



St Aidan's Catholic Academy

Willow Bank Road, Sunderland, SR2 7HJ

School Unique Reference Number: **108899**

Inspection dates:	27 – 28 June 2018
Lead inspector:	Mrs Meg Bains
Team inspector:	Mr Joe Linden

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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 Aidan's Catholic Academy is an outstanding Catholic school because:

- St Aidan's is an outstanding Catholic school. The school has a strong sense of its own identity and states rightly that it offers education for the whole person. There is a warm and authentic welcome extended to all who visit the school.
- The Catholic Life of the school is outstanding. The deeply rooted religious dimension of life at St Aidan's is woven through every aspect of the community. Leaders, staff and students speak freely and intelligently about matters of community, faith and the spiritual journey.
- Outcomes for students in Religious Education are high at key stage three and four. Intelligent and creative approaches to teaching and learning ensure that pupils achieve well and enjoy their learning. Strong practice is linked to support systems and professional realism.
- Collective Worship is strong. Acts of Collective Worship are thoughtful and have meaning for the pupils. Those of differing faiths embrace the Catholic nature and are respectful of the genuine prayer life found at St Aidan's.

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

- St Aidan's is a smaller than average Catholic academy for boys aged 11-18, serving 11 Catholic parishes of Sunderland. There are 842 boys on roll, 59% of whom are baptised Roman Catholic. In recent years the ethnic mix in the background of boys has become more varied. 23% of boys are from non-white British backgrounds.
- There are 51 full-time members of staff and six part-time teachers. The school has seen a change of senior leadership since the last inspection. The new leadership has moved the school forward so that now all boys take GCSE Religious Education at the end of key stage four. Over 10% of curriculum time is allocated to the study of Religious Education in key stages three and four and 5% in key stage five. There are four full-time teachers in the Religious Education department.
- The proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals is 24% which is below the national average. The number of pupils on the school's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) register is also below the national average.
- A very recent Ofsted section five inspection awarded the school a good grade and highlighted strengths in teaching and learning, behaviour and personal development. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development were seen as effectively taught in the context of the school curriculum with the Religious Education curriculum making a strong contribution to this.
- St Aidan's sixth form shares some curriculum and teacher time with St Anthony's Catholic Academy. In September the two schools will harmonise even more closely in the sixth form.
- The school is part of the Sunderland Catholic Schools' Partnership and as such they share ethos and training days.
- St Aidan's acts as a hub for students in Sunderland who are preparing for the sacrament of confirmation. Good links with local parishes exist.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Raise attainment at key stage five by:
 - continuing to monitor closely the progress of students.
- Develop further the impact of Catholic Life in school by:
 - Looking for creative ways to further highlight the Catholic nature of the school using prominent signage and designated holy spaces both inside and outside school.
- Continue to develop Collective Worship by:
 - Creating a formal chaplaincy team, populated by staff and students.

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.

- Almost all pupils at St Aidan's have contributed to or have been involved in the evolution of the school's mission. Pupils contribute to planning and evaluating the Catholic Life and take a keen lead in this planning. A number of groups exist to carry out this function. The impact group is made up chiefly of year seven and eight pupils who consider ways of developing pupil leadership and prayer. The One Voice group meets regularly to lead, plan and evaluate the liturgical life of the school. Pupils embrace their roles fully, many taking this beyond the school gates into the wider community and parishes. In key stage five students study the importance of Catholic social justice. Boys visit local care homes and are encouraged to engage with residents and the wider community.
- The behaviour of pupils is excellent. They are full of life and alert to the needs of others, responding generously to calls on their time.
- The school's behaviour policy and practice of restorative justice is well embedded and has a very positive effect. Pupils know that they themselves will be forgiven and in turn this encourages them to understand the implications of forgiveness and more readily forgive others.
- Pupils are quick to congratulate others on their success and progress. The school's recently revived house system underpins this.
- Pupils are confident and proud to be associated with their school. Almost all pupils take advantage of the opportunities in school for personal development and emotional growth. They understand what it means to have a vocation and are quick to respond to the needs of others in the school community.
- Pupils and staff offer their help and free time in the service of others. A large number of charitable works and events occur throughout the school year. These include fundraising for CAFOD, making gifts of shoe boxes, Samaritan's Purse – Operation Christmas Child, Lenten alms and Water Aid. There is also an international dimension to the charitable work in school. India Immersion Project began in 2013 and continues as the school works in concert with the Edmund Rice international network to develop an immersion project for key stage five students. They raise money to travel to India where they support charities.
- The pupils at St Aidan's are very familiar with the history of the school. Pupils are proud of its Catholic identity and links with the local parishes and Diocese. In welcoming the Youth Ministry Team, pupils speak fondly of their trips to God camp and The Source and the inspiration they derive from such events.

