

INSPECTION REPORT

Our Lady & St John Catholic College, North Road, Blackburn, BB1 1PY

Inspection date 10th July 2017

Reporting Inspector Sheldon Logue
 Leo Conley

Inspection carried out in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School Secondary
 URN 119790
 Age range of pupils 11-16 years
 Number on roll 723
 Appropriate authority The Governing Body
 Chair of Governors Mr M Zammit
 Headteacher Mr P Murden / Mr P Tite
 Curriculum Leader Religious Education Mrs M Rishton
 Date of previous inspection November 2011

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades 1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3=Requires Improvement 4 = Inadequate
Overall effectiveness of the school	1	
The quality of Catholic Leadership	1	
The quality of the Word	1	
The quality of the Welcome	1	
The quality of Welfare	1	
The quality of Worship	1	
The quality of Witness	1	
The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements		

CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

Our Lady and St John's is an increasingly popular and successful 11-16 comprehensive school which serves the following Catholic communities: St Antony's, St Mary and St Joseph, Holy Family, Blackburn; St Alban and Good Shepherd, Blackburn; Holy Souls, Blackburn; Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Blackburn and part of Sacred Heart (formerly St Anne's Parish). It is an average size school with 723 pupils on roll, of which 31% are baptised Roman Catholics. The number on roll is rapidly increasing over recent years due to the schools rising popularity. The school is very diverse: 25% of pupils do not have English as their first language. The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium is 55% which is above the national average, whilst the percentage of pupils classified as eligible for support for special educational needs is 28%. The school is situated in an area of social deprivation and the catchment area is in the seventh poorest ward in the country.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL IS OUTSTANDING

Our Lady and St John's is an outstanding Catholic school where it is abundantly clear that the governors together with both senior leadership and middle leadership teams are absolutely committed to Catholic education and the underpinning values of 'Mission' within the Catholic context. This was succinctly put in the phrase: *'our core business is teaching and learning but our core purpose is the Catholic mission'*. The belief in this mantra was the catalyst for the rapid improvements in the school in the past few years. The effectiveness of the school is most obviously 'felt' from the creation of a safe, happy learning environment where pupils are given opportunities to flourish as individuals and where staff are empowered to continuously improve. Pupils, parents, teachers, leaders and governors are all proud to belong to Our Lady and St John's. Furthermore, the confidence in the school of the wider community is reflected in the massive increase in pupil numbers to the point where the school is now over-subscribed. A major strength of the school is its aspirations. It is a school which is ambitious for its pupils and there is an energy, drive and capacity to improve the school further.

KEY STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL INCLUDE:

- The leadership, including governance is strong, and can articulate not only the strengths of the school, but more importantly, how to address the weaknesses
- Relationships at all levels are conducive to core gospel values of respect, care and love and these ensure that the dignity of each individual is prominent within the school
- Pupils, especially the most vulnerable, are really cared for reflecting the fact that inclusion is paramount and there is strong pastoral care

THE QUALITY OF CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

The mission of the school is to be *'a caring Catholic community centred on Christ'*. This mission permeates all levels of the school and has led to the transformation of its fortunes. Dynamic leadership has led to a relentless focus on improvements and a 'no excuse culture' has removed many barriers to learning. There has been noticeable improvements in achievement, standards and behaviour since 2014. Governance is strong, confident, has an impressive skills-set and are self-assured yet also conscious that the job is 'not yet complete'. A successful partnership with another outstanding diocesan school has been instrumental in its success. This partnership is strong and is beneficial to both schools, where expertise in leadership and teaching can be shared. Both the executive headteacher and head of school have a joint vision for the school. This vision is shared and accepted by all staff. The senior leadership team is relatively new, yet work together effectively as a coherent team. The religious education subject leader has transformed pupil outcomes in a relatively short period of time. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural activities were evident across the curriculum and pupils were confident in their understanding of core British values. For example, in a Year 7 history lesson, pupils were learning about important moral issues; in a geography lesson about the prison system, issues of reconciliation and redemption were prominent and in a modern foreign language lesson on

the topic of school uniform questions were raised about the banning of the hijab in French schools. These 'big questions' equip the pupils with the skill and values to make reasoned judgements.

