

INSPECTION REPORT

St Gabriel’s RC High School, Bridge Rd, Bury, BL9 0TZ

Inspection date 10th October 2016

Reporting Inspectors Mr Kevin Hogan
 Mr Martin Reynolds

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

Type of School	Roman Catholic VA High School
URN	105367
Age range of pupils	11 -16
Number on roll	1078
Appropriate authority	Governing Body
Chair of Governors	John Costello
Headteacher	Simon Smith
Head of Religious Education	Anna Evers
Date of previous inspection	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 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

St Gabriel's is an 11-16 voluntary aided Catholic school with 1078 pupils on roll. Most pupils join the school from six named feeder primary schools; St Marie's, Bury; St Joseph's, Ramsbottom; Guardian Angels', Bury; St Joseph and St Bede, Bury; Our Lady of Lourdes, Bury; Holly Mount, Tottington. The school is heavily oversubscribed. Most pupils are white British with a growing number of pupils from eastern Europe. The number of pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding is below the national average. The number of pupils with a statement or educational health care plan is 30. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 88% and this is increasing. Approximately 60% of employees are baptized Catholics. At its last section 5 Ofsted report [2011] the school was judged to be 'outstanding'. The headteacher is a local leader of education, and one of the senior leaders overseeing RE, is a specialist leader of RE.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Gabriel's is an outstanding Catholic School. Over the years it has established and maintained a reputation as a first class provider. The school's commitment to excellence has been driven forward by the vision and commitment of the headteacher, senior leadership team and the governors. Outcomes are significantly above the national average and the school is well set to continue its impressive progress. The school's accomplishments in all areas of provision have been achieved, whilst remaining faithful to its core mission as a Catholic institution. The hard work and endeavour of the school in bringing about excellent academic outcomes is matched by an authentic commitment to developing the spiritual and prayer life of the pupils and staff. This in turn serves to inspire and nurture the school's commitment to charitable work in the local and wider community. The school makes a particular effort to help those in need and reach out to those on the margins of society. It is clear that pupils, staff and governors are united in a common purpose to achieve excellence in all areas and they are justifiably proud of all St Gabriel's has achieved.

THE KEY STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL INCLUDE:

- The inspirational and visionary leadership provided by the headteacher, senior leadership team and the governors.
- Quality of teaching and learning in key stage 4 RE, leading to consistently outstanding outcomes at GCSE.
- The quality of relationships across the school, which demonstrates a profound commitment to the dignity and well-being of every individual within the community.
- The Catholic life of the school as a witnessing community, committed to the service of those in society most in need.

THE QUALITY OF CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

Leadership of the school at all levels is outstanding. The governing body has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and what is required in order to ensure continued improvement. Governors demonstrate a profound commitment to the school's place within the mission of the Church and its role within the local Catholic community. The headteacher and leadership team share a clear and coherent vision for the school as a Catholic institution. Together, governors and the leadership team present a unified and cohesive approach towards the provision of Catholic education. They are both a model and an inspiration for the whole school community. Pupils are encouraged to participate in leadership roles through the numerous groups that are active across the school. These include the GIFT Chaplaincy group, Make a Difference group and peer mentors. Such groups provide the opportunity for pupils to fully engage and play their part in the mission of the school. Outstanding leadership has ensured that the school has maintained consistently high standards. Thorough and systematic self-evaluation and rigorous quality assurance procedures are evident across the school and underpin excellent outcomes. St Gabriel's has a clear vision for the education of the whole person and has placed great emphasis on the importance of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, which runs as a 'golden thread' throughout the curriculum and extra-curricular activity. Provision for SMSC is outstanding. The

school demonstrates a particular concern for the vulnerable in the community and has in place a comprehensive support programme to assist those on greatest need. St Gabriel's places Christ at the centre of all it does. It is evident that He is the source, the sustenance and the goal of all the school strives to achieve.

