

**SALFORD DIOCESE  
INSPECTION REPORT**



**ST HILDA'S ROMAN CATHOLIC GIRLS HIGH  
SCHOOL, BURNLEY**

Inspection date November 2005

Reporting Inspector Mr A. Slade

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	790
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of Governors	Mrs. B. Rycroft
Headteacher	Mr. R.Bowles (Acting)
Head of Religious Education	Mrs S. Woolf
Date of previous inspection	April 2000

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

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

St Hilda's is a Voluntary-Aided girls' comprehensive school (11-16) serving the contributory parishes of St Mary's, St John's, Christ the King, St Mary Magdalene's, St Teresa's, St Augustine's (Burnley), St John the Baptist, St Philip's (Padiham) and St Joseph's (Todmorden). It is also a Specialist Humanities Colleges focusing on the subject areas of Religious Education, English and History. It is smaller than most secondary schools and it is oversubscribed. There are 790 pupils on roll of whom 93% are baptised Catholics. The standard admission number is 150. Most pupils are White British with a small number from minority ethnic groups. Very few pupils do not have English as their first language. Attainment on entry is broadly average and there are a few pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. 10.4% of pupils are eligible for free schools meals. 67 pupils are on the school's special educational needs register with 16 having a statement of special educational needs. 62% of the teachers are Catholic. The inspection took place in the background of the implementation of Burnley's programme, "*Building Schools for the Future*". In 2006 St Hilda's will be amalgamated with St Theodore's Catholic High School for boys.

## **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL**

St Hilda's is an outstanding Catholic school. The Mission Statement is a living document which is fully implemented in all aspects of school life. The priority given to the Christian philosophy can be seen in the exceptionally high quality of relationships, care for pupils and collective worship. The priority given to the religious education of pupils is seen in the quality of teaching and learning and this has born fruit in the greatly improved examination results. The headteacher and senior staff give clear, effective and energetic leadership, with an obvious main concern for the school as a Catholic centre with high quality teaching and learning. The governors make a knowledgeable and dynamic contribution. The Religious Education department is well led and has an enthusiastic team of teachers who are well qualified and fully committed. The religious life of the school is clearly seen as a matter for all teachers, not just the teachers of religious education.

### **Improvement since the last inspection**

Following the last Section 23 inspection in April, 2000, both recommendations from the inspection have been implemented. There is now excellent classroom provision for the teaching of Religious Education and good information communication technology facilities for use in the teaching of Religious Education and for enhancing the quality of collective worship. Additionally, there is a newly refurbished prayer room and sacristy which provides an opportunity for peaceful, small-group prayer and reflection.

### **Capacity to improve**

The school's self-evaluation is of the highest order. The senior management, the head of the religious education department and the governors have excellent documents and policies in place. These are clearly living documents used to monitor and evaluate the quality of education provided by the school and identify areas for improvement.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- There is no significant recommendation beyond that of maintaining the present high standards.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL**

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. The headteacher and senior management team provide excellent leadership and give a clear and cohesive direction to the school. They are very effective and as a result of their style and commitment they can take pride in a cohesion which stems from the Mission Statement. This is implemented in all aspects of school life especially in those matters which define the school as a Catholic institution such as the care for pupils, the worshipping community and the priority given to the religious education department. A good example of this is seen in the recent vastly improved provision of teaching rooms and technology facilities and the appointment of well qualified staff. The involvement by the governors is an active and positive one, supporting the school in its day-to-day activities and the long-term planning. They are well informed. The aims for the religious life of the school permeate to all levels – as seen in the involvement of so many staff in various aspects of the religious life of the school. There is a priest on the full-time staff. He is not an appointed chaplain but gives valued pastoral support.

## **THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP**

Provision for collective worship is outstanding. Thanks to the regular visits by all the local clergy, three of whom are governors, there is a regular programme of Masses - for groups, the whole school and on a voluntary basis. The priests' visits often have a pastoral purpose and this is welcomed by the pupils who regard the clergy as being very approachable. Prayers, led by different staff in turn, are said at the staff briefings. There are regular year and form assemblies; copies of prayers are provided in the homework diaries. The year assemblies observed during the inspection were of the highest order: well planned, with a great deal of pupil participation and involvement. The message of the gospel was brought home in a very realistic, vivid and sometimes humorous way. The pupils find assemblies very enjoyable. In addition to several teachers, some senior pupils are Eucharistic Ministers. There are flexible facilities for Mass and there is a small room put aside for prayer, peaceful reflection and where any pupil with problems can go and meet designated senior pupils.

