



St John's School and Sixth Form College

Woodhouse Lane, Bishop Auckland, County Durham, DL14 6JT

School Unique Reference Number: **137702**

Inspection dates:	24 – 25 October 2019
Lead inspector:	Mrs Meg Baines
Team inspector:	Mr Mark Henderson

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Catholic Life:		Outstanding	1
Religious Education:		Outstanding	1
Collective Worship:		Outstanding	1

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St John's School and Sixth Form College is an outstanding Catholic school because:

- A strong Catholic ethos permeates all aspects of school life. The personal commitment to their faith shown by the headteacher, leaders and staff is having a profound effect on the atmosphere and learning environment. The warm and genuine welcome given to visitors is typical of the sense of nurture found to be offered to the pupils.
- Pupils enjoy their Religious Education lessons. They are outstandingly well behaved in the classroom and around school in general. Teaching is in almost all cases outstanding. This high level teaching has led to excellent outcomes for pupils at the end of each key stage. GCSE and A level results this summer were outstanding.
- Pupils enjoy a variety of forms of Collective Worship and are very respectful. Links with parishes are exemplary. The highly regarded lay chaplain is critical to the success of Collective Worship in school.

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

- St John's is a larger than average Catholic secondary school and sixth form. St John's converted to be an academy in December 2011 and became a MAT in December 2016.
- Pupils are drawn from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, many travel from remote areas. The majority of pupils are bussed to school.
- The proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities is well below the national average at 8.7%.
- The percentage of pupils eligible for pupil premium is also below the national average at 22.7%.
- There are 110 pupils on the special educational needs (SEND) register, 8 of whom have an education health care plan (EHCP). This indicates that the number of pupils supported is below the national average.
- The number of looked after pupils is also below the national average.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Increase further pupil participation in leading and planning Collective Worship by:
 - developing the role of the student chaplaincy team into the sixth form.

CATHOLIC LIFE

THE QUALITY OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

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- The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.
- The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.
- How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

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The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- Almost all pupils value and appreciate the Catholic Life and the school's mission. Pupils were instrumental in creating the mission statement and reviewing it in 2018. They speak warmly of the ways in which they have benefitted from being part of a Catholic school. They know what makes them different and delight in it.
- Pupils are encouraged to lead and this can be seen in the ways in which they readily participate in voluntary work. Examples of this are the Peru project, Lourdes pilgrimage and in developing the newly launched Community Café. Every year group adopts a charity for the year. Pupils say, 'We do a lot of charitable work, like food banks and the Northern Air Ambulance fund'.
- Behaviour is exemplary, both in and out of the classroom. Almost all pupils showed a high level of respect for themselves and each other. They are quick to congratulate each other. When asked they are able to articulate the need to forgive and be forgiven. The school welfare team focuses on restorative experiences for pupils.
- Pupils fully embrace the opportunities given to them. This is seen in their attendance at many retreats and opportunities to give to others such as the fund raising event for sixth form students to go to Peru.
- The vast majority of pupils value the school's chaplaincy provision. They are comfortable taking leadership roles and speak positively about their experiences on retreat. They engage in a wide range of spiritual experiences. This provides the pupils with opportunities to reflect on what it means to be part of a community guided by Gospel values.
- The school is part of the Escomb partnership which works closely with the school on a number of inter parish events. Many pupils are involved with local parishes and a number take advantage of diocesan opportunities. The parish priest emphasises the key role the school plays in meeting the needs of the families in its care.
- Pupils and parents spoke of how much they value the pastoral and support programmes at school. St John's is a very inclusive school. Its student welfare team provides help and support to pupils, staff and parents. Pupils, as a result, are happy, confident and secure in their own stage of emotional development and spiritual growth.
- Well-considered personal social health education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) programmes enable pupils, appropriate to their age and ability, to develop an understanding of loving relationships within a Christian context.

- Pupils understand what it means to have a vocation. They value and respect the Catholic traditions of the school and many proudly detailed their long family ties with the school.

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- The headteacher takes a strong lead in modelling the school's vision. The school's mission statement is summed up in its sub-heading, 'A Learning Community Guided by Gospel Values'. The mission in St John's is strong, clear and is embraced by the whole school community. Staff from across the school speak about inclusivity, care for the vulnerable and the desire to create a safe learning environment for pupils in their care. This level of care epitomises the true Catholic Life of the school. It is an all-embracing community. Parents spoke of their great satisfaction with the way their children had been nurtured in the faith and through difficult times.
- Support for each other is tangible. Recent bereavements in school have drawn the community together in fellowship and prayer. It is a testament to the school that staff and pupils of all faiths recently came together in prayer for one of their school community who tragically died. A beautiful prayer tree remains in the main hall with thoughts and prayers attached by pupils and staff.
- There is a vibrant and welcoming entrance hall where the visitor is left in no doubt that this is a Catholic school. Beautiful art work created by pupils and staff is of a very high quality and reflects strongly the Catholic nature of the school.
- Staff are superb role models for pupils. They demonstrate respect and forgiveness and relationships in school are consequently very good.
- The welfare team is a real strength of the school. Leaders and staff ensure that clear policies and structures are in place which offer pupils pastoral care suitable for their needs. Strong relationships with outside agencies ensure safeguarding guidelines are also met. There is a genuine commitment to the most vulnerable in the school community helping them to develop positive working relationships and participate when ready in the wider life of the school.
- There is an excellent PSHE programme which is taught by form tutors and supported where necessary by specialist staff. This programme reflects the Catholic nature of the school and is in line with the Church's teachings and principles.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- The leaders and managers at St John's are highly committed to the Church's mission in education. It is given the highest priority in their planning, evaluation and monitoring.
- Leaders are continually seeking ways to strengthen and develop the Catholic Life of the school. An example of this is that during the inspection a Community Café was successfully launched. People from the community were invited to school and looked after by a team of pupils who had prepared food and drinks for them. This is typical of the type of engagement the school has with the wider community and underpins the commitment leaders have to ensuring Catholic Life has a high profile.

