

DIOCESE OF **Hexham & Newcastle**
SPIRITUALITY, FORMATION & EDUCATION SERVICE



S48 Inspection Report

**St Robert of Newminster Catholic School and Sixth
Form College, Washington**

**DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION
REPORT (Section 48)**

on

**THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE
SCHOOL AND RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION**

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| School: | St Robert of Newminster Catholic School and Sixth Form College |
| Address: | Biddick Lane Washington NE38 8AF |
| Telephone Number: | 0191 561 3810 |
| Email address: | st.roberts@schools.sunderland.gov.uk |
| School URN: | 108870 |
| Headteacher: | Mrs Jennifer Bowen |
| Chair of Governors: | Mr John Waugh MBE |
| Lead Inspector: | Mr Anthony Finnerty |
| Team Inspector: | Mrs Mary Hood |
| Date of Inspection: | 3 and 4 April 2012 |

This Inspection Report is produced for the Rt. Reverend Seamus Cunningham the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle Diocese, (c.f. Code Canon Law, 804, 806), and for the Governing Body of the school (Education Act 2005, Section 48). The inspection reviews, evaluates and plans further improvements in the school's witness to the Catholic faith and Curriculum Religious Education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation.

The inspection schedule follows criteria set by the National Board of Advisers and Inspectors.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Robert of Newminster Catholic School and Sixth Form College is a larger than average-sized secondary school with a very large sixth form. It has a specialism in humanities and has achieved Healthy School status and Thinking School accreditation. The majority of students are White British. There are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low. Students come from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds. A small number of students attend alternative provision for parts of the week through the school's involvement in the Sunderland Futures 14 to 19 partnership. The school has been led by an acting headteacher during this school year; a new headteacher has been appointed and will take up post in September 2012.

FACTUAL INFORMATION

Pupil Catchment:

Number of pupils on roll: 1629

Planned Admission Number of Pupils: 210

Percentage of pupils baptised RC: 64%

Percentage of pupils from other Christian denominations: 28%

Percentage of pupils from other World Faiths: 1%

Percentage of pupils with no religious affiliation: 7%

Percentage of pupils from ethnic groups: 6%

Percentage of pupils with special needs: 14%

Staffing

Full time teachers: 128

Part time teachers: 19

Percentage of Catholic teachers: 48%

RE Department Staffing:

Number of full time RE teachers: 13

Number of part time RE teachers: 2

Percentage of Catholic teachers: 100%

Percentage of teachers with CCRS: 50%

Percentage of learning time given to RE:

Yr7 10%

Yr10 10%

Yr8 10%

Yr11 10%

Yr9 10%

6th Form 10%

Parishes served by the school:

Our Blessed Lady Immaculate, Washington

Our Lady Queen of Peace, Penshaw

St Bede, Washington

St John Boste, Washington

St Mary, Easington Lane

St Michael's, Houghton le Spring

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

How effective the school is in providing Catholic education

1

The school’s capacity for sustained improvement

1

MAIN FINDINGS

St Robert’s is an outstanding Catholic school which lives up to its mission statement in striving to meet the academic, moral, physical, social and spiritual needs of the pupils. This is built on a strong tradition of high quality Catholic education and service of the Common Good. The school has a strong sense of its own identity and is rightly confident in its claim to offer education for the whole person, as one student said: “I can be who I am, and grow as a person”. A strong ethos is evident which allows staff and students to feel self-assured, to work hard and to be happy. There is a warm and authentic welcome extended to all who come to the school. Pupils feel they belong, they know themselves to be valued, that they are cared for and that they are safe. The religious dimension is woven through every aspect of the community. Staff and students speak freely and intelligently about matters of faith and the spiritual journey.

Outcomes for students are high at all key stages (KS). Intelligent and creative approaches which allow a range of pathways have ensured that pupils achieve well and enjoy their learning. The determinedly high standards set throughout the curriculum, linked to support systems and professional realism, suggest the capacity to continually improve in this respect is outstanding. Students value, and gain profound benefit from, the Catholic character of the school. Prayer is at the heart of the daily experience of all members of this inclusive Christian community.

Provision for Catholic education is outstanding. The school takes care to appoint key staff capable of delivering high standards of teaching and learning and actively committed to the values and ethos of the school. Assessment practices are well documented and rigorously implemented in line with school policy and this has a positive impact on student achievement. Sound evaluation of student needs has led to imaginative developments in the curriculum, especially at key stages four and five (KS4 and KS5).

The leadership of this school is outstanding. The acting headteacher has served the school well and the newly appointed headteacher, scheduled to start in September, will be inheriting a school with an outstanding capacity for continuous improvement.

