



Our Lady and St Thomas' RC Primary

Cumberland Terrace, Willington, Co Durham, DL15 0PB

School Unique Reference Number: **8402425**

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| Inspection dates: | 18 – 19 November 2014 |
| Lead inspector: | Liz O'Hehir |

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| 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

Our Lady and St Thomas' RC Primary is an outstanding Catholic school because:

- The Catholic Life of the school is outstanding. Governors, leaders and staff have high expectations and a shared vision for the Catholic mission and ethos of the school with pupils' well-being, personal and spiritual development being at the heart of it.
- The quality of Religious Education is outstanding. Teaching is outstanding and this enthuses pupils and enables them to make very good progress. Pupils are passionate about Religious Education and committed in their learning.
- The quality of Collective Worship is outstanding. Leaders and staff, through exemplary modelling and skilful guidance have enabled pupils to take the initiative in leading the community in prayer. Pupils' response to Collective Worship is outstanding. Their engagement and enjoyment is overt.

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

- Our Lady and St Thomas' is a smaller than average primary school.
- It is a popular school and is currently over-subscribed.
- It has four classes of mixed age groups. Class 1 (early years foundation stage and year one), Class 2 (years one, two and three), Class 3 (years three, four and five), and Class 4 (years five and six).
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is higher than average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is average.
- Most pupils are from a White British background. A small proportion of pupils are learning English as an additional language.
- The school has achieved Rights Respecting School Level 2 Status, Investors in Children and has an International Schools Award.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Maintain the drive for continuous improvement in assessment of Religious Education by:
 - Embedding the use of "Can I ..." statements and continued involvement and engagement with emerging diocesan guidance.

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 mission statement is central to the life of the school and embraced by all. It was recently consulted upon, taking into account views of pupils and therefore they have ownership of it and feel valued.
- Pupils have a deep-sense of belonging to their school family and are very proud of their reputation in the community, seeing themselves as ambassadors whenever they are wearing their school uniform. Their behaviour is exemplary.
- Pupils take full advantage of the opportunities the school provides for their personal and spiritual growth. Pupils are happy and confident. One pupil described the distinctiveness of a Catholic school as giving... “a sense of freedom in being able to pray”. Pupils care for each other and older pupils take very seriously their roles as Buddies, school councillors and “Mini-Vinnies” because, “Jesus tells us to love each other.”
- They are regularly and enthusiastically involved in parish and diocesan celebrations. Links with the parish and parents are strong with the school as the hub of the community. Numbers at Mass are growing as a result of this. Pupils value prayer and understand that support for others does not always have to be of a financial nature.
- Pupils understand that others are not as fortunate as themselves and the importance of having respect for and how to treat each other regardless of faith tradition. They have a very strong sense of social justice. The school has extensive links locally and globally and has been awarded “Rights Respecting School” Level 2 status. Older pupils are acutely aware of the impact religious conflict can have through their involvement in a project to support a Catholic community in Pakistan.

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

- The provision for the Catholic Life of the school has the highest priority. It is reflected in the mission statement and school improvement plan and this is lived out by all in this family community. This is a very prayerful and joyful school where mutual respect and shared mission is owned and practised by all.
- Displays, artefacts, sacred spaces, together with the reflection garden, engage pupils’ hearts and minds. They provide a stimulating environment that reflects the school’s Catholic character.

- Clear policies and procedures are in place and there is explicit commitment to the most vulnerable and needy. The quality of relationships throughout the school is evidence of the strong sense of family and pastoral support for pupils, staff and families. This was reaffirmed in discussions with pupils, staff and parents who related personal and sometimes emotional accounts of support they had received.
- Pastoral programmes, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) are well planned and celebrate Catholic teachings and principles. They cater for the needs of all pupils and are skilfully taught.
- Senior leaders promote the highest standard of moral and ethical behaviour deeply rooted in Gospel values and teachings of the Catholic Church. This permeates the school and as a result, behaviour of pupils is exemplary.

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

- There is a deep commitment from all leaders to the Church's Mission. They lead by example, acting as a source of inspiration to the whole community. They are very active and visible in both school and parish and ensure pupils are given the very best experiences in order to grow in faith and spirituality.
- School self-evaluation is rigorous and robust. This leads to well-planned improvements. The Catholic ethos is palpable throughout the school and as such there is a great sense of naturalness conveyed in everything that goes on.
- School, home and parish work very closely together. The inclusive and welcoming nature of the school, together with outstanding pastoral care and effective communication have led to increasing numbers of parents engaging with the school and returning to church.
- Governors make a very significant contribution to the Catholic Life of the school. They are passionate about the school's mission and their role. They are actively involved in evaluating Catholic Life, ensuring that the pupil is always at the heart of what they do. They provide appropriate challenge and support when required.

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.

- Pupil engagement and enjoyment of Collective Worship is undisguised. They are inspired and enthusiastic and this ensures the highest quality response. Singing, participation in prayers and responses are appropriately joyful and reverent.
- Pupils understand the importance of prayer and express the centrality of it in their lives. As they move through school, pupils take increasing responsibility for choosing and preparing resources, planning and the delivery of prayerful worship experiences. Older pupils independently prepare and lead worship based on ethos statements of Nurturing Human Wholeness or other fitting themes of their choosing. They use scripture, silence, artefacts, music and other forms of prayer to engage their peers in a powerful way.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of the Church's liturgical year, its seasons and feasts. For older pupils, this is outstanding.
- Pupils have a deep sense of social justice and a well-developed understanding of other faiths which contributes positively to their outstanding spiritual and moral development.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship is outstanding.

