



DIOCESE OF
SHREWSBURY

DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION REPORT:

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

School:	St Ambrose Catholic College
Address:	Hale Road Hale Barns Altrincham WA15 0HE
Tel No:	0161 980 2711
URN:	138134
Headteacher:	Mr D Rainey
Chair of Governors:	Dr P Goodwin
Date of Inspection:	1 & 2 December 2021
Inspectors:	Mrs A Burrowes Mr J Doust

THE SCHOOL'S MISSION STATEMENT

At St Ambrose College, we will follow the example of Blessed Edmund Rice and his vision for education as laid out in The Eight Essentials.

We will provide a rounded, holistic and transformative Catholic education enabling all boys to grow in faith and reach their full potential as well educated, disciplined, compassionate and empowered young men who strive for excellence and justice in all that they do.

With the Gospels and the spirit of Blessed Edmund at the heart of what we do, staff, pupils, and families will partner together to celebrate the talents and individuality of all in our community and produce resourceful and resilient Ambrosians, equipped to make a positive impact in the modern world.

SCHOOL: St Ambrose College

DATE OF LAST INSPECTION: 23rd April 2015

JUDGEMENT FROM PREVIOUS INSPECTION: Outstanding

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT FROM PREVIOUS INSPECTION

- Undertake to plan a strategy for the development of a sustainable model for the provision of effective and appropriate chaplaincy.

PROGRESS MADE WITH AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PREVIOUS INSPECTION

- A Chaplaincy Team was established in 2018-19 and in 2019-20 and 2020-2021 additional hours were allocated to focus on Chaplaincy provision and the Catholic Life of the college.
- From 2019 increased capacity in the Religious Education department provided additional support.
- In July 2021 a Lay Chaplain was appointed 3 days a week.
- The college continues to benefit from the Youth Ministry provision of the Blessed Edmund Rice Network.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS: how effective is the college in providing Catholic Education.

1

This is an outstanding Catholic college

The above judgement on overall effectiveness is based on all the available evidence following the evaluation of:

CATHOLIC LIFE

1

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

1

Summary of key findings:

- St Ambrose College provides an outstanding Catholic education for all its pupils.
- The college mission and ethos are at the forefront of the vision and planning of all aspects of the college, and the leadership team gives the highest priority to the Catholic Life of the college when making all decisions.
- Whilst striving to support and develop the whole person through a rich broad curriculum and a vast enrichment programme, the college also promotes a clear understanding that 'all individuals are part of a bigger picture', and that 'everyone has a role to play as part of the Body of Christ, to build God's kingdom here on earth in the here and now'.
- College policies are written with the dignity of the human person, created in the image of God, at the centre.
- The curriculum is set out with Catholic values and the Eight Essentials of Edmund Rice at the core. All pupils sit GCSE Religious Education and follow general Religious Education at Sixth Form. The Religious Education department teaches an engaging and challenging curriculum whilst recognising the need for flexibility due to the pandemic.
- Pupils make excellent progress in Religious Education.
- All pupils are known and cared for as individuals and the opportunities they have to become the best they can be are exceptional.
- The pupils are very proud of their college and are overwhelmingly positive and appreciative of the support and hard work of the staff.
- Standards of behaviour observed in lessons and around the college are outstanding and pupils genuinely support each other to do their best.
- The newly appointed chaplain has made a significant impact in the college and his presence and work is highly valued by everyone.
- Prayer is central to the life of the college and the experiences of Collective Worship are of such a high quality that they are cherished by the whole community.

What the college needs to do to improve further

- Continue to involve pupils in contributing to the monitoring, evaluation, and review of the Catholic Life of the college so that the evidence collected can be used to inform on-going improvements and developments.
- Provide enriching opportunities for Sixth Form students to support their leadership role with younger pupils in the college as, for example, with the Year 12 retreat.

Information about the Inspection

The Inspection of St Ambrose College was carried out under the requirements of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Shrewsbury Diocesan Framework and Schedule for Denominational Inspections approved by the Bishop of Shrewsbury. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the college is in providing Catholic education. This process begins with the college's own self-evaluation and the inspection schedule follows the criteria set by the National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers (NBRIA 2017).

