

**DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION  
REPORT (Section 48)**

on

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

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**School:** St John's RC Comprehensive School and Sixth Form College

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**School URN:** 114325

**Headteacher:** Mr Gerard Moran

**Chair of Governors:** Mr Leo Robinson

**Lead Inspector:** Mr Anthony Finnerty

**Team Inspector:** Mr Stephen Hammond

**Date of Inspection:** 8 and 9 June 2010

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 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 John's Catholic School and Sixth Form College is a large 11-19 comprehensive which serves the Catholic community of Bishop Auckland and the surrounding areas. Students come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The majority of students are white British. There are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. The number of students who have a statement of special education needs is slightly below average. The Sixth Form includes a significant number of students who have come from other schools.

## **FACTUAL INFORMATION**

### **Pupil Catchment:**

Number of pupils on roll: 1396

Planned Admission Number of Pupils: 209

Percentage of pupils baptised RC: 56%

Percentage of pupils from other Christian denominations: 42%

Percentage of pupils from other World Faiths: 1.4%

Percentage of pupils with no religious affiliation: 0.6%

Percentage of pupils from ethnic groups: 5.5%

Percentage of pupils with special needs: 13%

### **Staffing**

Full time teachers: 99

Part time teachers: 10

Percentage of Catholic teachers: 51%

### **RE Department Staffing:**

Number of full time RE teachers: 8

Number of part time RE teachers: 0

Percentage of Catholic teachers: 100%

Percentage of teachers with CCRS: 15%

### **Percentage of learning time given to RE:**

|     |     |                      |     |
|-----|-----|----------------------|-----|
| Yr7 | 10% | Yr 10                | 10% |
| Yr8 | 10% | Yr 11                | 10% |
| Yr9 | 10% | 6 <sup>th</sup> Form | 5%  |

**Parishes served by the school:**

St Charles', Tudhoe

St Mary and St Joseph's, Newton Aycliffe

St Joseph's, Coundon

All Saints, Ferryhill

Our Lady and St Thomas, Willington

St Mary's/St Wilfrid's, Bishop Auckland

St Cuthbert's, Crook

St Paulinus, Bishop Auckland

St Thomas, Shildon

## OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

**How effective the school is in providing Catholic education**

1

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

1

### MAIN FINDINGS

St John's is an outstanding Catholic school and provides an education which enables students to flourish. The distinctive leadership model employed by the two principals is inspirational and transformative. Leadership is distributed across the community and this serves the development and the empowerment of everyone. The school's holistic approach to education, its pursuit of excellence, its care and provision for the weakest and most vulnerable and the centrality of prayer are all testaments to its distinctive Catholic character. St John's declares itself to be "a learning community guided by Gospel values" and all the evidence available confirms that it is fulfilling its mission. There is a friendly and welcoming atmosphere throughout the school. Mutual respect ensures a culture which encourages students and staff to develop in the image and likeness of God. As one student said, "the school, has helped me become more than I thought I could be".

Outcomes for students are high at all key stages. Current and secure data provide a particularly positive picture of their progress and their predicted achievements. The determinedly high standards set throughout the curriculum, linked to support systems and professional realism, suggest the capacity to continually improve in this respect is outstanding. Students value, and gain profound benefit from, the Catholic character of the school. Prayer is at the heart of the daily experience of all members of this inclusive Christian community and whole school liturgical celebration is valued.

Provision for Catholic education is outstanding. The school takes care to appoint key staff capable of delivering high standards of teaching and learning and actively committed to the values and ethos of the school. Assessment practices are well documented and rigorously implemented in line with school policy and this has a positive impact on student achievement. Sound evaluation of student needs has led to appropriate changes in curriculum, especially at Key Stage 4. Innovative curriculum development for Religious Education in the Sixth Form is underway. All assemblies are well prepared and incorporate student involvement to varying degrees. Experience of daily prayer is provided and supported for all students.

School leadership is characterised at all levels by reflection and self-evaluation, providing confidence that there will be continuing improvement in these areas. Every issue highlighted in the last inspection has been successfully addressed and developed. At all levels of the school community there is a sense of ownership and an enthusiasm to play a full role in its life. This stems from the 'Servant Leadership' lived out at the centre of the school in the form of the highly collaborative leadership of the two principals. Their modelling of co-operation and their overt witness to distinctly Christian leadership has encouraged many staff to reconfigure their own approaches to leadership. Robust systems and strong structures for communication and support give confidence that there will be sustained improvement in all aspects of an already highly successful school.

