

**SALFORD DIOCESE
INSPECTION REPORT**



**OUR LADY AND ST JOHN
CATHOLIC ARTS COLLEGE
Blackburn**

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 940

Appropriate authority The governing body

Chair of Governors Canon J. Harrison

Headteacher Mrs. C. Gillen

Head of Religious Education Mr. S. Hedderman

Date of previous inspection November 1999

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	2	
The quality of Collective Worship	2	
Achievement and standards in Religious Education	2	
The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education	2	
The quality of the Religious Education curriculum	2	
Leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education	2	

The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Our Lady and St John is a Voluntary Aided Catholic 11-16 high school with Arts College status. The college serves the parishes of Holy Family, St Alban and Good Shepherd, Holy Souls, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, part of Sacred Heart, and St Mary, Osbaldeston. Many of the learners are from areas of severe economic difficulty such as high unemployment and low income. The area has a high ethnic mix with 10% of the school's intake being of a minority ethnic origin. 9% of learners do not have English as their first language. The admission number is 190 and there are 940 pupils on roll of whom 65% are Catholics. 29% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals - well above the national average. 253 pupils have been identified as having special educational needs 33 of whom have a statement of special educational needs. A significant number of pupils have low-level literacy and reading skills. There are 65 teachers of whom 50% are Catholics.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

Our Lady and St John's is a good Catholic school with a deep awareness of its purpose in serving an area of great deprivation. Children from a variety of ethnic mix are welcomed and integrated. Many children have severe emotional problems and these are addressed realistically. The commitment of resources to schemes such as the Personal, Achievement, Social and Spiritual Centre is typical. There is a school counsellor and two behaviour support assistants. The headteacher and senior staff give clear and effective leadership with a total commitment to religious priorities and values. The pupils value and respect the school, responding well to the open door policy and respect shown to them by the teachers. As one pupil said "*The teachers respect the pupils and thus create a sense of community.*" A positive tone permeates attitudes and behaviour. Teaching and learning in Religious Education is generally good and there has been significant progress in the standards achieved at GCSE level. The Religious Education department is well led. Collective worship is an outstanding feature, focusing especially on the weekly voluntary Mass which is so well attended that the day's timetable is amended to cater for it.

