

**SALFORD DIOCESE
INSPECTION REPORT**



**ST. AUGUSTINE'S
ROMAN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL
Billington**

Inspection date February 2006

Reporting Inspector Mr A. Pearson

Inspection carried out in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School Catholic Secondary
 Age range of pupils 11-16
 Number on roll 1032
 Appropriate authority The governing body
 Chair of Governors Fr E. Willoughby SJ
 Headteacher Mr. A. McNamara
 Head of Religious Education Mrs M. Wells
 Date of previous inspection October 2000

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	
Overall effectiveness of the school	1	Explanation of the Grades 1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3 = Satisfactory 4 = Inadequate
Leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school	1	
The quality of Collective Worship	1	
Achievement and standards in Religious Education	2	
The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education	2	
The quality of the Religious Education curriculum	1	
Leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education	1	

The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Augustine's, Billington is a voluntary aided Roman Catholic Comprehensive School and Specialist Science College for boys and girls aged 11 to 16 within the Lancashire Local Education Authority. It has Leading Edge status. The school serves 10 associated primary schools from 12 contributory parishes in the villages and small towns characteristic of its large and semi-rural catchment area in the Ribble Valley in East Lancashire. The school's indicative admission number is 205 and it is oversubscribed annually. There are 1032 pupils on roll whom 1006 are baptised Catholics. The pupil population is almost entirely of white British heritage and represents the full range of socio-economic backgrounds. Overall pupils' attainment on entry to the school is above average. 6.8% of pupils are entitled to free school meals which is below average. The number of pupils identified as having special educational needs is 141 and 29 have a statement of special educational need. 48 (75%) of the schools 64 teachers are Catholics.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Augustine's is an outstanding and highly effective Catholic school. The response to its call in its Mission Statement to "encourage, inspire, challenge and care for each other, be open to the wider world around us and celebrate our reasons for living and hoping" is evident in all aspects of school life and in the wholehearted commitment of teachers, support staff, families and pupils towards its realisation. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher is the key to this success. He is effectively supported by the Senior Leadership Team and governors. Strengths and developmental areas are very well understood and all stakeholders are actively involved in the evaluation process. Training and finance are well targeted in support of the development of the Catholic life of the school through careful planning. Collective worship is also outstanding. A rich and varied range of liturgical experiences is provided backed up by excellent music and drama. These experiences are appreciated and enjoyed by pupils, teachers and parents alike. They also make a significant contribution to pupils' understanding and appreciation of the universality of the Church. Standards in Religious Education are well above average by the time pupils leave school and all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well. Pupils' experiences in Religious Education lessons make an outstanding contribution to their spiritual and moral development. Teaching and learning is good overall with significant strengths evident in the way in which lessons are planned to meet the needs of all groups of pupils. Assessment is good. Excellent procedures recently devised for use in Years 7 to 9 are beginning to have a positive effect on progress. The high quality of the Religious Education curriculum is strongly enhanced through retreats, the liturgical life of the school and opportunities for prayer and reflection in lessons. Leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education are outstanding. Subject performance is effectively monitored. The very hard working team make an outstanding contribution to the prayer and liturgical life of the school.

Improvement since the last inspection

Following the last Section 23 inspection in October 2000 issues concerning funding for Religious Education and the use of computers to support learning have been effectively resolved. Teaching time made available for curriculum Religious Education remains slightly below that expected but does not affect standards, achievement or the quality of the provision.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation succinctly provides an accurate appreciation of how well it is doing as a Catholic school. Strengths and areas needing further work are well understood and have informed development planning. Taken together with the many outstanding features confirmed during the inspection this indicates that the school has an excellent capacity to improve its performance as a Catholic school still further.

What the school should do to improve further

- There are no significant weaknesses which need to be addressed but the school should continue to evaluate formally its current provision in relation to the Diocese's expectations concerning the future of the chaplaincy role in its secondary schools

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The weight of inspection evidence firmly supports the school's own view that the leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. The vision which drives this is energetically and very clearly articulated through the headteacher's outstanding leadership and is very well understood by all members of the school community. The vision is encapsulated in the recently revised Mission Statement, firmly rooted in Gospel values, which uniquely mirrors the individual character of this school. Well targeted in-service training supports the teachers' understanding of their roles in supporting the Catholic life of the school. Teachers new to the school appreciate the practical support provided to enable them to play their part. Opportunities presented through the school's specialist Science College and Leading Edge status are effectively used to support curriculum Religious Education and enhance the quality of its liturgies and prayer life. Finance raised for, and devoted to, supporting the Catholic life of the school is used wisely. The school bravely takes the risk of inviting all its stakeholders, including pupils, to contribute to an ongoing evaluation in how well it is doing in translating the vision into reality and reacts positively to their views. Governors are rightly proud of their school and understand its strengths well including the fact, as one governor said during the inspection, "for many pupils this school is Church". Though the governors have no specific mechanism for monitoring the Catholic life of the school they are nevertheless well informed, quick to challenge its performance where necessary and prepared to initiate consideration of ways it can improve further.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship is excellent. The most outstanding feature is the quality of whole school Masses which take place several times each year and are highly appreciated by pupils, parents, teachers and the priests who celebrate them. Many of these are the result of extraordinarily high quality of preparation by members of the Religious Education department supported by generous contributions from the school's music, technology and drama departments and many other individual teachers and school support staff. There is also a very high level of involvement by pupils themselves not least through preparation. Themes are highly imaginative, for example when pupils from Year 6 of the contributory primary schools are formally handed into the "care" of St Augustine's supported by their catechists from Year 10. Equally so are those Masses which celebrate the universality of the Church and provide a rich and rewarding experience for pupils. These have included participation by priests and people of the Catholic Asian community, locally and from further afield and by African missionaries and seminarians. High quality music, dance and drama strongly contribute to the authentic cultural ethos and the quality of the liturgy. Regular form and voluntary Masses are also celebrated. Collective worship observed during the inspection was appropriate and, in the case of a Year assembly, was of very high quality. A very strong programme of retreat experiences provides excellent opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own faith journeys. An outstanding feature of the Religious Education curriculum is the way in which opportunities for prayer and reflection, using the school chapel, are built into lesson planning. Pupils are very generous in their support for others through charitable activity and community work. Regular staff prayer supports the very strong staff commitment to the school's Catholic ethos

