



**DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION
REPORT (Section 48)
on**

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

School: St Robert of Newminster Catholic School and
Sixth Form College

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School URN: 108870
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Headteacher: Mr S White

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Lead Inspector: Susan Pitcher

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Date of Inspection: 13th & 14th September 2007

This inspection report is produced for Bishop Kevin Dunn, (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.

Characteristics of the school and views of the stakeholders.

St Robert's is a very large 11–18 Catholic School with Specialist School Status in Humanities. It serves the Catholic communities of Washington and the surrounding area. Pupil attainment on entry to Year 7 is above average. The school has a large sixth form with nearly half the students entering the school in Year 12. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is broadly average. 7.6% of students are eligible for free school meals. There are very few pupils and students who are of other than white UK ethnic origin or for whom English is not the first language. The proportion of students with Statements of Special Educational Need is below local and national averages.

St Robert's is held in very high esteem by all its stakeholders. Parishes value their partnership with the school and its contribution to parish and deanery life. In a recent survey 98.5% of parents felt that the school made good provision for their children's religious and spiritual formation. Students and staff are enthusiastic about the school and are proud to belong to the community of St Robert's.

FACTUAL INFORMATION

Pupil Catchment:

Number of pupils on roll: 1630

Planned Admission Number of Pupils: 210

Percentage of pupils baptised RC: 74%

Percentage of pupils from other Christian denominations: 23%

Percentage of pupils from other World faiths: 2.8%

Percentage of pupils with no religious affiliation: 0%

Percentage of pupils from ethnic groups: 3.1%

Percentage of pupils with special needs: 4.5%

RE Department Staffing:

Number of full time RE teachers: 10.2FTE

Number of part time RE teachers: 0

Percentage of Catholic teachers: 68%

Percentage of teachers with CCRS: 17.7%

Percentage of learning time given to RE:

Key Stage 3 – 9.3%

Key Stage 4 – 12% (average across both Key Stages – 10.4%)

Key Stage 5 - 5%

Parishes served by the school

Our Blessed Lady Immaculate, Washington

St Bede's, Washington

Our Lady Queen of Peace, Penshaw

St Michael's, Houghton

St John Boste, Washington

St Mary's, Easington Lane

Key for inspection grades:Grade 1 **Outstanding** Grade 2 **Good** Grade 3 **Satisfactory** Grade 4 **Unsatisfactory****Overall Effectiveness****Grade: 1**

St Robert's is an outstanding Catholic school with a strong sense of Christian community. Senior leaders ensure that its Catholic mission and purpose drive all aspects of the school's life and work. Gospel principles are evident in planning, policies, procedures and relationships. Provision for Collective Worship is outstanding with a strong emphasis on student ownership. Student achievement and progress has improved considerably and is now outstanding. Curriculum provision and leadership of the Religious Education department are key strengths of the school. A high proportion of sixth form students enter St Robert's in Year 12 with no experience of education within a Church context. The school is very successful in integrating these students into the Catholic life of St Robert's.

Improvements since last inspection**Grade: 1**

The school has responded positively to the four issues for action identified in the Section 23 Inspection in 2002.

Effective action has been taken to improve student progress and achievement in Key Stages 3 and 4. This has included a review of curriculum provision to ensure that the needs of all students are met and the implementation of effective systems for monitoring pupil progress and achievement in Religious Education.

The contribution of the Religious Education department to the life and work of the school has been maximised. It is a lead department in the development of strategies for improving teaching and learning. Staffing levels have been enhanced to ensure its continued status within the curriculum.

The chaplaincy team has been extended and chaplaincy has a generous annual budget. The role of the Spiritual and Moral Co-ordinator has been enhanced following review. The student retreat programme has been expanded. These and other related actions have ensured continued high standards in the quality of provision for students' spiritual and moral development.

Collective Worship has been further developed to provide opportunities for students to take on a spiritual leadership role. Student ownership has become the essential focus of worship.

