



Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection report for St Aidan's Catholic Academy, Sunderland

URN: 139538

Carried out on behalf of the Most Rev Malcolm McMahon, Archbishop of Liverpool and Apostolic Administrator
of the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle on:

Date: 15-16 June 2023

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school.....

1

Catholic life and mission (p.2)

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.....

1

Religious education (p.4)

The quality of curriculum religious education.....

1

Collective worship (p.5)

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school.....

1

The school is fully compliant with the curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference



The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop



The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection

Fully

Summary of key findings

What the school does well

- All staff are outstanding role models in promoting servant leadership. The head teacher, senior leaders and the highly effective chaplaincy team support them in this with great compassion. They have worked hard to establish a culture of respect within the school, which reaches into the wider community and is valued by students.
- Inclusivity is a priority for all at St Aidan's; the school celebrates the uniqueness of the individual. Discussions with students and staff highlight the caring and positive environment that has developed in the school, ensuring all students are held in high esteem.

- Religious education is taught by a dedicated team of outstanding practitioners. Students appreciate this; they talk with enthusiasm about their lessons and understand that the support they receive from their teachers is second to none. Consequently, this results in outstanding attainment and progress.
- The religious education programme is well-sequenced and supported strongly by other subject areas; this is complemented by a relationships, sex and health education programme that has been adapted well to meet the needs of the students.
- All staff are extremely confident in planning prayer and liturgy activities. They are skilled in their delivery and promote student participation. Consequently, students are able to make connections between prayer and their own lives.

What the school needs to improve:

- Many students readily participate in collective worship. However, too few are involved in planning and preparing collective worship activities.
- The school should work to further strengthen parish links.

Catholic life and mission

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

Catholic life and mission key judgement grade:.....

1

Pupil outcomes

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

1

Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

1

Students benefit hugely from the commitment shown by all staff in their mission to provide a full and rich Catholic life experience at St Aidan's. All students know and understand the school's mission statement, with a number commenting that their aim is to 'live life to the full'. Students of other faiths recognise that they are all members of the St Aidan's family too, with the school being committed to offering the best provision possible to them. The rich offer of provision allows all students to contribute to improving the lives of their peers, the local community, and those further afield. Catholic Social Teaching is integral to the work that students are involved in through the many initiatives offered by the school. Students and their families contribute to a food bank that is run by the school, with students being involved in distribution of hampers to those in need locally. Students' involvement in other activities, such as weekly homeless lunches, blankets for the homeless, and 'Reverse Advent', enables them to experience great personal reward and bring positivity and joy to others. Students understand the links between the work that they do and Catholic Social Teaching values, speaking about this eloquently.

The provision for Catholic life and mission is underpinned by the belief that Christ is at the heart of the school. This belief drives the whole school curriculum intent and encourages curriculum leaders to collaborate and work together. There are strong pastoral systems in place, which help drive this mission, with staff modelling the behaviour expected from students. There is a steadfast commitment to the most vulnerable within the school and the local community. Students and staff clearly articulate the charism of St Aidan's, which is one of lived Gospel values. All staff work hard to successfully foster a community where equality

and diversity are promoted, and forgiveness, reconciliation, and inclusion are the norm. The school's chaplain is extremely well-regarded by all staff and students. Her humble dedication to the school community is extraordinary, with her vocation and personality being constantly cited as a source of enormous strength and influence. Her work in creating new opportunities for staff and students to grow spiritually is inspiring. High quality display throughout the school exemplifies the strength of the Catholic life and mission. This is regularly updated by staff and students to reflect the liturgical year. Students are proud of this, and they value it.

Governors know their school well and bring expert support and challenge to senior leaders. Their strategic involvement is welcomed by the senior team. They use this expertise to support them in their continual reviews of the school's provision, thus refining and improving the Catholic life experience for all students. This professional and honest dialogue between governors and school leaders is a real strength. The school's leadership style has moved in recent years to a more collegiate approach, and this has allowed staff to develop their skills, growing people into new roles and further improving provision. Links with parishes are good and improving. Leaders and staff have worked hard to re-establish and strengthen these links over recent years and the local parish priest is active in school, visiting regularly. As a governor, he plays a key role in developing the Catholic life programme and his contributions are highly valued. As these links strengthen, provision for students has also strengthened. There is further work to be done but governors and staff recognise this, and it is a focus for development.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade:.....

1

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education.....

1

Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education.....

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for religious education.....

1

Students at St Aidan's enjoy their religious education lessons and like their teachers. They feel challenged and supported in achieving their potential by staff. They articulate their learning well in lessons during discussions, showing high levels of religious literacy. This relates well to the lesson content, which makes links with prior learning and wider knowledge. Retrieval tasks at the beginning of each lesson are effective and students understand that these are important, feeling well-prepared as they progress through the religious education programme. Staff and students enjoy excellent working relationships. Students are willing to fully engage and to take risks with their learning. They are keen to praise each other, and teachers reward effort and progress with genuine words of warm encouragement and celebration. Students show great pride in their work and books are of the highest standard. The vast majority meet the high expectations of their teachers. Students are extremely invested in their lessons and are articulate, willing to question and reflect. Progress is evident in students' books, a direct result of the fact that they 'know more, do more, remember more'. This results from a strategy adopted by the department where teachers model the standard of work expected during lessons and students transfer these skills into their own work. This has secured better progress and attainment for all learners. Data for all groups of learners shows that strong progress is made as a result of high quality, well-tailored adaptive teaching. This climate for learning culminates in outstanding progress for all groups of students at key stage 4, particularly the more able and the vulnerable. There are also much improved, strong outcomes for those at key stage 5.

