

**THE DIOCESE OF SHREWSBURY**



**St Nicholas Catholic High School**  
**Greenbank Lane, Northwich, CW8 1JW**

**URN: 111450**

**DfE No: 875 4610**

**18 & 19 October 2011**

**Report on the  
Inspection of Denominational Education**

**Lead Inspector: Mrs Pat Barker**  
**Link Inspector: Mr Huw Powell**

The inspection of the denominational education of  
St Nicholas Catholic High School, Hartford  
was carried out at the request of the Governors of the School  
in fulfilment of their obligation under the requirements,  
and according to the directives of, the School Inspections Act 2005. The  
school was inspected within the framework  
approved by the Bishop of Shrewsbury  
for the conduct of inspection of the denominational education of  
Catholic Secondary Schools within the Diocese.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL**

ST Nicholas' Catholic High School is an 11-18 Catholic, voluntary aided, co-educational comprehensive school. The College is under the trusteeship of the Diocese of Shrewsbury and in the Cheshire West and Chester Local education Authority. The College has specialist status in Business Enterprise. Students are drawn in the main from the 6 parishes of St Wilfrid, St Bede, St Joseph, St Mary, St Vincent and St Luke, and 6 Catholic primary schools that the school serves. There are 1202 students on roll of whom 250 are in the Sixth Form. A little over 91% of the students are baptised Catholics with 5.57% from other Christian denominations and 1.25% from other World Faith traditions. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average as is the proportion of those with a statement to support their special educational needs. The proportion of students known to be entitled to free school meals is below the national average. There are 96 (Including 16 part-time) of whom 30 are Catholic. There are 5 full time members of staff in the RE department, including 2 NQTs.

## **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

**GRADE 1**

St. Nicholas' Catholic High School is an outstanding Catholic High School and highly effective in providing Catholic education. The school's Mission Statement gives a clear outline of what the school's principal characteristics must be –

We aspire to embrace the Gospel and its values, celebrating uniqueness and diversity. Our learning, within an enterprise culture, is based upon trust and respect, which define our relationships within the world family. 'Everyone Matters'.

The school meets Diocesan requirements in delivering the RE Curriculum and is providing the entitlement for students in accordance with the recommendations of the Bishops' Conference, and it was observed, in line with Pope Benedict's comments at Twickenham in September 2011 - 'Education must pay regard to the formation of the whole person, so that all may attain their eternal destiny and at the same time promote the common good of society.'

## **IMPROVEMENT SINCE THE LAST INSPECTION**

**GRADE 1**

The recommendations made in the last S48 Report in 2007 were seen to have been met.

- Continue to develop the system of rewards and sanctions - this was evidenced in an assembly for Yr 10 & 11 students, at the time of the Inspection, where awards (as gift tokens) were presented to pupils; they clearly valued these awards.
- Longer Form Period - this has been in operation since the last Inspection.
- Inclusion Centre Resource – the work to support pupils is seen through both the Learning Support Room for SEN pupils and 'The Link' for those requiring different support for their learning.
- RE Teachers should define learning objectives more precisely - this was seen to be the case in all lessons observed during the Inspection.

## **CAPACITY FOR SUSTAINED IMPROVEMENT**

**GRADE 1**

There is the capacity for sustained development which is evident from the detailed and thorough Self-Evaluation document provided for the Inspection. A new management structure is in place and the Head teacher is line manager for the RE Department and is thus very aware of the challenges that are being faced by the department and the resources and support that is needed. The introduction of the Mission Team has impacted on the Catholic life of the school and is charged with acting its 'conscience'. It will lead the school in reviewing its Mission Statement and scrutinise new and existing policies to ensure that the school is fulfilling its mission.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

- Continue to induct all staff members and, in particular, Pastoral Leaders, in the ethos of the school, through the work of the Mission Team. Look at the possibility of including a pupil voice element to this team.
- Further develop the prayer life of the school by seeking to involve the very successful music department to provide good liturgical music and so enhance participation in the liturgy.
- The RE Department should set up a programme of lesson observations within the team so as to embed the sharing of good practice and the development of skills including teaching and learning strategies.
- The RE Department should maintain a consistent approach to the use of the marking and assessment policy, building upon the excellent practice seen throughout the Key Stages, ensuring that worthwhile homework is set on a regular basis.

