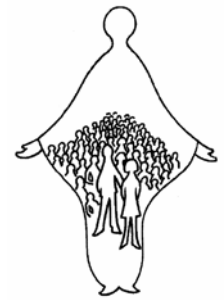


**SALFORD DIOCESE
INSPECTION REPORT**



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

North Road Blackburn BB1 1PY

Inspection date September 2008

Reporting Inspector Anthony Pearson

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

Type of School	Catholic Secondary
URN	119790
Age range of pupils	11-16
Number on roll	930
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of Governors	Rev. Canon J. Harrison
Headteacher	Mrs. C. Gillen
Head of Religious Education	Mrs. Deborah Williams
Date of previous inspection	November 2005

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	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	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 which has Arts College status as well as Applied and Leading Edge Status. The college serves the parishes of Holy Family, St. Alban and Good Shepherd, Holy Souls, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and part of Sacred Heart and St. Mary, Osbaldeston. The college is broadly average in size with 930 pupils on roll of whom 657 are baptised Catholics. The number with special educational needs is above average at 312. The number having a statutory statement of special educational need is 37. This is fewer than in recent years reflecting changes in the way that the Local Authority identifies these pupils. 30% of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The pupil population whilst of largely white British heritage also contains a significant minority from Blackburn's Indian and Pakistani communities as well as increasing numbers from Eastern Europe. Pupils represent the full range of socio-economic backgrounds but most are from areas of significant social and economic deprivation. 40 (64%) of college's 63.42 full-time equivalent teachers are Catholics.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

Our Lady and St John Catholic Arts College is a good Catholic school which has several outstanding features. Outstanding leadership and management of its life as a Catholic community ensure that it effectively meets the needs of its students and serves the distinctive nature of the community in which it is situated. In so doing it makes a reality of its Mission Statement, aiming to be a "caring Catholic community, centred on Christ, so as to fully develop the gifts and talents of each person in order to love and serve God, others and ourselves." The very clearly articulated vision of the headteacher which underpins the work of the college, strongly supported by able senior managers and a committed governing body, is recognised and translated into a reality by all members of the college community. A key feature of this process is seen in the outstanding collective worship. The college's effectiveness could be enhanced even further with support from a full-time chaplaincy. Students are keen to take on responsibility for others, involve themselves in activities such as the recent "Interfaith" project and contribute generously to charitable activity on behalf of those less fortunate than themselves. Overall performance in the GCSE in Religious Studies and that of boys' in particular, is improving though standards remain below average. Better means of assessing students work and, consequently more appropriate target setting is leading to improved achievement of students in Years 7 to 9. Their experiences in Religious Education contribute well to students' good spiritual and moral development. The quality of classroom relationships underpins the generally good quality of teaching and learning which takes place across the college. Effective leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education ensures that both curricular and extra-curricular experiences meet students' needs well and also ensure that it has an impressive and considerable influence on the general life of the college. Senior managers are well aware of the need to support closely the work of the department during the future absence of the head of department.

Improvement since the last inspection

All issues arising from the last Section 48 inspection in November 2005 have been appropriately resolved. The Religious Education department has also effectively contributed to whole school improvement, for example through making better use of the college's specialist arts resources to improve teaching and learning and the quality of collective worship. Information technology is used more frequently and to better effect in lessons. Project links with other local schools have helped students make a strong contribution to local community cohesion as well as contributing well to their own spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation, though a little modest in some aspects, is honest, accurate and linked to appropriate development planning. Consequently, taking into account improvements made since the previous inspection, there is a good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Investigate ways of providing the college with a chaplain.
- Continue to improve standards and raise achievement in the GCSE particular at the higher A*-C grades.
- Closely monitor the work of the Religious Education department during the forthcoming absence of its leader to ensure that the current momentum for improvement is maintained.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

