



St Mary and St Thomas Aquinas RCVA Primary School

Stella Lane, Blaydon, Tyne and Wear, NE21 4NE

School Unique Reference Number: **108392**

Inspection dates: 24 – 25 September 2014

Lead inspector: Mary Tate

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Catholic Life:		Outstanding	1
Collective Worship:		Outstanding	1
Religious Education:		Outstanding	1

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Mary and St Thomas Aquinas RCVA Primary School is an outstanding Catholic school because:

- Faith and community are at the centre of this outstanding Catholic school. Caring relationships, strong team work and high expectations underpin all aspects of the school's work.
- The Catholic Life of the school is outstanding because the mission and ethos of Catholic education underpins the work of this inclusive community. The school is a beacon in the community and a place where pupils witness a living faith.
- The quality of Collective Worship is outstanding because it is central to the life of the school. Staff and pupils plan and lead high quality acts of worship and all pupils act with the deepest reverence and respect.
- Religious Education is outstanding. Strong teaching ensures pupils make excellent progress.

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

- This is an average sized primary school serving the parish of St Mary and St Thomas Aquinas, Stella.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- To improve the quality of teaching in Religious Education by:
 - further strengthening subject knowledge for all staff.
- To improve the provision for Collective Worship by:
 - further developing creative prayer spaces within the school grounds.

CATHOLIC LIFE

THE QUALITY OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

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- The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.
- The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.
- How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

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The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic Life of the school and benefit greatly from it.
- Pupils say they are valued and confidently express their views and feelings. They embrace the vision statement to, 'be the light, share the light'.
- They take on many roles of responsibility and take full advantage of many opportunities available to them. Year six pupils act as 'special friends' to reception children, a link which many maintain after they leave the school.
- Pupils confidently talk about charity work that they support including CAFOD, St Cuthbert's Care, Romanian Shoebox appeal and Comic Relief.
- Pupils are proud of their school and the part they play in their community. They are proud of their religious identity and deeply respect the Catholic traditions of the school.
- Pupils' exemplary behaviours towards one another enables them to celebrate life fully in this cohesive community.
- There are excellent partnerships with parents, parish and the wider community resulting in a variety of activities which improve the school's provision. One governor remarked that there is an almost seamless rhythm of movement between school and church
- The school has established strong links internationally with a group of pupils, staff and parents visiting a partner school in China every couple of years.

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- People are at the heart of this nurturing community. The strong family ethos is welcoming and caring where faith is modelled and each person is valued as a member of God's family.
- The school chaplain contributes significantly to the work of the school. She is highly visible to all (pupils, staff and parents) and guides them in their journey of faith.
- The school's behaviour policy reflects Gospel values. It is clear that pupils are supported well in making right choices and that they understand personal responsibility
- The school mission statement is clear and displayed throughout the school ensuring that it is an integral part of daily life.
- 'Statements to live by' are displayed throughout the school and these are clearly used to help pupils to understand how to live in the way Jesus wants them to.
- Pastoral care for pupils is outstanding as a result of the commitment of all stakeholders,

and through having clear policies and structures in place. Pastoral programmes working alongside Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) refer to Catholic teachings and principles.

- Vibrant displays throughout the school contribute to the stimulating learning environment which reflects the school's mission and Catholic character.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- The school leadership team, including governors are deeply committed to the church's mission and are highly ambitious for the Catholic Life of the school. There is a clear understanding of Catholic education and the role of the Catholic school within that. Personal development and high quality, inclusive care are paramount.
- School leaders are viewed as outstanding role models in the continued development of the Catholic ethos. The mission of the school is given the highest priority along with the spiritual and moral development of pupils.
- Leaders conduct a range of robust monitoring activities and therefore self-evaluation of the Catholic Life of the school is accurate and provides a clear and effective framework for school improvement.
- Governors know the school well, they are knowledgeable and well informed. They provide support as well as effective challenge. This leads to well-targeted school improvements to continually enhance the communal life of the school. As a result, the understanding of staff and pupils of the mission of the school is outstanding.
- This is a school which is constantly looking to further improve and it thrives on self-challenge, ensuring the best possible care for all pupils.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

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- How well pupils respond to and participate in the school’s Collective Worship.
- The quality of provision for Collective Worship.
- How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

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How well pupils respond to and participate in the school’s Collective Worship is outstanding.

- Pupils’ involvement in Collective Worship is a central part of their experience from their earliest years. Pupils are skilled in using a variety of methods to support their prayer.
- From a young age pupils are deeply reverent and respectful during Collective Worship. They are reflective and focused during prayer and know how to lead and contribute appropriately from their earliest days in school.
- Pupils speak highly of the different ways they pray in school and are able to outline the ways in which they plan Collective Worship and pray together in their different class groups.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of the church’s liturgical year, seasons and festivals and a love for special devotions such as the Rosary and Stations of the Cross which they celebrate with staff.
- Pupils are proud of their school chapel which they are free to visit at break times. They enjoy the calm, prayerful atmosphere.
- There is a deep sense of respect for different faiths. One parent commented that they were astonished by their child’s acceptance of difference.
- All of these contribute very positively to their spiritual and moral development which is outstanding.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship is outstanding.

