

**DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION  
REPORT (Section 48)**

**on**

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

**School:** St Aidan's Catholic School

**Address:** Willow Bank Road  
Sunderland  
SR2 7HJ

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**School URN:** 108899

**Headteacher:** Mr Stephen Hammond

**Chair of Governors:** Dr C Emmerson

  

**Lead Inspector:** David Lewis

**Team Inspector:** Mark Henderson

**Date of Inspection** 15 and 16 November 2012

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Aidan's Catholic School is an 11-18 Voluntary Aided Boys Comprehensive serving 14 parishes in Sunderland. It is a Specialist Language College. Most students are of White British origin with an increasing number of students from ethnic, religious and cultural minority groups. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals or with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.

### Pupil Catchment

Number of pupils on roll:	1054
Planned Admission Number of Pupils:	180
Percentage of pupils baptised RC:	75%
Percentage of pupils from other Christian denominations:	18.7%
Percentage of pupils from other World Faiths:	2.6%
Percentage of pupils with no religious affiliation:	3.7%
Percentage of pupils from ethnic groups:	11.7%
Percentage of pupils with special needs:	15.9%

### Staffing

Full time teachers:	66.0 FTE
Part time teachers:	9
Percentage of Catholic teachers:	36%
Percentage of teachers with CCRS:	4.6%

### RE Department Staffing

Number of full time RE teachers:	6
Number of part time RE teachers:	1

### Percentage of learning time given to Religious Education

Year 7	10%
Year 8	10%
Year 9	10%
Year 10	10%
Year 11	10%
6 <sup>th</sup> Form	10%

**Parishes served by the school**

The Holy Family, Sunderland

Holy Rosary, Sunderland

Immaculate Heart of Mary, Sunderland

The Sacred Heart and John Bosco, Sunderland

St Anne, Sunderland

St Benet, Sunderland

St Cecilia and St Patrick, Sunderland

St Hilda, Sunderland

St Joseph, Sunderland

St Leonard, Silksworth,

St Mary, Sunderland

St Cuthbert, Seaham

## INSPECTION JUDGMENTS

**OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

**2**

**CATHOLIC LIFE**

**2**

**COLLECTIVE WORSHIP**

**2**

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

**2**

### KEY FINDINGS

- This is a good Catholic school where students achieve well in Religious Education, and where prayer, worship and the development of faith are given the highest priority. It is not yet outstanding because recent improvements to teaching and subject leadership in Religious Education are not yet sufficiently embedded to ensure outstanding achievement and a consistent approach to form time Collective Worship.
- Religious Education is good overall because standards of attainment have risen to the current good level and the very large majority of teaching in Religious Education is good or better. It is not yet outstanding because not all teaching is good or better, and differentiation is not yet sufficiently developed to ensure outstanding achievement for all groups of students.
- The Catholic Life of the School is good overall because of the good provision. It is not yet outstanding because recent developments in Religious Education staffing are not sufficiently embedded to have had an outstanding impact on the development of the Catholic Life of the school.
- Collective Worship is good overall because students, staff and governors prepare and take part in a wide variety of liturgies, assemblies, masses and other Collective Worship events throughout the school year. It is not yet outstanding because, whilst whole school Collective Worship is good, the quality prayer in form time is variable.

### WHAT THE SCHOOL NEEDS TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

To improve further the school needs to:

- Improve the quality of teaching in Religious Education to ensure outstanding achievement by:
  - Improving differentiation at all key stages so that all groups make at least good progress
  - Ensuring a more consistent approach to marking, Assessment for Learning (AfL) and extended writing in religious literacy
  - Moving swiftly to full course GCSE Religious Education at KS4
- Improve progress at KS5
- Improve the quality prayer in form time by:
  - Developing a more consistent approach to the promotion, monitoring and evaluation of prayer in form time

## 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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Pupils speak maturely of their deep commitment to the Catholic faith, its traditions and its impact on their attitudes and behaviour. They feel widely consulted on developments and are central in shaping the school's mission and ethos. For example, the Student Chaplaincy Group is having significant impact on developing Student Voice. Students prepare their own prayers for Collective Worship, plan liturgies and masses including choosing music, and have ensured each year group holds a 'singing assembly' every fortnight in order to improve singing at masses, liturgies and other school events. They are enthusiastic about involvement in retreats at the Youth Village, school trips to Rome, Lourdes, Poland and Israel, and raise substantial funds for the less fortunate through CAFOD events including non-uniform days, school concerts, poppy appeals, cake sales and sponsored silences, as well as funds for their twin school St Joseph's Blama, Sierra Leone. Students respond very well to opportunities provided by the school for personal support and development including Personal Development Education (PDE) days. A sense of mutual respect and support pervades every aspect of the school, which is developing to become a very cohesive community. Pupils take part in diocesan events such as the Flame Congress, Lourdes Pilgrimage and the Diocesan Youth Council.