The inspectors reviewed in detail the following aspects:

- The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the college
- The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the college
- How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education
- How well pupils respond to and participate in the college's Collective Worship
- The quality of Collective Worship provided by the college
- How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education, Collective Worship and the Catholic Life of the college

The inspection was carried out by two inspectors over two days.

The process was quality assured throughout by the Diocesan Schools Commissioner.

The inspectors:

- Scrutinised a wide range of documentation made available before, and on request, during the inspection, including the Diocesan Self Evaluation Form (DSEF), departmental and whole college development plans, quality assurance records for the Religious Education department, prayer and worship planning and resourcing, and relevant college policies.
- Held preparatory phone calls with the headteacher before the inspection.
- Met with the headteacher and senior leadership team, the subject leader for Religious Education, the chair of governors and members of the governing body, heads of year, a range of subject teachers and pastoral staff, a panel of non-teaching staff, the chaplain and the director of the Blessed Edmund Rice Network.
- Met with parents and carers from pupils across all year groups.
- Met with pupils representing 'pupil voice' from all year groups.

- Observed all Religious Education teachers who were present on the days of the inspection, across all year groups and abilities, through either full observations and/or learning walks.
- Attended a house assembly, Mass, and a range of form tutor periods.
- Attended lunch time sessions, for example, Philosophy Club, Liturgy Group, Staff Spiritual Conversation.
- Scrutinised a selection of Religious Education books and saw some assessment data to ascertain progress.
- Collected and analysed responses to staff and pupil questionnaires.
- Carried out the inspection within the guidelines of the college's Covid-19 risk assessment.

Information about this college

- St Ambrose College is a Catholic, selective, 11-18 all boy's grammar school under the trusteeship of the Christian Brothers. There are 1071 pupils on roll; 87% of the pupils are baptised Catholics, 8% from other Christian denominations and 2% from other faith backgrounds, with the remainder not identifying with any faith.
- There are 61 members of the teaching staff of whom 46% are Catholic. There are four fulltime teachers of Religious Education and four part time. Four teachers have the CCRS or equivalent.
- Since the last denominational inspection, the college has undergone some significant changes, having had three headteachers in that time. The current headteacher was made permanent in April 2019. The current senior leadership team is newly formed and the subject leader for Religious Education was appointed permanently to the position in July 2021, having temporarily carried out the role since September 2019.
- There were significant changes to the governing body in 2018-19 following an external review of governance in the spring term of 2018.
- The leadership team have skillfully navigated the college community through the challenges of the pandemic with compassion and support and the strong sense of community is palpable across the college.
- The parishes served by the college are
 St Hugh and St John, West Timperley
 St Vincent de Paul, Altrincham
 All Saints, Ashton-on-Mersey
 St Margaret Ward, Sale
 St Joseph, Sale
 Holy Angels, Hale Barns
 Our Lady of Lourdes, Partington
 Holy Family, Sale Moor
 St Alphonsus, Old Trafford
 St Ann's, Stretford
 English Martyrs, Urmston
 St Hugh of Lincoln, Stretford
 Our Lady and the English Martyrs' Davyhulme / Urmston
 St Monica's, Flixton
 St John's and St Teresa's, Firwood / Chorlton

In addition to the Trafford parishes the college serves a vast number of parishes across Greater Manchester and beyond.

