

## INSPECTION REPORT

School: Our Lady and St John Catholic College  
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Headteacher: Mrs C. Gillen  
Chair of Governors: Canon J. Harrison

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Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Salford  
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act  
2005

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Date of inspection: November 2011  
Date of previous inspection: September 2008  
Reporting Inspector: Mr A. Slade

<b>The Inspection judgements are:</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Explanation of the Grades</b>
Overall effectiveness of the school	2	
Capacity for sustained improvement	1	1 = Outstanding
Overall pupils' outcomes	2	2 = Good
Leadership and management	1	3 = Satisfactory
Effective provision for Catholic education	2	4 = Inadequate

Our Lady and St John is a voluntary aided Catholic 11-19 College. It serves the parishes of Holy Family, St. Alban and Good Shepherd, Holy Souls, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and part of Sacred Heart and St. Mary, Osbaldeston. The sixth form provides vocational education across the borough. There are 1004 students, including 66 in the sixth form and 48% of the pupils in Years 7 to 11 are baptised Roman Catholics. The proportion of students with special educational needs is above average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is about double the national average. The pupil population, whilst of largely white British heritage also contains a significant minority from Blackburn's Indian and Pakistani communities as well as many from Eastern Europe. Pupils represent the full range of socio-economic backgrounds but most are from areas of significant social and economic deprivation. 36% of the college's 67 full-time equivalent teachers are Catholics. It is involved in a Building Schools for the Future project entailing an extensive re-building programme.

### **Overall effectiveness**

### **Grade 2**

Our Lady and St John's College is a good Catholic college with some outstanding and some satisfactory features. It has very many strengths, but outstanding ones include

- the quality of self-awareness along with a very deep determination to make improvement for the spiritual and educational betterment of pupils;
- effective leadership and management of the school as a living catholic institution, particularly in relation to its caring role;
- a dedication to provide and deliver a good quality religious education;
- a deep concern for the welfare of pupils as individuals and exceptionally good community cohesion;
- a strong commitment to professional development.

### **Capacity for sustained improvement**

### **Grade 1**

Since the last Religious Education inspection in September 2008, the three main recommendations have been acted upon. A chaplain has been appointed. Steps have been taken to obtain an accurate picture so that effective policies can be adopted in order to effect improvements and raise standards. There is a robust monitoring and honest awareness of staffing needs.

The college has a widely promulgated Vision Statement: it goes to the heart of its policies and actions: it aims "to be a Catholic, caring community, centred on Christ." Its Mission Statement emphasises its role in assisting the total formation of each individual, emphasising that Catholic education takes place within a structure that promotes a community of love, service, prayer and forgiveness. This is supplemented by Aims including one of "trying to put Christ at the centre of our daily lives." Deep commitment is tangible attitudes and policies, particularly in pastoral care, concern for disadvantaged pupils and links with the local community. The Development Plan gives due priority to its Catholic nature with plans to develop the use of the chapel, and explore the nature of Catholic schools. Policies on issues such as sex and relationship education are firmly in line with Catholic teaching. The college's self-evaluation is outstanding: it is thorough and brutally honest. It is based on an accurate and comprehensive awareness of what is happening and deep determination to use this awareness as stepping stone to future developments and improvements.

### **What the college needs to do to improve further.**

Continue to develop and implement strategies, already in operation, relating to:

- identifying under-achievement and ensuring a rapid response ;
- raising levels of achievement, particularly among girls;
- working towards Fair Trade status;
- developing the role of the Lay Chaplain.

## **How good outcomes are for pupils, taking particular account of variations between different groups.**

### **Grade 2**

The Catholic life of the college benefits pupils in a way which is good with some outstanding features. Pupils recognize the college's distinctive Catholic nature. Pupils from other faith communities are welcomed and fully integrated. Likewise, pupils who have particular needs or disabilities are thoroughly integrated into the college community and the success of this integration is one of the college's special strengths, thus fulfilling the its own Vision and Mission statements. Pupils treat each other with high levels of respect. A strong pastoral philosophy and a wide variety of imaginative methods assist pupils, particularly in regard to the most vulnerable and less able, with an excellent approach to inclusion. The role of the lay chaplain is another dimension. Pupils' responsibility to the community is seen in the positive approach to fundraising and charitable activities. They are proactive in fundraising and appreciate being able to select their good causes. They support CAFOD, Caritas (St Joseph's Penny), Darien House, a senior citizens' party, and food hampers for local distribution. Thanks to links via a member of staff, money has been raised for schools in South Africa. Steps are being taken towards obtaining Fair trade status.