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

- Central to the school is its mission statement which holds at its heart the educational mission of the Church and the Christian brothers. All staff are fully committed to the school's vision. This is evident across the whole of school life.
- Excellent relationships across the whole school community are tangible. One member of staff who is not of the Catholic faith said that the ethos of the school is the main reason she came to the school and subsequently stayed. She expressed her belief that the school is a caring, supportive community.
- Most areas of the school reflect its Catholic character strongly through signage and through some beautiful pictures and graphics, in particular in the main hall and entrance hall and at certain times of the year outdoors. This is however an area that would benefit from some upgrading in certain parts of the school.
- There are clear and effective policies for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) and relationship and sex education (RSE) which are delivered jointly by the Religious Education and Science departments. Policies are in line with the Bishops' Conference and celebrate Catholic teachings and principles.
- There is a highly effective pastoral team whose work in recent years has been instrumental in promoting good behaviour and a deep sense of respect and equality which is understood by all. Pastoral needs of pupils are met by the team who identify pupils in need of intervention and support. Staff affirm that they also feel supported and have their own needs met.
- There is a formal calendar for Catholic Life events including opportunities for personal formation of staff. Staff take a lead in their own prayer time before school and in staff briefings. Staff induction is in place.
- Senior leaders are highly visible throughout the school day and at breaks promoting the highest standards of dress and behaviour. They engage with the pupils on an individual basis demonstrating to them that they are important and underpinning the good relations that exist across the school community. The school's behaviour policy is based on forgiveness and on taking personal responsibility for one's actions. Following any detention each pupil is spoken to individually and told that they have been given a new start tomorrow. This form of restorative justice is highly effective.

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

- The strong leadership and governance at St Aidan's are deeply committed to the Church's mission in education. Leaders work with enthusiasm for their task and are a source of inspiration to other staff and pupils. Leaders have reintroduced the house system giving pupils a renewed sense of identity within the school. Highlighting ethos and school vision as central to their thinking.
- Provision for Catholic Life is given a high priority. This can be found in the rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems in school. Staff and pupils are very aware of the extensive planning and preparations that go into developing the Catholic and communal life of the school. All are involved in shaping and sharing in it. An inspirational ex-sixth form student has recently been appointed as a lay chaplain. He is working closely with senior leaders to further develop the Catholic Life of the school.

- The school engages well with parents who are supportive of the traditions and Catholic nature of the school. Parents say that good communications exist between them and school and they feel welcome and encouraged to come in to school. They feel that their children are dealt with fairly and support the behaviour policy.
- Senior leaders and governors are forward looking and ambitious for the school. They are excellent role models for the Catholic Life of the school and consistently make Catholic Life a priority. This is central to all that the governors do and is spread not only amongst the school community but also outward through their links with parish, clergy and Diocese. The governors have a clear view of all aspects of school life. They set challenges to school leaders and are actively involved in the evaluation and monitoring of Catholic Life at St Aidan's.

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.