- A well-developed programme of continuous professional development (CPD) is in place offering staff the opportunity to invest in the school's mission and thereby share in its purpose. Staff's understanding of the school's mission is outstanding and demonstrates their personal commitment to it.
- Leaders and governors are highly ambitious for the Catholic Life of the school. They ensure it is a priority in planning and evaluation meetings and actively seek continually to review and update their understanding of it through questioning and challenge where appropriate. All leaders are passionate about the Catholic Life of the school and see it as central to operational life at St John's.
- The school promotes the Bishop's vision for education in the diocese through policy, practice and initiatives.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

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How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is outstanding.

- Almost all pupils achieve well in Religious Education. From their starting points they generally make very good progress and many achieve outstanding results. They enjoy their Religious Education lessons and have very good relationships with their teachers.
- Pupils are highly engaged in their lessons and are able to demonstrate progress. Appropriate to their individual age and stage, they are religiously literate and are able to use their knowledge and skills in tasks set. They have a very good understanding of the topics observed and are being effectively tutored in skills development. Pupils demonstrate effective recall and are able to reflect spiritually. They reason effectively and are beginning to think ethically. Students in year 13 lessons showed high levels of ethical thinking and a deep understanding of their subject.
- All pupils observed were actively engaged in lessons. They are committed to improving themselves and are also keen to please their teachers. They concentrate and engage with the subject matter, answering questions with relish. They are aware of their own progress and also know what to do to improve. They respond well to feedback in books and work hard to improve.
- Behaviour for learning is outstanding. Without exception in the lessons observed the pupils were engaged and on task. The best lessons challenged the pupils to think deeply and give thoughtful responses. Pupils responded well to encouragement and praise from their teachers.
- The progress and attainment of pupils are outstanding overall. An excellent set of summer results at GCSE and A Level have ensured that the Religious Education department is one of the highest performing in the school.
- Work scrutiny showed that pupils' work in individual books is well marked and assessment for learning is proving effective. Homework is regularly set and marked and the overall standard of work and presentation is outstanding.

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is outstanding.

- Teachers of Religious Education are highly effective in their planning thereby extending pupil knowledge and understanding. The teachers know their pupils well and use assessment to build on progress, ensuring teaching and learning are outstanding. Teaching is almost always outstanding and never less than good.

- A wide range of teaching strategies was observed in key stages 3 and 5. Teachers question effectively and use group and pair work to encourage collaborative learning. Due to timing of the inspection a very small sample of key stage 4 teaching was seen. Teaching at this key stage has however generated outstanding results this year and the work seen in books confirms progress across the teaching groups in key stage 4.
- Teachers use praise well in lessons and achievement is celebrated both within the department and in the whole school rewards system. They ensure that pupils are involved with evaluating their own work. They mark regularly and give constructive feedback. This assessment for learning is contributing to outstanding progress.
- Lessons observed were taught with very good pace and links were made to previous lessons and learning. Very good quality resources were used and effective use of other adults was seen, enabling all pupils to access the curriculum and make outstanding progress.
- Teachers are passionate about their subject. The Religious Education team has a good mix of experienced and newly qualified teachers giving a good balance which benefits the pupils. All teachers communicated their high expectations to their pupils. All pupils observed came prepared for work and were engaged and interested in the lesson.
- Regular marking and high quality feedback contribute to pupils fully understanding what they need to do to improve and they are able to articulate this.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is outstanding.

- The recommendations from the last Section 48 report regarding the sixth form have been met with the development of a specialist general Religious Education programme. This is a well-received programme which uses the ten commandments as a starting point for discussion, thought, investigation and reflection. Leaders and managers have ensured that Religious Education is given parity with other subjects in terms of Continuous Professional Development (CPD), resources and funding. The Religious Education department has a suite of rooms together on the second floor, enabling staff interaction and facilitating the sharing of resources readily.
- Leadership is a strength of the department. The curriculum lead for Religious Education has a strong vision which includes developing new staff and supporting more experienced teachers. It includes a focus on the most vulnerable pupils. High levels of expertise ensure that best practice is shared across the department. It is no surprise therefore that teaching seen was mostly outstanding and never less than good.
- Leaders and governors have ensured that a good deal of thought and imagination have gone into planning the Religious Education curriculum. Therefore it meets the needs of the different groups of pupils, building on previous knowledge and understanding and providing skills to access a more challenging curriculum at later key stages.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

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- How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.
- The quality of provision for Collective Worship.
- How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

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How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship is outstanding.

