



INSPECTION REPORT

School: Saints John Fisher and Thomas More Catholic Humanities College

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Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Salford
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education
Act 2005

Date of inspection: March 2011

Date of previous inspection: March 2008

Reporting Inspectors: Anthony Pearson & John McDonald

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades
Overall Effectiveness of the School	1	1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3 = Satisfactory 4 = Inadequate
Capacity for Sustained Improvement	1	
Outcomes for Pupils	1	
Leadership and Management of Catholic Life of the School	1	
Effectiveness of the Provision for Catholic Education	2	

Information about the school

Ss John Fisher and Thomas More is a smaller than average 11-16 voluntary aided high school for girls and boys. It has specialist status as a Humanities College founded on strengths in English, drama and Religious Education. Approximately 63% of pupils are baptised Catholics. The vast majority, almost 90%, of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion with special educational needs including those who have a statement of special educational need is high. Average numbers of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school serves parishes in Colne and surrounding areas of East Lancashire and is regularly oversubscribed. 19 of the school's 46 teachers are Catholics.

Overall Effectiveness

Grade 1

Ss John Fisher and Thomas More is an outstanding Catholic school where all members of its community recognise, accept and strive, under the leadership of a highly effective headteacher, to make a reality of the vision that "Christ is central to all we do". Success in building the Catholic ethos has been achieved because it has been a high priority in development planning, strongly backed by governors and been very well supported with both training and resources targeting teachers and pupils equally. There is wide recognition of the effectiveness of the work of the chaplaincy in challenging and supporting adults and pupils on their faith journeys and inspiring them to be unselfishly involved in action for the good and care of others. This is underpinned by the quality of the school's prayer and liturgical life. Consequently, this has led to the creation of a community where, as one member of staff observed, "the beatitudes are lived out". At the same time, pupils throughout the school achieve well in Religious Education because the teaching is good overall and sometimes outstanding, and because of their own positive attitudes to learning. A strong team of committed teachers enabled standards to be maintained in Religious Education during a recent period of instability. New subject leadership has quickly gained an accurate appreciation of the subject strengths and where the provision can be further improved, notably in some aspects of the curriculum and assessment. As one of the school's specialist Humanities subjects, Religious Education's subject expertise, training and resources are making an effective contribution to improving the quality of whole school provision and further enhancing the spiritual and moral development of pupils in the school and beyond. Links with the local Catholic community are mutually productive and the school makes an outstanding contribution to social cohesion in its diverse local community, and increasingly, abroad.

Capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

There is a strong track record of improvement of academic performance with GCSE results in Religious Studies rising over the last three years. Governors

have ensured that provision to promote the Catholic life of the school has also improved since the previous inspection. Efforts to tackle the single curriculum issue for improvement identified at the previous inspection have been inhibited somewhat by discontinuity in leadership of curriculum Religious Education. However, this has been well managed by senior leaders so that the department is now very well placed to continue to improve. Self evaluation is rigorous, accurate and leads to effective action planning. Consequently the school's capacity to improve is outstanding.

What the school needs to do to improve further

Continue to improve assessment procedures in years 7 to 9 so that:

- there is greater agreement about standards and their relationship to pupils' levels of attainment
- assessment information is used more sharply and consistently in lesson planning to ensure learning needs of all groups of pupils are met appropriately.
- agreed assessment strategies are used with greater consistency in lessons
- written comments on pupils' work show them clearly what they need to do to improve

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

Grade 1

Pupils respond very well indeed to the school's vision for them which seeks to "offer young people a reason for living and hoping". They recognise that this takes place in an environment which welcomes all and where everyone is treated personally in a warm friendly way. They recognise that its Catholic life is "knitted into the fabric of the school" and the role of the chaplaincy central to its daily life. Consequently, pupils, inspired by the Gospel values which they see lived out, want to be involved themselves. At the very least this is indicated by the open, friendly, helpful welcome given to visitors and by the positive quality of their relationships with each other. Additionally, many pupils become involved in the wide range of opportunities which the school provides for them to be involved in its rich liturgical life and in various forms of Catholic Action such as the junior St Vincent de Paul conference or as trained bereavement counsellors, the "Rainbows" group. Pupils also respond very well to the opportunities provided to participate in the strong programme of residential retreat experiences which they recognise benefits them spiritually and personally. They generously support a wide range of charities.

Well-devised procedures for form prayer were seen to get a good response from pupils in the two form periods which were observed. This was because of the efforts which teachers made to ensure that these experiences were relevant to pupils' own lives. Pupils also respond well to the innovative experimental use of pod casts which are available to supplement the teachers' own provision. Although there was some difference in the quality of response and active participation between younger and older pupils in the two assemblies observed, all were appropriately reverent and behaviour was excellent. Pupils readily offer to lead prayer and many are very actively involved in preparing for and participating in, including involvement in music and drama; in the broad programme of Masses and other liturgical events which take place at appropriate times of the school year.

Over recent time, standards reached in the GCSE in Religious Studies have risen year on year and compare very well with performance in other core and specialism subjects. Pupils achieve well in relation to their starting points on entry to the school. Their performance in Religious Studies is better than in most of their other subjects. In contrast to the national picture there is little difference between the performance of boys and girls. Creditably, the vast majority of pupils leave school with an accredited qualification in Religious Education. Currently in Year 11, most pupils are on track to reach the challenging targets set by the school, with performance in the higher A*-A range notably strong.

