



St Mary's Catholic School

Benton Park Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear, NE7 7PE

School Unique Reference Number: 140081

Inspection dates:	19-20 January 2016
Lead inspector:	Tony McCourt
Team inspector:	Pat Witte

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

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Mary's Catholic School is an outstanding Catholic school because:

- The overall effectiveness is outstanding. St Mary's is a beacon of excellence, a light for all to see. The Catholic nature of the school permeates all aspects of school life, recognises the uniqueness of the individual and encourages pupils to develop their gifts and talents to the full. Worship in various forms is a vibrant and daily feature of the school. There is a high level of commitment from all staff to the pursuit of excellence and this work is supported by rigorous whole school planning, evaluation and review. As a result of outstanding teaching, pupils achieve highly in Religious Education.
- Collective Worship is outstanding. A wide range of opportunities are offered to pupils to explore their relationship with God, individually and as a worshipping community, within and beyond the school. High quality liturgies throughout the year are prepared by pupils and staff and provide uplifting and memorable experiences. The headteacher, director of ethos and lay chaplain jointly ensure thorough preparation, evaluation and review of the school's Collective Worship.
- The Catholic Life of the school is outstanding. There is a strong sense of belonging, manifest in the outstanding quality of relationships. A climate of tolerance and respect, emanating from the Gospel precept of love of one's neighbour, ensures that those from different social, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds live and work in harmony. The school prides itself on its inclusivity. The headteacher, staff and governors are committed to a flourishing Catholic ethos which nurtures and supports pupils on their faith journey and provides opportunities for them to thrive and develop.
- Religious Education is outstanding. Pupils thoroughly enjoy Religious Education and are totally committed to their learning. Teaching is often outstanding and never less than good. The leadership of the department is outstanding and the striving for excellence is shared wholeheartedly by the department. The senior leaders and governors are actively involved in monitoring the work in Religious Education.

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

- St Mary's is an above average sized Catholic academy whose pupils come from a wide social and economic background
- 52% of pupils are baptised Catholics
- The majority of pupils come from a white British background with 25% from other ethnic groups
- 10% of pupils have special needs
- The headteacher was appointed a National Leader of Education in September 2011
- St Mary's is a National Support School and a core partner in two teaching school alliances

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Share the outstanding practice of the Catholic Life of the school by:
 - Leading and supporting other Diocesan schools
 - Continuing to develop the school's international outreach work
- Share the school's outstanding Collective Worship practice by:
 - Leading and supporting other Diocesan schools
- Share the school's outstanding practice in Religious Education by:
 - The Religious Education department contributing significantly to the development of teaching and learning throughout the school
 - Leading and supporting other Diocesan Schools

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.

- The vast majority of pupils from year seven to year thirteen have a deep experience of belonging and are enthusiastic members of the vibrant Catholic community. Pupils demonstrate a clear commitment to the school and enjoy and benefit from an outstanding Catholic community. Pupils are actively encouraged to develop their gifts and talents to the full.
- Pupils are at the centre of shaping the mission and ethos of the school. They contribute to it in a planned and systematic way and to the school's evaluation of Catholic Life.
- Pupils are actively aware of the needs of others and seek justice for all, as demonstrated in fund raising activities such as Soup Friday to support CAFOD. The quality of relationships is a very special feature of this diverse community. Both pupils and staff express a sense of real joy at living and working in a climate so imbued with the Gospel values of tolerance, respect and love of one's neighbour, clearly visible in the excellent behaviour and good manners of pupils. As a consequence, pupils benefit from a learning environment which is calm and purposeful.
- The vast range of opportunities for personal support and development is embraced by the pupils. They are happy and confident, developing spiritually and emotionally to become responsible members of the community.
- Pupils are actively encouraged to value themselves as unique individuals with abilities to learn and achieve and to value everyone else in the community as being of equal worth, with much to contribute to the life of the school. Pupils enthusiastically support retreats to examine where God can be found and what it means to be Christian. A high level of respect is given to every member of the community which is evident in movement around the buildings, in the dining hall and behaviour in classrooms.
- Every individual in the school community is highly valued. Pupils, including those who are not Catholic, celebrate their own religious identity and beliefs, whilst at the same time deeply valuing and respecting the Catholic ethos of the school.

