

**DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION  
REPORT (Section 48)**

on

**THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL  
AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

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**School:** St. Mary's Catholic College

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**School URN:** 119778

**Headteacher:** Mr Stephen Tierney

**Chair of Governors:** Mr Barry Leyland

**Inspectors:** Mr Anthony Finnerty  
Mr Paul Wawszczyk

**Date of Inspection:** 23rd and 24th January 2012

The inspection report is produced for the Rt. Reverend Michael Campbell O.S.A., the Bishop of Lancaster (c.f. Code Canon Law, 804, 806), and for the Governing Body of the school (Education Act 2005, Section 48). The inspection reviews, evaluates and plans further improvements in the school's witness to the Catholic faith and Curriculum Religious Education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation.

The inspection schedule follows criteria set by the National Board of Advisers and Inspectors.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Mary's Catholic College in Blackpool caters for young people from 11 to 18 in an area of above average deprivation. It is above average size and is currently undergoing major building work for expansion and improvement under the BSF scheme. The majority of students are of White British origin, with a number of pupils from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds who are integrated into the college community. Slightly more pupils receive free school meals than is the case nationally. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to the national figure.

## FACTUAL INFORMATION

### Pupil Catchment:

Number of pupils on roll:	1183
Planned Admission Number of Pupils:	210
Percentage of pupils baptised RC:	68.0%
Percentage of pupils from other Christian denominations:	22.1%
Percentage of pupils from other World Faiths:	2.2%
Percentage of pupils with no religious affiliation:	7.7%
Percentage of pupils from ethnic groups:	12.4%
Percentage of pupils with special needs:	20.8%

### Staffing

Full time teachers:	79
Part time teachers:	8
Percentage of Catholic teachers:	39.0%

### RE Department Staffing:

Number of full time RE teachers:	11
Number of part time RE teachers:	0
Percentage of Catholic teachers:	100%
Percentage of teachers with CCRS:	45.5%

### Percentage of learning time given to RE:

Yr7	10%	Yr 10	10%
Yr8	10%	Yr 11	10%
Yr9	10%	Yr 12	17%
		Yr 13	17%

### Parishes served by the school:

St. John Vianney	237
St. Kentigern	157
St. Cuthbert	101
Holy Family	98
Christ the King	92
St. Bernadette	49
Our Lady of the Assumption	19
Others	15

## OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

**How effective the school is in providing Catholic education**

**1**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**1**

### MAIN FINDINGS

St Mary's is an outstanding Catholic College providing an education which enables students to flourish. It declares its aim to be the provision of an outstanding education of the whole person - all the evidence shows that it is fulfilling its mission. There is a friendly and welcoming atmosphere throughout the school. Mutual respect ensures a culture which encourages students "to grow in wisdom, understanding, self-esteem and closeness to God." As one student said: "in this school, everything is based on the Catholic ethos." The school's holistic approach to education, its pursuit of excellence, its care and provision for the weakest and most vulnerable and the centrality of prayer, all bear witness to its distinctive Catholic character.

Outcomes for students are at least good and sometimes outstanding at all key stages. Current and secure data provide a positive picture of student progress and achievements. The determinedly high standards set throughout the curriculum, linked to support systems and professional realism, suggest the capacity to continually improve outcomes for students is outstanding. Students value and gain profound benefit from the Catholic character of St Mary's. Relationships between staff and students are healthy and supportive. Teachers are frequently described as "firm but fair" by students. Prayer is foundational to the daily experience of all members of this inclusive Christian community and whole school liturgical celebration is valued. The excellent chaplaincy is central to the life of the college; it is valued by staff and students alike; a word frequently used to describe the chaplaincy and the service it offers is "amazing". The self-reflective character of the school leadership at all levels provides confidence of continuing improvement. Every issue highlighted in the last inspection has been successfully addressed and developed.

The strong collegial model of leadership nurtured by the headteacher is effective and transformative. Leadership is distributed across the community and this serves the development and the empowerment of each member of the college. At all levels of the school community there is a sense of ownership and an enthusiasm to play a full role in its life. Increasingly robust systems and strong structures of communication and support give confidence that there will be sustained improvement in all aspects of an already highly successful school.

Provision for Catholic education is good. The school takes care to appoint key staff capable of delivering high standards of teaching and learning and who are actively committed to the values and ethos of the college. Assessment practices are increasingly strong and rigorously implemented and this has a positive

impact on student achievement. Sound evaluation of student needs has led to innovative curriculum development for Religious Education in the Sixth Form. All assemblies are well prepared and incorporate student involvement to varying degrees. Daily prayer is supported and resourced.