THE QUALITY OF WORD IS OUTSTANDING

A clear and sustained focus on improving provision for all learners at the school underpins the excellent achievements recorded by St Gabriel's over recent years. Teaching is well matched to the needs of the pupils and high levels of challenge were evident in lessons observed across the curriculum. Assessment procedures are robust and rigorous. Marking policies are used with impressive consistency to support learning and enable pupils to make excellent progress. Over recent years the school has maintained exceptional outcomes at Key Stage 4. Outcomes in RE are amongst the best in the school and significantly above the national average with 79% achieving A*-C in 2016, 32% of pupils achieving A*/A. The RE department is staffed with well-qualified, committed, effective practitioners whose high expectations and attention to detail has enabled the department to sustain excellent outcomes over time. The leadership of RE is outstanding. Schemes of work, assessment, monitoring and quality assurance procedures across both key stages, demonstrate a thorough and relentless commitment to departmental improvement. The sustained focus on excellence has helped to ensure that RE is rightly recognised as a leading department within the school. The department is well resourced and the school allocates 12% of curriculum time to RE, which exceeds the Religious Education Curriculum Directory requirement. The RE department has taken appropriate steps to ensure that it is well prepared for the recent changes to the GCSE RE specifications. Exceptional levels of Religious literacy were apparent across the age range. Pupils were comfortable in discussing religious concepts, demonstrating sophisticated skills and mature insights, not only in answering questions, but also in posing them. Levels of pupil engagement were observed to be excellent with pupils demonstrating a real desire to be involved in the learning process. It was evident that pupils are challenged to address 'big questions' in many areas of the curriculum. A Year 11 class was observed addressing the issue of war and conflict in which pupils were able to demonstrate a mature and developed understanding of the complexities of the 'just war' theory and Christian teaching. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is well developed and embedded across the school through both curriculum and extra-curricular provision. The school strives to deepen knowledge of Sacred Scripture by ensuring that the Word of God is integral to worship and liturgy. Every effort is made to link learning across the curriculum to the teaching of the Church and the truth of the Gospel message. Through the many charitable activities carried and in the quality of interpersonal relationships and dialogue observed, the staff and pupils of St Gabriel's provide an authentic and active witness to the Word of God.

THE QUALITY OF WELCOME IS OUTSTANDING

St Gabriel's extends a warm, enthusiastic and sincere welcome to all members of the school community. A well established and effective transition programme provides numerous opportunities for Y6 pupils from partner primary schools to visit the school prior to joining in September. An induction evening for the parents of Y6 pupils is also held in order that parents are given the opportunity to meet their child's form tutor. The close and effective link between home and school is something that the school works hard to maintain and develop across all year groups. St Gabriel's has a clear understanding that new pupils are being inducted into a faith community and Y7 pupils are welcomed with a mass and take part in a retreat day. The school also provides Y7 pupils with a chance to take part in a residential trip with their form tutor, the aim of the trip being to develop pastoral bonding. Pupils gain a great deal from this experience through establishing new friendships, engaging in team building and developing a stronger sense of community. Pupils who join the school 'in-year' are provided with a 'buddy' who supports them in getting to grips with the organisation and routines of the school. One pupil who had joined in Y9 spoke warmly of the efforts made by staff and pupils to make her feel welcome "I really felt they cared and wanted me to be part of the community and I really feel that I am." Members of staff who join the school also benefit from a structured programme of induction. New staff are provided with mentors to guide and support them in getting to know the school and establish themselves as part of the community. Throughout all induction programmes there is a sharp focus on the school as a Catholic institution committed to the service of the Church. Procedures for welcoming visitors to the school are clear and well understood by all staff. The school enjoys strong support from parents/carers as evidenced in the parent surveys that are regularly conducted. Attendance at school events such as parents'

evenings is very high. Through the school website and parish newsletters parents/carers are invited to attend school on numerous occasions and do so in large numbers. Pupils, parents and staff are very proud of their school and it is seen as very much being at the heart of the local Catholic community.

THE QUALITY OF WELFARE IS OUTSTANDING

The school motto of 'learn, love and believe' is prominent across the school on displays, noticeboards etc. It is also clearly evident in the way in which members of the school community care for each other. The golden thread running through all interactions between members of the school community is one of mutual respect based on the belief that each person is created in the image of God. This belief informs school policies and practice and shapes the response of the school in dealing with all individuals, particularly those in greatest need. St Gabriel's has close and effective links with a number of agencies working with those within the school who require a higher level of support. It also makes strenuous efforts to engage with groups and charities who provide support for those at risk in the local community and internationally. Pupils, staff and parents provide enormous support to a number of charities including CAFOD, St Joseph's Penny, KEY 103 Toy Appeal. The school also provides substantial support to a school in Uganda.

St Gabriel's provides a comprehensive sex and relationships education programme. The programme is delivered through the science department, the RE department and through personal social and health education by form tutors. The PSHE element supports the SRE programme delivered through the RE department and is provided via a programme of study approved by the diocese. In February 2016 the school delivered a 'Respect' day. All year groups considered how best they might respect self and others. A number of aspects relating to SRE were addressed on the day and the impressive level of engagement and maturity of all those pupils taking part was commented on by those leading the day. The entire SRE programme is firmly rooted in the teaching of the Church and prepares pupils to meet many of the complex moral challenges posed by contemporary society. Pupils feel that their views are listened to and taken into consideration. Pupils and staff are questioned about their learning experience in 'focus fortnight'. Pupils are given opportunity to share their views via questionnaires and through the school council. Issues raised by the school council are addressed by the Head and leadership team. Pupils not only feel safe at school but they also feel that they are valued. The school uses its resources wisely and is committed to the principles of Christian stewardship and service. The local authority audit report states that St Gabriel's "is a well-run establishment with ... a sound approach to financial controls." The school provides numerous opportunities for parents to engage in the educational journey and fulfil their role as the primary educators of their children. Parents/carers are involved not only in supporting their child's academic progress, but also in supporting their faith journey. A good example of this support being the involvement of parents/carers in the mission week held at the school in February 2015.