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

- The aims of St Mary's school, with their emphasis on understanding the Catholic faith, love of the values of the Gospel and support for pupils from whatever faith background, are a clear and inspiring expression of the educational mission of the Church. This is re-enforced by the prayer life of the school which centres on a weekly theme derived from the previous Sunday's Gospel.
- Year seven pupils are welcomed to the school with dedicated sessions in the chapel where they learn about the Catholic Life of the school. The lay chaplain and tutors work together to ensure high quality experiences which develop the spirituality of each individual.
- The quality of relationships is a significant strength of the school. St Mary's prides itself on being a caring school, a happy place, where order and respect for others underpin the everyday life of the school.
- Invitations for pupils to develop spiritually and deepen their personal relationship with God are a central feature of the life of the school. Daily prayer in tutor groups, assemblies, the weekly Mass, engaging liturgies in Lent and Advent and dedicated time in the chapel are occasions for pupils to lead prayer and celebrations.
- Pupils understand their role within the community and willingly at every opportunity offer their gifts in the service of others. Retreats, diocesan festivals, the Justice Group, Flame Train and charitable expeditions to Peru and India receive whole-hearted support from pupils as they reach out to others in this outward facing school.
- The school regularly contributes its support to the wider Catholic community. Pupils have eagerly joined the Pope John Paul II Award and provided the choir for the local launch of the project at St Mary's Cathedral.
- High quality religious icons are to be found around the school. Crosses displayed in classrooms are particularly attractive and are chosen by the pupils.
- Pastoral leaders, the SENCO and her team, the lay chaplain, tutors and support staff all play a huge part in ensuring outstanding care for the most vulnerable pupils, both in policy and practice.
- Planning at all levels is rigorous with carefully designed pastoral programmes to meet the needs of all pupils
- The school is equally attentive to the pastoral needs of staff, taking into account their individual needs and well-being. Staff comment on strong team work and each person being valued for their individual role. All staff voluntarily re-dedicate themselves to their mission working in a Catholic school.
- The highest standards of moral and ethical behaviour are promoted through the clear and consistent communication of the school's expectations and are embodied in the school's aims. The termly newsletter contains many examples of the realisation of these aims in the commitment of pupils to charitable work, retreats and liturgical events.
- High standards of behaviour are rooted in the teachings of the Church and embody personal responsibility and the need for justice and also facilitate healing and reconciliation. Pupils mix well with each other as witnessed in movement around the school and in the informal morning gathering in the atrium.

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

- The leadership of the headteacher is inspirational for the whole school community. His example energises leadership at all levels and permeates this prayerful community. Governors, staff and pupils speak unreservedly of the Catholic ethos as the prime motivator of the success of the school.
- The provision for the Catholic Life of the school is given the highest possible priority by leaders. Effective systems which rigorously monitor and evaluate the Catholic Life of the school are led by the headteacher. This leads to well targeted, planned improvements which allow the Catholic Life to flourish. Leaders place emphasis on the evaluation of the Catholic Life of the school by pupils.
- A spirituality development plan highlights the priorities and actions to develop prayer, pupil and staff formation and the liturgical and sacramental life of the school.
- The governors are pivotal to the Catholic Life of the school. They are passionate about the school's mission, provide support and challenge wherever necessary and ensure the Catholic Life is well resourced and identify opportunities for pupils to work in local parishes.

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.