The quality of the college's prayer life is outstanding. Prayer is central to the life of the school and a key part of every celebration and meeting, including staff briefings where staff take turns to present a meditation for the day. Assemblies and other forms of prayer and worship make very good use of ICT, music and drama. Assembly themes are well planned and relate to the Church's liturgical year. The high quality year and form assemblies have pupil participation and are regularly monitored. There is a Book of Prayers for use by staff and pupils. There is a rota for weekly Mass where possible and the college is blessed in having a deacon on the staff. He assists with services where appropriate. Many of the staff are Eucharistic Ministers. Mass and special services are held for key times of the year such as leavers' Mass and key periods of the Church's liturgical year. Pupils show great respect and reverence at these services. During the inspection, there was a very powerful and thoughtful house assembly on the theme of "All Souls." In lessons, most pupils concentrate well and industriously with an enjoyment which they stress stems from the quality of teaching. A notable feature of lessons was pupils' level of understanding of faiths other than their own, linked with a tolerance and desire to learn more.

## **How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the School**

### **Grade 1**

The effectiveness of leaders in developing the Catholic life of the college is outstanding. The headteacher is clearly motivated by Christian principles. She and her team lead the college with a very clear sense of direction. They are exceptionally well informed on all aspects of college life. Of particular concern are vulnerable pupils and any who may require any special help - very much in line with the college's vision and mission statements, "*to be a caring Catholic community, centred on Christ ..... assisting in the total formation of each individual within the school community.*" The leadership team shares this commitment. Policies on a wide range of issues are cohesively and consistently linked to the school's Vision and Mission Statements and aims. The governors are well-informed and dedicated and show their support in many ways, not least in making appropriate challenges. They have a specific link with the Religious Education department. And they give a great deal of support to the college's religious and worshipping life.

Community cohesion is one of the strengths of the college – on a person to person level within the college as well as on local, national and international levels. In Key Stage 3, pupils follow the Diocesan syllabus and study Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. In Key Stage 4, the Edexcel Catholic units enable a wide range of topics to be studied. During the

inspection, lessons observed included a study of life and death issues (including abortion), Christian stewardship of the world, the work of CAFOD and the Church as a means of faith. Support for the RE is seen in the provision of excellent resources, the number of high quality teachers despite some temporary difficulties, a chaplain, good curriculum time at Key Stage 4, and a suite of rooms. There is an excellent level of support for professional development which is taken up by many. The new building will have a chapel and a suite of rooms for RE. The department's subject leader is committed, well informed and enthusiastic. The department has its own aims and objectives which are clearly implemented. There are outstanding levels of planning with a purposeful use of bureaucracy. The department, along with teachers from other subjects give outstanding support to the worshipping life of the college. A recent in-service training day was devoted to the ethos and spirituality of a Catholic school.

### **How effective the provision is for Catholic Education**

### **Grade 2**

The effective provision for Catholic education is good with some satisfactory features. The monitoring systems in operation ensure that leaders and managers of Religious Education are accurately informed of the college's strengths and weaknesses. Curriculum time allocated to Religious Education is up to the 10% recommended by the Bishops' Conference at Key Stage 4 but not at Key Stage 3 but this is being reviewed. The Religious Education curriculum helps pupils develop an understanding of the Roman Catholic faith – a task which is done sensitively in view of the proportion of non-Catholic children. The Sixth form has an excellent "Values" course which is accredited. It is ideal for the purpose and is highly valued by the students. In Religious Education, the standard of GCSE results is marginally lower than those in other major subjects, but many pupils arrive without a Catholic religious background. The performance of boys is generally better than that of girls and there are whole-school strategies in operation to tackle this. Very commendably, all pupils are entered for GCSE. Robust data and tracking is ensuring that pupils are aware of their progress. Teachers use it to adapt their teaching, its content and the planning – as one pupil remarked, *"We get a lot of useful feedback."* All this provides genuine grounds for belief that results will continue to improve, backed up by the determination of staff. Extra-curricular activities include residential courses available to pupils from years 9 and 10 at Castlerigg Manor, Keswick. These are exceptionally popular and valued. Steps are being taken towards obtaining Fair Trade status.

The RE curriculum makes a major contribution to the academic, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils. Schemes of work are reviewed regularly and informed by the progress of pupils. The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is good with some outstanding features. Lessons are planned in great deal with the needs of pupils of differing abilities being well catered for. Teachers have a strong knowledge of the subject, are confident and present challenging tasks. They employ a wide range of techniques and use teaching assistants well. Lessons are well timed and paced with a good working atmosphere.. There is excellent use of ICT. Pupils enjoy group work and work co-operatively. Relationships between pupils and teachers are excellent: there is good rapport, helped by teachers' positive and supportive comments. Books are systematically marked with positive and helpful comments. There is a good display work in classrooms and public areas. The RE department sets challenging targets and is monitored systematically. Senior leaders have faced various staffing problems with determination to ensure that pupils are not disadvantaged. The chaplain has been absent on maternity leave but there are plans to develop her role to include pastoral and counselling roles.