



St Robert of Newminster Catholic School and Sixth Form College

Biddick Lane, Washington, Tyne and Wear, NE38 8AF

School Unique Reference Number: **108870**

Inspection dates:	06 – 07 July 2017
Lead inspector:	Mrs Meg Baines
Team inspector:	Mr Joe Linden

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Catholic Life:		Outstanding	1
Collective Worship:		Good	2
Religious Education:		Outstanding	1

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Robert of Newminster Catholic School and Sixth Form College is an outstanding Catholic school because:

- The Catholic Life of St Robert's drives everything that happens in the school. The school's motto, "Let your light shine", ensures faith is at the forefront of daily life. The governors and headteacher have a clearly defined vision for a vibrant and aspirational place of learning with Christ at the heart. There is a strong Catholic ethos which permeates the school. A number of pupils are involved in a variety of ministries. Catholic Life is evident in the behaviour of pupils. They treat each other with kindness and respect. There are religious icons and symbols, many made by the pupils and the strong relationships that exist between staff and pupils reflect the school's evident Catholicity. Parents frequently attend services in the chapel. Strong links with parishes and local clergy exist, benefitting all the school community.
- Collective Worship is good with some excellent features. Pupils and staff lead prayer and liturgies throughout the school year. Prayer is seen as a priority and a key part of daily life at St Robert's. The chaplain and school leaders work closely to provide good quality Collective Worship. The pupils pray formally every morning and the chapel is open for use at any time. Students speak with knowledge and confidence about the Church's liturgical calendar and the place it has in their lives. There is weekly Mass for classes on a rotational basis.
- Religious Education teaching is outstanding. In Religious Education the progress and attainment are excellent and a strength of the school. Progress for pupils in vulnerable groups is also excellent; the results in Religious Studies show they outperform other subjects at key stage four. Evidence shows a three year trend of rising standards. The attitudes of staff and pupils to teaching and learning are excellent.

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

- St Robert's Catholic School and Sixth Form College is a larger than average mixed school located in Washington.
- The school was built in 1970 and has benefitted from a refurbishment and new build in 2010.
- There are 1,569 pupils including a sixth form.
- A new headteacher has been appointed since the last Section 48 inspection.
- A new chaplain was appointed in 2015. Prior to this there had been four other chaplains since the last inspection.
- A director of ethos was appointed in 2014
- The school serves three local parishes.
- 71% of pupils are baptised Catholics.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Develop pupils' responses in voluntary acts of Collective Worship by:
 - providing more opportunities for reflection, spiritual development and personal growth during form time;
 - Encouraging pupils to prepare, lead and respond to acts of Collective Worship.
- Look for further ways for the school community to enhance their experience of Collective Worship by:
 - utilizing the school chapel more;
 - Linking the weekly Mass programme more closely to the Church's liturgical calendar.

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.

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

- During the inspection pupils spoke warmly about their school and the various roles they play in the Catholic Life of the school. Behaviour at St Robert's is outstanding. The pupils treat each other with respect and are most courteous to staff and visitors. They treat their school environment and those who work there with dignity. The relatively new headteacher has high ambitions for the school. A director of ethos was appointed in 2014 and the school's mission statement is currently being revisited. The senior leadership team (SLT) and headteacher make regular reports to the governing body on ethos and Catholic Life. Effective planning and monitoring of Catholic Life of the school are in place. During the inspection a number of sixth form students left for Zambia to help at a school supported by St Robert's, preparations for a trip to Lourdes were underway and evidence was seen of the school's trip to Flame in London where forty pupils took part. In key stage three there are six pupils who are trained CAFOD leaders and a small number of students took part in the Handicapped Children's Pilgrimage Trust (HCPT) trip to Lourdes earlier this year. The school is a caring environment which places Christ at the heart of the community. The school chapel is a well-kept resource in the heart of the school and open to the whole school community and the parishes. Times of liturgies and Masses are advertised in local parish newsletters. During the inspection the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament took place in the chapel.
- Behaviour of the pupils is outstanding in and around school. Behaviour for learning in lessons is also excellent. Pupils are proud of their school and its Catholicity and its connections with the local parishes and places of retreat. For example the school provides both day and residential retreat opportunities at the Emmaus Youth Village for all year groups. Pupils are highly knowledgeable about their own faith and vocations. They are also proud of their charitable initiatives. They take part in a wide range of charitable events many of which are originated by themselves. Staff also give freely of their time and expertise in this area. Over £17,000 has been raised for the various charities this year. They have frequent visits from clergy and excellent links with local parishes.
- All pupils spoken to by inspectors displayed a strong sense of personal worth. Pupils acknowledge the diversity of faiths in school and are supportive, tolerant and respectful of each other's faith background. This was highlighted in their recent 'Inter-Faith Day'. A profound sense of belonging was identified. Younger pupils feel encouraged and empowered to play an active role in their community.