- Very large numbers of pupils respond positively to a huge range of opportunities offered to explore their relationship with God, individually and as a worshipping community within and beyond the school. Worship was described by staff as 'a culture of acceptance, sharing and witness'. A practical expression of this witness is the involvement of pupils in a parish dementia centre.
- The vast majority of pupils participate in high quality liturgies throughout the Church's year and regularly prepare and lead acts of worship. Tutor group led assemblies are inspirational as seen in a year ten assembly on the theme of 'Give us this day our daily bread', providing a medium of expression to deepen spiritual awareness. Members of the school community recall uplifting and memorable events such as the Remembrance service and Lenten and Advent liturgies.
- The experience of living and working in a praying community has had a profound and visible effect on the development of pupils. Regular tutor group prayer in the chapel is enriching and all pupils participate. An atmosphere of prayerful reverence was observed during the inspection, most notably during acts of Collective Worship.
- There is a deep sense of respect for different faiths and pupils are at ease in sharing prayer with those of different faiths. A year thirteen group recently forged a link with a Buddhist monastic community as part of a faith in action project.
- Pupils have made a powerful witness to the difference a community of prayer has made to their own sense of identity, security and growth. The sudden death of a member of staff inspired pupils to express their sadness and loss through prayers which they composed and exhibited for all to read. Occasions of joy have been celebrated with messages put together to form a tree in the chapel.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship is outstanding.

- Collective Worship is central to the life of the school for pupils and staff. Prayer life revolves around a 'theme of the week' based on the gospel from the previous Sunday. Excellent resources to interpret and portray the theme are provided weekly for tutors by the lay chaplain, helping to stimulate prayer and reflection.
- Prayer and worship is an integral feature of the life of the school. Each morning begins

with prayer in tutor groups, assemblies and staff briefings. A weekly Mass, celebrated by local clergy, is led by a form group with preparations, including a rehearsal, arranged two weeks in advance organised by the lay chaplain. The thoroughness of this approach enhances the understanding and enjoyment of the liturgy.

- The search for excellence extends to the time, thought and effort put into ensuring outstanding provision for Collective Worship which has a clear purpose, message and direction. Major occasions in the school calendar are celebrated with Mass or a formal liturgy, creating memorable acts of worship to mark Lent and Advent and the start and conclusion of the school year. In 2015, the end of year Mass focused on the celebration of the different cultures in the school community and achievements recorded during the year.
- The school prides itself on the creativity of its prayer styles. More traditional forms such as the rosary are sometimes used but pupils also express personal thoughts in prayer to reflect their own concerns. The chapel located in the centre of the school is visited by pupils and staff to engage in private prayer and reflection.

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

- Leaders and managers demonstrate a high level of skill and commitment which secures meaningful and quality Collective Worship for the community. The respectful and willing participation of pupils in the many opportunities for worship is testimony to the high quality provision, regular monitoring and effective evaluation of Collective Worship. The largely positive pupil feedback via questionnaires, for example, is used to guide planning by leaders and managers.
- The headteacher manages the director of ethos who in turn manages the lay chaplain so that there is a direct flow of information about this most crucial area of school life. The passionate and high profile role of the lay chaplain and director of ethos energises Collective Worship and inspires pupils and staff. Staff expressed confidence in preparing and delivering acts of worship and leading prayer.
- Staff are very receptive to training and formation sessions such as one recently led by a speaker from the Jesuit Institute. New staff receive induction on the school's Catholic ethos from the headteacher and all staff are encouraged to attend retreats and diocesan events. Six members of staff are currently completing the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (CCRS).
- The headteacher and senior leaders lead and attend assemblies and daily acts of worship. As well as sharing in the worship, they have immediate insight into the quality of the provision which helps, therefore, to inform future planning. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation is a hallmark of the school and combined with the expert knowledge and skills of leaders and managers helps to sustain and develop outstanding Collective Worship.
- Evaluation of Collective Worship is thorough and regular. Major events such as the Mission are reviewed by pupils and staff. Each liturgical season is reviewed to determine the efficacy of Collective Worship and to identify areas for improvement.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1

- 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.