School's capacity to improve further**Grade: 1**

Review, evaluation and reflection are part of the culture of St Robert's. Monitoring and planning for the further development and strengthening of its life and work as a Catholic school are rigorous and embedded. The Headteacher and senior leadership team are very well supported by staff at all

levels in demonstrating exemplary levels of personal and professional commitment to the school's Catholic character and purpose. The capacity for further improvement is therefore outstanding.

In order to further raise standards the governors should seek to:

- further embed the Bishops' Conference Levels of Attainment in Religious Education;
- develop more consistent practice in the use of written diagnostic assessment in Religious Education;
- consider the formal appointment of a Link Governor for Religious Education;
- review and, where possible, enhance opportunities for students to further develop their understanding and experience of the diverse nature of contemporary British society.

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The Leadership and Management of St Robert's as a Catholic school is outstanding.

The school is driven by the Headteacher's dynamic and inspirational vision for St Robert's as a Catholic learning community in which everyone is valued as a child of God and where the search for excellence flows from this. He is passionate in articulating his vision which energises every aspect of the school's life. He and the other senior leaders work with enthusiasm and dedication to translate this vision into a lived daily experience for students and staff alike. A positive view of the individual, and compassion, are the values that underpin the work of the school. These informing values are known, understood and lived out by leaders at all levels. Students are able to talk about the school's vision and values, referring freely to the school's motto "Let your light shine" and its meaning for them.

There is an outstanding commitment to developing the Catholic life of the school. Time and resources are set aside from the school budget to enable an extensive programme of retreats. Liturgical celebration is a key feature of the school where the Headteacher and senior leaders are active participants. Thursday lunchtime is kept free for the well attended voluntary Mass. The staff bulletin includes prayer and reflections related, amongst other things, to the liturgical year. At various points in the year, the staff briefing is suspended and an opportunity provided for prayer and reflection in the chapel. Current planned developments include a staff retreat. The school follows the CES model for the induction of new teachers ensuring that a good understanding of St Robert's distinctive character and their responsibility in its continued development are well understood.

The spiritual and moral development of students is a fundamental priority for the school. This is reflected in the importance the school attaches to the full-time post of Spiritual and Moral Co-ordinator and to ensuring that the salary reflects the level of responsibility that the post carries. The Spiritual and Moral Co-ordinator has parity with heads of department and heads of year and attends their meetings. The spiritual and moral formation of students forms the context within which policy, procedure and practice are determined. The priority the school attaches to its Catholic identity and to spiritual and moral formation is also evident in St Robert's Building Schools for the Future project which provide spaces at the heart of the buildings for worship and reflection.

All departments work actively to promote spiritual and moral development within their curriculum and opportunities for this are identified in schemes of work. Students have many opportunities to discuss and develop their own understanding of spiritual and moral issues.

Self-review is continuous and embedded. It applies to the Catholic life of the school with the same rigour as other aspects. Review involves everybody in the school community and St Robert's strives continually to strengthen its witness and provision as a Catholic community. Strategic planning, as evidenced in the School Improvement Plan (SIP), ensures that the quality of provision for the Catholic life of the school is effectively planned, evaluated and resourced. The Headteacher and senior leadership team monitor this strand in the SIP. A whole-school INSET day in June 2007 was devoted to evaluation by all staff of the Catholic purpose and mission of St Robert's. Following this day a working group, consisting of approximately 30% of the staff, was established to take this work forward. The SED48 is regularly reviewed and updated.

The governors are a visible and active presence in the school. They participate in the appointment of all teaching staff where their first question at interview focuses on the applicant's capacity to promote the school's Catholic character. They have a thorough knowledge of the school's strengths and they participated actively in completing and updating the SED 48 through the appropriate governors' committee.

Provision and support for chaplaincy are outstanding. The chaplaincy team of four consists of a full-time lay chaplain, the Spiritual and Moral Co-ordinator, a clergy chaplain, and a chaplaincy support assistant all of whom have appropriate professional salaries paid from the school budget. Their work is well-developed and is able to be at the heart of the school because of the evident importance that governors and senior leaders attach to it. There is a chaplaincy office and financial resources for both spiritual and moral development and chaplaincy are very generous.

