



St John's School and Sixth Form College

Woodhouse Lane, Bishop Auckland, DL14 6JT

School Unique Reference Number: **137702**

Inspection dates:	15 – 16 June 2015
Lead inspector:	Tony McCourt
Team inspector:	Rachael Blackburn

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 John's School and Sixth Form College is an outstanding Catholic school because:

- The school's mission of a "Learning community" guided by Gospel values is at the heart of all aspects of school life. Love and respect are central to this vision: love of self, unconditional love for others and love of learning. Leadership at all levels drives the ethos of the school and makes the Gospel in action explicit in the life of the school. Mutual respect underpins strong positive relationships, engenders a sense of justice for all and ensures care for the most vulnerable.
- There are varied opportunities for prayer and reflection. There is a high level of engagement by pupils, responding willingly, reverently and with confidence to a range of quality liturgical experiences. The range and variety of stimulating displays and religious artefacts around the school are constant reminders of the school's mission.
- The Religious Education department provides a challenging and imaginative programme to effectively maximise learning opportunities. Progress and attainment of pupils at all levels is outstanding.

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

- St John's is a larger than average Catholic secondary school located in Bishop Auckland in the south west of County Durham.
- Pupils come from a wide spectrum of social and economic backgrounds, the majority travelling from districts remote from the school.
- The proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities is well below average.
- The number eligible for pupil premium is below average.
- Numbers of pupils supported through school action and school action plus and through statements of special or additional needs is below average.
- The number of looked after pupils is below average.
- St John's converted to an academy in December 2011. The headteacher is a National Leader in Education.
- St John's is a founder member of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle partnership of schools.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Continue to provide an accessible, relevant and stimulating general Religious Education course in the sixth form by:
 - reviewing the current provision and finding a suitable alternative course in response to the demise of wider key skills.
- Improve Collective Worship by:
 - exploring ways of finding accommodation to increase the number of key stage or whole school Masses to enable larger groupings of the school community to share the celebration of the Eucharist.

CATHOLIC LIFE

THE QUALITY OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

1

- 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.

1

1

1

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- The vast majority of students have a deep sense of belonging and accept the commitment of taking a leading role in those activities which promote the school's Catholic ethos and shape its mission within the wider community.
- Strong emphasis is placed on the development of leadership at all levels and is exemplified in the contribution by students to the organisation of liturgies, Masses, daily acts of worship, charity events, sporting and musical occasions. In recognition of voluntary work, for example, in projects in Peru, Lourdes and the local community, St John's has secured Leadership Academy status.
- One parent identified the distinguishing characteristics of St John's as being inclusivity and care, exemplified by the student welfare team, nurture groups, the Haggrid programme to build self-esteem of vulnerable students and the Capernaum Centre for challenging students.
- There is mutual respect harnessed through a clear focus on the Gospel values of reconciliation, love and respect, ensuring behaviour at all times and in all places is exemplary.
- The vast majority of students are involved in the planning and preparation of Masses, assemblies and special celebrations throughout the year such as the Remembrance Day service.
- Students across all key stages have an extensive extra-curricular programme and are actively encouraged to use their God given talents to represent St John's. Arts projects, drama and music events enable students to develop their skills and talents promoting St John's ethos within the wider community e.g. Guys and Dolls, The Sound of Music, performances at the Sage and Gala theatre, exhibitions at Durham Cathedral, the National Glass Centre and Auckland Castle.
- Day and residential retreats provide valuable opportunities for students to reflect on what it means to be part of a learning community guided by Gospel values. These afford opportunities for students to grow in their faith.
- A strong sense of justice for all is embedded within the school community. Local and global initiatives centre upon caring for others e.g. Cafod, RNIB Week, Macmillan coffee mornings, Butterwick Hospice visits, aid to the Phillipines and evidence of the work is included in newsletters and displayed on notice boards.
- International projects in Lourdes and Peru allow students to provide emotional, pastoral and practical help for the less fortunate.

