

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Augustine of Canterbury is a voluntary aided high school for boys and girls aged 11-16. It is a specialist school for humanities with Religious Education, Drama and English as the specialist subjects. Situated in the east of Oldham it serves the parishes of Corpus Christi, Holy Family, Holy Rosary, St. Anne, St. Edward and St. Mary. The school is smaller than average with 696 pupils on roll of whom 302 are baptised Catholics. The number with special educational needs is 165 which is broadly average. The number having a statutory statement of special educational need is 11 which is above average. 25.2% of pupils are eligible for free school meals which is above average. Almost half the school population is from ethnic minority groups, the largest of which is comprised of pupils from the Pakistani heritage community. Although pupils represent the full range of socio-economic backgrounds a significant minority live in areas characterised by higher than average levels of social and economic deprivation. 22 of the school's 46.6 full time equivalent teachers (47%) are Catholics.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Augustine of Canterbury is a satisfactory Catholic school which has some good features. Good leadership from the recently appointed headteacher supported by a reinvigorated senior leadership team is enabling the school to build on previously identified strengths. This is recognised by teachers, pupils, governors and other stakeholders. The school contributes effectively to the good spiritual and moral development of its pupils. They behave well and are keen to take on responsibility for themselves and others in the school community as well as responding to needs in the wider community. The school lives out its Mission Statement in recognising, responding to and serving the needs of its distinctive local community and by ensuring that Religious Education has a key role within its specialist humanities status. The non-Christian pupils, who comprise a significant minority of the school population, feel valued and respected, taking a full part in school life. The quality of collective worship is one of the school's key strengths, which the school is keen to improve further. Both collective worship and the curriculum are enhanced by the recent introduction of a programme of reflection designed for use in form time as part of Religious Education's contribution to the school's humanities specialism. Overall performance in the GCSE in Religious Studies has been weak for some time. Curriculum changes and some improvements to teaching and learning, both strongly promoted by senior managers, are beginning to lead to some, albeit, modest improvements to the achievement of older pupils in particular. However progress in Years 7 to 9 is hampered by weak assessment procedures. There is not enough consistently good teaching to ensure that pupils achieve well so that, consequently, standards improve. Leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education is satisfactory but too reliant on senior managers to evaluate performance and set the agenda for improvement.

Improvement since the last inspection

Since the last inspection in January 2006, governors have considered increasing the time allocated to Religious Education from the current 8% to 10% as required by the bishops of England and Wales and providing a prayer room. Despite best intentions both remain currently beyond the school's resources. Performance in the GCSE in Religious Studies has been inconsistent with no significant overall improvement. More recent actions by senior managers in identifying and dealing with weaknesses are beginning to have a positive impact.

Capacity to improve

The school's evaluation of its performance as a Catholic school is generally accurate and linked to some appropriate development planning. Taking into account the initial positive effects of actions taken by senior managers to improve performance in Religious education capacity to improve is therefore satisfactory

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of leadership and management of Religious Education in order to raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in the subject across the school by providing more consistently good teaching and more effective use of assessment information.
- Closely monitor the content of "wider key skills" courses to ensure that all pupils receive their full entitlement to Religious Education as required by the bishops of England and Wales.
- Improve the quality of self evaluation of curriculum Religious Education and use the information provided in more sharply focussed development planning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The inspection evidence supports the school's own view that this aspect of its performance is good. The recently appointed headteacher ensure that his vision for the school, strongly reflecting gospel values, is effectively communicated to all stakeholders. Leaders at all levels have been re-energised in their commitment to translating the school's Mission Statement into a reality which recognises the particular characteristics of the community it serves. By ensuring that Religious Education has a prominent role as one of its humanities status specialist subjects the school seeks to ensure that its Catholicity permeates the whole of its everyday life. This has helped to inform its commitment to being sensitive to the needs of its local community and so make a strong contribution to local community cohesion. Governors are well informed about the school's performance and are increasingly confident in challenging it where necessary. They provide strong support typified by the regular active presence of the chair of governors in the school together with his strongly articulated commitment to ensuring that the local Catholic community is well served by its Catholic schools. Pupils respond well to, and enjoy, the many opportunities provided for them to take responsibility in school and be of service to others, for example as "Peacemakers" or members of the impressive "School Focus Group". They enjoy their enthusiastic commitment to charitable activity on behalf of a wide range of good causes locally, nationally and in the wider world. Reducing exclusion rates demonstrate the way in which school ensures that the gospel spirit of reconciliation and a commitment to strategies which uphold the dignity of the individual, underpin the way in which it deals with pupils who fail to live up to expected standards of behaviour.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