- Pupils are highly responsive to the many opportunities given for Collective Worship. Sessions observed were moving occasions in which pupils engaged fully in pupil led talks and prayers. Pupils acted with reverence and respect and said that they were all given the opportunity to plan and/or deliver Collective Worship. These occasions engendered a real sense of belonging to a Catholic worshipping community.
- The school's impact group reviewed this area of school life and as a result rewrote the school prayer incorporating school values. This group is part of the planning and reviewing systems that occur throughout the school. Pupils are developing excellent skills of planning and delivery and interfacing with the school community.
- Examples of both large scale Collective Worship and small scale events are highlighted in the impressive liturgical calendar produced by the Religious Education curriculum leader. All teachers and classes have a copy which means the pupils are familiar with the turn of the Church's liturgical year. Staff and pupils are creative in their approaches to delivery of Collective Worship for example in concert with the Art department pupils produced their own ceramic poppies for Remembrance Day.
- The school has a beautiful chapel and tabernacle. This space is regarded as important to the pupils and is used for weekly Mass. It is also a space that all members of the school community can use for prayer and quiet reflection.
- While St Aidan's is a strongly Catholic school an awareness of the differing religious identities in school is apparent. Pupils are greatly respectful and inclusive in this regard. This is reflected in the way all are included in preparing Collective Worship. Broad themes are chosen with Gospel values at the heart and excellent use of technology supports the highly effective delivery of Collective Worship.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship is good.

- Prayer and acts of Worship are given a high priority. Staff and pupils pray together and prayer is part of almost all school celebrations. Staff meet weekly and share a morning reflection and morning prayers in the classroom are the norm. Three times a year the school curriculum is suspended, while liturgical celebrations occur; Christmas, Easter and end of academic year Mass.

- Acts of Collective Worship are well resourced and therefore engaging. Such occasions have a positive impact on the school's sense of identity connecting it to its roots and reaffirming its direction.
- Themes used are consistent with the Church's liturgical year and are sensitively interspersed with responses to current events in and out of school.
- The school has made efforts to invite parishioners into key events at school. This has been less successful but has not stopped their efforts to work hard to maintain good links with the parishes. Boys and staff regularly go into the parishes to speak to the congregations about their charity events and pilgrimages.
- Weekly Mass takes place after school and is carried out on a rota system. Classes prepare the Mass music and prayers. Bringing this within the timing of the school day would ensure the Blessed Sacrament is made available to more of the school community.
- Teachers are creative and highly skilled in helping pupils to plan and deliver good quality Collective Worship. They have a good understanding of the purpose of worship and are familiar with the various forms it can take. They are supported by the curriculum lead and the senior leadership team and a framework for the Church's liturgical year is disseminated for their reference. Diocesan training is made available for class teachers affirming them in their role as leaders of worship. This training highlights what is expected of them and offers support and ideas.
- A handbook for Catholic Life in the school is also given to all staff to help them in their delivery of worship, alongside in-house training and support. As part of the Edmund Rice network there are many opportunities for staff to develop. Through these links they can access training nationally and internationally.

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

- Leaders within school have a clear understanding of what it means to lead Collective Worship and they are well prepared for it. They act as role models in their attitudes towards Collective Worship and confidently lead and support the delivery in a way which reflects the strong traditions of the school and the Church.
- Leaders are completely conversant with the Church's liturgical calendar, its seasons, rites and symbols and thereby ably lead the school to a deep appreciation of the traditions of the church. This in turn affects the pupil's response to worship which is therefore outstanding.
- School leaders and governors view the spiritual and liturgical development of staff and pupils as a priority. Quality time is devoted to it, ensuring that all staff receive formation and are provided with opportunities for personal growth in Christ. This leads to outstanding practice.
- Leaders are highly visible in and around school at all times and especially during times of Collective Worship. Leading by example their role is one of both effective delivery and support.
- Review is key to the high standards of Collective Worship at St Aidan's. Effective systems are in place to take the views of pupils, staff and parents in this regard. This can be evidenced in the development plans and calendar of observations of worship. Leaders are prompt to respond to the results of pupil voice outcomes and the small teams such as the impact group and Catholic One Voice group working within the chaplaincy area use the

outcomes to press for change. Parental feedback is also keenly sought and responded to.

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.

