

Holy Family is an 11-16 voluntary aided Roman Catholic and Church of England co-educational College with specialism in mathematics and computing. The school serves an area which is socially and geographically large and diverse. It provides education for the pupils living in the associated Roman Catholic parishes of St. Joseph and Our Lady and St. Paul, together with the Church of England parishes of St. Luke, All Souls, St. Margaret, St. Michael, St. George and Middleton. Admission is also available to all other Church of England parishes in Rochdale. The indicative admission number is 120 and there are currently 568 learners on roll of whom 398 are baptised Roman Catholics, 40 are baptised members of the Church of England and 69 are from other Christian denominations. 14.4 % of learners are eligible for free school meals. The school has 58 learners who are identified as having special educational needs and of these 25 have a statutory statement of special educational need. There are 19 Catholic teachers and 12 Church of England teachers in the school which represents 82 % of the total staff.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

Holy Family is a good church school, still in the process of developing as a joint Anglican-Catholic foundation. Described by the head and chair of governors as ‘Catholic-plus’, the school still has an unmistakable Catholic ethos in which the Anglican element (in terms of broader worship traditions, the approach to teaching religion, and chaplaincy input) is still in the early stages of development and could usefully be given much more systematic thought. Nevertheless, in terms of actual practice, the school makes outstanding provision for the teaching and living of Christian values and for the spiritual and moral development of its pupils. This is due to the outstanding leadership of the head ably supported by senior colleagues and a committed governing body. The school offers good provision for both Religious Education and worship but both would benefit from a more systematic approach to planning and evaluation. The Religious Education syllabus for Years 7 to 9 in particular requires a thorough review.

