



**ST. MONICA'S ROMAN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL
AND SPECIALIST LANGUAGE COLLEGE**

Bury Old Road Prestwich Manchester M25 1JHG

Inspection date February 2009

Reporting Inspector Mr. A. Slade

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

Type of School	Catholic Secondary
URN	105366
Age range of pupils	11-16
Number on roll	1114
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of Governors	Mr. J. M. Browne
Headteacher	Mr. F. McCarron
Head of Religious Education	Mrs. E. Crutchley
Date of previous inspection	April 2006

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades 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. Monica's is an 11-16 Roman Catholic voluntary aided high school serving the parishes of Our Lady of Grace (Prestwich), St. Bernadette and St. Michael (Whitefield), Our Lady of Dolours (Salford) and St. Mary and St. Philip Neri (Radcliffe). It is Specialist Language College. The overall social and economic background of pupils is broadly average with a significant minority is from areas of major social deprivation. The planned admission number is 210 and there are 1114 pupils on roll. All but one of the learners are Roman Catholics. 9.4% of pupils qualify for free school meals which below the national average. 154 are identified as having special educational needs and 12 have a statutory statement of special educational need. Almost all pupils have English as their first language. Attainment on entry is slightly above average. 54 of the 72 teachers (75%) are Catholics.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Monica's is an outstanding Catholic school. This is because of the centrality of its Mission Statement which states that the school is "a Catholic community working in partnership with families and parishes to teach the Catholic faith. We provide a caring atmosphere where everyone is of equal worth. Jesus Christ is central to our school and our aim is that everyone can develop their talents and gifts to the full, whilst growing in faith through prayers and service." The principles of the statement are full implemented. An example of this is that a major part of the school's development planning is devoted to the "Catholicity of the School." The Christian life of the school, including excellent relationships and exceptionally high standards of pastoral care, is driven with determination by the headteacher, senior leaders, and the governors along with the full support of the teachers of Religious Education. Very high and effective provision is made for Religious Education and collective worship. When one pupil was asked by the inspector, "What is good about this school?" it was no surprise that the answer was "Everything!"

Improvement since the last inspection

There were two issues raised in the last inspection in April 2006. High quality communication information technology facilities for Religious Education are now available to all the teachers and pupils. Their use is widespread and well monitored. A detailed marking policy has been developed in line the school's overall policy and learners have clear knowledge of their targets and what they have to do to improve. In fact these issues have been so well resolved that they are now amongst the major strengths of the department.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is outstanding. The school's ideas for future progress are based upon a realistic awareness of the current situation and detailed methods and proposals for further improvement. This applies to the school as a whole, with particular reference to its Catholicity, and to the Religious Education department where the policies and plans are in accord with those of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- There are no significant issues to address

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 a dynamic force vigorously implemented by all strands of management. Senior leaders and governors have a total, fully focused and professional commitment to run the school as an outstanding Catholic community. Policies and practices are fully cohesive in implementing the Statement “to provide a caring atmosphere where everyone is of equal worth.” The pastoral care and religious development of pupils have been given top priority. The school motto, “Prayer and Service” neatly summarises what the school is all about. The Catholicity of the school is at the forefront of planning. As a result, all the major matters pertaining to the school as a Catholic community are fully in place. These cover staffing, capitation, resources, time and planning for religious services and activities. Whilst academic success is a major priority it is within a clear framework of a desire to give greater priority to spiritual development. As the development plan states, the aim is “Well rounded Catholic students, with high esteem, good relationships with others and with God, able to make sound moral judgements.” There is the Just Youth team which is an important part of the school’s liturgical life. There is a genuine community and family atmosphere. The school has paid for 17 of its teachers to take the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies. There have been many successful strategies to promote social cohesion, particularly through links with the local and international community. The governors give widespread and active support to the Catholic life of the school especially through their link-governor and the well-informed and enthusiastic chairman.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship is outstanding and there are very many activities and policies to support this judgement. These include the policies for chaplaincy and prayer, the presence of a chaplain and the Just Youth team and the wide range of liturgical services. These reflect not only the Church’s liturgical year but the school’s academic year to include the Welcome and Leavers Masses which are attended by parents and governors. These are of high quality thanks especially to the planning undertaken by the Liturgy group, prefects and some staff and pupils together with the Just Youth team. Form tutors have an excellent resource of prayers at form time. Form assemblies are monitored and there is strong support for non-Catholic staff. Pupils’ planners contain a variety of prayers. Several local priests provide support on a rota basis. There are staff liturgies at the start and end of each term. Year assemblies are held weekly. During the inspection a very thoughtful year assembly on the theme of Lent was observed. It was well prepared and presented and pupils participated. Many departments make a contribution to the worshipping life of the school. There is a chapel which is used for the regular voluntary Masses, services, private prayer and reflection both group and personal. There are annual day retreats in school organised by Just Youth, residential retreats at Castlerigg Manor and a school mission every five years. The school is officially represented at the Holocaust memorial service in Bury and a small group makes an annual visit to Auschwitz with King David High School. Links with Nazareth House and local parishes are good. These links together with the full recognition of other world faiths and denominations, the use of worship to explore Christian personal and social responsibility all ensure that collective worship makes a valuable contribution to community cohesion.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education are outstanding. The pupils make very good progress relative to their ability with noteworthy “value added”. Robust monitoring is used to drive progress. At the same time there is a clear determination to give priority to spiritual development over mere academic achievement. Already at Key Stage 3 pupils have achieved high standards. The work of the Key Stage 3 co-ordinator is strengthening this progress even further. At GCSE in 2006 76% of candidates achieved grades A* to C in Religious Studies. In 2007 this rose to 84.9% but dropped in 2008 to 81%. These results are above the national average and are amongst the best results in the school. In 2008 four pupils were among the top ten from 67773 candidates entered nationally. All Year 11 pupils are entered and almost all obtained grades A* to G. On average girls’ performance has exceeded that of boys. These differences are being carefully monitored with strategies being developed to balance them. There are very generous donations and personal involvement in activities relating to many charities such as the Diocesan Rescue Society, Francis House and CAFOD. Other activities include SVP members visiting nearby Nazareth House, a Fair Trade group and support for Christie Hospital. There is a Christmas party to which local elderly people are invited. The school is also linked with St Joseph’s Catholic school in Rwanda. These activities make an immense contribution towards community cohesion and the social and cultural development of pupils.