## **ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education are outstanding. The progress pupils make, relative to their ability, is good in terms of the added value. In 2003, 50% of the girls obtained grades A\* to C in their GCSE results. By 2005, this had risen to 74%. A decision was recently made to change the GCSE examinations provider. This was done with the welfare of pupils in mind and it has proved to be a very wise decision. The huge improvement is testimony to the hard work of the teachers whose infectious enthusiasm clearly rubs off on the pupils. Thanks to the introduction, development and implementation of an excellent set of attainment targets, staff can monitor the progress of pupils and give pupils a clear picture of what they can do and what they need to do. Pupils clearly enjoy their work. As one said, "*We do well in RE because we enjoy it so much.*" They produce a variety of writing styles and are able to evaluate widely differing views on major religious issues. Pupils are very well behaved: this is not only because the lessons are so well planned and stimulating but also because there are such good relationships in the school. There is a good level of involvement in the local and wider community. Very generous amounts of money are collected for CAFOD, the Diocesan Rescue Society. Food parcels are collected for elderly people in the area as well as "shoe-boxes" for Operation Christmas Child. The Burnley Women's Refuge is one local charity with which the school has special links. There have been wonderful and immediate responses to sudden emergencies such as the earthquake in Pakistan.

## **THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

The school's judgement is that teaching and learning in Religious Education is good but the inspector considers them to be outstanding. Several lessons, covering all ability groups and all year groups except year 11, were observed. The lessons are very well planned and long-term planning is very good. There is a variety of teaching styles including a dynamic use of information communications technology. Teachers have a full and detailed knowledge of the progress of pupils and, thanks to some innovative work by the department, they can monitor progress at both key stages. The work observed included a variety of writing styles and an ability to weigh up arguments on a range of religious issues. Some of the latter is stimulated by the very good co-operative and thoughtful work produced by pupils working together. One typical comment from one pupil was "*We are not told about beliefs, but have to work it out.*" Marking is generally up-to-date with positive comments. There is a variety of different tasks available for pupils according to their ability. Teachers have a full command of their subject and they have high levels of demand and expectation. They are confident, enthusiastic, committed and caring. In this way, they make a significant contribution to the spiritual, moral and cultural development of pupils individually and to the school as a whole.

## **THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM**

The Religious Education curriculum is outstanding. The Salford Diocesan Guidelines have been implemented and adapted for local circumstances. A study of local, non-Christian religions has been introduced. The change of GCSE examination provider was a considered and successful decision. There has been a thorough scrutiny of the topics in the syllabus with a view to producing lessons which are interesting, dynamic and valuable to the pupils. Time and again, pupils commented about how they enjoyed their Religious Education lessons – "*I enjoy RE because we study interesting things*" was a frequent comment. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities including visits to Salford Cathedral and links with CAFOD. Residential courses at Savio House and Castlerigg Manor are available and the cost for learners is subsidised. The Religious Education department plays a leading role in the contribution that the school makes to the pupils' moral and spiritual development.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

The school has stated that it considers this aspect of school life to be outstanding and the inspector agrees with this judgement. The Religious Education department has benefited from the successful bid for Specialist Humanities status and the department has used the ensuing advantages wisely and enthusiastically and it now has access to support staff. The head of department leads with knowledge, commitment and example. She is supported by an enthusiastic and well qualified team. The assistance of the diocesan adviser in a programme of self-evaluation has produced positive results. All the work of the department is exceptionally well monitored and evaluated. The learning resources, especially the technology, are up-to-date and well used. The governors have shown their commitment by giving priority to the Religious Education staffing structure and the appointment of a priest as deputy head to give pastoral support. This philosophy is mirrored in the decisions of the headteacher and senior staff.