

**DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION
REPORT (Section 48)**

on

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

School: St Joseph's RC Middle School

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School URN: 122369

Headteacher: Alan Hodgson

Chair of Governors: Mary Pyle

Lead Inspector: Stephen Hammond
Team Inspector: Eileen Lawson

Date of Inspection: 1 and 2 March 2011

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 Joseph's is a three form entry, mixed Roman Catholic Middle School serving the parishes of Hexham, Haydon Bridge, Haltwhistle, Bellingham and Minsteracres. The pupils come from mixed social backgrounds although the proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, although the proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs is higher than average.

The school secured Arts College status in 2008 and holds numerous awards including Investors in People, Healthy School status and International School award.

FACTUAL INFORMATION

Pupil Catchment:

Number of pupils on roll: 339

Planned Admission Number of Pupils: 84

Percentage of pupils baptised RC: 43%

Percentage of pupils from other Christian denominations: 48%

Percentage of pupils from other World Faiths: 0.3%

Percentage of pupils with no religious affiliation: 8.7%

Percentage of pupils from ethnic groups: 2.5%

Percentage of pupils with special needs: 8%

Staffing

Full time teachers 12

Part time teachers 5

Percentage of Catholic teachers 47%

RE Department Staffing:

Number of full time RE teachers: 2

Number of part time RE teachers: 2

Percentage of Catholic teachers: 100%

Percentage of teachers with CCRS: 100%

Percentage of learning time given to RE:

Yr5 12%

Yr 7 8.3%

Yr6 12%

Yr 8 8.3%

Parishes served by the school:

St Mary's, Hexham

St John of Beverley, Haydon Bridge

St Wilfrid's, Haltwhistle

St Oswald's, Bellingham

St Elizabeth's, Minsteracres

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

How effective the school is in providing Catholic Education

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

MAIN FINDINGS

St Joseph's is a good Catholic school with some outstanding features. It is a welcoming, caring school where pupils feel valued and supported. Strong pastoral care and meaningful, trusting relationships underpin the life of the school community. All areas for improvement from the last inspection have been addressed and the school has made great strides in improving the progress pupils make in Religious Education and the standards of attainment they achieve. A shared vision rooted in the school's distinctive nature results in a community which has a strong sense of its own identity and pupils who can think morally and ethically.

Outcomes for all pupils are good. They participate fully in the many and varied learning opportunities that are given to them and enjoy their learning. Pupils enter the school with standards broadly in line with the national average. They make good progress throughout both key stages and achieve higher than average standards. Sometimes tasks are not differentiated enough and the learning focus not sharp enough to enable even more rapid progress. Pupils benefit from the range of opportunities offered to contribute to the Catholic life of the school. Pupils' levels of participation in the prayer and liturgical life of the school is growing and they are beginning to develop independent skills in preparing and leading prayer and collective worship.

The school provides a good Catholic education. Overall teaching and learning in Religious Education is good which enables pupils to make good progress. Parents and carers are kept well informed. The Religious Education curriculum provided is focused on meeting the needs of all pupils and raising standards. Assessment, monitoring and tracking systems are in place but, as yet, are not embedded enough to have impact on accelerating progress of more able pupils. The quality of collective worship is good although pupils are not involved enough in its planning and preparation. It is well defined within the school day and pupils respond with respect and reverence. Staff are good role models for pupils and offer a variety of prayer and worship opportunities.

Leaders and managers are outstanding in the promotion of community cohesion. This enables students to engage well with a variety of communities and the development of an array of excellent partnerships has resulted in improvements to pupils' learning and well-being. Leaders and managers are open and honest and are

informed by a shared understanding of strengths and areas for development regarding the provision for Religious Education and the Catholic life of the school. They are pro-active in making the necessary interventions to improve the classroom experience of pupils. The head of the Religious Education department is not, at present, afforded sufficient opportunities to develop his role in monitoring, evaluating and supporting the department in their efforts to improve provision and standards further.