- Worship and prayer is at the heart of this school. Praying together is a natural part of daily life for all staff and pupils. Collective Worship has a clear purpose to support each pupil on their own journey of faith.
- There is a well-planned programme of Masses, liturgies, assemblies and other liturgical celebrations, matched to pupils' stages of development. This allows pupils to participate in a range of acts of worship including voluntary lunchtime prayer groups such as Mini-Vinnies and Rosary Club which are extremely popular.
- Staff are very skilled at guiding pupils so that they can have a deeper experience of prayer and worship. They have an excellent understanding of what constitutes outstanding Collective Worship and ensure there is a progression of skills from early years foundation stage to year six. As a result, pupils have been taught to plan and effectively deliver worship using high quality resources.
- Families are involved in pupils' religious development through the many celebrations and special events they attend. They speak highly of these occasions. Resources such as "The Wednesday Word", which, they report, their children insist they share with them, and seasonal artefacts like Travelling Cribs encourage further engagement.

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

- The headteacher and Religious Education coordinator have excellent knowledge of how to plan and deliver quality Collective Worship and ensure this is shared with staff. As role models and inspirational leaders, their dedication and commitment is instrumental in the drive to provide high quality Collective Worship across the school that meets the needs of each child in their care.
- Leaders and managers have a thorough understanding of the Church's liturgical year, its seasons, rites and symbols, as a result Collective Worship is delivered in a way that is relevant to pupils in a contemporary context using a range of skills and high quality resources.
- Collective Worship has a high priority in the school improvement plan and is included in staff performance management objectives. It is very well resourced and focused professional development has ensured that Collective Worship is outstanding.
- Leaders and governors have developed a rigorous monitoring and evaluation system for Collective Worship. There is a shared commitment to continuous improvement. Parents and pupils are consulted regularly about the quality of their experiences and report very favourably on them.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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- 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 are passionate about Religious Education. They enjoy it immensely and many view it as their favourite lesson. They particularly appreciate the range of teaching strategies used by teachers to engage and enthuse them. As a result, pupils concentrate well and behaviour for learning is outstanding.
- Teachers have high expectations of their pupils. They know them well and have an accurate understanding of their starting points. Work is differentiated and tasks are well-matched to pupils' age and ability.
- Religious Education is at the heart of the school curriculum. It is taught both discretely and in a cross-curricular way. Pupils acquire knowledge quickly and in depth, linking their learning in religious education to other subjects. They are able to interpret sources and symbols, to understand nuance and subtlety enabling them to reflect on their learning. The vast majority of pupils engage with religious ideas and integrate them into their daily lives.
- There are no perceivable differences between different groups of pupils. As a result almost all pupils are making rapid and sustained progress.
- Due to the state of transition in level expectations across all diocesan schools, the current averages for attainment and progress are not reliable benchmarks. Therefore, no judgement will be made in this report against diocesan averages for either attainment or progress.

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

- Teaching is always good with outstanding features and the majority is outstanding. They employ a wide range of teaching strategies, media and environments to enthuse pupils.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, know their pupils very well and have a high level of confidence and expertise. Teaching assistants are used very effectively to support individual and group learning and they are fully involved in planning and evaluating Religious Education. All adults use questioning skilfully and maintain good pace in order to promote learning and to challenge thinking.
- The school uses the 'Come and See' curriculum for Religious Education and has successfully developed a rolling programme to incorporate both mixed age and mixed phase groups of children in the school. Planning is based on systematic assessment and a thorough understanding of pupils' starting points. Lessons have a clear focus and as a result pupils

acquire knowledge very quickly and are very secure in their learning. Teachers critically evaluate their lessons in order to determine the next steps for individuals or groups.

- Pupils know and understand their targets through high quality teacher feedback. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning, recording it formally in their Religious Education books or Response booklets and informally, through discussion at the beginning of each lesson in this way any misconceptions are addressed and learning is deepened.

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

- Leaders and managers conduct a wide range of monitoring activities that are carefully planned to determine the impact of provision. Rigorous tracking of pupil progress ensures that no pupil is left behind and that timely action can be taken to prevent underachievement. School self-evaluation is thorough and robust and is integral to the school improvement plan. Key governors are highly visible in the school and appropriately challenge and support the leadership.
- Leaders provide excellent role models for their colleagues. Their knowledge of best practice and current developments in Religious Education ensure that staff are increasingly skilled and share the vision for continuous improvement. The Religious Education coordinator supports teachers in planning the highest quality experiences to meet pupils' needs and ensure learning and progression.
- The personal and professional integrity of the leadership inspire whole-hearted commitment from staff, pupils and parents. Consequently, Religious Education not only has a high profile, it is at the heart of the curriculum and daily school life. The wide range of links that the school has both globally and nationally provide outstanding enrichment activities to promote pupil's learning and engagement having a profound impact on pupils' moral and spiritual development.
- Religious Education is very well resourced and meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference fully.
- Sacramental preparation is outstanding and carried out in accordance with diocesan policy.

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.

1

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:

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

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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

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| School name | Our Lady and St Thomas' RC Primary |
| Unique reference number | 8402425 |
| Local authority | Durham |
| This Inspection Report is produced for the Rt. Reverend Séamus Cunningham the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle Diocese, (c.f. Code Canon Law, 804, 806), and for the Governing Body of the school (Education Act 2005, Section 48). The inspection schedule follows criteria set by the National Board of Advisers and Inspectors. | |
| Chair of governors | Alison Aisbitt |
| Head teacher | Frances Gowland |
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