The majority of pupils in Year 9 are on track to reach their targets. They achieve equally well in learning about belief and practice in Catholicism and the other major world faiths studied as well as in the extent to which they are able to reflect on belief in the light of their own and others' life experiences. Some pupils are beginning to tackle more difficult skills, for example by evaluating the extent to which the media and scripture influence peoples lives in the world today.

How effective the provision is for Catholic Education

Grade 2

The content of the curriculum for Religious Education meets Bishops' Conference and Diocesan expectations well. The time provided overall is appropriate although there is a slight imbalance in favour of Years 10 and 11. In this school the taught curriculum is very strongly enhanced by the myriad other experiences which the school provides, for example through its programme of retreats, liturgies and through the pervading highly positive influence of the work of the chaplaincy. Continuous evaluation of the effectiveness of the provision ensures that the curriculum reflects local circumstances and the personal needs of pupils, for example in the recent decision to choose an optional unit of work for older pupils which enables them to develop more understanding of and empathy with other faiths represented in the local community. The work provided in both key stages ensures that pupils are able to develop a knowledge and understanding of Catholic belief and practice which helps them tackle "difficult" questions about moral issues or the meaning of life.

Planning for the prayer life of the school is outstanding and takes as its starting point that which is provided for staff. Many teachers, including some from other Christian backgrounds or other major world faith communities feel comfortable with leading the morning prayer and reflection in the staff room which inspectors observed to take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and reverence. Liturgical experiences take account of pupils' prior experiences as well as being appropriate for their age. The liturgical programme is closely linked to the Church's year. For example all pupils were able to take part in the celebration of Mass on Ash Wednesday, (the day before the inspection) and be anointed with ashes. The frequency and quality of these experiences also rely on the excellent relationships which exist between the school and local priests who are extremely generous with their time. This means also that Mass can be celebrated regularly in school. The school provides suitable accommodation for non-Christian pupils who wish to perform their own prayer rituals.

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and several outstanding learning experiences were observed during the inspection. The high quality of classroom relationships is one of the strongest features. This means that teachers can confidently use their good subject knowledge to stretch pupils with challenging questions and the pupils themselves feel able to offer responses even when unsure. A broad range of interesting and challenging learning activities are used to make learning relevant to pupils own lives. Different groups of pupils are identified in lesson planning but it is not always clear in practice how their particular learning needs are to be met. Most lessons observed provided effective examples of the use of information technology. for example to show well-selected video clips which stimulate interest, or to supplement text book resources. Despite some current inconsistency, teachers are becoming increasingly comfortable in using a range of assessment techniques such as mini plenaries to check learning towards learning objectives previously shared with pupils, or by using self and peer assessment. Books are regularly marked but not always in a way which clearly shows pupils what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils' overwhelmingly positive attitudes to learning means that they continue to learn well even on those few occasions when the teaching is relatively uninspiring.

During a recent period of some turbulence in departmental leadership, committed colleagues with previous leadership experience worked hard and with some success to ensure that existing strengths such as examination performance have been sustained. The strong prevailing team ethos in the department also contributed to this success. The recently appointed subject leader has, consequently, been able to quickly identify strengths and areas for development and begin to instigate appropriate action planning in order to bring about further improvement. This has included, for example, an appropriate emphasis on evaluating the effectiveness of assessment procedures and the curriculum in Years 7-9. Recently introduced whole school assessment procedures are providing an accurate picture of pupils' progress so that early intervention can now be made where underachievement is identified.

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

Grade 1

The school's vision for Catholic education is expressed in a mission statement, recently subjected to a review which included contributions from staff, governors, teachers, parents and pupils. In pursuit of this, the headteacher clearly sets out his challenging expectations and leads by example in a quiet but highly effective manner. He is supported very well by leaders and managers throughout the school in ensuring that the vision, inspired by Gospel values, underpins its everyday life of the and is understood and accepted by all who work and study there. Thus in the words of the prayer devised by pupils, "our bright colours shine". Self-evaluation of the Catholic life of the school is rigorous, accurate and integrated well into whole school development planning. Recent examples of this working successfully include chapel and chaplaincy developments and the astute handling of leadership succession in curriculum Religious Education. A strong programme of in service training ensures that teachers understand their role in promoting the Catholic life of the school and have the opportunity to develop appropriate skills. Concern for teachers own personal and spiritual development is also evident in the provision, and well supported through school chaplaincy. Pupils too have a clear idea of what a Catholic school represents and, inspired by the example of their teachers, are keen to play their part in its mission.

Governance, under the leadership of a highly experienced, committed and knowledgeable Chair, is extremely strong and effective. Governors reflect a broad range of backgrounds and experience. They are firm friends and supporters of the school yet quick to use their sharp understanding of its performance to challenge where necessary. Where issues arise, they react quickly and decisively. They are prepared to allocate scarce resources to ensure that the school can effectively continue to carry out its Catholic mission. Their appreciation of the almost exclusively "white" nature of the school in a locality of cultural racial and religious diversity has resulted in an effective programme of engagement with the local community.

This is a strong feature of the outstanding contribution which the school makes to community cohesion. Strong productive links have been created with local faith communities through the "Building Bridges" initiative. Local parish liturgies and sacramental programmes are enhanced by the music and drama provided by the school. This support is very effectively led and coordinated by the hard working lay chaplain. In turn, parishioners support the school's programme of voluntary Masses and use other school facilities for parish celebrations. The "Rainbows" counselling group is active in the school, locally, for example through work in primary schools, and also further afield. Mutually productive links also exist between the school and an African orphanage and school. The Religious Education department also contributes well to school and local cohesion through its role to as one of the school's Humanities specialist subjects.