THE QUALITY OF WORD IS OUTSTANDING

RE is very much at the core of the curriculum and pupil outcomes at the end of Key Stage 4 over the past few years has been rapid, from 24% [2014] to 65% [2016]. As a department, religious education is well resourced for a school this size with four full time specialists. Curriculum time is slightly above the recommended 10% and the Key Stage 3 curriculum is fully RECD compliant. The department is currently reviewing its Key Stage 4 schemes of work and assessment practices to meet the demands of the new specification. Inspection evidence of lesson observations and scrutiny of books shows that any legacy issues have been addressed. Strong leadership at subject level has correctly identified that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is below that of non-disadvantaged pupils but the gap is narrowing. Teaching and learning was at least good in all lessons, with some inspirational teaching observed. Within lesson observations, pupils were challenged to address the 'big question'. For example, a Year 10 religious education class were grappling with the issue of 'abortion' and were able to articulate both pro-life and pro-choice viewpoints to form a reasoned argument. In a Year 7 religious education class, a confident teacher created a positive learning environment and facilitated discussions around the Sikh religion. Quality assurance, through SLE reports, is robust and identifies strengths and areas for development, ensuring that a continuous cycle of improvement is embedded. Due to the nature of the intake, starting points in religious literacy are low but pupils make exceptional progress as demonstrated by GCSE pupil outcomes which are comparable with other core subjects.

THE QUALITY OF WELCOME IS OUTSTANDING

A genuine welcome recognises the worth and value of each individual who enters the school and this hospitality was continued throughout the day. This welcome was a reflection of a 'Christ-centred' school. All stakeholders are proud to belong to Our Lady and St John's and very keen to 'show-off' the school. They do so as there is a strong sense of belonging and ownership. A strength of the school was the genuine sense of inclusion and Christian value of 'no discrimination'. Indeed, this respect for diversity is keenly felt by the pupils who quoted Jo Cox when describing the school: *'we are far more united and have far more in common with each other than things that divide us'*. This has created a community of dignity and respect where, for example, there are low incidences of racism and where incidents of bullying are rare and quickly dealt with when they arise. Furthermore, this sense of community was encapsulated by one Year 10 pupil who said: *'We are all individuals but we all stick together as a team'*. This acceptance of a strong community was typical, regardless of background, ethnicity or religion and was validated by pupil voice. A concerted effort to improve transition arrangements has had impact but it has been recognised that this needs to continue. The school takes pains to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils are not overwhelmed by the transition to secondary school and has developed a 'generic curriculum' for a Year 7 group who stay together with a class teacher for the majority of curriculum time. A lesson observed demonstrated that these pupils are comfortable in this setting and were extremely well supported as well as being supportive of each other. A culture of effective safeguarding is based upon the 'dignity' of the individual.

THE QUALITY OF WELFARE IS OUTSTANDING

The school has a long-held reputation for providing a high standard of pastoral care. Support services such as the school counsellor and behaviour support worker are highly regarded and have an extremely positive impact. Strategies introduced to promote improvements in attendance and punctuality have been successful and transition procedures have aided the increase in applications to Year 7 in 2016 and 2017. Sex and relationship education (SRE) is mapped and embedded across the curriculum with particular focus in RE, science, PSHE and pastoral learning time. Awareness of the importance of good mental health has been identified as a priority for development and the 'Healthy Heads' programme is proving effective in this area. The school's safeguarding and behaviour policies are embedded and clearly understood, and staff and pupils treat each other with respect and care. Incidents of bullying, homophobic or racist behaviour are rare and the pupils report that they feel safe at school. Schemes of work, particularly in the PSHE programme, tackle

potential threats to pupil well-being and deal with such issues as e-safety, extremism and radicalisation. This has encouraged a culture of openness and community cohesion, and promotes a commitment to interreligious understanding, social justice and human rights that reflects the teachings of the Catholic Church and the mission statement of the school. This positive emphasis upon compassion, understanding, human dignity, togetherness and respect characterises the Christ-centred ethos that is so carefully nurtured by the governors, senior leadership and staff of the school. There is a high priority given to enabling staff and pupils to work to their best potential and a clear commitment to overcoming barriers to learning especially among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the school community (e.g. pupil premium spending is carefully mapped and monitored). There is a strong sense of community, and both pupils and staff are proud of the family atmosphere in the school - as one pupil put it: *'the staff treat us as if we are their own children'*.