- There is a genuine enthusiasm for Collective Worship across the school. Pupils are inspired by worship led by their peers and teachers. This is reflected in the quality of prayerful silence observed.
- Pupils happily take the initiative and read and lead prayers. One preparation session observed saw pupils planning their whole school assembly which included their own personal prayers and reflections as well as a presentation. Almost all pupils from the class had a role in this act of Collective Worship.
- Almost all pupils have an excellent understanding of the Church's liturgical year. They were able to state the seasons and feasts in chronological order. They are able to prepare appropriate acts of Collective Worship which reflect this.
- A variety of approaches to prayer was seen. An even wider variety of prayer experiences was described by pupils who spoke about their retreats, the Lourdes Pilgrimage and the Emmaus Village.
- Prayerful work can be found across the school. A wide range of beautiful religious paintings and artefacts created by the pupils was seen. Such spiritual pieces reflect a deep sense of faith within the community.
- A mixture of traditional and contemporary approaches to prayer was seen. Pupils pray or reflect every morning in either the classroom or in whole group liturgies. They spoke fondly of whole year Masses and enjoyed the preparation and singing on these occasions. Parents and staff spoke about the uplifting nature of these whole year Masses.
- Pupils are proud and happy to be part of a praying community. They draw on its support when needed in times of crisis. They deeply respect those with a faith different to theirs.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship is outstanding.

- Prayer is at the heart of the school community. Praying together is part of the daily routine for pupils at St John's. Every day they have: PREP (prayer, registration, equipment, planner).

- During acts of Collective Worship the pupils are given the opportunity to pray and reflect. The programme for Collective Worship is well planned and follows the themes across the Church's liturgical year. Prayer is the norm for most groups in school. References to prayer and worship can be found all around the school.
- A variety of acts of Collective Worship occur, including the lay chaplain and a team of pupils taking the Travelling Stations out to feeder primary schools during Lent. Thus making effective connections and bearing witness to their faith in the wider community.
- A large proportion of the pupil body are either Catholic or from another Christian faith and it is notable that on each session of Collective Worship observed deep respect and reverence were discerned.
- Staff are highly skilled in planning and delivering inspiring Collective Worship. They also help pupils prepare and deliver it themselves.
- Thanks to the support of local clergy, a weekly Mass for school staff and anyone who is able to attend takes place in the school chapel.
- Adults associated with the school are invited into school for start of year Mass and other liturgical events. Parents are happy to be invited. This term's year 7 welcome Mass saw record-breaking numbers of families attend.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship is outstanding.

- Leaders, senior leaders, and the lay chaplain all have and promote an excellent understanding of the Church's liturgical history and in their own areas promote it, helping to develop high quality Collective Worship.
- All have an extensive knowledge of the Church's liturgical year and its feasts and seasons. They apply this to a deeply felt faith in a school which they describe as being, 'not just a school but a real community'.
- Leaders plan, with guidance from the highly skilful lay chaplain, to make such events accessible to all in the school community. Examples were given of detailed and helpful staff induction for non-Catholic staff before the start of the new school year Mass, explaining protocols and ensuring all felt welcome and included.
- Senior leaders and governors are visible leaders of Collective Worship and role models themselves. The chair of governors is highly visible in school working on the day of the inspection with the Youth Ministry Team and a visiting speaker from the Emmaus Centre.
- The promotion of pupils' planning of Collective Worship is a focus. Leaders are keen to ensure that pupils take the lead whenever possible.
- Leaders and managers place a high priority on CPD and staff personal formation. The headteacher line manages the lay chaplain and they meet regularly to discuss such matters. They have also recently had a focus on pupil-led Collective Worship. There is a well-defined programme for Collective Worship for the whole academic year and it forms part of the school improvement plan.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

HOW EFFECTIVE THE SCHOOL IS IN PROVIDING CATHOLIC EDUCATION:

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CATHOLIC LIFE:

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The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.

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The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

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How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

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How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

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The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education.

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How well leaders and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

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COLLECTIVE WORSHIP:

1

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.

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The quality of provision for Collective Worship.

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How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

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SCHOOL DETAILS

School name	St John's School and Sixth Form College
Unique reference number	137702
Local authority	Durham
This Inspection Report is produced for the Rt Reverend Robert Byrne the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle under canon 806 of Canon Law. For voluntary aided schools it also fulfils the responsibility the governing body has to inspect the school under s48 of the Education Act 2005.	
Chair of governors	Mrs Ann Wake
Headteacher	Mrs Lisa Byron
Date of previous school inspection	June 2015
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