## **ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS**

### **GRADE 1**

All the results seen demonstrate a religious education department that is concerned for the attainment and progress of the young people in its care. Results for the last 2 years indicate a consistent pattern with grades in line with or exceeding those of other core departments in the school. The department is rightly pleased with its percentage of A\* and A grades; in 2010 nearly half of all pupils attained these higher grades and the 2011 results were well-above the national average. The 2011 results were especially pleasing as the department faced some of its most difficult times in regard to staffing, because of the ill-health of members of the department. It is a credit to both the Head of Department and the second in department that these results were maintained.

At AS and A2 there is a consistent pattern of take up. Results at A2 demonstrated a nearly 75% A-C pass rate and for AS in 2010 the pass rate was 81%. These results were either in line with or above the grades students gained in other subjects at this level.

## **QUALITY OF LEARNING AND PROGRESS IN RE**

### **GRADE 2**

The quality of work undertaken in Religious Education is very good. Evidence from the work scrutiny, both in and out of lessons show that pupils are meeting all the demands of the Diocesan Scheme of Work. The work is well-presented with a variety of learning activities present. In one example, sixth form pupils who had been to Lourdes as part of the Shrewsbury Diocesan Pilgrimage were able to use their knowledge to help younger pupils understand the experience and purpose of Lourdes as a place of pilgrimage. Pupils demonstrate an excellent level of religious literacy being able to discuss spiritual and ethical concepts. The pupils enjoy their RE lessons, attributing much of this to the excellent teaching they receive.

Pupils' progress in RE in all key stages is at least good. With the exception of key stage 4 in 2010, where a significant number of pupils exceeded FFT estimates, pupils progress in line with external assessment criteria. Specific groups of pupils (for example, those with Special Educational Needs) showed more variable performance, some of it below their external estimates. Given all of this evidence, the department is making good (but not exemplary) progress.

## **PUPIL CONTRIBUTION TO AND BENEFIT FROM COLLECTIVE WORSHIP AND THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL**

### **GRADE 1**

Students have opportunities for practical involvement, and ownership of aspects of worship. This was exemplified on the day of inspection through an assembly in which students and staff were fully engaged. Music and visual images were used to very good effect to enhance the worship. The students were attentive and absorbed in all aspects of the assembly and there was an opportunity for quiet reflection. It is noted that during the Year 10 Mass students were given every opportunity to participate and that those who did not engage with the Mass on a personal level did nothing to prevent others around them for exercising their own level of engagement with the celebration. It is felt that the celebration of Mass would benefit from incorporating good liturgical music.

The student planners feature photographs of inspirational people whose lives are known by the students and they are used to encourage students to aspire to become 'future saints' as Pope Benedict put it during his Papal visit to the UK.

## **QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

### **Teaching and learning**

### **GRADE 1**

The Inspection Team observed five lessons, covering most of the teachers in the RE Department. Over 75% of lessons seen were considered to be outstanding. All the teachers had excellent relationships with their groups and the behaviour in the classrooms was also excellent. In the best of the lessons seen, a variety of activities such as pair and share and the use of audio-visual resources were employed to maintain pace and engage the young people with the work. For example, in one GCSE lesson, the use of a video clip and music to set the scene for a lesson on Abortion was excellent as was an image helping pupils in year 7 appreciate the contribution of Oscar Romero. The outstanding lessons demonstrated definite progression, use of high order thinking skills and superb engagement by all students. In many lessons, targeted questioning was used to encourage pupils to think beyond the most obvious responses, drawing out and developing knowledge. In some lessons, however, there was a clear need to consider using targeted differentiation and modelling activities to help some pupils engage better with the work.

### **Effectiveness of Assessment**

### **GRADE 2**

The RE department participates in the whole school monitoring and tracking system. A record is kept of all levelled and assessed work and the Head of Department intervenes as appropriate to support and encourage pupils.