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

- Embed a pattern of provision for retreats and days of reflection as an entitlement to students in each year group;
- Ensure improved outcomes and greater or more consistent challenge in year 13 Religious Education.

## PUPILS

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

1

Students' learning and enjoyment in Religious Education is outstanding and they achieve highly. Progress across the five years of Key Stages 3 and 4 is excellent with 12.5% increase in the number of students attaining A\* - C at GCSE and 72% of students making at least three levels of progress. There is a sustained trend in raised attainment for each key stage. Progress and the quality of learning for students with particular learning needs and/or disabilities are outstanding with over 90% meeting or exceeding challenging targets. Standards of attainment at Key Stage 3 are now high and the work done since the last inspection on ensuring the accuracy of assessment at this level has secured improvement. Key Stage 4 standards of attainment have risen rapidly in recent years and are now above average. The school's rigorous tracking system indicates that the current Year 11 students are on target to attain in excess of 31% A\*-A; 81% A\*-C and 99% A\*-G. If this is achieved it will confirm the school's own current assessment of its work as outstanding in this area. Learning and progress at Key Stage 5 are both good and the students enjoy and value Religious Education. Attainment is average. Higher ability students perform well at AS whilst students studying at A level make expected progress with a 100% securing A-E in 2009 and 44% of these students attaining A or B grades. Overall attainment levels at AS are average and a creative and responsive "fast track" in Religious Studies accounts for the negative residuals of 2009. Students who do not study a discrete A Level in Religious Studies may follow an AS in Religious Studies over two years and can complete a Level 2 course which is devised by the school and externally validated. Next year it is planned that Year 13 students will complete the course at Level 3. This will encourage both a higher degree of challenge and improved outcomes for students.

Students recognise that the guiding gospel values of the mission statement have created a positive community which is keen to celebrate. Students know themselves to be valued members of a community. They readily participate in all areas of school life. Most students can express themselves with confidence; they know that their views and opinions will be treated with respect and in turn they show respect to fellow students and to staff. Students are keen to participate in charity events and have initiated such events, for instance the "P Factor" which raises money for Epilepsy Research and honours a student who died tragically three years ago. This annual talent show is entirely student led. Student involvement in service to the community - local, national and global - is woven into the school's life. A strong chaplaincy serves to enrich their spiritual lives and facilitates their contribution to the Catholic life of the school.

Student response to collective worship varies but all students acknowledge the fact that it is central to the school's life and they respect the significance of prayer in the lives of fellow students. In assemblies teachers sit amongst students

sharing moments of prayer and worship which encourages a mature approach from students. In times of personal or shared tragedy the role of worship has been particularly strong in enabling students to find peace and consolation. Vibrant, sensitively prepared Eucharistic celebration to mark milestones in the lives of students is strongly appreciated. There is a great openness on the part of the young people and there is an expressed desire for spiritual development which can be further developed via retreat days and formation in personal prayer. Very few students at St John's belong to world faiths other than Christianity but they feel their needs are addressed respectfully.

# PROVISION

## How effective the provision is in promoting Catholic education

1

The quality of teaching in Religious Education is outstanding. It is consistently effective in promoting excellent, purposeful learning. Where teaching is best the pace is fast, activities are varied and student enjoyment and engagement is evidently high. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and all display a strong commitment to teaching Catholic beliefs and values and in developing the religious literacy of their students. The Religious Education department makes a marked contribution to the development of students' general literacy and thinking skills. Highly positive relationships in Religious Education classrooms ensure that students have excellent attitudes to their learning. Teachers demonstrably accompany their students on a journey in their search for meaning. High challenge and low stress are the hallmarks of Religious Education classrooms at St John's.

The Religious Education department has a very effective system for assessing students' progress. The system at Key Stage 3 has been refined over a period of time as the department has sought the most effective means of measuring students' learning. Assessments are identified in medium term planning and range from formalised activities to more informal methods. This enables a well rounded view of student performance and the system is well matched to student need. Work sampling and moderation activities ensure that standards are applied consistently across the department. Tracking and monitoring of progress is robust. Appropriately focused and targeted intervention strategies spring naturally from these processes.

The quality of the curriculum is excellent. The time allocated to Religious Education meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference in all key stages. This is supplemented and enriched by the way faith, spirituality and prayer permeate the life of the school. Work is well matched to students' prior learning and contributes very effectively to promoting the school's mission and values. The curriculum is planned and delivered in a way that reflects the school's vision of 'a learning community guided by Gospel values'. As a consequence academic achievement in Religious Education is high and students' spiritual and moral development is outstanding.