The Headteacher and senior leadership team have ensured that the school has a very strong partnership with all of the parishes that the school serves. In the parish profiles drawn up by each parish in the deanery, in preparation for the Bishop's Visitation, every parish referred to the importance and strength of its relationship with St Robert's. The relationship with partner primary schools

is equally strong as illustrated by the shared 'transition liturgy' for Year 6 pupils. The school's specialist humanities status has, by virtue of the enhanced resources it brings, enabled the further development of outreach into the neighbourhood community.

Collective Worship

Grade: 1

All aspects of Collective Worship are outstanding.

Provision is extensive and varied and its high quality is a reflection of the commitment of leaders at all levels. Particular emphasis is placed on providing opportunities for reflection. A key factor in the overall high quality is the support that the chaplaincy team give to staff and students in the preparation of Acts of Collective Worship. This support centres on themes and is given in timetabled time with registration groups, both of which are published at the beginning of the year. In addition to assemblies, Mass and other liturgical celebration, prayer takes place in registration groups and lessons at the beginning of the day, before lunch and at the end of the day. Staff ensure that this pattern of daily prayer is honoured appropriately.

In interviews students were consistently enthusiastic about Collective Worship. Year Masses were described as "brilliant". Voluntary Mass on Thursday is very well attended and the chapel is full - "teachers have to stand". Central to students' enthusiasm is their ownership of assemblies, Mass and other worship. They take responsibility for all of the year Masses (with a whole school template providing both a framework for planning and a record) and for half of the year assemblies. Students volunteer willingly to take responsibility and are not "embarrassed" by prayer or praying. They plan and lead worship with considerable autonomy, knowing that teachers and the chaplaincy team will support and enable them whilst allowing them to take responsibility for every aspect. Whilst this autonomy can mean that the quality of delivery of Acts of Worship may vary, students remain enthusiastic. The very high uptake of retreats is a further illustration of students' enthusiasm for the range of opportunities for worship available to them.

The themes around which worship is centred reflect the liturgical season and a wide range of spiritual and moral issues. By virtue of this and its accessibility and meaningfulness to students, Collective Worship makes a very effective contribution to their spiritual and moral development.

Schools contribution to the promotion of Community Cohesion

Grade: 1

Students and staff alike speak of the importance of the community dimension at St Robert's. They see the school as a community characterised by compassion, respect and equality where everyone has opportunities to grow and achieve. In a recent survey of students the school was described as "a second home", a place where individuals feel "safe, valued and confident" and where "people will respect me and what I have to say". Staff at all levels build relationships with students which demonstrate respect for and engagement with the individual. The commitment to retaining students in the school

community is evident in the low number of exclusions, in which the work of the school's effective Integration Unit is a significant factor.

There is a range of opportunities for students to interact with others from different groups. Years 7 and 8 are taught in mixed ability classes into which pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated. Friendships cross year boundaries. Students recognise the School Council as an effective means by which different groups work together to influence whole-school decisions. Each year group chooses charities to support and the registration groups across the year collaborate with each other and students from other years in their fund-raising.

Beyond the school there are opportunities to work with students from other schools through the diocesan network and St Robert's is a major provider of CPD within the diocesan partnership. Students develop their understanding of the wider world through work placements, visits abroad, music and personal development events such as the Sunderland Racial Equality Day. A group of students recently participated in a video conference with students in a New Zealand school. Students have opportunities within the formal curriculum to learn about the diversity of British society although opportunities for them to experience this diversity through interaction with different ethnic or cultural groups are limited by the school's location.

Students make a strong contribution to the common good through their support of many charities. These embrace global deprivation, such as Street Child Africa and CAFOD, as well as more local charitable concerns which include a local hospice and Cancer Research. Students have a good understanding of Fair Trade issues and give good support to the school's Fair Trade Stall and Water Aid. Through a member of the teaching staff, the school has developed strong links with communities in Burma. He has had the support of senior leaders in raising students' awareness of the issues of justice and deprivation in these communities and students have raised considerable sums to support the continuing work in Burma. There are currently plans for staff and students to visit Burma in order to work in the field.

