

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Joseph's is a voluntary aided Roman Catholic primary school serving the parish of St. Joseph in Halliwell, an inner urban district with considerable social and economic disadvantage to the north of Bolton town centre. Housing in the area is mostly a mixture of local authority accommodation and privately owned terraced houses. The church of St. Joseph is a short distance walk away from the school. The age range of the pupils is 4 to 11 and the indicative admission number is currently 30. There are 207 pupils on roll of whom 149 are baptised Catholics. 22% of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals and 42 pupils have been identified as having special needs. 2 learners have a statutory statement of special educational need. The school admits children from 14 different pre-school settings. 10% of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds from 7 different nationalities. The last two years have seen extensive staffing changes. There are 8 full-time teachers and 1 part-time teacher of whom 6 (66%) are Catholics. 2 hold the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies or equivalent and 3 are studying for the certificate.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Joseph's is a good school. It has a strong Catholic ethos. The school's Mission Statement, which was drawn up in 2001 by staff and governors and is prominently displayed, is in need of review to take into account the changes the school has undergone. Leadership and management ensure a warm, caring environment in which all aspects of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. The Religious Education curriculum is well planned and further enhanced by the provision for prayer and worship, the quality of relationships and the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers are well supported by non-teaching assistants. All staff are good role models for pupils and are dedicated, committed and hardworking. They demonstrate excellent levels of care. Pupils are happy to come to school and their behaviour is excellent. They are mannerly, polite and friendly showing good attitudes to their learning and respond well to the quality of teaching they experience. Pupils, including gifted and talented and those children with special educational needs, achieve well as a result of the differentiated Religious Education curriculum, which meets the needs of all children. The leadership and management provided by the governing body, led by a relatively new but committed chair, together with the experience and commitment of the headteacher and the school leadership team are excellent. Staff at all levels are strong positive role models for the pupils and are dedicated to the school.