The provision for the Catholic Life of the school is given the highest possible priority. For example, all staff and students speak volubly about the positive impact of the visionary leadership of the headteacher which has transformed the Catholic Life of the school. His personal commitment and example to the Catholic faith and in developing the school to become a worshipping community has impacted significantly on all aspects of the school. Staff work well as teams and good relationships exist at all levels. Both students and staff speak openly about the prayer life of the school and its impact each day. Residential retreats for students, staff and governors ensure the school is an inclusive and prayerful community, committed to the social teachings of the Church. The school is a cohesive community where mutual respect and forgiveness are clearly evident, where behaviour is never less than very good. The recently developed chaplaincy team of chaplain and spiritual coordinator report directly to the headteacher. This team is becoming a very effective force in supporting and developing the Catholic Life of the school through prayer, liturgies and assemblies, and is an important part of the pastoral support for both students and staff.

The school is fortunate in the commitment and leadership of this headteacher. Governors, staff and students hold him in high regard and speak openly of the significant impact of his personal witness to the Catholic faith and its impact throughout the school community. He has worked tirelessly to create a new senior leadership team, has restructured the religious education department including the appointment of an effective new head of department, and created a wider chaplaincy team with the additional appointment of a spiritual coordinator. The teams have worked cohesively to bring the school to its current good standard and have the capacity to improve outcomes further. The school effectively monitors and evaluates its provision for the Catholic Life of the school through the governors' Catholic Life Committee who scrutinise the work of the school through regular reports and presentations from the Chaplaincy team and other staff. The Student Chaplaincy Group is becoming increasingly effective in monitoring and evaluating collective worship, masses and liturgies as well as identifying areas for development of the Catholic Life of the school. Responses to a parents' questionnaire highlighted the strong Catholic ethos, high attainment and good leadership at the school.

# COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

## THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

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- How well pupils respond to and participate in the schools' 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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Pupils act with reverence and are keen to participate in Collective Worship. Assemblies are characterised by pupil involvement and leadership, prayers written by members of the school community, and a real sense of belonging to a Catholic worshipping community. Pupils prepare a weekly mass in the school chapel, including readings, prayers and music, and masses are led by parish priests from the local deanery. A suggestion from the Student Chaplaincy Group has led to a singing assembly every fortnight for each year group. This has had a significant impact on masses and other liturgies throughout the school year. The prayer life of the school is becoming well developed including pupils composing their own prayers Collective Worship during form time. The school hosts the deanery Confirmation Preparation Programme and this has resulted in a large response from pupils at the school. Every year, Remembrance Day is celebrated with a two minute silence for the whole school in the yard, with the 'Last Post' played by pupils. This moving and deeply spiritual event was witnessed by the inspectors. In addition, the school holds a Remembrance Day Service for each year group where prayers are written and led by pupils and petitions are presented as part of the liturgy.

Acts of Worship are given high profile. Students and staff speak easily of their part in preparing prayer and worship. Staff and students pray together regularly with a full calendar of morning prayer, assemblies, retreats, weekly and end of term masses and liturgies. Governors are invited to attend all liturgical events in school and they feel welcomed as part of the school community. The weekly mass is led by each Religious Education teaching group in turn who prepare the mass music and prayers. They take an active part in these weekly masses which are led by priests from the denary who volunteer to come into school as part of the role in supporting young people and staff at the school. Pupils are also becoming increasingly skilled and equipped in leading prayer and are keen to compose their own prayers and plan masses and other liturgical events.