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. Lessons are well planned and delivered with confidence and enthusiasm. There is a good pace and demanding work with tasks that are appropriate to the different abilities of the learners. Excellent and confident use is made of information communication technology. The teachers are well qualified, well-informed and committed to their subject. There are six full-time teachers of Religious Education and six part-time. There are rigorous and effective systems, such as "buddying" and "second subject" meetings which ensure full integration of all the teachers into the department's work. All pupils' work is marked in accordance with the department's marking policy and pupils have a good understanding of the system. They hold the teachers and the subject in high regard. They particularly enjoy the controversial topics and the discussions relating to them. They also enjoy the variety of teaching methods used by the teachers. Much hard work and preparation by teachers together with an appropriate choice of examination syllabus ensure high standards of academic progress. It is very obvious that Religious Education is taught for its own inherent value and as a means of developing pupils' personal spirituality. There is an industrious atmosphere, good behaviour and co-operative group work which all assist progress. Display of pupils' work in all the classrooms and in public areas is good.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The quality of the Religious Education curriculum is outstanding. This is because the Salford Diocesan syllabus is fully implemented and has been reviewed and adapted in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4 the carefully considered decision to adopt the Edexcel syllabus enables pupils to study Catholic issues in depth. Lessons observed during inspection included those dealing with Christian values, as seen in the life of Mother Teresa, Christian living, Christian teaching on wealth, the roles of men and women in the Bible and stewardship of God's creation. These issues were all taught from a clearly Catholic perspective yet at the same time pupils are encouraged to reach their own personal decisions. The directive from the bishops of England and Wales that 10% of curriculum time be given to Religious Education is fully observed. There is a huge volume of material which teachers share with each other, very often electronically, and this is one of the great strengths of the department. Other Christian denominations and world faiths, especially Judaism, Buddhism and Islam, are studied. The strong links with other departments are seen especially in the worshipping life of the school and the personal, health social and citizen education programme. It is for these reasons that Religious Education curriculum makes a significant contribution to community cohesion and to the pupils' moral, cultural and spiritual development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education are outstanding. This is because the managerial tasks of planning, monitoring and line management have a clear focus on developing pupils' spirituality as the priority. The school sees academic progress as a means of personal development, leading to deeper spiritual understanding. The head teacher, senior management, governors and the head of Religious Education all share and execute this philosophy in a consistent and determined way. The department is line-managed by the deputy headteacher and its performance is robustly and regularly reviewed. In a short period of time, the second-in-department has reviewed the syllabus for Key Stage 3 and initiated an SVP group. The team leader inspires others with her knowledge, determination and clear vision and despite the large number of staff in the department they all share the department's ideals and common purpose. Teamwork is therefore excellent. Books and resources are up-to-date. The support from senior management and governors is seen in the provision of excellent facilities, a good staffing structure and the fact that the department has a suite of rooms. The department's documentation is excellent and its policies dovetail with those of the school. The pro-active governors are kept fully aware of the work of the department thanks to the close involvement of the link governor who visits the school regularly, attends lessons and whose pastoral work is much appreciated by staff and pupils. The chair of governors himself is well informed about curriculum Religious Education in particular and the school's religious life in general.