Religious Education makes a strong contribution to the promotion of community cohesion by actively encouraging individual thinking, challenge and open, honest debate. This enables students to listen to the views of others and respect differences. In-depth study of world religions in Year 9 is a particular feature of the curriculum and is very well resourced.

Collective Worship includes everybody and promotes community cohesion by making provision for students to collaborate with each other and with staff. The programme of themes includes topics designed to enhance community cohesion, such as 'Unity' and 'Forgiveness'. The annual celebration liturgies are a strong expression of the school's community identity.

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Curriculum Religious Education

Achievements and standards in Religious Education

Grade: 1

Achievement and Standards are overall outstanding. The standard of learners' work seen during the inspection was good overall, and better in the most able students at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and those studying Philosophy and Ethics as a full course in years 12 and 13.

Progress in the Sixth Form is good overall, and sometimes outstanding, especially considering the starting point of approximately half the students who are new to St Robert's, with little or no background in Religious Education. Within the core provision, the vast majority of the Y12 cohort study for the AS qualification. Most are entered for the exam and succeed in gaining good grades, some in limited curriculum time. Retention through to Y13 is impressive. "62 students were entered for A2 in 2007. All students, except for one who was seriously ill, achieved Grade E or above and 79% achieved Grades A –C." There are some ungraded results at AS. The school recognises that these could be eliminated by not entering the few students unlikely to achieve a grade but chooses not to do this, in the belief that this would not be consistent with their inclusive philosophy.

Attainment at Key Stage 4 is a particular strength of the school. Attainment at GCSE has improved considerably over the past three years and continues to do so. In 2007 77% of students attained A* - C, compared with 70% in English. The majority of students in 2007 achieved their best or equal best grade in Religious Education at GCSE in 2007, with a significant proportion achieving A*/A grades. Especially notable is the success of a 'Fast Track' group in Y10, all of whom achieved A*/A grades in one year of study. Boys' performance is improving and the department is making good progress in closing the gender gap.

Attainment on entry to the school is above average in Y7 but there is a clear determination on the part of the school that all students should make appropriate progress. Secure systems for monitoring, tracking and assessing progress are implemented effectively. At Key Stage 3 Religious Education compares well with English in terms of Levels of Attainment achieved. The accuracy of L8 assessments is evidenced by the clear success of the 'Fast Track' group created in Y10. Good building blocks are in place to enable students to produce more structured writing by Y9 but there was limited evidence of extended writing in the Y7 and Y8 sample available during the inspection.

Quality of Provision for Religious Education, Teaching and Learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning seen during the inspection was good overall and sometimes outstanding. Teachers were energetic in their approach and this had a positive impact upon learning. All lessons were very

well planned using a consistent departmental approach. In most lessons the pace was good. In the lessons seen, there was sometimes scope for greater challenge, especially in Key Stage 3. A hallmark of the department is the approach to Assessment for Learning which was competently employed in all lessons. Lesson intentions and success criteria were usually very effectively explained. A variety of teaching and learning styles were used, including paired and group work. In the most successful lessons, this resulted in high levels of engagement and enthusiasm of learners. In some cases a competitive approach helped to ensure the enthusiastic participation of both genders.

Specialist teachers are very secure in terms of their subject knowledge and this had a positive impact on learning, especially in Key Stage 5. Smaller group sizes in some Y11 classes, and the school's decision to adopt an appropriate modular course, is impacting positively in terms of progress, with some students working above their target grades. Students were well supported as a group and individually. In some modular Y11 classes, a very personalised learning approach was deployed in order to ensure more rapid learning gains. A particular feature of the department is the often skilful use of open ended questioning techniques. New sixth form students were challenged to address the complex issues surrounding 'situation ethics' and they were able to give reasoned answers for their conclusions. Key Stage 3 students demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of community, both from prior learning and in the context of the lesson of the day. Those interviewed had a sound awareness of the sacraments.