Pupils in KS3 have a clear record of their current and target levels, noted in the front of their books, although there was some occasional inconsistency over how this was recorded. Pupils in KS4 were also aware of their target grades and both groups of young people were able to enunciate what they needed to do to improve in religious education.

Books were well-marked and there were clear targets set for the pupils on how to improve further. Pupils also evaluated their own performance using a proforma, setting personal targets for their own improvement. All the marking seen followed the department policy, however, the quantity of marks in each book did differ, with some having only one or two pieces marked, demonstrating some inconsistency of practice. The presence of a level-ladder sheet in pupil-speak helped many understand what they needed to do to improve, although in some books it was absent.

At KS5, there were some excellent examples of marking and assessment, using diagnostic comments and targets to guide students' progress. An essay book used by students is an especially effective piece of good practice, giving excellent feedback and preparing them well for the examination.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE AND ETHOS**

### **GRADE 1**

The leadership and management of the Catholic Life and Ethos of the school are based upon a sound spirituality and vision which emanates from the Head teacher and percolates through all aspects of school life. During the inspection there was clear evidence from the staff, governors and students that the aims of the school are lived out in its daily life. The Head teacher, who is line manager for the Religious Education Department, has a clear understanding of the mission of the school in which 'Everyone Matters'. Students felt valued and respected and were appreciative of the support given by their teachers. New staff and students also felt welcomed and supported. The behaviour of students in whole year assemblies, in Mass and in the playground was orderly and considerate. During lessons the school was calm and settled with a purposeful atmosphere. Students were friendly, outgoing and helpful.

The innovative Mission Team, which is made up of teaching and non-teaching staff, is impacting on the Catholic life and ethos of the school. A particularly effective idea they introduced was in renaming Forms after inspirational Christians:- Maximilian Kolbe, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Pope John Paul II, Oscar Romero, St Bernadette, Dom Helder Camara and St [Vincent de Paul](#), chosen by the students themselves. All meetings in school begin with prayer.

The school supports many charities: local, national and global. Innovative ways to incorporate the school's Business and Enterprise status into the Catholic life of the school have been found. During the Inspection, preparation was underway for a Mini-Market which entailed each class organising fundraising activities to support the chosen charities. This year they include the Royal Manchester Children's Hospital, sponsoring rooms at the YMCA and the work of a community in Brazil.

Another impressive link with Business Enterprise was the school's support of **KIVA**, an organisation which lends money to people in countries such as Rwanda and Tagakhistan to help them set up their own small business. When the loan is repaid, it is available to offer to someone else.

An impressive number of Sixth Form **and Year 11** students and staff attend the diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes each year, and parents value the opportunities this gives to the spiritual development of the young people.

Although many **members of staff** are not Catholics themselves, strategies are in place to support them in their understanding and support for the Catholic ethos of the school. It was noted that a recent staff development day focussed entirely on this and there are already follow up plans in place.

Transition from Primary schools and Induction are well managed and the school's ethos is outlined by the head teacher in his visits to speak to parents at the feeder schools.

The Governing body meets regularly and there are link governors for each subject discipline. They support the school well, provide effective challenge, and play a key role in monitoring the school thus making an excellent and very effective contribution to the work of the school.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE RE DEPARTMENT**

## **GRADE 1**

The leadership and management of the Religious Education Department are outstanding. The subject is at the core of the Catholic Life of the college. The Head of Department meets regularly with the Head teacher who is line manager and there is a clear shared view of the role of Religious Education within the school. The Head of Department provides high quality management and coordination within the department, which was evidenced in the last academic year in particular when **the department faced particular difficulties**. Both he and second in the department managed to maintain the high quality teaching and learning that is required for success in external examinations. Students expressed to the inspectors how much they had valued this care and support. The Department has a clear understanding of its strengths and the areas for further development. There are five full time specialist staff who deliver the curriculum (two being NQTs). Together they are an active, committed team, which accounts for the status and success of the subject within the College. It would be useful to develop a process of peer observations of teaching to enable sharing of good practice and continued professional development.

