



St Joseph's RC Middle School

Highford Lane, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 2DD

School Unique Reference Number: **122369**

Inspection dates:	29 – 30 June 2016
Lead inspector:	David Lewis
Team inspector:	Christine Ingle

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Catholic Life:		Good	2
Collective Worship:		Good	2
Religious Education:		Good	2

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Joseph's RC Middle School is a good Catholic school because:

- The Catholic Life of the school is good because pupils readily contribute to and benefit from the numerous opportunities and the inclusive and sensitive approach to the inclusion of pupils and their families from other Christian denominations and other faiths;
- Collective Worship is good overall with pupils and staff readily participating in and leading worship. The recently appointed headteacher and head of Religious Education have had a significant impact on development of Collective Worship and future plans are well developed;
- Religious Education is good as the governors, and school leaders have worked tirelessly to raise attainment and improve progress in Religious Education.

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

- This middle deemed-secondary school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Almost all students are of white British heritage and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those supported by the pupil premium, is lower than average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is lower than average.
- No students are educated off-site.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for the students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school is a specialist arts college.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Improve the Catholic Life of the school by:
 - building on the developments in place from September 2015 and implementing the vision articulated in the mission statement;
- Improve Collective Worship by:
 - developing strategies to increase the response to and leadership of Collective Worship by the pupils;
- Improve the quality of Religious Education by:
 - improving the consistency of differentiation and quality of feedback in pupils' assessments and written work across all classes, so that the progress of pupils is both rapid and sustained.

CATHOLIC LIFE

THE QUALITY OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

2

- 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 good.

- The appointment of a new headteacher from September 2015 has enabled the governors and school community to shape and implement a new mission statement for the school and faith community. During the inspection, the pupils spoke of their involvement in developing the Catholic Life of the school and how they contributed to new developments. Central to this is the establishment of a Spiritual Council, an excellent example of the school's commitment to the development of the Catholic Life of the school for every member of the community, including those of the Catholic faith as well as other denominations and faiths;
- The Spiritual Council is the key focus for pupil engagement in developing the spiritual life of the school. Pupils spoke warmly of their appreciation of every aspect of the rapidly developing Catholic Life of the school from an already firm base. Pupils are involved in numerous fund raising activities including CAFOD, 'bag-packs' at local supermarkets and cake sales (very popular), and were extremely conscious to support those who are less fortunate than themselves;
- Personal development was very strong and there were many examples of overcoming significant personal challenges as a result of support within the school, including those who transferred from elsewhere. The personal witness and commitment to each and every individual within the school was exemplary;
- Pupils readily acknowledged others' gifts and talents and openly praised and supported each other's skills and attributes. The gift of service to others permeated the school;
- The Catholic identity of St Joseph's is clear and visible. Children and their families from other Christian denominations and faiths are warmly welcomed to this worshipping community and readily choose to play an integral part to the development of the Catholic Life of the school. There are close links with the local parish, the parish priest is a regular visitor to school both in his role as chaplain and governor, and his support and encouragement is widely acknowledged and appreciated. The pupils talked enthusiastically of their involvement in diocesan activities including Mini Vinnies, which allow them to live out their beliefs in their everyday life.

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

- Staff are committed to the Catholic Life of the school and its development. There is a growing sense of mission as the school grows under the strong leadership;
- The sense of community is remarkable with excellent relationships at all levels. This is a key achievement of the school – relationships really matter and are viewed as the key to the development of the school;
- The mission and purpose of St Joseph's is clearly evident as soon as you enter the building. During the inspection, a newly designed doorway in reception was dedicated, as an outward sign of commitment to the Year of Mercy, through which every member of staff and all pupils walked after its blessing;
- The governing body has, together with the headteacher, led what they call a revolution (in reviewing policies and structures) to best meet the needs of this Catholic school. There is a remarkable commitment to the needy and vulnerable and significant evidence that many parents specifically chose to send their children to St Joseph's due to the tangible pastoral care in the best tradition of the Catholic church;
- Personal, social and health education and relationship and sex education have been carefully redesigned after a thorough review and staff spoke warmly of the personal commitments to their care and well-being by the school community.
- Pupils were vigilant in their determination to ensure justice for everyone at St Joseph's – behaviour was never less than excellent. Pupils openly acknowledged that forgiveness is at the centre of our Christianity, where individuals are supported to achieve their best.