### **What the school needs to do to improve further**

- Effectively employ the improved tracking systems and assessment processes to ensure that each individual is guided to achieve their best in Religious Studies at Key Stage Four.
- Provide continuing professional development opportunities for RE staff focused on consolidating good teaching and learning, and moving towards outstanding teaching and learning.
- Embed and systematise the Sixth Form General Religious Education programme which runs alongside the A level Religious Studies courses.

## **PUPILS**

### **How good outcomes are for pupils, taking particular account of variations between different groups**

<b>1</b>
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Throughout the school pupils have a positive regard for Religious Education. Learning in RE is good at all key stages with correspondingly good, and sometimes outstanding, outcomes in progress and attainment. Lessons are enjoyable and characterised by positive relationships and excellent behaviour. Students are eager to succeed and improve.

At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is good and, as students progress through each key stage, an increasing proportion are meeting or exceeding their target levels. Attainment over the last three years has been inconsistent, but generally good at GCSE. In Key Stage 5 a significant number of students take Religious Studies at A level. In 2011 all student passed and 59% gained A\* -B (giving an excellent ALPS grade 3). Overall the quality of learning for pupils with particular learning needs and/or disabilities is good and, as a consequence, pupils progress well and achieve according to expectation. Pupils from abroad are similarly well catered for. They are strongly supported by formal and informal structures. The cross-college 'PITStop' team offer a multi-disciplinary approach for the support of vulnerable students. Pupils throughout the school gain knowledge and understanding of religion and some are able to reflect on what the insights of religion can offer them in terms of the search for meaning and fulfilment.

Because pupils at St Mary's feel themselves to be members of a community, they readily participate in all areas of college life. Most pupils can express themselves with confidence; they know that their views and opinions will be treated with respect and in turn they show respect to fellow students and to staff. Pupils are eager to participate in charity events and are involved in groups that foster

spirituality and faith in action such as 'Activate,' and a vigorous Youth SVP. Care and concern for each other and for staff is apparent in the support offered by groups such as Rainbows and the variety of charities supported to assist those in need at home and abroad. Particularly noteworthy is the impact of the Student Care Team which provide peer support and are active in ensuring that vulnerable students are supported effectively in their growth and development. Students make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic life of St Mary's and benefit in significant ways by being at the school. Pupils are aware of the core values and teachings of Christianity and there is strong support for Catholic practices and worship that are offered at St Mary's.

Acts of Worship in St Mary's are well prepared and are taken seriously by staff and students. Reverence and confidence in prayer is displayed and pupils engage in worship by preparing music, readings, drama and art. Daily Prayer and assemblies are followed by classes throughout the school. Staff have a bank of resources provided by the Chaplaincy to encourage pupil participation and some tutors are eager to engage more fully in this crucial dimension of college life. Various approaches and styles of prayer and worship such as 'circle time' and prayer books for students are promoted. The chapel is a thriving hub of the community and is an appealing focus for prayer and reflection.

## **LEADERS AND MANAGERS**

### **How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the school**

<b>1</b>
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The outstanding leadership and management of senior leaders in promoting and supporting the Catholic life of the school is deeply rooted in their own personal commitment to Christ. Promoting the Catholic life of the school is given the highest priority by leaders and by managers who have made explicit the school's mission of service, enabling all members of the community to grow in faith. Religious Education is rightly placed, and seen to be placed, at the core of the curriculum. The school's staff recruitment process ensures, that from the earliest stage, everyone who is appointed makes a commitment to support the ethos of this Catholic school. The induction process for new staff also reinforces the importance of working practices which support the school mission statement.

The monitoring and evaluation of Religious Education provision is systematic, increasingly rigorous, and is targeted at securing improved outcomes for students. The in-house evaluation of teaching and learning is robust and this has led to clear priorities for development which are planned for appropriately. A strong team of specialist RE teachers work together to share ideas and to review progress. They are well led by the recently appointed head of Religious Education.

Governors are actively involved in the Catholic life of St Mary's and ensure continuous improvement through both informal monitoring and evaluation and more formal governor briefings and improvement planning. The governors know the school very well, and they speak with passion and knowledge about the

school. They are concerned that the college have an impact on the wider community and are strongly encouraging of the contribution the Chaplaincy makes to this. Governor strengths and skills are broad and are effectively deployed. They give tirelessly of their time and energy to play a full and very active role in evolving the strategic development of St Mary's.