What the school needs to do to improve further

- To raise standards further in Religious Education by:
 - using precise learning objectives, set against intended outcomes and success criteria to aid assessment
 - ensuring that teachers' marking provides information to pupils about the next steps in their learning
 - ensuring that more appropriate tasks and activities enable pupils to achieve higher standards of progress and attainment
 - ensuring that the head of Religious Education is given increased opportunities to monitor provision and standards within the department
 - reviewing curriculum time for Religious Education so that each key stage satisfies the Bishops' Conference requirement of 10%
- To improve the quality of provision of collective worship by:
 - extending further pupils' involvement in collective worship by developing their skills in planning and preparation.

PUPILS

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

2

The quality of learning in Religious Education for most pupils is good and most achieve well. A key feature of the Religious Education classrooms is the confidence and competence that the pupils demonstrate when discussing ideas and issues in groups. The pupils say that they enjoy Religious Education and levels of engagement are high in all year groups. Pupils generally make good progress from average starting points and by the end of Key Stage 2 the very large majority attain at least level 4. This progress is continued into Key Stage 3 and by the end of Year 8 the very large majority of pupils are attaining level 5. The progress made by pupils with particular learning needs is outstanding with almost all of these pupils making significant progress. This is the product of the quality of support that is provided by the school.

Pupils make a good contribution to the Catholic life of the school and benefit greatly from it. They are reflective and understand that religious belief and spiritual values are important to many people and can articulate how the school is helping them to become better people. Pupils are confident when expressing their own beliefs and are understanding and respectful of those with beliefs different to their own. They understand the importance of key celebrations throughout the liturgical year. They value and respect the Catholic tradition of the school and benefit from the chaplaincy team provision offered. The school has a 'Chaplaincy mind'. Pupils are considerate to others and respond to the needs of people beyond the school through prayer and fundraising activities. They understand the need for forgiveness and have a good understanding of what is right and wrong.

Pupils' response to and participation in collective worship is good. They act reverently and respectfully and can reflect silently. They demonstrate good understanding of different forms of prayer and are keen to take part in and lead prayers, class and whole school liturgies and school masses. However, pupils are not given enough opportunities to develop their skills in planning and preparing acts of collective worship. Pupils are at ease when praying with their school community and appreciate what is taking place. This appreciation has been demonstrated by pupils requesting prayers and masses for bereaved members of the school community. Pupils have a good understanding of the religious seasons and are becoming skilled in the use of scripture, religious artefacts, hymns and other forms of prayer to enhance acts of worship. Collective worship contributes positively to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils.

PROVISION

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

2

The quality of teaching in Religious Education is good overall and it promotes purposeful learning. Where teaching is best, the lessons are planned effectively; activities are varied and are well matched to pupils' abilities. Teachers are generally aware of individual student needs and have good relationships with their classes. The department is making increasingly good use of 'Assessment for Learning' strategies including rich questioning and self-assessment but diagnostic feedback is not given consistently enough, leaving some pupils unsure about how to improve the quality of their work. The department is contributing well to the development of pupils' personal learning and thinking skills as well as their independence as learners.

Assessment and academic guidance in Religious Education are good. The department has worked hard to develop a more robust assessment and monitoring system since the last inspection and this is having impact. The head of department has used training effectively to develop teachers' knowledge and understanding of assessment processes. The school data tracking system provides an accurate picture of pupil progress over time and the key messages from this monitoring inform the department's self-evaluation and development planning processes. However, learning objectives and intended outcomes are not always evident in teacher planning. As a consequence of this the marking of pupils' work is sometimes not sufficiently focused on securing improvement.

The quality of the Religious Education curriculum offered to pupils is good and is strongest in Key Stage 2 where adaptations to the scheme have helped to enrich and enhance the learning experiences of pupils. The detailed medium term planning sheets developed by the head of department ensure that a consistent, meaningful curriculum is experienced by all. The department acknowledges that provision at Key Stage 3 is not as developed and rightly sees the need to update schemes to enable greater achievement and attainment in Years 7 and 8. In addition the plans in place to enrich pupils' learning about other faiths through visits and visitors are appropriate. In each Key Stage pupils are awarded ample opportunity to develop spiritually and morally. This is due, in no small part, to the excellent relationships that exist between teachers and pupils. Pupils say that they feel their Religious Education teachers value and care about them. Curriculum time allocation is inconsistent across the Key Stages. 12% of curriculum time is now devoted to Religious Education in Key Stage 2. The school has unequivocally resolved to match this allocation in Key Stage 3 from September 2011.