Improvement since the last inspection

Following the last Section 23 inspection in December 1999 three of the five key issues have been addressed. One issue to review the school's admissions policy has been superseded by a change in the law. The Religious Education department has invested in information communication technology. These facilities are being well used and their value is carefully monitored. There has been a significant improvement in GCSE results and the difference in the performance of boys and girls has been eradicated. This is the result of a thorough review of the GCSE course including a change in the examination board used. The tracking of progress has greatly improved and this has been a contributory factor in the improvement of GCSE results. The time allocated for curriculum Religious Education is now 10% throughout the school. The final recommendation, to raise the levels of attainment of the most able pupils, is still being addressed.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is good. There is a full awareness of what it is doing and what still needs to be done. Planning and leadership in senior management and in the Religious Education department is good. There is no temptation to rest on laurels but a determination to plan for further improvements. This is seen, at senior management level, in the inclusion of "The Catholic Ethos" in the School Development Plan. In the Religious Education department the planned and monitored change of GCSE provider is part of the process of raising standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the flexibility and variety of prayers in form time with reference to planned themes and the liturgical cycle.
- Maintain the drive for improved GCSE results in Religious Education for the more able pupils.
- Maintain the progress in determining Key Stage 3 levels in Religious Education.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are good. The governors take their responsibilities seriously and regularly monitor progress. The chair of governors is especially involved. The headteacher has established a clear set of priorities with a full recognition of the importance of the school's religious life and the Religious Education department. A chapel area has been built and this is well used particularly for the daily Eucharistic service. Money has been allocated for the School Mission and for residential retreats. The quality of self-evaluation is good, based on a sound knowledge of the current situation and clear, realistic ideas for future developments and improvements. The school's senior management and the Religious Education department give a clear lead in promoting the school's Catholic life with regular monitoring and evaluating systems being in place. This lead is understood and appreciated by staff and pupils.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship is good. There is a weekly voluntary Mass which is exceptionally well attended. It is symptomatic of the school's priorities that, the moment the opportunity arose, a chapel adjoining the assembly hall was inaugurated. It is flexible in its use. Year assemblies are well planned and provide prayerful occasions. Daily prayers are said and there is a daily Eucharistic service. This is well attended. Various services and Masses are celebrated throughout the year reflecting the Liturgical Cycle. This includes a staff Mass at the start of the year. The chair of governors makes a large and very valued contribution. The religious celebrations invariably include contributions from teachers of other subjects, notably music, dance and, drama. Year assemblies tend to be led by year tutors. Many of the Eucharistic Ministers are not Religious Education teachers. As the general liturgical life of the school is a matter for the whole school this could be better reflected if responsibility for some of the major celebrations was assumed by teachers who are not Religious Education specialists. Part of the School Development Plan is the development of the Catholic ethos. This could be extended to consider a review of the routine prayer life of the school, how to promote greater pupil involvement and to relate prayers in form period time to planned themes and the liturgical cycle of the Church.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education are good. In terms of added value at Key Stage 4 the GCSE results are quite outstanding. In 2004 38% of candidates obtained grades A* to C. In 2005, this had risen to 48%. In addition boys and girls obtained a similar percentage of high grades whereas in the past, girls had obtained much better results than boys. This is a tribute to the hard work, planning and implementation of fresh ideas by staff. The decision to change examination boards was carefully thought out and has proved a positive step to the benefit of pupils. Standards achieved by pupils of all abilities are carefully monitored in both key stages. There is a recognition that more work is still to be done in determining levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3. This would then provide a yard-stick against which an objective measure of progress could be made. Learners clearly enjoy their work many commenting that their enjoyment stems from the fact that teachers make it interesting. Because the work is stimulating and there is such a positive and respectful tone in the school it is not surprising that the pupils are well behaved. Pupils are heavily involved in a range of charitable activities. In addition to the fund-raising for CAFOD and the Diocesan Rescue Society each year group has its own charity. Pupils are also involved in a range of other activities such as the Christmas Party for local elderly people. They are often asked to sing at weddings and funerals.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The inspector agrees with the school's judgement that teaching and learning in Religious Education is good. Several lessons covering all year groups and the full ability range were observed during inspection. These were well planned and taught. Both short-term and long-term planning is good. There is a good pace to the lessons and teachers are clearly in command of their subject. They use a variety of teaching techniques, including the use of information communication technology, and are fully aware of the needs of individual learners. Marking is generally up-to-date with many helpful comments indicating how work could be improved. There is a very positive tone in the approach of teachers to their subject and the respect shown to pupils. Pupils work well and diligently producing work of a good standard. They also worked very co-operatively when group work took place. Examples were seen of a variety of learning and writing styles. Appropriate work is set according to the ability of pupils and it is an indication of the dedication of staff that extra voluntary lessons are available to assist older pupils with their examination technique. The Religious Education teachers take their responsibilities very seriously and make an important contribution both in and out of lessons to the social, moral, cultural and spiritual life of the school.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The Religious Education curriculum is good. The head of department has completed a total review of the Key Stage 3 syllabus incorporating fresh material into the Salford Diocesan Guidelines. Very commendably a study of world religions especially Islam is included. This reflects the local character of the school's intake area. The assistant head of department has devised high quality booklets for use by teachers and learners for the GCSE course. These include some material which makes demands on the most able and other material which enables the less able to cope. The success of these developments is seen in the improved GCSE results. There is a suitable range of extra-curricular activities especially the residential courses at Castlerigg Manor. These are greatly valued by the pupils. The value of these is supplemented by the fact that some of the staff who accompany the pupils are not specialist Religious Education teachers.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school has stated that it considers this aspect of school life to be good and the inspector agrees with this judgement. The head of department gives a clear and knowledgeable lead and he is supported by well-informed and enthusiastic staff. In turn he is very supportive of the Religious Education teachers. There has been a complete re-appraisal of the syllabus and this has led to very improving and positive results for learners. Decisions were made with the interests and knowledge of pupils at heart. There is a good monitoring system in place. The department is well resourced and the resources are well managed. There is a temporary accommodation problem affecting one of the specialist Religious Education rooms but this is being dealt with. In the meantime the teaching of Religious Education does not suffer. The governors, especially the chair of governors, are actively involved in providing support for curriculum Religious Education.