



DIOCESE OF
SHREWSBURY

**REPORT ON THE
MONITORING INSPECTION
OF OUTSTANDING SCHOOLS**

**St Nicholas Catholic High School,
Hartford**

URN: 111450

DfE Number: 8964610

18th May 2017

Inspector – Mr J McCann

The areas of focus in this monitoring inspection were :-

1. **OUTCOMES FOR PUPILS** - How well pupils achieve and enjoy learning in Religious Education
2. **LEADERS AND MANAGERS** – How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school and plan and implement improvement of outcomes for pupils.
3. **PROVISION** – The quality of Collective Worship

The school's most recent Self Evaluation judges that its **Overall Effectiveness** is **Outstanding** and supports these judgements with comprehensive evidence. This overall judgement is **confirmed** through Section 48 Monitoring Inspection and the following comments summarise findings in the aspects of the key areas identified above.

OUTCOMES FOR PUPILS

Standards of achievement in Religious Education are judged good overall with very high outcomes in the majority of areas. There is effective analysis and monitoring of academic performance with positive intervention strategies carried out in each key stage. The standard pupils achieve at GCSE RE are consistently well above national average and girls' performance at the highest levels is in line with the outstanding standards achieved in other core subjects. The evidence provided indicates a sustained level of pupil progress and achievement in each key stage. GCSE results in RE over the last 3 academic years show 75%-80% of the whole year cohort achieving an A*-C grade, with more than 23%-31% achieving an A*-A grade. The school has confirmed that the departmental actual targets for 2017 results are consistent with previous performance. The department enters all students for examination and all consistently achieve an A*-G grade.

A three-year GCSE course begins in the summer term of year 9 that allows opportunities for development, linkage and reinforcement of topics. From learning walks book scrutiny, responses to pupil questionnaires and interviews with pupils it is evident that the pupils in each key stage are keen to do well, display an engaged and positive attitude to the subject and work with interest and engagement in lessons. Pupils speak very positively about the subject, especially, studying different religions and discrimination in KS3, the nature and range of contemporary moral issues studied in key stage 4, and Philosophy A level. A level Philosophy is a popular subject and pupils achieve well, always at or above their other subject outcomes.

Pupils appreciate the atmosphere created in class, the willingness of staff to support them and the encouragement for them. Pupils gain a good understanding of the beliefs and traditions of Catholicism while also engaging with the broader spiritual, moral, cultural and social issues of contemporary society. This is all underpinned by the frequent opportunities that exist beyond the classroom for pupils to be involved with many local national and international charities. Many opportunities exist for pupils to take part in residential retreats throughout their school career. The school's crest, motto, Mission Statement and form names are introduced to all students through RE in Year 7 and revisited each year and are a recurrent theme in each classroom, public space and documentation throughout the school.

LEADERS AND MANAGERS

The Headteacher, senior leadership team and governing body are deeply committed to the Church's mission in education. The commitment to these values, in which academic and personal growth are so important, is evidenced in the school's policy documents and practices and its effective leadership, management and governance. There is unequivocal and explicit evidence that the Catholic mission of the school is a priority, along with opportunities for spiritual and moral development and collective worship. This is most clearly evidenced through the appointment of an effective dedicated lay chaplain whose impact is acknowledged throughout the school at all levels. The commitment of all to the provision of a chapel to accommodate whole class groups and the allocation of an appropriate budget to support chaplaincy provides further evidence of this commitment.

There is effective monitoring of academic performance and appropriate intervention strategies undertaken by the Head of the RE department. RE department staff are all engaged in the 'Open Doors' and 'Developing Together' school initiatives to further enhance Learning and Teaching. The department until recently was line managed by a member of the SLT, this role has now been taken by the recently appointed Headteacher, who is also line manager for the lay chaplain. The RE department is also offered support by a link member of the governing body. The Catholic life of the school is monitored and reviewed by the SLT, governors and the chaplain as well as the pastoral team.