Full report – inspection judgments

CATHOLIC LIFE

The Catholic Life of the college is outstanding

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The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the college	1
The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the college	1
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the college	1

- The pupils are rightly proud of their college, and they all genuinely appreciate, value, and actively participate in the Catholic Life and mission of the college.
- They can eloquently and passionately articulate the difference attending St Ambrose College makes to their life, and their aspirations include going out to make a positive impact in the world as Ambrosians.
- Relationships across the college, at all levels, are exceptionally positive and respectful and pupils speak with real affection of the hard working and committed staff that encourage and enable them to fulfill their potential.
- Behaviour in class, and around the college, is exemplary and the presence of the older students, as role models, creates an atmosphere of calm and admiration.
- Sixth Form students are keen to live out their faith and lead by example. They take the lead encouraging and creating opportunities for younger pupils to be happy and confident in their faith. As a result, they are also keen to take on leading roles in those activities which promote the Catholic Life and mission, both within the college and in the wider community.
- All pupils speak knowledgeably and proudly about the life of Blessed Edmund Rice and the wider Eight Essentials of an Edmund Rice education. They do not take this for granted and are fully aware of the responsibility they have to live as Ambrosians.
- Newly appointed staff embrace the distinctive Edmund Rice ethos, helped by the example of staff who have been at the college for many years. The induction programme is delivered by the chaplain and the leadership team and the feedback for this is overwhelmingly positive.
- The newly appointed chaplain and the chaplaincy provision is excellent and will become exceptional as it grows and develops. The vision of the chaplain to 'deepen people's experience of faith' and expand the opportunities to 'make faith accessible to all' is already evident in so many ways, with staff and pupils actively participating in the wide variety of options offered that embrace the distinctive charism of the college.
- The college mission statement is a clear and inspiring expression of the educational mission of the Church and the staff and governors are fully committed to its implementation across the curriculum and the whole of college life. It drives decision-making and plans at all levels and is reflected in all policies, for example, appraisal, professional development provision and curriculum design.
- The whole curriculum reflects a commitment to Catholic social teaching, to care for our common home and to the dignity of every human person.

- Subject leaders have mapped links with Catholic social teaching and the Eight Essentials across the curriculum and are aware of how their subject content fits into the wider ethos of the college. They have identified topics that support how the pupils can be 'equipped to make a positive impact in the modern world'. For example, in geography the ambitious curriculum looks at being a global citizen and covers inequality, the Human Development Index, the Sustainable Development Goals, and addresses misconceptions about migration. In science the pupils are challenged to consider complex moral and ethical issues and judgements and the English department have introduced the topic of 'Revolutionary Voices'.
- Staff speak passionately about how privileged they feel to work at the college and the pleasure they get teaching the pupils, but also working with them in the many extracurricular activities that they offer outside of lessons.
- The pastoral support is a strength of the college and contributes greatly to the Catholic ethos. Staff work hard and with genuine care to give pupils the best possible experience in college and respond appropriately and sensitively to those pupils needing bespoke support.
- Personal, social and health education and relationships and sex education are well led. Developing schemes of learning are thoughtfully designed, carefully planned, consistently well taught and celebrate Catholic teachings and principles.
- The college environment is impressive and the facilities extensive and the Catholic character and mission of the college is reflected throughout.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the college and appreciate the spiritual contributions the headteacher makes in the college newsletters.
- The governors are very experienced and totally committed to St Ambrose College at every level. They are ambitious for the future of their college and demonstrate wisdom and understanding in ensuring that the pace of future decisions is in line with the rapidly changing landscape in education.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Religious Education is outstanding

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How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education	1
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education	1
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education	1

- The subject leader for Religious Education is a hardworking, committed, and inspirational leader who has a clear understanding of the department's strengths and what needs to be addressed and developed. She has a clear vision for the Religious Education department and effectively uses the evidence from the monitoring, evaluation and review systems implemented to inform future planning and on-going developments.
- The subject leader knows her department well and the quality assurance processes are robust and effective. They include work sampling, lesson observations and learning walks and take place in line with the whole college quality assurance calendar.
- The Religious Education curriculum has been well planned and is constantly reviewed and decisions taken to resequence units are based on assessment and progress information.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been evaluated and schemes of learning are ambitious in terms of content and religious literacy, for example, in Year 9, pupils study Mark's Gospel.
- Teachers in the department are specialists with excellent subject knowledge and a passion for their subject. As a result, most of the teaching is outstanding and never less than good. One of the assistant headteachers in the department is a Specialist Leader of Education (SLE) of Religious Education. Three of the Religious Education teachers are examiners at GCSE.
- In lessons observed, and with conversations with pupils, it is evident that pupils really enjoy their Religious Education lessons and are genuinely committed to their learning.
- Behaviour observed in lessons is outstanding. Relationships, at all levels, are strong.
- Pupils spoke about how they relish the academic challenge in Religious Education lessons and that the 'bar is set high' for them by their teachers. They enjoy the lessons where they are encouraged to think theologically and ethically, and the contributions of all pupils are valued.
- Pupils can make connections and links with the content of the topics studied and the call to be Ambrosians and demonstrate this in high quality spoken and written responses.
- Pupils are entered for the Young Catholic Writer Award and two of the national winners have been from the college.
- Lessons are well planned, and teachers use a wide range of appropriate strategies which motivate and inspire the pupils. Consistent strategies used help pupils to recall knowledge and identify gaps in learning and pupils are involved in evaluating how well they are achieving.

