

INSPECTION REPORT

OUR LADY’S ROMAN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL
Alworth Road Blackley Manchester M90RP

Inspection date May 2010
 Reporting Inspector Mr. A. Slade
 Inspection carried out in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School Catholic Secondary
 URN 105576
 Age range of pupils 11-16
 Number on roll 741
 Appropriate authority The governing body
 Chair of Governors Mr. J. Lamb
 Headteacher Mrs. T. Dervin
 Head of Religious Education Mrs. N. Buckley
 Date of previous inspection April 2007

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades 1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3 = Satisfactory 4 = Inadequate
Overall effectiveness of the school	2	
Leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school	1	
The quality of Collective Worship	2	
Achievement and standards in Religious Education	2	
The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education	1	
The quality of the Religious Education curriculum	1	
Leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education	2	
<i>The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements</i>		

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Our Lady's Roman Catholic High School is an 11-16 voluntary aided school serving the north Manchester parishes of St. Clare (Blackley), St Patrick (Collyhurst), St Anne (Crumpsall), St Chad (Cheetham Hill) and St Malachy (Collyhurst). The planned admission number is 150 and there are 741 pupils on roll of whom 504 are Catholics. The proportion of pupils qualifying for free school meals is 46%. 121 are identified as having special educational needs and 11 have a statutory statement of special educational need. Most pupils have English as their first language but their background is from a catchment area of significant social and economic disadvantage. Attainment on entry is below average. 35 of the 56 teachers (63%) are Catholics.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

Our Lady's is a good Catholic school with outstanding features. Its Mission Statement is clearly at the centre of all key aspects of school life. It states that "to know, love and serve God is what we believe our mission is about." It asserts that the impact of this should be seen "in the way we treat others the way we support our most needy students and the way we provide every opportunity for our children to be successful." The statement is supplemented by the headteacher's and governors' "Vision" which clearly defines what they want for the school, its staff, pupils and parents, and by the "Be-attitudes" which clearly outline expectations in behaviour and attitudes. There is an acute awareness that there is a wide difference in the levels of religious commitment shown by pupils but an equal determination that they should benefit from their experience of Catholic education. This determination and enthusiasm is shared by the headteacher and all with leadership responsibility, including the well informed governors.

Improvement since the last inspection

The three issues arising from the last Section 48 inspection in April 2007 have been addressed. Pupils are heavily involved in various liturgies and services. Strategies to improve the achievement of boys have not been successful so far but further strategies have been introduced in the last year, including the appointment of male teachers, and there is justifiable confidence that these will be successful. There are new and plentiful information communication technology facilities which are exceptionally well used.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is outstanding. This is because the school's development is based on a systematic review of all aspects of school life and policies. High quality documentation shows a realistic awareness of the current situation and a clear strategy for improvement. This is true not only for the religious life of the school in general but for Religious Education department in particular.