THE QUALITY OF WORSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

Prayer is at the heart of the school, and pupils and staff are well supported and highly confident in the planning and delivery of acts of worship. The school prayer which the pupils say with pride and confidence has echoes of the school's mission and motto (emphasising unity, family and community). The school is fortunate to have the services of three active priests ensuring that the liturgical life of the school is extensive. The celebration of Holy Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation are regular features in the life of this community. The pupils take part in a daily act of worship either in assembly or in their form groups. Form-time is used constructively for this purpose and a lovely reflection on the 'Nature of Love' was observed. The opportunity is also taken to address 'big questions' during this time as part of the well-constructed PSHE programme (e.g. the ethics of genetic engineering). A member of the RE department also carries out the role of school chaplain. She leads an active GIFT team of about 30 pupils from all year groups, backgrounds and faith traditions. Both staff and pupils described the Chapel as 'the heart of the school' and it affords opportunities for reflection, meditation and reconciliation which complement the regular celebration of Mass in the school. A mission week is planned for the end of year celebrations and each year the chaplain plans 'Light Fever' which has 'an immense effect upon the pupils'. The 'Edge Programme' encourages links between the family, parish and school and five Our Lady and St John staff have contributed to the delivery of this course in the evenings. A significant number of Year 7 and 8 children (both Christian and Muslim) have completed it. The school deserves particular credit for the extent to which it is sensitive to the active inclusion in their acts of worship of those pupils who do not share the Catholic faith tradition. These pupils are also supported in the practising of their own faith (e.g. access to a prayer room in the winter months to ensure that Muslim pupils and staff can actively live out their own prayer commitments and during the month of Ramadan provision is made to allow pupils a space to sit away from the canteen).

THE QUALITY OF WITNESS IS OUTSTANDING

Positive relationships based on mutual respect and understanding are a key feature of the school. It is clear that the vision and direction at Our Lady and St John's is based around the words of the mission statement. It was acknowledged that the school is for many pupils, their 'parish'. Leaders spoke eloquently and passionately about the mission; as one school leader stated *'the mission statement has not changed but it has become crystallised more recently'*. During a Year 7 assembly, which was pupil-led on the core value of 'Love', pupils were able to bear witness to their Catholic faith and articulate the importance of this value on their everyday lives. Delivery of the assembly was by pupils from all backgrounds and faiths. Both PSHE and education of 'British Values' are well mapped across the curriculum. Observations show a good level of pupil engagement in discussion around 'the big questions'. Practical activities to raise money for charitable causes were evident, in support of Mary's Meals, the local food bank, and providing senior citizens hampers. Staff take part in events like the big sleep out, cake sales, bike rides and charity walks. However, the school intends to develop a more formal basis for its charitable work. Excellent pastoral care and support are heavily rooted in the mission statement. The behaviour policy is based upon 'reconciliation'. Governors praised staff for their determination to ensure that prayer and reflection are witnessed at every opportunity and there are Scriptural references decorating the walls in all areas of the school. Senior leaders are wonderful role models for the whole community. There are numerous opportunities for staff to develop their faith, including retreats, leading prayers and being Eucharistic Ministers.

AGREED AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT:

- To sustain the rising trend in attainment and progression of all pupils in religious education, particularly pupil outcomes at the end of Key Stage 4
- To adopt and then embed a more formal approach to charitable fund raising to ensure focus and clarity
- To further develop parental engagement to ensure that this important stakeholder has the same aspirations and ambitions as the school

10th July 2017

Dear Pupils,

A massive thank you for the warm welcome that you gave us when we visited on Monday 10th July to inspect the Catholic life of your school. As inspectors, it is always a privilege to be in another school and from our experiences, this was no exception.

We were very impressed with how proud you were of your school. It was evident that you 'belonged' to Our Lady and St John's and you have all played a part in making it such a fantastic Catholic school. We were equally impressed with the great relationships that permeate the school. This was apparent in the positive attitudes to learning observed in lessons as well as the general conduct within the school.

Finally, this is an exciting time to be part of Our Lady and St John's and we wish you well in the future and hope you all go on to achieve great things.

God bless you all.

Yours sincerely

Sheldon Logue
Leo Conley

(Section 48 Inspectors)

Summary Report to Parents

On 10th July 2017 the school was inspected in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005. The full report has been made available to the school and can also be accessed via both the school website and the Education section on the website of the Diocese of Salford.

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