- From first entering the school, it is clear that Collective Worship is at its heart.
- There is a rich variety of different forms of worship, led by the school chaplain, which are enthusiastically embraced by the whole school community.
- Praying together is a natural part of the school day and parents commented on how much they value the school’s Collective Worship, which is threaded throughout the school.
- High quality displays, stained glass windows designed by pupils and the Stations of the Cross around the school promote an ethos of prayer and provide good support for reflection.
- The school is justifiably proud of its recently developed chapel and Gospel Garden which is used well by pupils in lessons and at break times.
- There are strong links with the parish where pupils serve at Mass and take an active part in Sunday Mass and other worship.

- The school organises an end of year liturgy for year six and reception 'special friends,' which is well attended by families. Year six pupils take part in an annual retreat to Holy Island.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship is outstanding.

- Leaders have excellent knowledge of how to plan and deliver high quality Collective Worship and model outstanding practice to help develop the skills of their colleagues. They continually support staff in their spiritual and liturgical understanding.
- All staff have attended and benefitted greatly from worship and prayer training. Their enthusiasm and focused drive for improvement has led to enrichment in liturgies and worship.
- Opportunities are provided for the staff to pray and reflect together and the response to this is excellent.
- The views of parents and governors are regularly sought. The responses are highly valued and lead to further developments.
- Very good strategies are in place to monitor many aspects of school life including Collective Worship and as a result the quality of Collective Worship continues to improve and enrich the school community.
- Sacramental preparation is well embedded and in line with diocesan policy.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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- How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.
- The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education.
- How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

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How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is outstanding.

- Pupils enjoy and understand the value of Religious Education and are keen to do well, they have very positive attitudes and speak enthusiastically about their learning
- Behaviour for learning is outstanding. Pupils concentrate exceptionally well and are rarely off task.
- Pupils make rapid progress in their learning as they journey through school. There are no differences in the progress made by specific pupil groups.
- Creative lessons, where children are challenged to think deeply and extend their knowledge and understanding, result in the vast majority of pupils achieving extremely well by the end of key stage two (KS2).
- Due to the state of transition in level expectations across all Diocesan schools, the current averages for attainment and progress are not reliable benchmarks. Therefore no judgement will be made in this report against diocesan averages for attainment or progress.

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is outstanding.

- The quality of teaching in Religious Education is outstanding and ensures that many pupils make at least good, and in some cases, outstanding progress.
- Teachers have high expectations and are enthusiastic about Religious Education. Creativity in lesson planning is a strength of the school.
- In the best lessons there is a good pace to learning and pupils' understanding is checked regularly. Teachers set lessons in context and intervene when necessary to ensure good progress.
- Marking is good and pupils are given regular feedback which they respond to. This ensures they know how well they are doing and what their next steps are to make progress.
- Staff are involved in cross moderation of standards between year six and year seven with the partner secondary school.
- As a result of very good assessment procedures teachers and other adults have an excellent awareness of their pupils' prior learning and capabilities.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is outstanding.

- The headteacher, together with the Religious Education coordinator, provides strong leadership and has conducted a wide range of monitoring activities relating to provision and outcomes in Religious Education.
- The well respected headteacher inspires confidence and commitment from pupils, parents, governors and colleagues. There is a strong belief that it is Religious Education which underpins the school's success in all areas.
- Leaders are very well aware of the areas for development in the teaching of Religious Education and see this as a high priority within the school improvement plan. Planning is therefore founded on sound evidence and data.
- The Religious Education curriculum is taught using creative and imaginative teaching strategies which stimulates pupil interest and effectively ensures continuity and progression.
- Religious Education is very well resourced and meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference fully.
- The governing body discharge their statutory and canonical duties well. They are well informed and knowledgeable about the school's strengths and further areas for development. Governors are regular visitors into school and provide appropriate challenge to the headteacher and senior leadership team.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

HOW EFFECTIVE THE SCHOOL IS IN PROVIDING CATHOLIC EDUCATION:

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CATHOLIC LIFE:

1

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.

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The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

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How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

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COLLECTIVE WORSHIP:

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How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.

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The quality of provision for Collective Worship.

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How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

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How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

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The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education.

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How well leaders and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education

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SCHOOL DETAILS

School name	St Mary and St Thomas Aquinas RCVA Primary School
Unique reference number	108392
Local authority	Gateshead
This Inspection Report is produced for the Rt. Reverend Séamus 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 schedule follows criteria set by the National Board of Advisers and Inspectors.	
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Head teacher	Mrs E. White
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