What the school needs to do to improve further:

- move all the teaching in the Religious Education (RE) department from being at least good to consistently outstanding by using peer observation, Continuous Professional Development and exchanging outstanding practice with other departments
- develop the strategies of intervention to ensure the differential in attainment of boys and girls is further reduced
- continue the bold initiatives in developing varied pathways for the Sixth Form to engage in theological study and spiritual formation.

PUPILS

How good outcomes are for pupils, taking particular account of variations between different groups

1

Outcomes for all pupils across each key stage are at least good and for the majority are outstanding. Pupils exhibit enjoyment and motivation in lessons. They show great respect for their teachers and for the right of their fellow pupils to learn. They participate willingly in lessons in a variety of ways and are not afraid to express their own opinion while at the same time being prepared to listen to the opinion of others.

In key stage three (KS3) attainment is now outstanding and pupils in each year group make very good progress. In key stage four (KS4) attainment is outstanding and pupils generally make very good progress. Although the department has maintained an upward trend in KS4 there is a gender difference in GCSE results, with the girls outperforming the boys. This gender difference is reflected in the attainment of higher grades across the school. The department is aware of this and has developed strategies to address the issue. In key stage five (KS5) attainment is outstanding and students make very good progress. A significant proportion of the year group choose to study AS and A2 Religious Studies and the department has sustained a 100% pass rate at A2 over the last two years.

Pupils with particular learning needs and with disabilities are very well catered for in all key stages with differentiated materials and learning support in lessons. Gifted and talented pupils are challenged in a variety of ways including some excellent questioning techniques and challenging tasks.

Pupils are keen to participate in charity events and in service to the wider community and they undertake a variety of activities to assist those in need at home and abroad. Pupils recognise the importance of religion and spirituality and many students make use of the services provided by the chaplaincy. Visits from individual speakers such as Sr Helen Prejean and trips to Lourdes or Auschwitz have inspired and challenged students. All pupils recognise that they are members of a community; they feel themselves to be known and valued and cared for. They feel safe and happy. They readily participate in all areas of school life. Most pupils can express themselves with confidence; they know that their views and opinions will be treated with respect. They are aware of the core values and teachings of Christianity and support Catholic practices and worship. Pupils help prepare Masses and assemblies and in the Sixth Form; they even run their own choir. Care and concern for each other is shown in both formal and informal ways, for example through peer mentoring. The good behaviour prevalent throughout the school reflects the positive values of the mission statement. The pervasive ethos of the school encourages self-respect, pride in belonging, and an approach to education which embraces the whole person

All students acknowledge the fact that worship is central to the school's life and they respect the significance of prayer in the lives of fellow students. Vibrant, sensitively prepared Eucharistic celebration to mark milestones in the lives of students is strongly appreciated. There is a great openness on the part of the young people and many express a desire for spiritual development. They are enthusiastic about retreat days and formation in personal prayer. Very few students at St Robert's belong to world faiths other than Christianity but those who do feel their needs are addressed respectfully.

PROVISION

How effective the provision is in promoting Catholic education

1

The quality of teaching in RE is good with some outstanding features. All observed lessons showed very strong planning, were well resourced, and engaged the vast majority of pupils. The full breadth of ability was catered for in each lesson. Progress in lessons is very good and the students are clearly able to articulate the level at which they are currently working in RE and their key stage target. Excellent use is made of ICT resources in order to stimulate student responses. Where teaching is best the pace is fast, activities are varied and student enjoyment and engagement is evidently high. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and all display a strong commitment to teaching Catholic beliefs and values and in developing the religious literacy of their students. The RE department makes a marked contribution to the development of students' general literacy and thinking skills. Highly positive relationships in RE classrooms ensure that students have positive attitudes to their learning. Teachers accompany their students on a journey in their search for meaning.

The department has rigorous and focused assessment strategies which provide a frequent and accurate picture of pupil progress in each key stage. Teachers in the department apply accurate assessment judgments consistently across all year groups. These are shared with pupils and, as a result, targets are agreed between staff and pupils. Pupils' progress is regularly monitored and specific groups targeted where underachievement is identified. A variety of forms of assessment are used and the work of pupils is generally marked to a very good standard; this marking is accompanied by specific and clear guidance on how work can be improved.

The RE curriculum is very well planned and resourced at each KS. It provides pupils with opportunities to be enthusiastic and highly motivated learners. In KS4 and KS5 pupils are offered varied and innovative pathways that enable them to achieve at a level that is appropriate to their ability and aspiration. Lessons in each KS show evidence of differentiation, enabling the least able to achieve while at the same time challenging the most gifted and talented pupils. The curriculum in RE provides excellent opportunities for the spiritual and moral development of pupils and meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference.