- Pupils really enjoy Religious Education and are totally committed to their learning. There is an outstanding attitude to learning which was evident in all lessons observed during the inspection. Pupils were relaxed, focused, confident and freely volunteered how much they enjoyed lessons and were even excited by the experience. Expectations are always high.
- Lessons proceed without interruption and pupils are enthused and challenged. A year ten group, being introduced to the work of St Thomas Aquinas, revealed a genuine interest and were invited to increase their knowledge and interest with an extension exercise.
- The vast majority of pupils make progress within lessons and over time. In 2015, 94% of pupils made 3 levels of progress, key stage two – key stage four, rating this as outstanding. Attainment is equally impressive: 89% of pupils gained A*-C with 43% recording A*-A. This performance ranks very high both locally and nationally. Disadvantaged groups are also making progress above national averages.
- At key stage three, the vast majority of pupils make significant progress within lessons and over time as verified by work scrutiny and observations of learning.
- At key stage five, Religious Studies is the most popular subject choice, increasing its appeal year on year. In 2015, there was 100% pass rate at both A and AS levels. Valued added scores are at least in line with other subjects.
- The General Religious Education NOCN course is rigorous and motivates pupils. Progress is positive and in line with national expectations. Pupil feedback illustrated how much they valued the course.

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

- The outstanding outcomes in Religious Education are only to be expected given the outstanding teaching and assessment evident within the department.
- According to school records, the learning observed in the last two years was at least good and the majority outstanding. This was verified during the inspection.
- Teachers communicate high expectations, a passion for the subject and excellent subject knowledge. Pupils were observed as being eager and confident in their learning. In a year twelve lesson, questioning by the teacher was challenging and

tested that progress was being made. Questioning was a considerable strength in other lessons and revealed the depth of knowledge acquired by pupils. Timed activities were especially successful in creating pace as well as allowing progress checks.

- Homework is regularly set, helping to consolidate pupils' learning and stretching and challenging the most able.
- Celebration of achievement in the department is scheduled each term. 'Religious Education Champions' are identified for significant work and their names are displayed on the Religious Education corridor.
- Planning and assessment are rigorous, fit for purpose and contribute significantly to pupil progress. Books sampled from every key stage showed marking and feedback of the highest quality, with detailed and helpful teacher comments. Green pen corrections were evident throughout and with peer and self-assessment, demonstrating clear dialogue between pupil and teacher with the intention of securing outstanding progress.
- Inspectors were deeply impressed by the quality of schemes of work, shared resources and lesson plans – which are used as examples of outstanding practice with other colleagues in this high performing school.

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

- The self-evaluation of Religious Education by leaders and managers is a coherent reflection of rigorous monitoring, searching analysis and constant self-challenge informed by best practice in Religious Education. Regular learning walks by school leaders are used to monitor the work of the department and findings shared with staff. Teaching and learning is the priority item of departmental meetings where good practice is shared and effective use of resources is communicated.
- Pupils are invited to comment on their learning and how it could be enhanced. At the request of pupils, more group work has been incorporated into lessons and is a regular strategy for learning.
- The leadership of Religious Education is informed by a high level of expertise and commitment with a relentless focus on improvement. The headteacher line manages the head of department, meeting regularly to monitor the work of the department. The head of department is a member of the Diocesan sixth form festival group, the sacrament of confirmation working party, a teacher on the CCRS course and a diocesan inspector.
- The imaginative and stimulating Religious Education curriculum is skilfully designed to match the full range of pupil needs and to ensure highly effective continuity and progression in learning. The assimilation and implementation of the new Religious Education curriculum is currently a major pre-occupation for the school in order to maintain the success and popularity of the subject.
- Sacramental preparation is incorporated into schemes of work for relevant year groups. The new confirmation course is integral to the teaching of year eight.
- The effectiveness of the department in promoting the study of Religious Education post-16 has led to a dramatic increase in numbers. The thorough scrutiny across the department ensures pupils of all abilities are carefully monitored and intervention made to aid learning and progress. A declared priority is to continue to raise

outcomes post-16.

- The timetable provision for Religious Education in all year groups is in line with the requirements of the Bishops' Conference.

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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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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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

1

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

1

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education.

1

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

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SCHOOL DETAILS

School name	St Mary's Catholic School
Unique reference number	140081
Local authority	Newcastle
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	Fr M Conaty
Choose School Leadership Type	Headteacher Mr J Foster
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