All religious education teachers are, without exception, passionate about their subject and demonstrate outstanding subject knowledge and teaching skills. As a team they work

extremely well together, and this enhances a dynamic and well-planned curriculum. Strategies such as 'reading like a theologian' add depth to the student classroom experience, whilst modelling and retrieval practices are outstanding. This is because students' learning is maximised through the excellent use of time and targeted questioning, which is adapted to suit the learner. Assessment and feedback within the religious education department are well-planned and thorough, ensuring that students' knowledge and skills are robustly tested and developed. Feedback to students is appropriate and thought-provoking; students respond well to this feedback and further their learning as a result. The work of the department has established it as one of the beacons for teaching and learning in driving up standards across the school. Where students fall short of these standards, teachers swiftly address this, holding them to account for the quality of their work.

The subject leader for religious education is strong. She has a clear vision for the subject and understands the importance of its impact across the school. She works well with other middle leaders to ensure that religious education is present in all aspects of the school curriculum and her quiet dynamism is recognised by other senior leaders and her team; they understand the impact she has had on her department. She has overseen the development of a creative curriculum and has facilitated well-timed and appropriate training opportunities for staff that reinforces their role in preparing students both spiritually, and as citizens in a diverse society. Leaders' and governors' self-evaluation is honest, striving for ambitious and constant improvement. They have unfailing, high standards that focus on the development of the St Aidan's offer. They ensure that the religious education curriculum fully meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference.

Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school.

Collective worship key judgement grade:.....

1

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

1

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship

1



Outcomes for prayer and liturgy at St Aidan's are outstanding because senior leaders and staff have worked to establish a calm and spiritual environment which is conducive to prayer and reflection. Prayer is strongly embedded into the daily routine of school life and students behave with reverence during these times, further evidence of the respect that students have for their peers and the adults with whom they work. Every morning students gather for the Examen, allowing them an opportunity to reflect on the day and to give thanks for what they have received. This is commented on by students and they recognise the value of reflection time. Most students are keen to participate in prayer and liturgy activities but discussions with students highlight the fact that not enough are involved in the planning and preparation of them. Mass is celebrated in school weekly, and the chaplain works with form groups beforehand to prepare students for this. This ensures that they understand the meaning of the liturgy, its responses and readings. Students have excellent knowledge of the liturgical year and they talk about this confidently. The school's thematic approach to collective worship, which mirrors the liturgical year, gives them a greater understanding of this.

The school chapel is well used by the school, with religious education lessons taking place in this sacred space alongside classroom-based lessons. It is during these times that students learn more about the importance of the chapel and they view it as a place for all. In addition to the chapel and other prayer spaces, the school provides a dedicated prayer space for students of other faiths, and they welcome this. The collective worship experience at St Aidan's is extended through annual retreats. All students and staff take part in a walking pilgrimage, a section of Bede's Way. Students learn about the life of Bede, the walk giving them an opportunity to discuss, pray and reflect. Students speak positively about this and recognise its

importance, both spiritually and historically.

Governors and senior leaders have a clear and inspiring vision for prayer and liturgy. They are deeply rooted in faith and are passionate about ensuring that the students at St Aidan's experience high quality prayerful encounters. They talk enthusiastically about the tailored provision for students of all ages. They plan the school calendar to ensure that key dates in the Church's year are celebrated through Masses or liturgies. Thoughtful timing of these celebrations ensures that they are accessible for all staff and students to attend. All prayer and liturgy sessions are well-resourced and offer a variety of different forms of worship; this supports staff with delivery. Prayer and liturgy are rooted in the school's improvement plan and regularly monitored and reviewed by senior leaders and the chaplain to ensure that they remain relevant, relatable and have an impact on students' lives. Leaders' planning also ensures that all staff take part in retreats throughout the year and staff comment on the importance of this, saying that it raises the status of prayer and liturgy in school and prepares them in supporting students on their spiritual journey. Senior leaders, alongside the school's chaplain, also provide robust and ongoing training for prayer and liturgy, seeing this as a high priority. This is complemented by the training opportunities offered by the diocese and ensures that all staff are confident in delivering prayer and liturgy and are comfortable in supporting students when participating in these sessions.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Aidan's Catholic Academy
School unique reference number (URN)	139538
Full postal address of the school	Willow Bank Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, SR2 7HJ
School phone number	0191 520 0333
Name of head teacher or principal	Glenn Sanderson
Chair of governing board	Catherine Emmerson
School Website	www.staidanscatholicacademy.co.uk
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy
Age-range of pupils	11 to 18
Trustees	Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle
Gender of pupils	Male
Date of last denominational inspection	June 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

The inspection team

Mark Taylor	Lead inspector
Roisin Ross	Team inspector
Rob Young	Team inspector

Key to grade judgements

Grade	England	Wales
1	Outstanding	Excellent
2	Good	Good
3	Requires improvement	Adequate and requires improvement
4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and in need of urgent improvement