Improvement since the last inspection

The school has successfully addressed the key issues arising from the last Section 23 inspection in February 2002. There is now a consistent approach to planning in curriculum Religious Education to include differentiation. Thorough systems for monitoring, evaluation and feedback are in place. All teachers are familiar with and use the diocesan REvision 2000 guidelines to support pupil progress in curriculum Religious Education. The school underwent major changes and challenges during the absence of the headteacher. St. Joseph's school has now overcome these difficulties. There is a strong governing body with a new parish priest who is the chair and, with one exception, a new teaching staff. All the staff work as an effective team under the guidance of the hardworking, committed headteacher. A Parents' Association supports the school.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is very thorough, objective and realistic. The leadership and management of the school have a clear focused vision for the school. There is a genuine commitment to ensuring that all involved in the school community recognise the important role they play in the future development of this good Catholic school. Religious Education policies were drawn up after consultation with staff and governors and are regularly reviewed and supplemented with additional guidelines as appropriate. The school demonstrates a good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Review the Mission Statement taking into account the views of all stakeholders.
- Provide a common planning and evaluation format for prayer and worship.
- Undertake and complete the proposed staff training based on the Diocesan guidelines for assessment and levelling of pupils' work.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are good. The school experienced a period of instability during the headteacher's 16 month absence from school prior to September 2005. During this time, when the local authority made the key decisions, three temporary headteachers took charge and most of the teaching staff changed. The school is now back on track and governors have full authority and work very closely with the headteacher to ensure the school's continuing success. This success is due mainly to the strong leadership of the headteacher, the dedicated leadership team, the wholehearted support of all the staff and the renewed sense of purpose of the governing body. Governors are supportive and are involved in shaping the life and direction of the school. The time is now right for the school to review its Mission Statement to take into account the views of all stakeholders. A shared vision for the ongoing development of the school as a Catholic community is reflected in governor appointments of committed Catholic teachers to the staff when possible. The parish priest, who is the chair of governors, demonstrates a good knowledge and understanding of school life. Together with the year-group link governors he is a regular visitor to the school meeting with staff and visiting pupils in their classes. During the governors' visits to school they are able to monitor Religious Education. In addition the detailed reports from the headteacher who is also the co-ordinator for Religious Education enable governors to monitor closely the work of the school as a faith community. There is a designated governor for Religious Education.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship is good both in frequency and quality. It is a key feature of the school and pervades all aspects of school life. It is underpinned by a clear Religious Education policy which includes prayer and worship. Throughout the year parents, parishioners, staff and learners are offered a range of meaningful opportunities to develop their relationship with God. Whole school Masses are celebrated in church on Holy Days of Obligation and class Masses are celebrated in school at other times. They are planned and led by different classes in order that pupils are given the opportunity to participate. The support of the parish priest and his involvement with these celebrations are appreciated and acknowledged by staff and parents. Assemblies and services reflecting the liturgical year and as an extension of pupils' curriculum Religious Education are a regular feature. Religious celebrations are planned but these could be more detailed and evaluated on a more regular basis. The Key Stage 1 learners observed during the inspection were fully involved in the headteacher led assembly based on the miracles of Jesus. All learners observed during the inspection prayed with respect and reverence demonstrating a growing awareness of the importance of prayer in their lives. Displays and focal areas in classrooms and throughout the school indicate that learners are encouraged to express their spirituality through prayer.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education are good. On entry to school attainment is average. In Foundation and Key Stage 1 progress is good. By the end of Key Stage 2 there are clear indicators of very good progress. Strategies and systems have been introduced to ensure that this aspect of the school's life and curriculum has been prioritised in order that good standards are achieved and maintained. There is a clear scheme of work together with a good range of resources. Thorough planning identifies focused objectives and outcomes and highlights appropriate differentiation. The inspector's scrutiny of work, together with lesson observations during which pupils were provided with opportunities to debate, question and express themselves in their written work, orally and through information technology, indicate that children make at least good progress and often better. Across the whole community there is a feeling of self-worth and self-esteem. This has been enhanced by the introduction of a school council and playground pals. Learners are aware of God's presence in their lives and of His forgiveness and love. They are aware of the needs of others and this is evidenced by their generosity to a number of worldwide and local charities.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school has assessed the quality of teaching and learning as satisfactory. Inspection evidence gathered judges this to be good. Teachers have high expectations for themselves and their learners and work hard using a variety of interactive teaching strategies. They demonstrate good subject knowledge, an understanding of Religious Education and make good use of the diocesan *REvision 2000* guidelines. Detailed planning, with clearly stated objectives which are fully explained to the learners, leads to well structured lessons incorporating a good range of activities. Assessment systems have been developed to evaluate teaching and learning and provide a focus for future planning. The school should continue to develop assessment in curriculum Religious Education by accurate levelling of learners' work using the latest Salford Diocesan guidelines. To support this development the school is encouraged to undertake and complete the proposed staff training based on the Diocesan guidelines as soon as possible. The school's marking policy is consistently used and provides feedback and direction for improvement. Information technology is widely used to support teaching and learning and teachers capitalise on opportunities to link Religious Education across the curriculum. Classroom management and organisation are highly effective. Behaviour is very good throughout the school with pupils co-operating when working with others or independently. They listen attentively, respond to questions and use appropriate religious vocabulary. They show an interest in their work and an eagerness to learn. Teaching assistants provide very good support for those pupils requiring extra help.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The Religious Education curriculum is good. Religious Education has a high profile within the school and is a key element of the school improvement and spending plans. At least 10% of teaching time in all classes is allocated to the subject. Diocesan guidelines on other world faiths and sex education are a feature of the provision. *REvision 2000* guidelines are followed and supplemented by activities relating to the liturgical year. The curriculum is further enhanced through an excellent range of extra-curricular provision including annual residential visit to Shrewsbury. Teachers' planning is thorough and together with pupils' learning is closely monitored by the headteacher by scrutiny and observation. Religious Education is a frequent topic on staff meeting agendas. In-service training, provided both in-house and externally by diocesan officers and advisers, ensures that its profile in the school remains high and that practices and curriculum are under constant review and development. The school plays an important supportive role in the preparation of pupils for the Sacramental Programme enjoying strong links with the parish leader.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school has assessed the leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education as good. Inspection evidence gathered supports this judgement. The headteacher who is also the co-ordinator for Religious Education has excellent knowledge of his subject and is well placed to advise and support staff and governors. The co-ordinator has a clear vision of his role within the school and provides strong leadership and direction. He leads by example, keeps good records and continues his own professional development by attending diocesan courses and conferences. His key strategic position as headteacher helps ensure that Religious Education is held first and foremost in the life of the school. He ensures that Religious Education pervades the school and fully involves stakeholders at all levels of decision making. Governors are kept fully informed of Religious Education and prayer and worship by written and verbal reports from the headteacher, parish priest, link governor and curriculum committee reports. They are also regular visitors to the school as class link governors and by attending various celebrations and functions. They are seen as "critical friends" who's input is valued. Resources for Religious Education and collective worship are plentiful. Attractive displays throughout the premises reflect the faith life of St. Joseph's School where Religious Education and prayer and worship have a high profile.