Inspection evidence confirms the college's view that this aspect of its performance is outstanding. The headteacher's clearly expressed vision for the college, based on Gospel values and recognising the diverse community which it serves, is shared by all stakeholders and effectively translated into action by committed leaders at all levels. A well-informed governing body provides strong support for the college. The hard working chair of governors has a regular and active presence in the college. He is dedicated to ensuring that the local Catholic community continues to be very well served by the education which the college provides. The college's commitment to its mission is very well illustrated in the developing and extending provision for work related learning for its older students thus ensuring that they continue to learn "within a structure that promotes a community of love, service, prayer and forgiveness". The Catholic life of the college is well supported through its programme of professional development including the training of members of the community as Eucharistic ministers. The college's Mission Statement is also reflected very well in its daily life. Its faith life reaches out into the whole curriculum and is reflected strongly through its specialist areas. Students following such programmes of study as art, music and drama are proud of the leading role which they have played in a successful series of "Interfaith" community projects working alongside students from other local schools. Students give generously to a range of good causes locally, nationally and further afield raising impressive sums in support of those less fortunate than themselves, Reconciliation and restorative justice underpin the college's systems to promote good behaviour and students' achievements are celebrated.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Inspection evidence endorses the college's own view that the quality of collective worship is outstanding. It was a privilege for the inspector to be present at a staff briefing to experience a moving, intensely spiritual reflection on the week's theme "creation" devised and led by a relatively junior teacher. This clearly showed that concern to do the very best for the development of the whole person lies at the heart of what the college provides for its students and that in so doing it lives out its Mission Statement. Her colleagues' response was an equally moving testimony to their sense of cohesion and shared values. Assemblies are very well prepared and provide students with a rich variety of experience. They are actively involved in some, making good use of the college's expertise in the performing arts to make these occasions lively and interesting whilst providing appropriate spiritual experiences on topics relevant to their own lives. In others, teachers are confident to share personal spiritual experiences with students and in so doing become strong role models. There is a good programme of regular liturgical experiences celebrating key Church festivals and important days in the college calendar. The college has been quick to adapt the way in which fortnightly voluntary Masses are celebrated to ensure strong student involvement and participation producing a palpable "sense of Christ's presence in the Eucharist". The college is fortunate to have the generous commitment of its chair of governors in the regular celebration of Mass and also has the services of a senior member of staff, who is an ordained deacon to, lead Eucharistic Services. The college recognises that collective worship and other elements of its provision could be further enhanced through the work of a full-time chaplaincy.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Inspection evidence supports the college's evaluation that standards and achievement in Religious Education are good overall. GCSE results in recent years have fluctuated reflecting some lack of continuity in staffing in Religious Education. In 2008 in the A*-C range GCSE Religious Studies results improved on those obtained in 2007 which were below average. The college is encouraged to continue its work of raising attainment in this area. Boys' performance has shown particular improvement and, in contrast to the national picture, is now similar to that of girls. Commendably, nearly all students leave with at least a pass grade. The achievement of the small group of lower attaining students entered for the diocesan Certificate in Religious Studies was good. The department has put considerable effort over the last few years into developing reliable means of assessing students' attainment in Religious Education on entry to the college in year 7 and thus set meaningful and challenging targets for them to reach by the end of the Key Stage 3. Teachers are now able to track students' progress through into Year 9 with greater accuracy and so measure their achievement with some confidence. Assessment information available at this stage indicates that progress overall is likely to be good. Students' who have learning difficulties or disabilities make generally similar progress to that made by other students because their needs are met well being taught in groups of similar capability and because of the support they receive from teaching assistants. Behaviour in Religious Education lessons is good and students' learning experiences in lessons, through participation in other activities which the college offers and through the general ethos of the college, make a strong contribution to their good spiritual and moral development.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Evidence from the lessons observed and from students' work supports the college's own judgement that the quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is good. Practically all lessons observed during the inspection were good and never less than satisfactory. The quality of learning is underpinned by good relationships between teachers and students which make for good levels of willing involvement in lessons. Where learning is particularly good the learning objectives are shared with students who then have the opportunity to be involved in evaluating the progress made by themselves by the end of the lesson. Sometimes this process is enhanced when progress towards the objectives is checked frequently by the teacher during the lesson. Overall the learning is generally well matched to students' capabilities. Teachers have the confidence to use their own experiences to illustrate points where appropriate. This makes the learning more real to students as well as demonstrating that the teachers are good role models. Teachers ensure that pupils know both the levels which they have reached as well as appropriate targets to be aimed for by the end of each key stage. Marking is regular and as well as being supportive usually shows students what they need to do to improve their work.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The quality of the Religious Education curriculum is good. Programmes of study meet the requirements of the Bishops of England and Wales. Effective preparation has ensured that older, lower attaining students will continue to have the opportunity to follow an externally accredited course well matched to their needs following the discontinuing of the diocesan certificate. A good programme of visits including residential retreat experiences, which contribute well to students' personal development, supports the compulsory curriculum. Good developing use is made of the college' specialism in the arts. For example, during the inspection a professional actor was being used in lessons to provide students with a "first hand" account of the life of one of the English Martyrs. The college has carefully chosen the optional elements of its courses for older students to reflect its local circumstances and so contributes well to their personal development and prepares them for adult life in the diverse society of modern Britain. Pupils were proud of, enjoyed, and gained much from their recent involvement in an interfaith project. The Religious Education curriculum is also enhanced by experiences provided in assemblies, for example a presentation provided by a survivor of the holocaust which was supported by a carefully crafted liturgy drawing on both the Jewish and Catholic traditions.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The college judges the leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education to be good. The inspection evidence, whilst supporting this judgement overall, indicates that some aspects of it are outstanding. This is due to the progress made since the previous inspection by the current head of department and the part played by the college's senior managers in supporting her. The department's strengths and weaknesses are well understood. Areas requiring development, including those identified at the previous inspection, have been efficiently dealt with although some have not yet been in place long enough to have a significant impact on raising standards and students' achievement. The head of department has been very successful in creating a strong positive ethos in the department which has extended out into the wider college community which is seen to "live out the curriculum". The clearly articulated vision for the future direction of the department is translated into effective action through careful planning supported by appropriate in-service training. Some disturbance in staffing in the department in recent years has been handled well so as to minimise its inevitable impact on its work. The day to day work of the department including the effectiveness of its teaching and learning is well monitored. Teachers, including those on temporary appointments or still working for an appropriate qualification, feel well supported. Senior managers have plans in place to support the work of the department during the impending absence of the head of department on maternity leave and the college is encouraged to pursue these plans vigorously.