The quality of collective worship provided by the school is good and ensures that the spiritual needs of all pupils and staff are well met. It is fully inclusive, reflective and well planned enabling pupils to take an active part. Themes are consistent with the

Catholic character of the school and responsive to the religious diversity among pupils. A new programme for collective worship has been introduced this year which has successfully focused the school community on the gospel readings of the week. Staff regularly review and plan improvements and are developing pupils' skills in planning and leading acts of worship. Prayer is central to the life of the school and this is reflected in the way staff pray together in a weekly prayer service planned and led by a member of staff. There is a range of formal and informal opportunities for pupils and staff to pray together.

LEADERS AND MANAGERS

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

2

Leaders and managers are deeply committed to the promotion of the Catholic life of the school and they monitor and evaluate the Catholic dimension with rigour and honesty. The Catholic mission of the school is a priority and there is a clear, shared vision and expectation between the headteacher, staff and governors as to how this mission is to be fulfilled. A range of formal and informal monitoring and evaluation activities ensures the continued growth and formation of the school community. The headteacher has demonstrated appropriate strategic leadership in the utilisation of the arts subject specialism to create a stained glass window, based on the theme of peace, which acts as a focal point in the assembly hall.

Systems are now firmly in place for the monitoring and evaluation of the provision for Religious Education. The head of department has worked effectively with an assistant headteacher to bring assessment and tracking of pupil progress into line with other subjects. The department is not content with the good progress that has been made however and continues to strive to improve outcomes for pupils. The school's self-evaluation shows a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development. The head of Religious Education has united a strong team behind his vision for excellence.

Governors provide effective challenge and support regarding the Catholic life of the school. They play an active part in planning for continuous improvement, showing determination in challenging and supporting the school. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and put the well being and development of the whole child at the centre of their work. They are well informed on issues relating to Religious Education and the Catholic life of the school, understand the school's performance in Religious Education and know what needs to be done to ensure continuous improvement of standards. Governors discharge their statutory and canonical duties well and are very supportive of leaders and staff. Governors are actively involved in the school community and have positive relationships with pupils and staff.

The school is extremely successful at developing partnerships with other providers and organisations which make a superb contribution to pupils' all round development. The headteacher ensures that a wide range of links are well established with other schools in the Hexham Partnership, other Catholic schools, the Diocese, parish, the Diocesan Youth Village and local and international organisations, which enable pupils and staff to enjoy, achieve and develop well. The school actively plans with these and other groups to offer varied and purposeful opportunities for the pupils which the school alone could not provide. As a result pupils achieve and cultivate relationships that will broaden their experience and enable them to develop exceptionally well. The parish community has close links to

the school. It joins in celebrations and fundraising and supports the school with sacramental preparation.

Leaders and managers' promotion of community cohesion is outstanding. The school is a highly inclusive community with a clear, shared vision and a strong sense of belonging. Leaders respect difference, value diversity and ensure equal opportunities for all. Many impressive opportunities exist for pupils to engage and collaborate with each other within the school day. Pupils are offered an extensive range of opportunities to collaborate and engage with those from different backgrounds locally, nationally and globally. As a result they recognise, respect and celebrate differences and have a strong sense of the common good. They demonstrate an excellent awareness and understanding of their global responsibilities. Collective worship is inclusive and the spiritual and religious identity of each individual is respected. The Religious Education curriculum promotes attitudes of respect and tolerance for all faiths and those with none.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Key for inspection grades:

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

Overall effectiveness	2
The school's capacity for sustained improvement	2
How good are outcomes for pupils, taking particular account of variations between different groups?	2
• how well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education?	2
❖ the quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
❖ the quality of learning for pupils with particular learning needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
❖ pupils' attainment in Religious Education	2
• to what extent do pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school?	2
• how well do pupils respond to and participate in the school's collective worship?	2
How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?	2
• the quality of teaching and purposeful learning in Religious Education?	2
• the effectiveness of assessment and academic guidance in Religious Education?	2
• the extent to which Religious Education curriculum meets pupils' needs?	2
• the quality of collective worship provided by the school?	2
How effective are leaders and managers in developing the Catholic life of the School?	2
• 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?	2
• how well leaders and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for RE and plan for improvement to outcomes for pupils?	2
• 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?	2
• 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