- Recent changes in the curriculum and the way it is delivered have ensured that Religious Education at St Aidan's enjoys a high status and is valued by all the school community. Pupils demonstrated their clear enjoyment for the subject and regard it as one of their most important lessons.
- Pupils work hard in lessons, concentrate and are rarely off task. Their behaviour for learning is outstanding. All lessons observed proceeded without interruption.
- In key stage three and four almost all pupils are making good progress in Religious Education over time and within lessons. Current progress figures indicate that attainment in A level is rising rapidly.
- In 2017 GCSE Religious Education was among the highest performing of the core subjects.
- Pupils eligible for pupil premium make good progress. Figures for Religious Education have been positive for the past three years. These are extremely high when compared to the national outcomes.
- Without exception all pupils have a clear understanding of where they are, how they are progressing and what they could do to improve further.
- Almost all groups of pupils including those with additional needs are making good progress.

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

- Almost all teaching observed was outstanding and never less than good. It is creative, effectively planned and highly effective in enthusing the pupils, engaging them and ensuring that they make excellent progress.
- The passion demonstrated by the Religious Education staff for their subject is infectious. They communicate high expectations of themselves and of the pupils.
- Subject knowledge and confidence in their ability are the trademarks of the department. A very wide range of pedagogies was employed to address the needs and styles of the learners at St Aidan's. Staff have a keen understanding of the different needs of their pupils and they know what it takes to get the best out of each. They employ highly imaginative learning resources to maximise learning opportunities in lessons.
- Effective use of set homework contributes to the very good outcomes in Religious Education. Pupils are challenged and expected to present their work well.

- Excellent use of questioning during lessons was noted. Teachers are skilled at drawing out pupils' existing skills and developing new knowledge and skills. Praise and reward are also skilfully used. The department is held in high regard within the school. Three members of the department have taken whole school training on lesson structure and planning for success.
- Planning in Religious Education is effective. It embraces challenge for those more able and ensures that those who require it are well supported. Differentiation is a feature of all teaching.
- Pupil work in books is well presented and shows that marking is consistent offering formative feedback. Pupils are encouraged to respond to feedback, engaging them in their own evaluation and development. This in turn leads to improvements in outcomes and a confidence that they know what to do to improve further.
- Emphasis on praise and celebrating success and achievement is central to the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

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

- Rigorous self-evaluation by leaders and management lies at the heart of the success of the Religious Education department. There are in place procedures for self-evaluation and monitoring which are detailed and coordinated. Analysis of data, pupil voice records, lesson observations, book scrutiny and learning walks are part of the process. The curriculum lead is well informed regarding current best practice and is highly qualified to lead her team in this respect.
- Effective and well-structured planning and strategic thinking have been employed by the school over the last few years and as a result Religious Education now has a much higher profile and standards have greatly improved.
- Leadership of the department is outstanding. It is informed by a high level of expertise and vision with Christ at the centre. A firm focus on raising standards of teaching and learning has inspired confidence and is having a very positive effect on not only the department but the school as a whole.
- An imaginative and creative approach to developing a stimulating curriculum for key stage three has been a great success. The new Eduqas GCSE is now fully embedded and resources for this are in place. Teaching for GCSE begins in the summer term of year nine.
- Engagement with the community to broaden enrichment activities in Religious Education is very good. Key stage five students in particular greatly value their general Religious Education programme as it gives them an opportunity to go into the community and engage profoundly with the older generation. Students said how they valued this experience.
- The curriculum offers pupils an opportunity to experience the liturgical life of the Catholic church, for example preparation for confirmation is part of the year nine syllabus, as well as experiencing a wide diversity of spiritual beliefs.
- Following changes to the staffing structure the Religious Education department is now appropriately staffed and funded. The amount of curriculum time it is afforded compares favourably with other core subjects and meets the Bishops' Conference requirements.
- There is a clear focus on sacramental understanding in all key stages. At key stage three assessments are based around knowledge, understanding and evaluation of these

sacraments. Leaders ensure that the curriculum delivery on sacraments is in tune with the parish sacramental programmes. Teachers from the department also play a role in the preparation for sacraments within the parishes, helping with the confirmation programme confirmandi. Leaders ensure that there are opportunities for receiving sacraments in school.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

HOW EFFECTIVE THE SCHOOL IS IN PROVIDING CATHOLIC EDUCATION:

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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.

2

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.

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SCHOOL DETAILS

School name	St Aidan's Catholic Academy
Unique reference number	108899
Local authority	Sunderland
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.	
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Head teacher	Mr Kevin Shepherd
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