- Within school, older students work with younger members to assist in adjusting to new challenges e.g. buddy and mentor, paired reading and student leader schemes.
- Almost all students, no matter where they are on their faith journey, support each other in times of need and value the compassion experienced by being part of the community of St John's. Students and staff recall with emotion the comfort and solace derived from the celebration of the lives of a student killed in a road accident and a teacher's son lost on active service in Afghanistan.
- All members of the school community, as well as visitors, are immediately aware that they are entering a vibrant Catholic community. This is evidenced in the student designed stained glass windows, artefacts and art work e.g. the Call to be Saints, Lourdes and St John's banners. In the chapel, Stations of the Cross, which have been designed by the students themselves together with an outside artist, add to the prayerful atmosphere and calmness. The recently constructed Memorial Garden is another resource for the community to remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

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

- Respect and support for one another, embracing diversity and celebrating individual talents and success, creates a community that is attentive to the needs of all.
- The mission statement underpins all aspects of the life of the community of St John's: social justice, peace, reconciliation, love of one's neighbour, love of the environment and prioritising action for those in need are inculcated into the life of the school.
- Each person is valued and seen as unique and created in the image and likeness of God. The year eight assembly during the inspection allowed students to demonstrate their musical ability while one student reinforced the gospel message by showing his dexterity with a Rubik's cube to the whole of his year group.
- A stimulating learning environment, making effective use of new technologies, is used to deliver a curriculum that responds to the interests and needs of learners.
- Staff lead the young people in their faith journey. Staff are committed to supporting the ethos of St John's and accomplish its mission statement. Attendance at staff retreats and at the weekly Mass and the leading of reflections bear witness to the commitment of staff to the spiritual life of the school.
- The strength of relationships is a key feature of the daily interaction of the life at St John's. Relationships between all members of the community are excellent. Students remark about the determination of the teachers for them to achieve their potential. For example, a challenging student celebrated his success at St John's with Mass at his own request with staff and students that he personally invited.
- Staff and students are passionate about the joyful experience of living and working at St John's. Teaching and support staff frequently commented during the inspection about the positive and fulfilling experience of working in the school.
- Achievement is celebrated in awards evenings, assemblies, as well as newsletters and visual displays.
- The chaplain, Religious Education department and pastoral leaders all provide resources to support the work of pastoral tutors in helping students along their faith journey. Reflections, prayers and other materials to support Collective Worship are regularly available on the school virtual learning environment (VLE). There is a strong sense of collective responsibility for this aspect of school life.
- Clear policies and structures are in place which lead to outstanding pastoral care. The welfare team ensure that students feel supported in their day to day school life.
- The pastoral programme is continuously updated to reflect the context of the changing

world in which students live. Recent themes have included alcohol awareness and anti-bullying strategies.

- Teaching and support staff are deployed effectively to best meet the needs of all students. In particular, the learning support staff are responsible for running the breakfast club and homework club, providing structure for all students before and after school.
- The Capernaum Centre provides a structured system to enable students to take time out and reflect upon their behaviour and make supported plans for the future. There is a clear system of reintegration to ensure students have the best chance of a positive outcome.
- Care for the most vulnerable is an important aspect of the work of St John's. Students are identified through links with the primary schools and a clear programme of support and care is put in place, e.g. students who need extra attention are given a key worker who follows their transition.
- Staff feel supported in their faith journey, their work life and their family life. St John's bases all behavioural policies on the Gospel values of justice, forgiveness and love. Students and staff are treated with respect and are valued as key members of the community.
- Students are encouraged to take personal responsibility for their actions and always reflect on the consequences for others.

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

- The centrality of the Catholic ethos is exhibited in the school's improvement priorities focusing on the development and enrichment of the school spiritually. The leadership team continuously monitors, evaluates and reflects upon the ways in which the Catholic Life of the school is lived out in St John's and making it the primary focus in the learning improvement programme and school self-evaluation form.
- The leadership team is deeply committed to leading the school community according to Gospel values which emphasise the development of skills and talents "which help us to become what God has called us to be".
- Governors are actively involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the Catholic Life of the school. They receive reports at termly governors' meetings which inform future planning priorities. They participate in Religious Education learning observations. Through their extensive knowledge of and involvement in school life, they are able to challenge school leaders and exert a powerful influence on future developments.
- Students and staff work together in shaping the school's mission. Each member is supported to become the best person they can be through a range of spiritual opportunities, academic enrichment and outstanding extra-curricular activities.
- Relationships with parents are excellent. Parents and carers willingly voice their strong support for the school. They are passionate in their support of the school's mission and the benefits it brings to their sons and daughters.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

1

- 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.

