the inspection in lessons observed in Year 9 and work seen in pupils' exercise books. There is a good balance between opportunities provided for pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding of their faith and using their knowledge and understanding to evaluate moral and spiritual issues appropriate to their current life experiences. The curriculum is also enhanced by pupils' experience of school liturgy, its prayer life and through their participation in extra curricular activities such as retreats. Consequently the curriculum contributes effectively to pupils' good spiritual and moral development and helps them to understand and appreciate religious and cultural diversity locally and in the wider community.

Teaching and learning in Religious Education is good and several lessons observed during the inspection were outstanding. Classroom relationships are strong. Teachers capitalise on this using their good subject knowledge to stretch pupils with sharp questioning. Learning activities are interesting, challenging and enhanced with effective use of information technology.

Teachers ensure that pupils can use their developing knowledge and understanding to explore real life situations at a level which matches their age and capabilities. Teaching Assistants are effectively deployed in lessons and their work is well planned. Despite some inconsistency overall, the best lessons also use ongoing assessment strategies well to maximise learning and involve pupils in checking their own progress. Pupils have generally positive attitudes to learning and this also contributes well to the good progress which was observed. Marking is regular and supportive but there is some inconsistency in the extent to which it shows pupils how to improve their work. Assessment procedures have recently improved and are now more effective in tracking pupils' progress, thus enabling potential underachievement to be identified and dealt with.

Highly effective detailed planning underpins the outstanding provision for the school's prayer life and its collective worship. There is a very carefully designed programme for daily form prayer and house assemblies which makes excellent use of PowerPoint presentations. The programme is very closely tailored to the Church's liturgical year and takes due account of where pupils are on their own journeys of faith. For example, during the inspection, assemblies on the theme of the Annunciation enabled pupils to experience traditional formal prayer such as the Magnificat as well as reflecting on their own response to the challenge to live the Christian life. Form prayer during Lent included reflections on the Stations of the Cross. Additionally there is a broad range of opportunities for pupils and adults to take part in a regular programme of Masses, reflections through "Open Chapel" and other liturgical celebrations at appropriate times in the school year. Inspectors were able to attend voluntary staff prayer which takes place regularly in the school's very well appointed and strategically placed chapel. This was a well attended prayerful occasion which, in addition to any individual benefit, also did much to reinforce commitment to colleagues' mission to Catholic education. The school community's prayer life is supported by the high profile and commitment of local priests who give their time generously to enable Mass to be celebrated regularly in school. Staff and pupils also recognise the effectiveness of leadership of the school's chaplaincy team in ensuring that prayer is a central part of daily life in the school. This work is enhanced through the active part played by one of the local priests in his role as school chaplain.

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

Grade 1

The headteacher sets the tone for the shared commitment present throughout the school in making a daily reality of its mission succinctly expressed in Jesus' words recorded in the Gospel of St John, "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full". In translating the vision into reality, the Headteacher is well supported by senior leaders and managers and enjoys the confidence of pupils and their parents and carers. Chaplaincy and curriculum Religious education leadership are given a high profile in the school and are well resourced. The mission statement is the starting point for

development planning throughout the school and underpins its self-evaluation processes. Evidence of commitment to the vision is provided graphically by the imposing Crucifix at the site entrance and in the way that pupils are encouraged to re-evaluate their understanding of the mission statement at the beginning of the new academic year. Within its evaluation of this very strong aspect of its performance the school still recognises that it is now the time to reinvigorate that part of its programme of in-service training which supports its Catholic life.

The extremely hard-working Chair of Governors is committed to ensuring that St Matthews continues to serve the needs of its local Catholic community very well and uses his knowledge and experience effectively in leading fellow governors in providing appropriate challenge to all aspects of its performance as a Catholic school as well as providing strong support, for example in making astute appointments to the teaching staff.

The school makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion. Pupils recognise that they benefit from the quality of personal relationships which exist and can identify ways in which the school has is concerned to see them develop individually on their faith journeys. Recognising the relatively monocultural nature of its own environment, school leaders ensure that pupils are being equipped to live in the culturally diverse society of modern Britain. There are strong links with the local community, for example with local parishes, through charitable activity, including the work of the school's junior Saint Vincent de Paul conference, and through pupils' involvement in local primary schools. The strong programme of mutually beneficial links with schools in Europe and Asia is being continuously enhanced.

Leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education is good overall and has some outstanding features. Although relatively recently appointed the subject leader, building on established strengths and a positive team ethos has quickly and accurately evaluated the performance of the department and put into place action planning which is already beginning to lead to improvements. Supported by governors and senior managers, the subject leader has set challenging targets for herself and the subject in relation to other core curriculum areas across the school. Improving, and a more consistently good quality of teaching, underpinned by more effective assessment procedures is already beginning to lead to better achievement in Religious Education. Additionally, the subject leader makes a strong contribution the school's programme of liturgies and collective worship.