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

- The school leadership is deeply committed to the Church's mission in education and celebrates the Catholic ethos in all its diversity throughout the school;
- Self-evaluation is accurate and developing as key developments brought about by the headteacher, senior leaders and governors start to become embedded. Significant work and attention has been brought to bear deepening the extent of self-review and evaluation. This is becoming increasingly robust and thorough;
- Plans have delivered significant improvement in the Catholic Life of the school so that it is now good. There is undoubted commitment by the whole community to move this to outstanding. Staff hold the school in high regard in its Catholic mission and are keen to ensure effective targeted improvement strategies drive the school to the next level. Indeed, many staff send their own children to St Joseph's signifying their complete belief and support for the school;
- The school has fostered extremely strong relationships with parents who eagerly work in partnership with the school and parish to achieve positive benefits for pupils. The governors are unwavering in their commitment to the development of St Joseph's as a Catholic school and have ambitious plans for its future. They are an integral part of the school, both as friend and challenging partner. They know how the school is developing because they check for themselves by visiting classrooms, attending liturgical and other events and representing the school at community events and meetings.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

2

- 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 good.

- The first day of the inspection took place on the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul where the parish priest celebrated mass with the whole school community. The pupils were reverent, prayerful and responsive and sang with enthusiasm, led by the school choir. Pupils and staff read and led prayers for the school. The sense of a committed Catholic community serving both Catholics and those of other faiths was clear, and the congregation included governors and parents, who attend as a matter of course, a clear demonstration of their commitment to and support for the Collective Worship of the school;
- Prayer and liturgies are characterised by a variety of approaches including the use of religious artefacts and the regular use of scripture was clearly evident both in lessons and as a stimulus for pupils preparing prayer and liturgies;
- Worship is regularly planned by pupils who appreciate the time the school allocates for small groups to prepare liturgical celebrations. Pupils explained the support of teachers in leading this preparation gave them confidence and allowed them to explore religious themes;

The quality of provision for Collective Worship is good.

- Pupils prepare and lead prayer in form time and every class prays at least four times a day – at the start of the day in form time, at the beginning of the lunch break, at the start of the afternoon and at the end of the day. Pupils and staff spoke warmly of their personal commitment to and experience of the prayer life of the school;
- Staff briefings and all meetings begin with prayer. During the inspection, a staff liturgy was led by the headteacher, using prayer, religious artefacts, readings, reflections and moments of silence for personal meditation. The staff spoke warmly of the headteacher's personal faith commitment, and positive influence on them as members of staff leading a Catholic community;
- All members of the community readily take part in worship and are eager to contribute and lead a variety of religious celebrations. A 'theme of the week' is directly related to the religious seasons and feast of the Church so that there is a growing understanding of the Church's liturgical year;
- The head of Religious Education, who also acts as the school's worship coordinator, has worked hard to deliver a highly effective programme of training and support so that staff

and pupils have a good understanding of the Church's liturgical heritage and are keen to lead and participate in all prayer, worship and liturgies.

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

- Leadership in the promotion, monitoring and evaluation of the provision for the Collective Worship of the school is outstanding. The headteacher's personal witness to the Catholic faith, and well supported by the committed governing body. The head of Religious Education has planned, delivered and supported and trained staff throughout the school to deliver high quality Collective Worship;
- Pupils' response to this provision was never less than good, and there is clear drive and desire to further promote Collective Worship in the school. Leaders and managers have no hesitation in witnessing their personal commitment to the Catholic school whilst sensitively engaging other faiths and traditions. Governors attend masses, liturgies and other celebrations at the school, receive reports about Collective Worship in school and are regular visitors during the school day including visits to classrooms to review the work and progress of the children, particularly in Religious Education.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

2

- 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 good.