Assessment is used appropriately throughout all Key Stages. Students know their target grades. Sub-levels have now been adopted to give more precision to pupil tracking. Documentation in books and files helps students to monitor their progress against pupil-friendly level descriptors. Praise is a marked feature of all assessed work and targets are set by staff for improvement on key assessments. However, there is a need for the department to develop consistent practice in giving detailed formal diagnostic feedback. The department uses the Bishops' Conference 'Levels of Attainment in Religious Education' to overall good effect and recognises that further work on the consistent use of diagnostic commentary will further strengthen practice.

Students with special educational needs are identified by the SEN department and the school provides good support for these students. Some resources seen in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 improved the accessibility of work and the department has identified in the SED that there is a need for continued work in this area. Provision for Gifted and Talented students is very good.

Both within the department and as part of the Specialist School Team communication with parents is developing well. Parents are informed in relation to aspects of the Religious Education curriculum and regular communication with individual parents is a feature of departmental practice, for example where teachers have a concern about a student's progress.

Effectiveness of Meeting Learners' needs and interests

Grade: 1

The effective personalisation of the curriculum to match learners' needs and interests is outstanding. This has been achieved because the school and the department are valiant in their efforts to ensure the most appropriate match between individual students' needs and the courses on offer, in spite the amount of additional work involved. This is a credit to the staff. The range of courses provided in Key Stage 4 is allowing more students to achieve success at this level, whilst also ensuring appropriate challenge for those moving on to Level 3 courses. In the Sixth Form, a brave policy of challenging some students to complete an AS course in just two periods each week is positively impacting on recruitment to A2. In addition, the department has recently developed an appropriate accredited course for other students.

The school's allocation of time to Religious Education exceeds the overall requirements of the Bishops' Conference and the Y9 time allocation helps to ensure the development of a firm base for progression to Key Stage 4. The school is committed to the effective implementation of the Bishops' Conference Levels of Attainment and is aware of what needs to be done next.

Throughout the school, all students demonstrated an enthusiasm for Religious Education. Religious Education challenges their thinking and students enjoy the way in which they are able to openly express their sometimes controversial opinions. Senior students both in Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 value the grounding they are given both in terms of transferable skills and in terms of moral development. Sixth Formers expressed their enjoyment in discussing religious issues with peers from diverse backgrounds in and beyond school. Students stated that Religious Education is fun and especially liked role play. Relationships between students and staff are outstanding and are firmly rooted in mutual respect.

The department make an outstanding contribution to the spiritual and moral development of students. A sound policy statement exists in the department and both staff and students were able to indicate how aspects of this are lived out in practice.

Leadership and Management of Religious Education

Grade: 1

Religious Education is at the heart of all that happens in this school. The Headteacher, senior staff and subject leaders are outstanding promoters of Religious Education and this helps to explain why Religious Education is a lead subject within the schools' Humanities Specialist Status. The importance of the subject is reflected in a highly developed, and appropriately resourced management structure which has allowed the department to achieve high standards.

The Head of Department and other key staff provide outstanding leadership. Curriculum development is creative in approach, staff have access to good quality training and a good system of self review is in operation. A well developed system of lesson observations is used in the school. The

Headteacher plays a pivotal role in the determination of lesson observation judgements against Ofsted criteria. This ensures consistency across the school. These judgements are then shared with staff to assist them in their ongoing development. The department employs a system for carrying out and recording scrutiny of students' work which enables the Head of Department to monitor standards.

The departmental team is strong and is made up of specialists who are effectively deployed in order to reflect their strengths and to ensure high standards. Detailed schemes of work, a comprehensive handbook and generous resourcing contribute to the smooth running of this large department which is committed to the raising standards agenda. Very good departmental resources are produced and a team culture helps to ensure that they are shared across the department.

Overall accommodation is good, or better. Classrooms have a distinct religious identity which celebrates both the subject and the learning of the students. All teachers have access to good ICT facilities and this resource was much in evidence during the inspection process.

Equality of opportunity is a strength of the school. Students have access to appropriate courses which allow them to achieve. They feel safe and good systems exist in order to tackle any form of discrimination that may arise.

The governors display a high level of commitment to the department which is evident in staffing, resources, support, and encouragement of the good work done by this professional team. Recently governors have become even more involved at SLT level. However, at present there is no link governor attached to the department and this is a development which the school may wish to consider for the future.