Improvement since the last inspection

Not Applicable

Capacity to improve

The school’s capacity to evaluate itself and improve is good. Leadership continues to be committed to raising achievement and enriching the lives of the learners. Stakeholders are enthusiastically committed to maintaining the momentum of developing the school as a learning Christian community.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement strategies to enable the governing body to monitor and evaluate the nature and impact of the Christian distinctiveness of the school both more formally and effectively.
- Implement more formal strategies for monitoring and evaluating the impact of worship on pupils.
- Rewrite the Religious Education syllabus for Key Stage 3 to ensure it reflects the joint faith nature of the school and includes teaching about faiths other than Christianity.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Christian life of the school are outstanding. Its commitment at all levels is undoubted and is effective in delivering high quality education and sound pastoral care to all pupils. Such excellent work is inspired by the head's vision and personal faith commitment both of which are articulated clearly to both staff and pupils. In this she is strongly supported by her senior team and the governing body all of whom take seriously their responsibility for developing the school as a lively example of Christian ecumenism at work. Staff recruitment policy is based on sound principles. Appropriate, ongoing training has been provided so that the school's Christian ethos and values, and the ways in which pupils develop spiritually, may be better understood. Pupils are given many opportunities to lead and school council members form an impressive, committed and appreciative group. When asked what it was about the school they would change it was clear that there was nothing of any significance. Due emphasis on the role of chaplaincy is allied with a concern to ensure that, because every child is infinitely valuable in the eyes of God, they are similarly valued as members of this Christian community. Whilst the actual delivery of those aspects of school life which are essential to maintaining the distinctive characteristics of this church school – the emphasis on prayer, for example - are outstanding there is still work to be done in cementing appropriate structures, responsibilities and procedures by which that excellent work can be formally evaluated and how, through that process, future planning can be accurately informed and further improvement facilitated.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship is good. The practice of prayer infuses every element of school life and so it was surprising that a year group ('success') assembly observed during the inspection had only a limited element of participative worship. 'Success' assemblies alternate weekly with more explicitly religious occasions effectively led by senior staff. Responsibility for the daily collective act of worship for four days of the week lies with form teachers and although there is, inevitably, varied practice across the school this provision is well established. However, brief visits to three different forms on the day of the inspection made it clear that some staff are less than comfortable with this responsibility and require further training and support particularly in establishing an ethos suitable for meaningful worship. There is at present no single person responsible for the planning, monitoring and evaluation of worship, particularly its impact on pupils' spiritual development. As a result there is little in the way of a clear overall approach to worship although the celebration of major festivals across the church year is done well. A small group of staff and governors meet regularly to discuss aspects of worship but it is not clear how these deliberations, although taking account of the comments of staff and pupils, actually inform future practice. Whilst pupils are fully involved in their form worship there is less evidence of any significant involvement in the larger group assemblies. Pupils report that they sing "occasionally". Individual form groups lead liturgies on a weekly rota. Both Catholic and Anglican Eucharistic liturgies are regularly celebrated and as much as possible is done to ensure that Church divisions are not too apparent. The school takes very seriously the need as a joint Anglican-Catholic school to affirm their commonality, whilst seeking positive ways to celebrate diversity of tradition and practice. There are also other, shorter, voluntary worship opportunities provided by those engaged in chaplaincy, which are greatly appreciated by pupils. A small chapel is made available to pupils for private prayer and reflection.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school considers achievement and standards in Religious Education to be outstanding. The inspection evidence indicates that this is an accurate assessment. Learners make good progress at both key stages and attainment in public examinations at Key Stage 4 continues to rise. Standards within the department are good and work, particularly at Key Stage 4, is challenging. Learners respond with enthusiasm and demonstrate that they have the ability to develop the knowledge acquired in well taught lessons. Respect and good behaviour enable sound teaching and encourage learning. Assessment procedures are in place enabling learners and their parents/carers to monitor progress and identify targets for improvement. All Religious Education lessons are taught by specialists. Regular monitoring of work by the department, a sound school-based marking procedure, departmental self-assessment and lesson observation both within the department and by the Leadership Team maintain the momentum of improvement. Learners work co-operatively, respect their teachers and hold the subject in high regard. Members of the department make a substantial impact on the spiritual life of the school not only as leaders in this area but also as role models by their own personal witness to their faith. Through their learning in Religious Education learners develop an understanding of moral issues and an awareness of others, responding to those needs through the many charities the school supports.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The school considers the quality of teaching and learning to be good and the inspectors consider it to be outstanding. Members of the Religious Education department follow the Salford diocesan guidelines at Key Stage 3. These do not adequately reflect the joint faith character of the school and should be revised to do so. Lessons are well planned and are presented in an interesting and challenging format to the learners. Information communication technology is effectively used to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Assessment informs planning and enables teachers, learners and parents/carers to track progress. The department follows the school marking scheme. Lessons observed during the inspection were good or better with some teaching that was outstanding. The pace of lessons was suited to the ability of the learners and a variety of teaching strategies was used to engage the differing styles of learning among them. Learners enjoy their lessons. Relationships in the classroom are outstanding. The respect teachers show for the learners is reciprocated. Consequently pupils are attentive and demonstrate appropriate respect for each other. The school makes excellent provision for learners with special needs through comprehensive in-class support, while the quality of teaching Religious Education to pupils with learning difficulties is commendable. Communication with parents/carers is good.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The school considers the quality of the Religious Education curriculum to be good while evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that it is satisfactory. The Key Stage 3 syllabus has yet to be revised to ensure that it truly reflects the dual faith character of the school and includes some elements of other religions in addition to Christianity. Assessment tasks are all in place. The department should continue the work of developing more rigorous assessment at this key stage. Learners are aware of the level to which they are working and set themselves targets to make further progress. However the lesson plans available to teachers are prescriptive and tend to be content driven so revision of these in tandem with the syllabus would be beneficial. The school's transition to a more suitable module for its learners at Key Stage 4 is commendable. Achievement continues to rise and curriculum content is recognised by the learners to be relevant and stimulating. Efforts to ensure that all learners can access the curriculum in Religious Education are proving successful while improving achievement at Key Stage 4 maintains the department's commitment to raising standards and learners' expectations. Further opportunities for personal development exist through the school's prayer life and its extensive and diverse charity work.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

At the time of inspection there was no head of Religious Education in post. Oversight of the work of the department is, temporarily, the responsibility of the deputy head who inevitably has many other areas of school management in his brief. At some stage during the transition from the Catholic diocesan syllabus (a process entailing only limited modification) teaching about faiths other than Christianity has been lost. This undermines the school's commitment to enhance social cohesion. There is no evidence that the question of how the Religious Education curriculum might be formulated in a joint Anglican-Catholic school has been seriously addressed. Whilst the current syllabus provides considerable guidance for teachers, down to individual lesson plans, it is not clear how much notice is taken of these. On the day of inspection one particular class was working on a topic which the syllabus places later in the year so that any connection with prior work done by pupils was strained. Although various aspects of assessment are, in practice, managed well the syllabus makes no reference to current practices by which progress and achievement in Religious Education can be measured. Perhaps as a result marking does not always show pupils how they might improve and in some cases it was inaccurate and cursory. This, together with the fact that verbal explanations of various policy matters were at odds with the written documentation, suggests that several aspects of departmental policy and its implementation would merit review.