The quality of collective worship provided is outstanding. It is central to the life of the school and is a key element of every formal and informal school gathering. Five local clergy visit the school regularly. Mass is celebrated weekly and to mark special occasions. Assemblies and prayer groups are jointly planned by students and staff and reflect a deep understanding of the Church's mission. Extra-curricular prayer and reflection opportunities are also offered by the strong and well-resourced chaplaincy. This provision has been recently enriched in Sixth Form by the appointment of a skilled spiritual formation co-ordinator. Retreat opportunities are offered in every year group; the Youth Village is well employed by the school. Students from different faith traditions are assisted and supported in their prayer rituals. The chaplaincy team work with students and staff to ensure a vibrant, varied and relevant programme of worship.

LEADERS AND MANAGERS

How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the school

1

Outstanding leadership and management are shown by senior leaders in promoting and supporting the Catholic life of the school. Their leadership is deeply rooted in a personal commitment to Christ and his Church. Promoting the Catholic life of the school is given the highest priority by leaders and by managers who have made explicit the school's mission of service, enabling all members of the community to grow in faith. RE is rightly placed, and seen to be placed, at the core of the curriculum. Great care is given to maintain the theological integrity of the courses taught, and in the spiritual formation which is provided in conjunction with them. The staff recruitment process ensures that from the earliest stage, everyone who is appointed makes a commitment to support the ethos of this Catholic school. The induction process for new staff also reinforces the importance of working practices which support the school mission statement.

The monitoring and evaluation of RE provision is systematic, increasingly rigorous, and is targeted at securing improved outcomes for students. The in-house evaluation of teaching and learning is robust and this has led to clear priorities for development which are planned for appropriately. A strong team of specialist RE teachers work together to share ideas and to review progress. They are superbly led by the recently appointed head of RE. All leaders give tirelessly of their time and energy to play a full and active role in evolving the strategic development of this school and ensuring continuous improvement of outcomes for pupils.

Governors are actively involved in the Catholic life of the school and ensure continuous improvement through both informal monitoring and evaluation and more formal governor briefings and improvement planning. Governors know the school very well, and they speak with passion and knowledge about the school. They are concerned for the school to have an impact on the wider community and are dedicated to ensuring that the Catholic ethos is sustained and celebrated. For example, governors have played an active role in the revision of the spiritual and moral programme in the Sixth Form, and the school has become a pilot school for a programme using Christian meditation for students as a direct result of Governor involvement. Governor strengths and skills are broad and are effectively deployed.

Leaders at all levels ensure that the school participates fully and actively in developing and implementing an impressive variety of partnerships and activities which promote Catholic learning. These partnerships involve pupils at all levels in school and all abilities. The special educational needs department is particularly noteworthy for the contribution it makes to this area of the life of the School. These partnerships enable the pupils to benefit significantly from and develop exceptionally well in areas the School could not provide by itself.

Leaders and managers ensure that the inclusion of all is a central goal within the school. The values of the School Mission Statement are very evident throughout the school. There are very good links with the local parishes, deanery, with the Diocese as a whole and with the wider community in the surrounding area. There is ongoing work to reach out to and to make links with both other Christian faiths and non-Christian religious communities, in particular the Jewish and Muslim communities. The School has a wide variety of partnerships with people in the Developing World; these include people in Burma, Lesotho, Pakistan, and Uganda. All of these

partnerships not only broaden the education the pupils receive but enrich the lives both of staff and of students.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1 **Outstanding** Grade 2 **Good** Grade 3 **Satisfactory** Grade 4 **Unsatisfactory**

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| Overall effectiveness | 1 |
| The school's capacity for sustained improvement | 1 |
| How good outcomes are for pupils, taking particular account of variations between different groups | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ the quality of pupils' learning and their progress | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ the quality of learning for pupils with particular learning needs and/or disabilities and their progress | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ pupils' attainment in RE | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship | 1 |
| How effective the provision is in promoting Catholic education | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the quality of teaching and purposeful learning in Religious Education | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the effectiveness of assessment and academic guidance in Religious Education | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the extent to which Religious Education curriculum meets pupils' needs | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the quality of Collective Worship provided by the school | 1 |
| How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the School | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan improvement to outcomes for pupils | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how well leaders and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for RE and plan for improvement to outcomes for pupils | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the extent to which the governing body provides effective challenge and support for the Catholic dimension of the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory and canonical responsibilities met | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how well leaders and managers develop partnerships with other providers, organisations and services in order to promote Catholic learning and well-being | 1 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how effectively leaders and managers promote community cohesion. | 1 |