Collective Worship is planned well across the school by leaders and managers, and pupil response is good overall. Retreats for both students and staff are a regular feature of the school calendar including a retreat for all staff and a retreat for newly qualified teachers. Staff respond very positively to these opportunities which help to create a prayerful community. Throughout the school, there is an expectation that every member of staff is a spiritual leader. Collective Worship is reviewed and evaluated regularly through the Student Chaplaincy Group, the Governors Catholic Life Committee and through views of pupils, staff and parents. Leaders and managers are involved in planning the school's prayer and liturgical life, view it as highly important, and have placed a great emphasis on developing student leadership in the promoting, monitoring and evaluating the provision for Collective Worship. Whilst masses, liturgies and assemblies are good, the quality of Collective Worship in form time is variable and needs to be more consistent across the school. Outstanding examples of form time Collective Worship were characterised by a reverence, deep reflection, considered response and full participation. Where Collective Worship in form time was less successful, form prayer was led by the teacher with limited pupil involvement.

# 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 monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education

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Pupils clearly enjoy Religious Education and this was highlighted in lessons observed and discussions held. Students spoke extremely positively about the support they receive from teachers within the RE department and commented that expectations in RE are high and built on mutual respect between teachers and students. Pupils apply themselves diligently in lessons and are enthusiastic about their learning. Observations confirmed that students make good progress within lessons. However, differentiation is not yet consistent or innovative enough to allow rapid and sustained progress for all groups.

The standards of attainment at key stage three (KS3) are above the diocesan average and while this is also the case at key stage four (KS4) – where standards have risen and are in line with student performance in English – the school has identified that there is a need to raise attainment further in RE at GCSE. The introduction of the ASDAN Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) course at this key stage has had a positive impact on pupil outcomes and student engagement. However given the prior attainment of students and the quality of teaching and learning observed, the school rightly plans to move swiftly to full course GCSE in RE for all key stage four students by September 2013. Numbers of students opting to study Religious Education at key stage five are high. It is in fact the second most popular subject in the sixth form, a good indicator of student enjoyment and interest in the subject and the quality of teaching received. Attainment is broadly in line with national averages at this key stage and the progress students make is improving.

The very large majority (82%) of lessons observed were good or better. Lessons observed that were outstanding were characterised by excellent use of questioning, challenge, innovative approaches to planning and rapid and sustained progress for all students. A good range of activities are used which appeal to all types of learner and is reflected in the positive attitude students show towards the subject. Collaborative learning is a real strength and can be developed even further in relation to differentiation. Students can speak articulately about what they learn in RE and how this impacts on their daily lives. Students are frequently praised and benefit from high levels of support. Achievement and effort are celebrated through the use of merit systems e.g. SIMS points and instant wins which are proving very effective.

The work scrutiny and conversations held with students in lessons reflected some good practice in relation to assessment however a more consistent approach needs to be adopted within the department towards assessment for learning and this should be

married with the new approach adopted by the school to developing student literacy. The department has identified this through their own monitoring and are taking measures to ensure this improves and as such impacts on student outcomes and progress.

Leadership and management of the provision of RE is good and improving. The headteacher links with the department and offers much valued and frequent support. Continued improvement of standards in RE is a clear priority for the senior leadership team. Key decisions relating to provision have led to a rise in outcomes for students at KS4 in terms of attainment and engagement. The GCSE curriculum at KS4 now meets students' needs and interests. The positive impact of the decision to change modules in year ten has already been realised in lesson observations and student voice and should also impact on results in the summer. The subject is very well led and recent appointments have brought a much needed stability to the department. Professional development time is used effectively to share outstanding practice which exists within the department and outstanding practice elsewhere in the school has also been incorporated into development plans e.g. Spanish. The head of RE has high expectations and knows from a rigorous level of monitoring exactly what needs to be achieved to make this department outstanding. Her enthusiasm to improve teaching and learning is infectious and can be witnessed in the passion and commitment expressed by her team. She has created a strong team ethic within the department and student perceptions of the subject have improved greatly as a result. It was resoundingly clear from meetings and discussions with students that RE makes a positive contribution to their moral and spiritual development and to their ability to discern their own unique vocations.

## SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

**HOW EFFECTIVE THE SCHOOL IS IN PROVIDING CATHOLIC EDUCATION.**

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### **CATHOLIC LIFE**

2

**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 schools' 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**

2

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

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**The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education**

2

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

2

	Pupil Outcomes	Provision	Leadership and Management	
Religious Education	2	2	2	2
Catholic Life	2	2	2	2
Collective Worship	2	2	2	2
	2	2	2	2