

**DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION
REPORT (Section 48)**

on

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

School: St Benet Biscop Catholic High School

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School URN: 929 4632

Religious Education: Mr Nick Bowen

Chair of Governors: Mrs Anne Hardy

Lead Inspector: David Simmons

Team Inspector: Mary Hood

Date of Inspection: 9 and 10 February 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.

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OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

How effective the school is in providing Catholic education

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

MAIN FINDINGS

St Benet Biscop is an outstanding Catholic school. Strong and effective leadership throughout the school creates an inclusive and welcoming ethos grounded in Catholic Christian values. All pupils are supported within the school and are proud to be a part of the community. The governors, headteacher, senior leaders and the subject leader in Religious Education have a shared vision that permeates all aspects of school life. Pastoral care is a significant strength of the school. Pupils feel safe, cared for and valued as members of the community. The school benefits from an energetic and creative chaplaincy team which is continually evolving and strengthening. The subject leader is seen by both staff and pupils as a major source of support and advice in this very important area of the school life. Collective worship is a major strength of the school and pupils appreciate the variety within worship.

Pupils make exceptional progress in Religious Education and have a real enjoyment of the subject. Outcomes are outstanding. This is reflected in the rising proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C at GCSE level and in the increasing uptake of AS and A2 Religious Education courses in the Sixth Form. Pupils demonstrate a strong element of ownership and participate enthusiastically in the Catholic life of the school. Many of them are outstanding role models and leaders within the school community. Since the last inspection the school has placed a major focus on collective worship and as a result pupils are actively involved in the preparation and delivery of meaningful and reflective acts of worship.

The provision for Catholic education is outstanding. A reflective self-evaluation process addresses all aspects of the Catholic life of the school. Energetic and creative leadership, ensures a developing provision that meets the needs of all pupils. The school development plan clearly reflects that the Catholic dimension of the school is at the heart of all that they do. Provision for Religious Education is outstanding and responsive to the diverse needs of pupils who enter the school in Year 9 from a variety of schools and with widely differing experiences of Religious Education. Teaching and learning is consistently good within Religious Education and is outstanding in many lessons.

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding at all levels. Embedded self-evaluation procedures provide a very accurate and detailed insight into the school as a basis for planning further development. The headteacher is totally committed to the school as a community deeply rooted in Catholic Christian values. The governors are highly effective in their work and supportive of the school at every level. The subject leader is an excellent role model to staff and pupils. Leadership at all levels reflects a belief in the value and uniqueness of every individual. The school has been

highly successful in improving outcomes for pupils since the previous, excellent, inspection and there is outstanding capacity for further improvement.

What the school needs to do to improve further:

- In the re-structuring of the school as an 11-18 institution, increase curriculum time to 5% in Year 13.
- Provide effective initial training and continuing professional development for the lay Chaplains (when appointments are made), including contact with the wider chaplaincy support available within the diocese.
- Review and, if necessary, modify the workload of the subject leader in Religious Education in light of his dual chaplaincy and head of department role.
- Maintain monitoring of the current marking policy in Religious Education to ensure its continued effectiveness.
- To continue the existing monitoring procedures and continuous professional development opportunities focused on outstanding teaching and learning.

PUPILS

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

1

Outcomes for pupils are outstanding and the pupils of St Benet Biscop are a credit to their school both in their attitudes and contributions to the life of the school and in their approach to their Religious Education. Pupils show considerable enjoyment and motivation in all key stages of the Religious Education curriculum and achieve highly. Pupils' attainment in Religious Education is very low on entry in year 9; however progress over the year is outstanding and this ensures that pupils are ready to study at GCSE level in year 10. Pupils are set challenging targets at GCSE level (Fischer Family Trust band D2) and a large majority of pupils meet these targets with a significant minority achieving beyond their target level. All groups of pupils, including the most and the least able, make outstanding progress. The department has sustained an upward trend in terms of overall attainment, and there is no longer a gender difference at GCSE level. At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is significantly above average. That the department is on the cusp of outstanding attainment is particularly significant given that pupils come to the school in year 9. Uptake at AS and A2 level has increased significantly over the last 3 years. Pupils are set challenging targets which the vast majority of pupils reach. Levels of attainment at AS and A2 level are very high and the department has sustained a 100% A-E pass rate over the last 3 years and in the last cohort the A-B pass rate was significantly above average. Pupils speak very well of their General Religious Education course and pass rates for the National Open College Network qualification are high.

Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic life of the school. They are proud to be members of the school and make a significant contribution to its distinctive nature. The pupil voice is a particularly strong element within the school and the variety of pupil representatives in each form class give breadth and depth to this voice. In particular the inclusion of two sixth formers in the school chaplaincy team has greatly enhanced and enriched pupil involvement in the moral and spiritual dimension of the school. The school's 'Youth Ambassadors' make an outstanding contribution to the life of the school. They are nurtured and well supported in their work as leaders within the community. Pupils are keen to take responsibility for their charity work and raise awareness of the needs of various local, national and international groups. The school's partnership with the 'Cooperative' is extremely impressive and helps the school pursue issues of world justice and social enterprise. The school caters very effectively for Sex and Relationships Education through a well-coordinated programme that is led by the Religious Education department and uses outside agencies to very good effect.

Appropriate and relevant acts of worship engage the vast majority of pupils who respond with respect, tolerance and enthusiasm. They appreciate the space that they are given in collective worship for personal reflection on moral and spiritual issues and often find acts of worship thought-provoking and challenging. In particular they appreciate that collective worship is 'never the same' and this variety comes through wide teacher and pupil involvement. Senior and middle leaders model good practice and this has enabled pupils to take an increasing role in scripting and leading liturgies. Pupils take full responsibility for and lead liturgies at key transition points in the life of the school.

PROVISION

How effective the provision is in promoting Catholic education

1

All teaching is at least good with many outstanding features across the department. Teachers are aware of the capability of pupils and effectively cater for the progress of all. All teachers in the department have excellent subject knowledge and in the best lessons this is used to inspire pupils and engage them in their learning. Teachers employ an effective range of teaching strategies, including 'assessment for learning' strategies and these enable pupils to develop as independent learners. I.C.T is used in most lessons and this was seen to be most effective when it enabled the pupils to interact with the teacher and with each other. Excellent relationships exist between teachers and pupils and these, together with high teacher expectations, ensure that the pupils make sustained progress in their lessons. On entry to the school the department works very effectively to create an atmosphere in which pupils can grow in confidence and acquire the skills necessary to succeed in their learning.

The department has rigorous and focused assessment strategies which provide a frequent and accurate picture of pupil progress. In Year 9 a diagnostic assessment provides a baseline from which progress is then measured. Teachers in the department apply accurate assessment judgements consistently across all year groups. These are shared with pupils and, as a result, targets are agreed between staff and pupils. The subject leader and class teachers regularly monitor the progress of all pupils and of specific groups of pupils. The sharing of success criteria, model answers and a variety of forms of assessment are all used to inform pupils about what they need to do to succeed and to develop further in the subject. Pupils in Sixth Form classes are given essays to complete on a regular basis and these are marked to a high standard accompanied by very specific and clear guidance on how the work can be improved.

The Religious Education curriculum is well planned and provides pupils with opportunities to be enthusiastic and highly motivated learners. The curriculum meets the requirement of the Bishops' Conference in years 9-12, though pupils in Year 13 have only 2.5% curriculum time for Religious Education. Pupils enter the school in Year 9 from a variety of middle schools and the department has cohesive and effective strategies that equip all pupils with the skills necessary for GCSE Religious Education. The department has a coherent long-term action plan which includes developing a Key Stage 3 curriculum in line with diocesan requirements. Aspects of this plan are already in place for the pupils from St Peter's, currently educated on the school site. The Religious Education curriculum provides excellent opportunities for the spiritual and moral development of pupils. General Religious Education is very well established in Year 12; pupil attendance and the pass rate are very high and this is a testimony to the hard work of staff and the appropriate nature of the course and teaching strategies.

