

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



Inspection Report of Denominational Character and Religious Education

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

St Joseph's Catholic High School (St Peter Catholic Academy Trust)

DfE School No:	871/4800
URN:	143803
Headteacher:	Mr Ciran Stapleton
Chair Board of Directors at time of inspection:	Prof Mark Watson-Gandy
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Jane Crow
Associate Inspector:	Mr Michael Manley
Date of Inspection:	9/10 May 2017
Date previous Inspection:	September 2012

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese working within the
St Peter Catholic Academy Trust

Introduction

In publishing this Section 48 report, the trustees of St Peter Catholic Academy Trust would like to acknowledge the outstanding leadership offered by Ciran Stapleton and his team at St Joseph's Catholic High School in helping bring about the remarkable turnaround at St Joseph's. In October 2013 the school was on a downward trajectory, requiring improvement across the board. Having just joined as interim headteacher in that summer of 2013, Mr Stapleton was among those praised for having a 'clear vision for school improvement' - one of the few bright lights in an otherwise difficult 2013 Ofsted Section 5 report. Six months later, an Ofsted inspector on a monitoring inspection visit wrote of the new head teacher's 'relentless drive to address the areas for improvement' and of 'a rapid change of ethos' effected by this. So rapid was this change of ethos that Ofsted, 18 months later, were able to report on a school that was 'good' across the board and on a headteacher and leadership team having 'transformed the culture of the school'. The trustees acknowledge that this is not simply down to leadership acumen, but instead are convinced that it is Catholic conviction, concern for each person created in God's image and redeemed by Christ that is behind all that Mr Stapleton has tried to do in his work with others.

Information about the school

St Joseph's is an 11-18 co-educational school in the Diocese of Northampton. The school is an academy and part of the newly established St Peter Catholic Academy Trust (December 2016). There are 60 teachers, 27 of whom are Catholic and 803 pupils on roll. 554 pupils are Catholic, the rest coming mainly from other Christian traditions. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is approximately 17% which is lower than the national average. Most pupils (76%) come from ethnic minority backgrounds; more than double the national average. Almost 50% of pupils speak English as an Additional Language and most come from an Eastern European background. Significant changes have taken place in the leadership of the school since the last inspection.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

St Joseph's is a good Catholic school which is oversubscribed and thriving because of strong leadership and very positive relationships between staff and pupils. The distinctive Catholic nature of the school is highly visible in these relationships. Prayer, collective worship and pastoral support are all of good quality and given a high profile in the daily life of the school. As a result, pupils are reflective and value opportunities to express their views and beliefs and to become involved in charitable fundraising. Both pupils and staff are rightly proud of their school and enjoy belonging to a community where they are made to feel valued. Pupil behaviour at St Joseph's is exemplary and parents are extremely positive about their children's school, expressing satisfaction with the ethos, academic standards and rapport with the staff.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

Since the last Section 48 inspection in 2012, St Joseph's has been through very challenging circumstances leading to a change in the leadership of the school and most of the staff are also relatively new. A key appointment of an enthusiastic, non-teaching chaplain working full time across the multi academy trust has made a significant contribution to the life of the community.

The headteacher and senior staff are highly motivated and have successfully driven up standards across the school. They are working effectively with the relatively inexperienced

RE department, to improve pupil outcomes. The policy to use regular, diagnostic marking and 'next steps' feedback is evident but still not used consistently across the department. A lack of clarity about the school's mission statement needs to be addressed.

The headteacher has a good overall view of the school's strengths and development needs and a strong vision for the place of religious education and Catholic ethos at St Joseph's. However, the Self Evaluation Form for Religious Education [SEF-RE] is not evaluative or evidence based and statements are not derived from rigorous formal monitoring processes by governors/directors and senior staff. As a result, there is a lack of clarity about the school's strengths and areas for development. Priorities for the development of Catholic life and religious education are not currently included in the school development plan.

Senior leadership is committed to achieving high standards and consistently communicates high expectations to staff to improve the quality of religious education and to strongly support the Catholic ethos of the school. Despite the changing landscape for assessment at GCSE and A Level, the school is working hard to develop accurate assessments and improve pupil outcomes in religious education. There is a strong capacity for the current leadership to maintain the school's effectiveness and to become outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- embed a culture of rigorous self-evaluation procedures, focusing specifically on the Catholic life of the school and religious education and linked to clear priorities for improvement in the school development plan
- continue to focus on improving the quality of teaching in religious education to ensure that higher order thinking skills are systematically developed across the age range and there is greater stretch and challenge for the more able
- further develop chaplaincy provision through the involvement of more pupils and staff across the whole school.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 2

Pupils benefit well from the school's Catholic ethos which encourages them to grow in faith, expressing their views and beliefs with confidence. They have a clear understanding of the school's values and are proud to admit that these are values they aspire to live their lives by. This is evident in all pupils' outstanding behaviour and positive attitudes. The school council spoke with sincerity about the importance to them of key liturgical celebrations throughout the year and their love of religious education lessons because of the opportunities presented to reflect, debate and offer informed opinion. Relationships in the pupil body reflect true Christian respect and concern for others. In particular, there is an overwhelming response from pupils towards charitable fundraising. Pupils willingly undertake a range of responsibilities in school such as form captain, prefect and belonging to the school council. A position of spiritual prefect has been established but needs further development.