THE QUALITY OF WORSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

Prayer and worship is central to the life of the school. Excellent support is provided for the sacramental life of St Gabriel's by local parish clergy who regularly visit the school. Inspectors met with the staff chaplaincy team who are drawn from across the school. The size and enthusiasm of this group was impressive and clearly demonstrates a commitment to developing prayer across the entire school. Staff are confident in leading prayer and sharing aspects of their own spiritual journey. Staff are provided with opportunities throughout the year to meet and pray together. The great work that is already taking place in this area is continually being reviewed and improved. The focus of the recent school mission was developing the prayer life of the school and staff readily engaged in experiencing new ways of praying. Staff new to the school are trained and supported in leading prayer. Pupils also demonstrate great confidence in leading prayer. Pupils in Y7 and Y8 have weekly opportunities to engage in meditation, such sessions are supported by Y11 peer mentors. The MAD group and the chaplaincy group have written their own prayers for use at the start of their meetings. The pupil GIFT chaplaincy group is heavily involved in the planning, preparation and leading of prayer. During the inspection the chaplaincy group hosted a 'Prayer Station' event. Pupils had devised the prayer opportunities which were thoughtful, creative and innovative. The session was well attended by pupils and staff from across the school and showed a school at ease with prayer and comfortable with the spiritual dimension. Prayer and worship are well resourced. The leadership of St Gabriel's is clearly committed to ensuring that all members of the school community experience prayer and worship that is rooted in the

sacramental life of the Church, is rich and varied, is appropriate to the needs of the individual and helps each person in their spiritual development.

THE QUALITY OF WITNESS IS OUTSTANDING

Staff and pupils were able to articulate what the mission statement meant for them and how it was the source and inspiration of all that went on in the school. There was a clear understanding of the school's role within the greater mission of the Church. Pupils were able to explain how the work and charitable activities they were involved in were part of their Christian responsibility and duty. The large numbers of pupils engaged in such groups as Caritas, GIFT Chaplaincy, Make a Difference [MAD] and peer mentoring, demonstrates impressive levels of engagement and makes clear the willingness on the part of the pupils to celebrate and witness to their faith and belief. The school ensures that pupils are provided with numerous opportunities to witness to their faith through a wide range of charitable endeavours and also through activities designed to help them reflect on what it means to be a Christian. In January 2016 the school organised a Holocaust Memorial event which turned the main hall into the centrepiece of a day dedicated to reflecting on the tragedy of the holocaust and the heroism of those who sought to help the victims. Pupils are encouraged to play a leading role in the organisation and planning of the school's charity work. The MAD group meets weekly to consider how the school can put into action the social teaching of the Church. This group has been involved in a wide variety of activities ranging from collecting and delivering Christmas hampers, to involvement in CAFOD campaigns, to writing letters of petition to world leaders about matters of international importance. The school has a vibrant GIFT pupil chaplaincy group which is involved in the design and delivery of liturgy and worship opportunities. The group is developing its outreach work with partner primary schools and another high school. All school policies and practice are rooted in the mission statement and seek to 'develop the whole person and enable him/her to make a positive Christian contribution to society'. St Gabriel's seeks at all times to further the mission of the Church and educate and engage its pupils in the work of witnessing to Gospel values. A good example of this is the work of the ECO council which is inspired and informed by the Church's view on Christian stewardship. The work of the group has been recognised by Bury Council who have awarded the school a special flag to mark their achievements in the field of ecology. Clearly, the school, at all levels, takes seriously its commitment and responsibility to witness to the teaching of the Church and the Truth of the Gospel message.

AGREED AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT:

- Continue to seek new ways of engaging pupils in their local parish community.
- Appoint a new lay chaplain.
- Continue to develop the involvement of pupils in planning and leading worship activities in school.

Summary report for parents

On the 10th October 2016 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.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

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Letter to pupils

17th October 2016

Dear Pupils

Thank you so much for the very warm welcome you gave us when we came to visit your school. We were very impressed with how proud you were of St Gabriel's, all the work it does and all it stands for. You all play your part in helping to make St Gabriel's an outstanding Catholic school. We certainly came away with a feeling of everybody in the school community having a strong sense of unity and purpose.

Your work is of a very high standard and we could see that you take your learning very seriously and are proud of your achievements. You have outstanding RE teachers, who are clearly helping you to feel confident in your learning and in your ability to discuss complex religious and moral issues. We were particularly impressed by the way in which you were able to reflect on serious matters of belief and values and discuss them in an open, honest and mature manner.

Mr Smith and the governors are determined to continue developing the RE curriculum and all aspects of the school as a Catholic institution ensuring that provision continues to be outstanding.

We were particularly impressed with your commitment to helping those who are in need. The charitable work completed at St Gabriel's demonstrates a real commitment to Gospel values and does you, your parents and your school great credit.

We wish you well for the future and are confident that you will continue to live out the school motto to love, learn and believe'.

God bless you all

Kevin Hogan
Martin Reynolds
[Section 48 Inspectors]