What the school should do to improve further

- Broaden the level of pupil participation and planning in upper school assemblies.
- Maintain the rigorous efforts and strategies to improve the performance and attainment of boys in comparison to that of girls.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. The Mission Statement is the springboard for the school's policies and decision-making. It states that "to know, love and serve God is what we believe our mission is about" and that its impact should be "in the way we treat others, the way we support our most needy students and the way we provide every opportunity for our children to be successful." It is supported by aims which develop these ideas further. A "Vision" statement from the headteacher and governors and the school's own "Be-attitudes" supplement these. Management on all levels, personally and professionally, has a clear determination to run a Catholic school with the Religious Education department at the heart of the school ethos, believing that "it is faith that holds us as a community." Evidence is seen in policies such as the restorative resolution principles - in itself a good example of inclusion policy, the appointment of good staff, the provision of excellent facilities for teaching Religious Education and for collective worship. Other school policies, such as those relating to bullying and sex education, are strongly in line with Catholic teaching. The governors have an equal commitment to these policies. They have strong, systematic links especially through the well-informed and enthusiastic chair. There are strong links with local parishes, and there are multi-levelled links with the adjacent Northridge Special School. These are good examples of the school's contribution to community cohesion.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship is good with outstanding features. The key to this success is the work of the assistant headteacher, with responsibility for the religious life of the school, and that of the head of the Religious Education department. This has resulted in high quality liturgical services and opportunities covering the whole of the liturgical year and the life of the school. The staff prayer book is supplemented by weekly briefings with prayers and suggestions. One of the weekly highlights is the "Tuesday Liturgy", led by different teachers (including non-Catholics) and exceptionally well attended. There is a good policy statement for collective worship. The weekly staff prayer-services are of exceptional quality. A local priest celebrates class Masses for Year 7 and this is to be extended to older pupils. The priest is very actively involved in providing a range of services including school Masses at key times of the year, especially the Welcome and Leavers' Masses and Lenten services. During the inspection an upper school year assembly had excellent content but pupils were mainly passive and efforts should be made to improve pupil participation. Many departments contribute to collective worship especially expressive arts and music with a wonderful gospel choir. The dedicated prayer room is well located and equipped. It is also very appropriately used in conjunction with lessons. A team of pupil helpers for liturgy assist in many of the practical aspects. There are links with local parishes with pastoral visits from a nun based in a local convent who, along with the chair of governors, monitors collective worship. It is by these means that collective worship makes a large contribution to the school's work for community cohesion.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education are good. In Key Stage 3 pupils make reasonable progress relative to their ability. This is checked and recorded by means of a comprehensive monitoring system which is well used and understood. The GCSE results in Religious Education show that in 2007 43% of candidates obtained grades A* to C. In 2008 43% of candidates obtained grades A* to C rising to 45% in 2009. Over 90% obtained grades A* to G. The target for 2010, based on results already achieved in Year 10, is 55%. There has been a reduction in the number of pupils not entered for any examination. Although these results are below national average, the "value added" figures show that, in comparison with attainment levels on entry, there has been genuine and significant improvement and progress. These results are amongst the best in the school. There continues to be a discrepancy in the results obtained by boys compared to girls but the recent appointment of male teachers is already having a major impact on boys' attitudes. The school should continue its efforts to raise the attainment of boys relative to that of girls. Amongst other initiatives, a Year 11 intervention group gives extra support, mainly to boys. Support for charities is deliberately three dimensional: local (such as the drop-in centre, hampers for local people and St Joseph's Penny), national (such as the British Heart Foundation) and international (such as the direct, personal links with an African school and CAFOD). The charity work is an important and successful aspect of the school's work in promoting community cohesion.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The inspector agrees with the school's judgement that the quality of teaching and learning in curriculum Religious Education is outstanding. This is because there is exceptionally lively teaching ensuring that tasks are suitable for pupils of varying ability. In this way the more able pupils are stretched and the less able are able to cope. The lessons observed during the inspection were outstanding because the teachers ensured that pupils made real progress in their knowledge and understanding of issues such as "Jesus as hero", Christian responsibility to the environment, poverty and human rights. The impact of these lessons was well described by one pupil when she said "We're never likely to fall asleep in these lessons." The friendly atmosphere and good behaviour in the lessons assisted progress. Teachers used a variety of styles in every lesson and made outstanding use of information communication technology. There is a strong team of well-qualified teachers. The marking scheme incorporates targets and levels of attainment which are systematically used and fully known. Pupils themselves are enthusiastic about their lessons. As one stated, "Religious Education lessons are very good because they are creative." Others commented that the lessons are good because "the teachers treat you equally, they listen to you and they care about you." There is very good display work in classrooms and in public areas.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The quality of the Religious Education curriculum is outstanding. This is because the Salford Diocesan syllabus has been fully implemented in Key Stage 3 and in Key Stage 4 the recent change of syllabus from Edexcel to AQA has been implemented in the pupils' best interests. These syllabi enable pupils to explore issues such as Roman Catholicism, Catholic ethics, matters of life and death and social harmony. Pupils are encouraged to personalise their thinking on these issues not forgetting Catholic teaching and not simply as a means of passing examinations. The recommendation from the bishops' of England and Wales that 10% of curriculum time be given to Religious Education is fully observed. An outstanding feature of the curriculum is the "Extended Learning Friday" when, on a rotational basis, each year group spends a whole day in the Religious Education department. The opportunities that this creates have been fully seized and pupils spoke highly of their enjoyment and educational and spiritual progress stimulated by the high quality programmes devised. They create a realistic basis for serious analysis of topics such as poverty. The curriculum includes a study of aspects of other Christian faiths and world religions particularly Islam, Hinduism and Judaism thus making a major contribution to community cohesion. The department makes a significant contribution to the personal, health social and citizen education programme as well as to the pupils' own moral, cultural and spiritual development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school considers that the leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education are good. The inspector agrees but judges that there are some outstanding features within them. This is because there is a shared philosophy regarding the priority to be given to the aims of the Religious Education department which commendably has its own Mission Statement and aims in line with those of the school, diocese and Bishops' directive. The department is systematically line-managed and clear job descriptions are in place. The head of department is well informed, dedicated and enthusiastic and has a great eye for detail. Her work is greatly assisted by her strong, well qualified team working within a well-structured department. The excellent team work is aided physically by the fact they teach in a suite of adjacent rooms, including a master classroom, and have an exceptionally well equipped office. There are very regular planning and briefing meetings. Systematic internal moderation of teaching takes place. The excellent departmental improvement plan demonstrates a clear resolve to improve standards and to work within the school's policies and priorities. Departmental documentation is very thorough. The governors are fully aware of the work of the department, thanks especially to the regular reports which they receive on the progress, activity and aims of the department. They are willing to challenge as critical friends particularly through the work of the well-informed, dedicated and enthusiastic chair.