The school believes that the quality of its collective worship is good. The inspection evidence endorses this. The weekly themes are carefully linked to those found in the corresponding Sunday liturgy. They provide good opportunities for pupils and staff to reflect on issues relevant to the ongoing life of the school as well as encouraging appropriate individual reflection. Worship is also well supported by the use of printed collections of prayers for use in form time. These provide a good variety of traditional and other forms of prayer. However the quality of their use on these occasions is inconsistent. One of the school's senior managers is an ordained priest who effectively contributes to both the extent and quality of collective worship. Assemblies are well planned and include good opportunities for active pupil involvement. In an assembly observed during the inspection pupils of all ages belonging to "Clitherow family" thoroughly enjoyed a quiz which turned cleverly into a serious reflection on our responsibility to look after each other. The experience not only helped set a good tone for the week but contributed well to the pupils' spiritual, social and moral development. In this and a form time also observed pupils, including those who are not Christians, responded to the invitation to prayer with reverence and respect. There is a regular programme of voluntary Masses. Pupils enjoy the well planned programme of liturgical celebrations which take place at appropriate times during the school year. Pupils' talents in performing arts enhance the quality of the liturgies which are also occasions when the school's commitment to welcome and include all members of its community in its prayer life is strongly evident. Nevertheless, the school recognises that it needs to re-invigorate its staff liturgy group, re-examine its chaplaincy needs and provide more opportunities for pupils to be involved in planning as well as participating in liturgical events.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Inspection evidence indicates that overall, achievement and standards in Religious Education are satisfactory. The school judges them to be inadequate but, in coming to this judgement, has not taken sufficient account of pupils' good personal development. Pupils are well behaved and well-disposed to learn. Their experiences in Religious Education lessons and through the ethos which permeates the general life of the school ensure that their spiritual and moral development is good. Pupils' achievements in Religious Education by the time they leave school are currently not good enough and standards reached overall are well below average. In 2008 only 25% pupils were entered for the full GCSE in Religious Studies and most obtained a pass in the higher A*-C range. Relatively few of the pupils entered for the short GCSE course obtained a pass in the higher range although, creditably, most achieved at least a pass grade. Too many pupils left school without having gained an accredited qualification in Religious Studies and the subject has yet to meet its specialist targets. Pupils following a recently introduced "wider key skills" course, investigating and reporting on appropriate religious themes and issues, generally reach expected standards. The school's most recent assessment of pupils work at the end of Year 9 suggests that they reach expected standards and that their achievement is satisfactory. However, procedures for ensuring the reliability of assessment are under developed. Leadership and management of Religious Education should be improved in order to raise standards and improve pupils' achievement by providing more consistently good teaching and more effective use of assessment information.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The inspection evidence supports the school's view that teaching and learning in Religious Education is satisfactory overall. The quality of learning in the lessons observed was never less than satisfactory and sometimes it was good. The best learning occurred when it was well matched to pupils' capabilities, when teachers used interesting and challenging learning activities and when they ensured that pupils knew the extent to which their work met examination criteria or clearly stated learning objectives. In some lessons pupils used computers effectively, for example, to present the results of their investigations. However, there is not yet enough consistently good teaching to ensure that the majority of pupils can achieve well. Evidence from some otherwise satisfactory lessons and from a representative sample of pupils work indicates that learning is not always sufficiently well matched to pupils' capabilities. Frequently, higher attainers are not being stretched enough and the work is not being adapted to meet the needs of lower attainers other than when they receive one to one help from teaching assistants. Pupils are well-behaved in lessons and remain compliant even when not thoroughly stretched or excited by their learning experiences. Marking is regular and supportive. However, it seldom clearly shows pupils what they need to improve to improve or the extent to which their work meets assessment criteria. Consequently many pupils remain unsure of how well they are doing. Teachers ensure that pupils with disabilities and those who belong to non-Christian faith communities take a full part in learning activities.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The school judges the Religious Education curriculum to be satisfactory and this is confirmed by the inspection evidence. It meets the requirements of the bishops of England and Wales. Optional elements of recently adopted GCSE courses have been well chosen to reflect pupils' interests and promote community cohesion but have not yet contributed to improved standards and achievement in Religious Education. Increasing numbers of pupils in Years 10 and 11 are following a "wider key skills" course which is beginning to contribute to improved achievement. However, the school is cautioned to monitor carefully the individual programmes of study in this course to ensure that the pupils learning in Religious Education continues to meet all requirements in full. The school's specialism in Drama is now being used to enhance the curriculum by broadening the range of learning activities and teaching styles used in Religious Education lessons. Other than the annual Year 10 retreat which pupils greatly enjoy and which contributes well to their spiritual, moral and social development there is relatively little enhancement of the curriculum through the use of educational visits or visitors to the school. Well-devised programmes for use in form time, based on the school's themes for collective worship, also help enhance the taught curriculum and ensure that the potential of Religious Education to contribute to the school's specialist status aim of helping pupils to know what it means to be fully human is realised.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The inspection evidence endorses the school's view that leadership and management of Religious Education are satisfactory. The department operates soundly on a day-to-day basis and the subject leader has striven to minimise the impact of some discontinuity in staffing in recent years due to long-term sickness. However the department has had to rely too much on the school's senior managers to set a clear direction in seeking to deal with its underperformance over the last few years, particularly in relation to pupils' poor achievement. For example swift action in curriculum change is leading to improved achievement of targeted groups of older pupils. Departmental self-evaluation has not been sharp enough in analysing examination results and the standards reached by younger pupils. Assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 are weak. There are no robust systems for measuring pupils' standards in Religious Education on entry to the school or reliably assessing pupils' performance as they move through the school. Consequently work is not always well matched to pupils' capabilities. The school-wide system for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning has been effective in supporting the department and contributing to some improvements in teaching performance through an appropriate programme of training and mentoring. However there is a need for the RE department, with the support of senior managers, to improve further the quality of self evaluation of curriculum Religious Education and use the information provided in more sharply focussed development planning.