The effectiveness of leaders in developing partnerships and in promoting Catholic learning and well-being is outstanding. Strong links have been established with schools, agencies and organisations locally, nationally and abroad, which contribute to Catholic learning, student development and well-being. The college has a role as a centre for leadership and innovation in the North West; a strong example of this would be the work with St Bernard's in Barrow. Partnerships with feeder primary schools are encouraged through transition arrangements and contacts. Links with local parishes are very good. The Chaplaincy Team is involved in helping with activities in parishes. Members of the local community use the college's sports facilities and chapel. Relationships with parents are strong.

The school is outstanding in the promotion of its vision for community cohesion. Students display sensitivity to those less privileged than themselves and commitment to working together for the Common Good. The links with primary schools and parishes are impressive. Within school there is concern, respect and hospitality towards others. Multi-cultural events, a Holocaust day as well as the PSHE curriculum, foster cohesion, as do measures to ensure that children from abroad are given all the support they need. Opportunities to experience the wider Church through visits and retreats have also been encouraged. Students in vulnerable groups are well cared for and achieve above average results in St Mary's. Parents are consulted and invited to be fully involved in the school. The service of a family support worker reaches out to vulnerable families. The strength of concern that goes beyond the community is evidenced by the charitable giving of the school as well as activities linked to Fairtrade, ecology and the Gapscheme.

## **PROVISION**

**How effective the provision is in promoting Catholic education**

<b>2</b>
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The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is good. All observed lessons showed very strong planning, were well resourced and engaged the vast majority of pupils. Provision was made in each lesson for the full breadth of ability and ingenious strategies were employed to ensure that most students were engaged in meaningful learning almost all of the time. Behaviour for learning is well managed and all of the members of the department are exemplary in their sensitive but firm handling of student behaviour. Progress in lessons is good and the students are clearly able to articulate the level at which they are currently working in Religious Education and their key stage target. Excellent use is made of ICT resources in order to stimulate student responses.

The department has made major improvement in the use of assessment data to support teaching and learning since the last inspection. The college wide SIMS based system has accelerated this progress very significantly. The use of this new system to improve individual guidance is developing rapidly. This system can serve teachers to quickly identify underachievement and to address it effectively. The department has embraced the Levels of Attainment at Key Stage 3 and is employing these with increasing expertise. Parents' questionnaires rate their own knowledge of their child's progress as well above average. The department makes good use of 'Assessment for Learning' strategies including peer and self-assessment. Significant examiner expertise within the department is put to good use in supporting standardisation within the department.

Religious Education at St Mary's is well-liked and pupils value the opportunities it gives them to explore their own faith and to respond to moral issues. They very much value the respect they are shown by the permission they have from all departmental staff to express their own opinion without fear of condemnation. The curriculum clearly meets the needs of the majority of students and is differentiated to accommodate particular student needs. An imaginative development in the provision of general RE in the Sixth Form has been initiated and has been well received by students, even at this early stage. In years 7 to 11 the requirements of the Bishops' Conference are met.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school is outstanding. It is central to the life of the school and is a key element of every formal and informal school gathering. Mass is celebrated weekly and to mark special occasions. Assemblies and prayer groups are jointly planned by students and staff and reflect a deep understanding of the Church's mission. Extra-curricular prayer and reflection opportunities are also offered at different year groups, such as the termly liturgy with SVP societies from local parishes and retreat opportunities such as those offered by Castlerigg and Tabor. Students from different faith traditions are assisted and supported in their prayer rituals. The local clergy and the school mission team work with students and staff to ensure a vibrant, varied and relevant programme of worship.

## SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1    **Outstanding**    Grade 2    **Good**    Grade 3    **Satisfactory**    Grade 4    **Unsatisfactory**

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The school's capacity for sustained improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>How good outcomes are for pupils, taking particular account of variations between different groups</b>	<b>1</b>
• how well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education	2
❖ the quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
❖ the quality of learning for pupils with particular learning needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
❖ pupils' attainment in RE	2
• the extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school	1
• how well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship	1
<b>How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the School</b>	<b>1</b>
• how well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan improvement to outcomes for pupils	1
• how well leaders and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for RE and plan for improvement to outcomes for pupils	1
• the extent to which the governing body provides effective challenge and support for the Catholic dimension of the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory and canonical responsibilities met	1
• how well leaders and managers develop partnerships with other providers, organisations and services in order to promote Catholic learning and well being	1
• how effectively leaders and managers promote community cohesion.	1
<b>How effective the provision is in promoting Catholic education</b>	<b>2</b>
• the quality of teaching and purposeful learning in Religious Education	2
• the effectiveness of assessment and academic guidance in Religious Education	1
• the extent to which Religious Education curriculum meets pupils' needs	2
• the quality of Collective Worship provided by the school	1