Worship and prayer are integrated into the daily life of St Benet's. A wide variety of worship is provided and the quality of collective worship is outstanding. Worship is Catholic in character, but also respectful of the diversity of pupils within the school. A significant and effective development has been the introduction of whole school 'Statements for Living'. This gives all form tutors and heads of learning a clear and accessible focus for the daily act of worship. The chaplaincy team provide excellent liturgies for the major Christian celebrations. Staff and pupils are made to feel welcome and pupils speak warmly of the inclusive nature of these celebrations. Form groups

often take responsibility for leading acts of worship and present themes and topics in appropriate and relevant modes that are understood by their peers. The subject leader offers support and assistance across the school and this has a significant impact on the quality of collective worship.

LEADERS AND MANAGERS

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

1

The leadership of the school is deeply committed to the Church's mission in education. They have established an ethos that inspires the whole school community. They are led in this by a headteacher and a subject leader who through outstanding personal example have ensured that this ethos is at the very heart of the life of the school. The headteacher's vision and commitment to the Catholic life of the school enthuse all members of the school community; all staff and pupils feel valued members of the community and are eager to contribute to the rich life of the school community. This outstanding leadership has resulted in substantial initiatives that have helped to develop further the school's Catholic dimension. The annual provision for continuing professional development clearly reflects the importance of this Catholic dimension. An effective self-evaluation process is embedded in the culture of the school and this is reflected in the improvements made since the previous inspection.

Self-evaluation is highly effective at all levels. Provision and achievement within Religious Education are closely monitored and evaluated by the subject leader, senior leader link and the headteacher. This high quality evaluation leads to well defined and appropriate targets that clearly impact on the quality of curriculum provision as well as on outcomes for all pupils which are all good, and in some cases exceptional. The inspirational subject leader in Religious Education involves all department members in reviewing and improving the quality of teaching and learning and this has resulted in a highly effective and happy team. There is a high level of trust between the headteacher and the subject leader which fosters a creative approach to the curriculum and results in accurate self-evaluation.

The governors make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic dimension of the school; they are a strong presence within the school and frequently observe lessons and attend liturgies and in-service training. Governors provide a strong and effective link between local parishes and the school community. They have a good knowledge of the Catholic life of the school and are involved in reviewing and improving this. They are supportive of the staff as a whole and in particular the staff within the Religious Education department. The governors ensure that the Catholic ethos within the school community is always a priority when appointing new members of staff. Their active involvement in regular reviewing of the school action plan provides an additional element of challenge to the Catholic life of the school.

Leaders ensure that the school participates fully and actively in developing and implementing an impressive variety of partnership activities which promote Catholic learning. These include the 'Northumberland Catholic Extended Service Partnership', the 'Cooperative', the 'Diocesan Youth Ministry Team', the 'Diocesan Mission in Peru' and partnerships working with the less privileged both locally and in the wider world, such as the 'West End Refugee Project' and CAFOD. Of particular note is the work of the 'Youth Ambassadors' both within the school itself and with other school partners. These partnerships enrich the lives of both staff and pupils and enable the pupils to benefit significantly from and develop exceptionally well in areas the school could not provide by itself.

Leaders and managers ensure that the inclusion of all is a central goal and a shared vision for this is very evident throughout the school. In a variety of ways pupils are given the opportunity to enter into dialogue with people of different backgrounds. Concern, respect and hospitality towards others are witnessed throughout the school. The Religious Education curriculum and the acts of collective worship leave room for individual spirituality and actively encourage respect for the spiritual identity of others as evidenced, for example, by the 'World Faith Day'. The participation of pupils in a wide range of community partnerships, local, diocesan and world-wide promotes an attitude of empathy with those on the margins of society.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Key for inspection grades:

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

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 the provision is in promoting 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
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