Collective worship in all its forms, from year Masses to assemblies and tutor group reflections, are an essential part of life at St John's and are of outstanding quality. Great skill is exercised to ensure that traditional prayers are known and loved while innovative styles of worship are also used for celebration and prayer. A powerful example of sensitive and inclusive worship is the recent Holocaust Memorial liturgy which was prepared by Gypsy Roma Traveller students and some of their non-traveller friends. It is routine for students to contribute to the planning of liturgical events and for them to play a role in worship.

# LEADERS AND MANAGERS

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

1

The outstanding leadership in promoting and supporting the Catholic life of the school is strongly connected to the senior leaders' own expression of personal commitment to Christ. The model of 'Servant Leadership' is lived out in a unique and collaborative approach manifest primarily in a shared principal role that echoes throughout the school. The intelligence and theological literacy of the two principals, and their communication of these qualities, means that staff members speak of gospel values with unusual ease. All leaders and managers make explicit the school's mission of service and, by giving the highest priority to promoting monitoring and evaluating the Catholic life of the school, enable all members of the community to grow in faith.

The monitoring and evaluation of Religious Education provision is systematic, rigorous, and targeted at securing improved outcomes for students. The ongoing evaluation of teaching and learning is robust. This has led to clear priorities for development being established which are planned for appropriately. A strong team of teaching specialists work together to share ideas and to review progress. Having a member of the leadership team linked to the department alongside the departments of Maths and English ensures that Religious Education is rightly seen to be at the core of the curriculum. Particularly noteworthy is the impact of the student welfare team in ensuring that vulnerable students are supported effectively in their growth and development.

Governors are actively involved in the Catholic life of St John's and ensure continuous improvement through both informal monitoring and evaluation and more formal governor briefings and improvement planning. The governors know the school very well, (the chair of governors knows every member of staff by name), and they speak passionately and knowledgeably about the impact of the Catholic life of the school on the wider community and the contribution to this of the Religious Education department. Governor strengths and skills are broad and are effectively deployed. They play a full and very active role in planning the strategic development of St John's.

Partnership runs through the veins of this school. The innovative senior leadership structure sets the tone. It is a collegiate school where positive relationships grounded upon trust and honesty enable a real collaboration and collective striving to turn vision into reality. Staff, students, governors and other stakeholders are all regarded as partners in learning. The prevalent theme of servant-hood extends far beyond the school walls. The school is committed to improving the lives of all people. Very effective partnerships have been established with schools, agencies and organisations locally, nationally and abroad which make an outstanding contribution to Catholic learning, student development and well being. Students and staff have benefited from and

contributed to a wealth of experiences facilitated by the Diocesan (South) Catholic Partnership.

The school is outstanding in the promotion of community cohesion. Students display remarkable sensitivity to those less privileged than themselves and high levels of commitment to working together for the common good. Numerous examples include the powerful Asylum Seeker/Refugee Project which changed perceptions of students and of adults alike. The interweaving of this theme with the Christmas celebration is one example of how the school puts into practice its vision for Citizenship Education rooted in the Gospel priorities for the poor and marginalised. There are excellent relationships throughout the school at every level. Vulnerable students are expertly cared for and those from a range of backgrounds, with difficulties and challenges are able to integrate successfully. There is a strong Catholic theme of prayer and liturgy in the school, which, together with the school's philosophy on inclusion and Religious Education provision allows plentiful opportunities for the sharing and celebration of other faiths and cultures. Involvement with the cultural hub projects has engaged students in outreach to local people of different generations and heightened awareness of local history. The opportunities for overseas travel, in particular through "Project Peru", has been invaluable in developing students' understanding of justice, prophecy and stewardship and provides an enriching experience of belonging to a worldwide community.

## SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Key for inspection grades:

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

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>   | <b>1</b> |
| <b>The school's capacity for sustained improvement</b>   | <b>1</b> |
| <b>How good outcomes are for pupils, taking particular account of variations between different groups?</b>   | <b>1</b> |
| • 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' standards of attainment in Religious Education   | 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        |
| <b>How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?</b>  | <b>1</b> |
| • the quality of teaching and purposeful learning in Religious Education?  | 1        |
| • 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        |
| <b>How effective are leaders and managers in developing the Catholic life of the School?</b>   | <b>1</b> |
| • 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 Religious Education 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        |