1
1
1

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship is outstanding.

- Acts of worship are inspiring and ensure the interest and respectful participation of students. Without instructions from staff, students enter assemblies calmly and compose themselves to a background of religious music provided by their peers. The theme of the weekly year group assembly is thoughtfully introduced and developed by an assistant headteacher with students leading prayers and delivering readings, listened to attentively and with engagement.
- Students volunteer to participate in liturgies and Masses and openly express their appreciation. The students particularly revealed how emotional they felt during Remembrance Day liturgies and those for deceased members of the school community.
- A range of daily acts of worship, which centre on a theme of the week, include tutor and student led prayers, Gospel based reflections, music and other inspirational activities.
- Students actively plan and deliver a range of liturgies. One student requested a leaving Mass for himself and close friends and invited staff to mark his own transformation in his time at the school and moving to a new phase in his life.
- Regular student retreats, especially at the Emmaus Centre, are embedded in each year group and are well attended. These opportunities are valued by students for building relationships and offering moments of reflection.
- Students of all age groups are enthusiastic about participating in liturgical events and celebrations both in school and within the diocese. Student art work is displayed as part of the 'Spirited Arts' event in Durham Cathedral and an inspirational painting of Christ's crucifixion, created by an A level student, was prominently featured in the main entrance to the school.
- Students are imaginative in their use of resources which aid both communal prayer and reflection. Religious banners, candle holders and purple crosses made by students are much in evidence at liturgies and around the school.
- Students and staff are quick to recall care and understanding afforded to them in times of distress and vulnerability and reinforced through Mass and special liturgies.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship is outstanding.

- High quality Collective Worship is central to the life of the school and is the focal point of every school celebration.
- A variety of opportunities is given for periods of stillness and reflection. Feedback from retreat programmes for students and staff highlights the value of opportunities for reflection.
- Collective Worship is clearly based around themes, particularly the Sunday Gospel. During the inspection, the parable of the mustard seed was the focus of an assembly and was referenced in class prayers.
- One of the priests serving the school confirmed that he and his fellow priests liaise with the school leadership to ensure that the weekly form Mass, prepared by students, is always celebrated.
- The chapel is centrally located for ease of access by staff and students and is a place of tranquillity and reverence thus affording opportunity for private prayer as well as gatherings for Mass and liturgies for small groups.
- The Church's liturgical calendar is central to the planning of Collective Worship, in particular, the weekly led leadership assemblies.
- In addition, there is a flexibility allowed by leadership which encourages students to suggest themes for worship and reflection, ensuring they are accessible to any denomination or religious belief.
- Where appropriate, parents join in liturgical celebrations in school. The recent year eleven leavers' liturgy attracted an exceptionally large number of parents.

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

- The leadership team, heads of year, members of the Religious Education department and the school chaplain promote an excellent understanding of the Church's liturgical heritage which they share with staff and students.
- The school chaplain plans and delivers retreat days with the support of other key staff. The assembly rota includes suggested themes linked to the Sunday gospel and the Church's liturgical year.
- Members of the leadership team and the school chaplain plan and deliver the annual staff retreat. This is well attended each year and the focus is on the individual member of staff and the nurturing of their faith. Staff are aware of key events in the Church's liturgical seasons which knowledge they use to enhance the daily act of worship.
- Staff INSET includes regular opportunities for all staff to explore and contribute to the spiritual development of the school community so that the school's mission is constantly re-energised.
- Leaders, managers and the school chaplain are visible in assemblies and supporting the daily act of worship. They lead and contribute to student retreat days and special liturgies held throughout the year.

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.

1

1

1

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

- Students exhibit the highest levels of attention and eager participation. They see value in their work and take care in its presentation which was observed in the scrutiny of work books and folders.
- Students work well together in groups. They interact confidently, mutually support and respect each other in their learning. Lessons are enjoyed and conducted with pace and variety. During the inspection, behaviour for learning was outstanding and all learning observed proceeded without interruption.
- There is evidence of a wide range of innovative and imaginative resources and teaching strategies to stimulate students in their learning, securing outstanding progress. Lessons are differentiated for the needs of students and assessments are tailored to be accessible to each student. As a consequence, students at all levels are making above average progress. The homework programme is rigorous and focussed. Students are given clear guidance in feedback, to which they respond by making improvements where necessary.
- Observation of learning showed students confidently evaluating their own achievements. They are knowledgeable of the level descriptors and what they need to do to achieve the next level.
- Praise and affirmation, both formal and informal, are a central part of assessment strategies aiding student confidence and enjoyment in the subject.