- Assessment is robust and embedded across schemes of learning and provides progress data which is used effectively to plan focused support, for example, Religious Education Clinic at lunchtimes, the use of foundation workbooks and a range of high-quality revision resources.
- Pupils speak extremely positively of the support they received during lockdown and feel confident that there was minimal disruption to their learning.
- Almost all pupils achieve well in Religious Education, both at GCSE and A level, with many achieving outstanding progress as evidenced in the Teacher Assessed Grades awarded following a rigorous and robust process of assessment.
- Governors and the leadership of the college are fully committed to Religious Education being the 'core of the core' and ensure that curriculum time allocated, and resourcing of the department are a priority.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Collective Worship is outstanding

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How well pupils respond to and participate in the college's Collective Worship	1
The quality of provision for Collective Worship	1
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship	1

- Collective Worship across the college is outstanding. Prayer is central to college life and praying together is part of the daily experience for all pupils and staff.
- There is a genuine culture of prayer and reverence that permeates the college and pupils are given the opportunity to lead and participate in a wealth of prayerful experiences both traditional and contemporary.
- Pupils are confident and eager to be involved in leading Collective Worship and they willingly lead prayer in form time and plan and prepare Mass celebrations and holy day liturgies. Every lesson starts with a prayer.
- Students in Sixth Form are exceptional role models. They prepare the weekly 'Thursday Thought', a reflection on a passage of scripture, which they deliver to all form groups. They lead assemblies on key themes within the liturgical calendar. For example, a house assembly was observed, which had been prepared and delivered by Sixth Form students and included a reflection on Advent and the launch of the Advent charity appeal. Pupils from all year groups were engaged and sincere in their responses and responded with the communal prayer.
- Pupils in each year group lead an assembly once during the year and celebrations throughout the liturgical year are planned and led by pupils, for example, praying the rosary and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.
- Weekly Mass is voluntary and very well attended. Each form group also has a Mass throughout the year which they prepare with support from the chaplain.
- Themes in assemblies and Collective Worship encourage pupils to consider the wider world and their role in it as young Catholics. Regular reference is made to the mission statement and all pupils spoken to were committed to 'making a positive impact in the world as an Ambrosian'.
- The commitment to fundraising for charities both at home and for the sister school in Sierra Leone is a reflection of the pupils' willingness to make a positive impact and put their faith into action.
- The recently appointed chaplain has made a significant impact since joining the college and provides a range of opportunities for pupils and staff to deepen their faith, for example, 'Spiritual Conversation' with staff, the Liturgy Group for pupils and the Chaplaincy group. He provides high quality resources and his presence around the college is valued by everyone.
- Effective training sessions have been delivered on liturgical formation and the planning of Collective Worship as part of the professional development programme offered to all staff.

- The leadership of the college gives Collective Worship the highest priority in terms of planning, resourcing, and evaluating. They are proactive and prominent in modelling outstanding practice for staff and pupils. There are effective systems to monitor the quality of prayer and liturgy.
- Governors take an active role in contributing to the prayerful community with all meetings starting with a prayer. There are regular items and reports focusing on the Catholic Life of the college and the chair of governors is the link governor for both Catholic Life and Religious Education.