Retreats are organised throughout the year. Year 7 were warmly welcomed into St Wilfrid's Church and followed a programme prepared by RE Staff and Fr Munroe for a day.

Yr 8 are involved in a collaborative Business Enterprise event lasting three days which marries the school's specialism and global outreach with spiritual activities.

Yr 9 had the opportunity for a 'Sleepover' at school which combined spirituality and fundraising and fun.

Yr 10 had a residential experience, with almost all the year group attending one of three centres for this experience, - Savio House, Soli House or Brettargh Holt. Some students were engaged in a school - based programme.

For a few years the school has arranged a retreat day for year 5 pupils from the local schools, which has been so successful that requests have been made to develop something similar for pupils in year 4.

### **Sixth Form**

Spiritual and Moral Education is timetabled for all members of the Sixth Form and it incorporates a Community **V**olunteer programme. All students are entered for an NOCN qualification and thus meet national as well as diocesan standards.

The school has an impressive number of Sixth Form students who attend the diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes each year.

## **COLLECTIVE WORSHIP**

## **GRADE 1**

The provision for and quality of Collective Worship is outstanding. Year group prayer and worship takes place once each week and form groups gather daily. Masses take place weekly. The school is extremely well supported by local clergy; Fr P Munroe, Fr J Carney, Fr Farrell, Fr P Dutton, Fr J Joyce, and Fr S Dwyer, some of whom are involved in the Governing Body, but also take it in turn to celebrate the weekly Mass that is held in the chapel every Wednesday morning. Each form has the opportunity to attend this Mass during the academic year and Masses are also celebrated for each year group during the first half term of the year.

The Head of Department is responsible for managing chaplaincy in the school and is ably assisted by other members of the team and the second in department, in particular. He provides sheets for staff to inform them about feast days and other traditions while providing CPD and student prayer-focused sessions for NQTs and trainee teachers. Each school day includes an act of collective worship, either as a Form, Year or Key Stage group. This worship can include a period of reflection or meditation with material provided by the students themselves, teachers and tutors or the chaplaincy. Some staff meet on a weekly basis to pray together after school. The Mission Team developed a school Prayer which forms the basis of worship in school.

## **COMMUNITY COHESION**

## **GRADE 1**

The school takes highly effective actions to develop the pupils' understanding of their role in the wider community. There is an inclusive feel to the nature of the school – this was especially witnessed in the comments of some KS3 pupils who spoke of it being a welcoming community as well as recognising the importance of studying and valuing the contributions of other religions and cultures.

The quantity and quality of the charitable work undertaken is also a testimony to this vision. Conversations with staff and pupils show a wide range of support for local, national and international charities through events such as the Mini-Market, mentioned earlier. It is especially pleasing that it is able to marry its Catholic ethos with its status as a Business and Enterprise school, its support of entrepreneurs in developing countries being a prime example. One pupil commented that 'we really want to help those less fortunate than ourselves'.

Overall, the school is an excellent example of a Catholic faith community being open and inclusive yet facilitating the young people's understanding of the wider community in which they live.

## INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Key to judgements: Grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory and grade 4 inadequate	Judgement
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### OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

How effective is the school in providing Catholic Education	1
The school's capacity for sustained improvement	1

### OUTCOMES FOR PUPILS

How good outcomes are for individuals and pupils	1
How well pupils achieve in Religious Education	1
pupils' standards of attainment in religious Education	1
the quality of pupils' learning and their progress in Religious Education	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the School	1
How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship	1

### THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

How effective the provision is for Catholic Education	1
The quality of teaching and purposeful learning in Religious Education	1
The effectiveness of assessment in Religious Education	2
The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum meets pupils' needs	1
The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school	1

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic Life of the School	1
How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils	1
How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils	1
The extent to which the governing body provides effective challenge and support for the Catholic dimension of the school so areas needing development are addressed decisively and responsibilities met	1
How effectively leaders and managers promote community cohesion	1