On taking up his post in April this year the Headteacher has overseen the production of an updated Catholic Mission Development Plan to supersede the existing plan. The new plan is ambitious and extensive, touching on all aspects of school life. The governing body, extended SLT and lay chaplain are all fully supportive of the plan and determined to drive forward each of the prioritized objectives.

Parental, pupil and staff opinion is sought through questionnaires, and the student council; results are analysed and impact upon the processes of evaluation and planning. Where concerns are raised the new leadership team is actively seeking openness and is not afraid to ask the hard questions. Parental support for the school's values and attitudes, as well as academic RE is very strong. 95% of respondents said that their child enjoyed school and they were made to feel welcome. Staff are overwhelmingly proud to be members of the school, and believe the school to be well led and managed.

Classroom observations are regular, accurate and well documented. Prayer and reflection are an integral part of school life, starting in the chapel each morning before school begins inviting students and staff to join in reflection and silent meditation. Form and whole year assembly provision are subject to regular informal monitoring by the lay chaplain, senior managers and pastoral leaders. This area could be further developed. There is general pride in what the school represents and the pupils are extremely positive in support of this.

PROVISION

Collective Worship, in its many forms, is central to the daily life of the school and forms a key part of every school celebration. The organisation of the provision is a strength of the school as it has involved so many senior leaders, thereby providing strength and depth – the new Headteacher is now the effective line manager for two of the strands of provision as it is seen as a central aspect of his recent appointment and a measure of his commitment. Praise, celebration and affirmation are a significant feature in the life of the school, as evidenced through interviews, pupils' books, many questionnaire responses and the school calendar of events liturgical and pastoral.

The school has a dedicated lay chaplain to promote, deliver and facilitate the development of Collective Worship across each year group and provide support for staff and pupils. The lay chaplain provides prayer and reflection materials every day for all form tutors to use. This element of school provision is very effective, valued, well developed and firmly integrated into the life and practice of pupils and staff. Morning Prayer, every day before school begins, is an excellent example of the work the school is engaged in, in developing the prayer life of pupils and staff. Members of the senior leadership team also work closely with the lay chaplain and pastoral leaders in leading year group Acts of Collective Worship. Collective worship and prayer are an integral part of the daily life of the school, as are planned opportunities to receive the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation, with a sympathetic appreciation of the opportunities given to those of different denominations and faiths.

The school is actively and positively engaged with a number of priests in the parishes it serves and welcomes their significant contribution to the Catholic life of the school. The commitment of the staff, governors and senior leaders is also evidenced in the many opportunities throughout their school career that pupils have to go on residential retreats. These activities are linked to practical experiences and challenges that enrich the students' spiritual, moral and cultural education, through charitable fund raising e.g. CAFOD, Caritas, Children in Hospital, supporting local foodbanks and working with other diocesan Catholic schools as part of Mini DASH.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

St. Nicholas lives its mission statement. Outcomes for pupils are good, the provision for Catholic Education, leadership and management in the development of the Catholic life of the school are confirmed by this inspection as outstanding. The mission of the school is clearly evidenced throughout in terms of practice, aspiration and relationships, all in the context of striving for the highest academic achievement.

IMPROVEMENT SINCE THE LAST INSPECTION

- The appointment of a lay school chaplain.
- The strength and depth of the 'Catholic Life Team' of senior leaders
- A consistently applied and effective marking and assessment policy is in place, based on a whole school policy.
- Departmental lesson observations and sharing of good practice firmly embedded.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to maintain and enhance the progress of the school even further it is recommended that the school:

- **conduct a full school review of the Vision and Mission statement engaging all new stakeholders**
- **continue to develop effective strategies to raise boys achievement at the highest levels in KS3 and KS4 – in line with girls attainment.**
- **decouple Y12 and Y13 SME provision and ensure full attendance for this core area of the VI form curriculum.**