- Pupils enjoy Religious Education, say they are challenged at least as well as in English and mathematics and speak eloquently of its value. A key feature of the inspection was the commitment of pupils to Religious Education, their keenness to do well and work hard. Behaviour was never less than excellent and behaviour for learning was outstanding, with all lessons flowing smoothly without interruption;
- Progress from entry at year five to the end of year six is at least good. There is clear evidence that 'gaps' are closing over time including special educational needs and pupil premium pupils and that there is a significant attention to ensuring every pupil and all groups achieve the very best in Religious Education;
- Pupils know their targets, know how to improve their work, and are involved in peer and other assessment activities. Targets and assessments are clearly labelled in exercise books, and teachers are beginning to be more consistent in their marking and feedback following the excellent example of school leaders;
- Pupils readily acquire skills and are able to apply them in unfamiliar contexts. They spoke appreciatively of Religious Education lessons exploring other faiths and traditions including Judaism and Sikhism, and the willingness of teachers to promote discussion and group work;
- Progress in Religious Education is good from the starting point of year five entry, and attainment is in line with or above diocesan and national averages at the end of year six. However, the school is committed to markedly improving outcomes and progress across the school and are implementing strategies to address this.

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

- Teaching is mainly good but there is also clear evidence of outstanding classroom practice from school leaders;
- Religious Education is highly valued by all teachers. In all lessons observed, there was a good understanding and secure knowledge of the subject. Planning and teaching was observed to be good overall, with a clear aspiration to make Religious Education the lead teaching and learning department of the school. Homework was appropriate and extended the classroom experience of the pupils. Marking was regular and reasonably consistent and diagnostic. Pupils responded to and commented on their performance and how to improve

their work;

- Assessment procedures ensured teachers had a good awareness of the prior learning and capabilities of the children but differentiation was less effective and consistent, though improving. Pupils enjoyed a partnership approach to their work in commenting on the marking and written feedback from teachers. This motivated them to want to achieve further and improve their next pieces of work, and teachers were quick to praise and celebrate the work of all pupils publicly identifying points of excellence in each individual's work and sharing that with the class. The school should, therefore, improve the consistency and quality of feedback and differentiation.

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

- The promotion, monitoring and evaluation for Religious Education is outstanding. Since September 2015, school leaders have worked highly effectively to lead staff and the school on a journey of self-challenge. This has resulted in significant improvements to Religious Education;
- The head of Religious Education is relentless in her pursuit of excellence and has led the staff unhesitatingly in a thoughtfully managed programme of coaching and development that will see further significant impact in the immediate future. Her inspirational leadership and her personal witness has had a profound impact on the moral and spiritual development of pupils at St Joseph's;
- The Religious Education curriculum has been completely reviewed and rewritten with appropriate training given to staff in order to best meet the needs of pupils at the school. Links with other groups such as the Jewish community and the wider parish community continue to flourish;
- Religious Education is a priority of the school and is well resourced in terms of staffing, physical resources, capitation and curriculum time. It fully meets the Bishops' Conference requirements and sacramental provision is good, with pupils being prepared for the confirmation programme which is undertaken the year after the pupils leave the school.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

HOW EFFECTIVE THE SCHOOL IS IN PROVIDING CATHOLIC EDUCATION:

2

CATHOLIC LIFE:

2

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

2

The quality of provision for 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.

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COLLECTIVE WORSHIP:

2

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

2

The quality of provision for Collective Worship.

2

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

1

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

2

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

2

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education.

2

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

1

SCHOOL DETAILS

School name	St Joseph's RC Middle School
Unique reference number	122369
Local authority	Northumberland
This Inspection Report is produced for the Rt. Reverend Séamus Cunningham the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle Diocese 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	Howard Forrest
Head teacher	Fiona Conley
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