SUMMARY INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Key to judgements: Grade 1 - Outstanding Grade 2 - Good Grade 3 – Satisfactory Grade 4 - Unsatisfactory	School Overall	16-19
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The Catholic Life of the School

The effectiveness of leadership and management in developing the Catholic life of the school	1	
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality care and education;	1	
The quality of the leadership of the headteacher and senior staff in leading and developing the Catholic life of the school;	1	
How effectively leadership at all levels in the school promotes learners' spiritual and moral development;	1	
How effectively the Catholic life of the school is monitored and evaluated;	1	
How well the Governing body fulfils its role in relation to the school's Catholic foundation;	1	
How effectively leaders promote and facilitate the work of chaplaincy;	1	
How effectively leadership at all levels and the school promotes partnership with parish community and wider community.	1	
The quality of Collective Worship	1	
The frequency and quality of the provision for prayer, Collective Worship and the liturgical life of the school;	1	
Learners' response to the school's provision;	1	
How well Collective Worship contributes to the spiritual and moral development of the learners.	1	
How effectively the school/college promotes Community Cohesion	1	
The school as a community with common, inclusive values, where differences and similarities are recognised and valued	1	
The quality of provision for engagement, dialogue and collaboration with groups and individuals within/beyond the school	1	
The school's commitment to serving the common good	1	
The contribution of curriculum Religious Education to promoting Community Cohesion	1	
The contribution of the school's Collective Worship in promoting Community Cohesion	1	

Curriculum Religious Education

How well do learners' achieve?	1	
The standard of learners' work;	2	
Learners' success in achieving challenging targets, with trends over time and any significant variations between groups of learners;	1	
Learners' progress relative to their prior attainment and potential, with any significant variations between groups of learners.	1	

The effectiveness of teaching and learning	2	
How well teaching is used to meet learners' needs and curriculum requirements;	2	
The suitability and rigour and assessment in planning, monitoring and informing;	1	
The identification of, and provision for, additional learning needs;	2	
The involvement of parents/carers in their children's learning and development.	2	
The effectiveness of the Religious Education curriculum in meeting the needs and interests of learners	1	
How well the curriculum matches learners' aspirations and potential, building on prior attainment and experience;	1	
How the Religious Education curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops' conference;	1	
How learners enjoy their work;	1	
How the curriculum in Religious Education contributes to the spiritual and moral development of the learners.	1	
The effectiveness of leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners in Religious Education	1	
How well senior and subject leaders in Religious Education lead and support their staff;	1	
How performance in Religious Education is monitored and improved through quality assurance and self-assessment.	1	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are well taught;	1	
The adequacy and suitability of the learning resources and accommodation, and how effectively and efficiently these are deployed to achieve high standards;	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve their full potential;	1	
How well governors discharge their responsibilities.	2	

Overall Effectiveness

The overall effectiveness of the provision of Catholic education in meeting the needs of learners	1	
The overall effectiveness of the provision for the Catholic life of the school;	1	
The overall effectiveness of the provision for curriculum Religious Education;	1	
The effectiveness of any steps taken to ensure improvement since the last inspection;	2	
The capacity to make further improvements;	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation.	1	

**St Robert of Newminster Comprehensive School
Washington**

13th & 14th September 2007

Denominational Inspection Report (Section 48)

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Copies of the full report are available from the school.

Summary of Findings

The Overall Effectiveness of the provision of Catholic education is outstanding.
Leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding.
The provision for Collective Worship is outstanding.
The school's contribution towards Community Cohesion is outstanding.
Achievements and standards in Religious Education are outstanding.
Teaching and Learning in Religious Education is good.
The Religious Education curriculum in meeting learners' needs and interests is outstanding.
Leadership and management of Religious Education are outstanding.

The school's capacity to improve further is outstanding.

In order to further raise standards the governors should seek to:

- further embed the Bishops' Conference Levels of Attainment in Religious Education;
- develop more consistent practice in the use of written diagnostic assessment in Religious Education;

- consider the formal appointment of a Link Governor for Religious Education;
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