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education are good. Over recent years GCSE results have been well above average in the ranges A*-A and A*-C which represents good achievement for the pupils concerned in relation to their starting points on entry to the school. Girls outperform boys but the margin is narrower than that found nationally. Pupils' performance in Religious Studies has been better than in many of their other subjects. A small group of pupils are entered for the less demanding Salford Diocesan Certificate in Religious Studies. In 2005, all 15 pupils who were entered passed with distinction ensuring that, most creditably, practically all pupils leave this school with an accredited qualification in Religious Studies. In Years 7 to 9 pupils also achieve well to reach standards which are above average overall. All groups of pupils including those who have learning difficulties or disabilities achieve equally well because they are taught with others of similar prior attainment ensuring that learning is well matched to their capabilities. By the end of Year 9, pupils are confidently using their knowledge and understanding of Catholic belief and practice to make informed comments on a range of difficult spiritual and moral issues. The content of lessons and the ethos in which they are taught means that pupils learn to value and respect their own lives and the values and beliefs of others so ensuring that the contribution made to their personal development by Religious Education is outstanding.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school believes that the overall quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is good. The inspection evidence supports this and indicates that it has some features which are outstanding. Major strengths include the way in which lesson planning takes advantage of the school's grouping arrangements to ensure that pupils of all capabilities are suitably stretched and that learning activities reflect their capabilities. Hence lower attainers are very well provided for with adapted learning resources. Those with particular needs are also very well supported by their classroom assistants. Teachers use their specialist knowledge and expertise to challenge the highest attainers with demanding questioning which makes them think for themselves. Classroom relationships are also very good which makes for a relaxed, enjoyable yet productive learning ethos. Digital technology is used effectively to enhance the quality of lessons and make them interesting. Teachers take advantage of the proximity of the chapel to their classrooms in order to ensure that pupils have excellent opportunities to reflect prayerfully on their learning in a way which makes it highly relevant to their life experiences. This also contributes significantly to their spiritual and moral development. Assessment procedures are developing well in making use of new Diocesan arrangements for measuring pupils' attainment and progress in Years 7 to 9. Newly devised means of involving pupils themselves in the process through self-assessment and target setting are exemplary.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The Religious Education curriculum is outstanding. Diocesan requirements are met and although the time provided in Years 7 is slightly less than that recommended pupils are nevertheless able to progress and achieve well. The examination specification taught to the vast majority of pupils in Years 10 and 11 meets their needs very well and they enjoy it. The Religious Education curriculum is significantly enhanced by the provision of a broad range of retreats, for example to the Lancaster Diocese's Youth Centre at Caslerigg, and through pupils' ongoing experience of the schools extensive and impressive liturgical life. The opportunities which are taken to enhance pupils' learning and personal development through use of the school's small but very well appointed chapel make a strong contribution to the overall quality of the curriculum. Schemes of work, together with opportunities provided through liturgies also ensure that pupils are well prepared for their future lives in the varied cultural environment of modern Britain.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school correctly believes that the quality of the leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education is outstanding. This quality is also recognised through the allocation of significant other whole school responsibilities to the Head of Department. The vision generated by the school Mission Statement is translated into very effective action through the departmental improvement plan. Departmental effectiveness is also characterised by the existence of a very strong team ethos underpinned by mutual support. At the same time, systems for monitoring the department's effectiveness by the Head of Department and the Senior Leadership Team do not lack rigour. Subject performance is thoroughly analysed though currently better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9 where newly implemented procedures for measuring standards and tracking pupils' progress are still bedding in. Very effective procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching are in place. The information gained, together with a strong commitment to the provision of effective in-service training, is used well to promote quality performance. Accommodation for learning is excellent and Religious Education is very well resourced through funding which compares well with other core subjects. The very hard working department makes an excellent contribution to the prayer life of the school in the preparation of liturgies and successfully takes on many of the functions typical of a chaplaincy role. Although not a key issue the school might benefit by evaluating further its current provision for chaplaincy.