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

- All teachers are passionate and enthusiastic in their teaching of Religious Education. The majority of lessons observed were outstanding.
- Questioning is a strength of the department as all lessons observed showed excellent techniques in using probing questions to ensure students could support their reasons and develop their arguments.
- Knowledge of the students and their abilities are at the forefront of lesson planning.
- Resources used are thoughtful, thought-provoking and up-to-date. Real life case studies provide students with a modern reflection on the Catholic faith and how it is lived out today.
- There is an effective programme of homework tasks. Variety and consistency are sustained across the key stages. Students are responsible for charting the completion of these tasks.
- Students are assessed regularly throughout the year in addition to the three diocesan assessments so they know how they are progressing and how to respond to feedback on

their work with comments indicating precisely their impact on future work.

- Clear guidance is given to students about success criteria; they know exactly what they need to do to improve.
- Lessons have a clear structure and all tasks build upon the knowledge of the students. Lesson objectives are shared with students at the start of lessons so they can review their progress at different stages. Students set their own targets regarding their future work and progress.

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

- Monitoring is rigorous; analysis is searching and informed by current best practice. The departmental development plan is clearly linked to the schools learning improvement plan.
- There is a very effective programme of lesson observations which has been used to strengthen teaching and ensure that the majority of teaching, as witnessed during the inspection, is outstanding.
- There is meticulous monitoring of students' books, lessons taught and results achieved leading to thoroughness in the knowledge of how and why students progress.
- Student voice is evident and responses are collated and reviewed and is, therefore, an additional strand in evaluating provision in Religious Education.
- Any action put in place by the head of department is monitored thoroughly and progress evaluated by senior leadership and governor link.
- The head of department leads by example with high levels of dedication focusing on outstanding provision for all students.
- Sharing best practice sessions has allowed all staff to contribute to the development of teaching and learning in the department and the school, enhancing the learning experiences of students.
- The head of department is aware of the department's strengths and areas for development. Tracking systems are in place for year groups, key stages and individual classes.
- Sixth form students enjoy a stimulating and accessible course. A review of sixth form general Religious Education will inform decisions about future provision post-16
- Students identify Religious Education as one of their favourite subjects because they enjoy success and affirmation; it is held in equally high esteem by other colleagues.
- The department takes a lead in whole school continuing professional development. Religious Education teachers also hold key whole school responsibilities including primary/secondary transition, leadership of sixth form wider key skills programme and coordination of citizenship, thus enabling their professional expertise and religious knowledge to impact on key cross-curricular areas.
- The Religious Education curriculum is imaginative and stimulating and skilfully designed to match the full range of students' needs and to ensure highly effective continuity and progression in their learning.
- The Religious Education department is in every sense at the heart of the school in terms of its academic success, the quality of leadership, its role in whole school professional development, the location of the teaching rooms and, of course, the all-embracing influence on the Catholic Life of the school community.

- Religious Education is extremely well resourced in terms of staffing, physical resources and is in line with other core curriculum subjects, including in the sixth form. It meets the requirements of the Bishop's Conference across all key stages including in the sixth form.
- Students have access to outstanding sacramental preparation in accordance with Diocesan Policy. Sacramental preparation is given high priority by leaders.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

HOW EFFECTIVE THE SCHOOL IS IN PROVIDING CATHOLIC EDUCATION:**1****CATHOLIC LIFE:****1**

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.

1

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

1

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

1

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP:**1**

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.

1

The quality of provision for Collective Worship.

1

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

1

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.

1

SCHOOL DETAILS

School name	St John's School and Sixth Form College
Unique reference number	137702
Local authority	Durham
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	Mr James S McMullan
Head teacher	Mr Gerard Moran
Date of previous school inspection	June 2010
Telephone number	01388 603246
Email address	staff@stjohnsrc.org.uk