Prayer has a very high profile within school life and is of good quality. Therefore, pupils are at ease praying together and clearly enjoy their assemblies which are well planned and effectively convey meaning. Some of the least able pupils who participated in a Year 10 assembly could accurately recall the key messages later in the day. Pupils make their responses to prayers respectfully and explain how regular prayer opportunities contribute well to their spiritual and moral development, especially retreats which take place in years 7 and 8. Pupils assist with worship and are occasionally given the chance to prepare and plan their own liturgies. However, they are not yet involved in evaluating worship opportunities.

Chaplaincy is well supported by the school's leadership and provides effective spiritual and pastoral support to the community. Pupils have a very high regard for the work of the chaplain. They are aware of how to access any help they need and several could recall the stories of individuals who have benefitted from this help when struggling to cope, for example at the time of a bereavement. As the chaplain is now working across the whole of the multi academy trust, it would be beneficial to further develop chaplaincy provision through the involvement of pupils and staff across the whole school.

Pupils are developing a good knowledge of the Catholic faith. Currently, religious education outcomes are lower than the outcomes in other core subjects but there is an improving trend at GCSE and the numbers of pupils opting to take A Level is increasing. Scrutiny of books and lesson observations indicate most pupils are making good progress but there is a need for a more differentiated approach to meet the needs of all pupils, especially those who are most able. The vast majority enjoy their religious education lessons and appreciate the opportunities to discuss their own ideas and opinions with others. Pupils have good relationships with their teachers who listen to them and encourage them in their learning. They have mainly positive attitudes and want to do well although in some lessons, where there is less challenge or where the pace is too slow, pupils can be less engaged.

Leaders and managers

Grade 2

Leaders and governors/directors work hard to ensure a strong Catholic identity permeates the school's daily life. This has led to a wide range of experiences for pupils to develop spiritually and a relentless drive for them to achieve their full educational potential. The headteacher is deeply committed to the church's mission in education and was described by a member of the clergy as, "Catholic to his fingertips". He is aware of major strengths and areas for development with respect to its Catholic character but systems are not yet in place for regular evaluations of these areas alongside the school development planning. A very large response (141 returns) was received to the parental questionnaire and the overwhelming majority responded positively. They indicated strongly that parents hold the school in high esteem and send their children to St Joseph's because of faith development, high standards and the quality of pastoral support. A typical quote from parents was; "A very good school with great staff and an amazing headteacher".

The new head of the religious education department is able, enthusiastic and dedicated to his role. He is well supported by his staff and the school's leadership. There are a range of monitoring activities as demonstrated in the school's *Middle Leader Handbook* which lead to good quality weekly planning. Monitoring activities need extending to include governor/director involvement. Pupils are assessed regularly and guidance is being actively sought to establish accurate judgements and appropriate marking responses while getting to grips with the new examination specifications. The whole school policy to use regular, diagnostic marking and 'next steps' feedback is evident in religious education but not yet used consistently. Strategic planning to embed skill development across the age range needs further development based on a rigorous evaluation of the department's strengths and areas for development.

Provision

Grade 2

Worship and prayer are central to school life for both pupils and staff. They are well supported and valued. There are a range of formal and informal prayer opportunities linking to Catholic tradition and additional activities across the curriculum which promote pupils' spiritual development. Worship themes reflect Sunday's gospel and liturgical year and attractive displays effectively promote the Catholic/Christian ethos of the school.

The quality of religious education lessons overall is good as the rapport teachers have established with their pupils creates a positive environment for learning. In the best lessons observed, teachers have good subject knowledge, set clear learning objectives and motivate pupils to learn well through engaging practical activities and correctly pitched success criteria. More able pupils need greater challenge throughout the lesson to make good and accelerated progress from their individual starting points. Planning currently requires pupils to work on less intellectually demanding work for much of the lesson, being stretched by tasks which develop their higher order thinking skills only at the end. In some year groups, the most able pupils are being taught in separate sets to address some of these issues. Assessments are made regularly and despite the changing landscape for assessment at GCSE and A Level, the department is working hard to develop accurate assessments and improve pupil outcomes in religious education.

Overall, the curriculum meets the Bishops' Conference requirements and is appropriate for the needs of all pupils. The quality is good and well planned to draw on experiences within and outside of the school. It makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Pupils' books evidenced a satisfactory coverage of the curriculum including developing a good understanding of other faiths.

The inspectors wish to thank staff and children for their very warm welcome and for contributing to their informative and interesting visit.