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

- The school's motto is known and understood by the whole school community. All documentation and school publications, including the termly magazine Ethos, and pupil diaries promote and raise awareness of the school's mission. The excellent relationships which are evident across the school ensure that this is a cohesive community, which celebrates its successes and gives support where needed. Classrooms are an inspiration, they are bright and displays around the school reflect the Catholic ethos and support learning effectively.
- The headteacher and senior leaders are effective in planning for pastoral care. There are policies for monitoring which ensure the highest quality provision for all. Pupils spoken to say they feel safe in school. Pupils in vulnerable groups are cared for and closely monitored. The house system plays a key role in the pastoral life of the school and is hugely successful at monitoring all aspects of pastoral care including attendance and behaviour both of which are outstanding. In 2016-17 there have been no permanent exclusions. The school is also attentive to the pastoral care of its staff providing opportunities for reflection, induction and formation.
- Catholic ethos is reflected in the strong relationships between pupils in the classroom and at play. The school's behaviour policy stresses the importance of personal responsibility and justice and offers routes to healing and reconciliation. Personal, social and health education and relationship and sex education programmes are in line with Canon Law and Catholic Education Service guidelines. They are sensitively designed and delivered in a variety of lessons throughout the school year.
- Induction of new staff is firmly embedded. The chaplain spoke warmly of his professional and open relationship with the headteacher and the head of Religious Education with whom he works closely. Staff are aware that they are leaders in faith and play a part in developing the spiritual as well as the academic life of each pupil. Opportunities for staff's development were found in the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) plans. Governors, the headteacher and SLT ensure that Catholic Life is a priority.

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

- Leaders are highly effective in providing for and promoting Catholic Life at St Robert's and make it a priority in their planning and programming. Evidence for this was found in governors' minutes and in monitoring documentation.
- The headteacher is supported by a highly professional and experienced governing body which collectively has a deeply held faith. Their dedication to the continuing success and future growth of St Robert's is a strength of the school. The senior leadership team is highly capable and they are supportive of each other and the headteacher. The school's leaders have a strong and authentic commitment to the Catholic faith. This has contributed to improved outcomes and opportunities for pupils as well as driving professional development for staff. Together they ensure that the spiritual, pastoral and academic needs of the pupils are met and that an authentic Catholic education is available to all.
- Governors monitor the Catholic Life through reports from the lay chaplain and visits to school by the link governors for Religious Education, the chair and other clergy.

- The school's monitoring systems include a Catholic Life planner check which keeps leaders up to date with events. Regular visits by clergy and governors ensure a monitoring presence.
- The school welcomes the wider community and regularly engages with parents. Parents play a key role on the governing body. Those parents interviewed as part of this inspection were highly supportive of the school, effusive in praise of its standards and ethos. They fully support the Catholic Life of the school, giving examples of how sensitively issues are dealt with and how they are proud of the confident young people produced by St Robert's. The governing body is proactive in its role and views the Catholic Life of the school as a priority. They deliberate carefully over documents and policies ensuring that the Catholic ethos is strong. In this way the governors make a vital contribution to the Catholic Life of the school.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

2

- 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 good.

- Acts of Collective Worship are attended by a respectful and reverent school community. Pupils reflect in silence and where directed they join in community prayers.
- Pupils are given the opportunity to prepare and lead worship. Those seen did so with confidence and some enthusiasm and independence. Pupil responses to prayers are mostly good. During the class Mass inspectors observed joyful singing and uplifting prayer.
- A variety of approaches to prayer was observed including prayer boxes, gospel reflections, stimulating video clips and prayer booklets. In pupil diaries there are weekly gospel reflections, prayers and the order of the Mass. Voluntary prayer held on Tuesday morning is largely student led and is advertised in local parish bulletins.
- Opportunities for worship are programmed by the lay chaplain and SLT. Staff and pupil-led assemblies were largely well planned and engaging.
- Worship opportunities for sixth form students are well developed. A joyful assembly was observed with student involvement and prayerful highlights. This was an area for improvement in the previous Section 48 inspection.
- Pupils spoken to demonstrated a good understanding of the Church’s religious seasons and feasts and were able to describe planning they had undertaken and worship opportunities. Notable examples being Advent, Lent and Easter liturgies.
- Pupils talked about their friends who did not share their faith and how they respected and accommodated them. The school held an Inter-Faith day during which prayer experiences were shared.
- Pupils were able to articulate very clearly what a difference being at a Catholic School meant to them and how learning in a community of prayer has helped them grow and develop a sense of identity.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship is good.

- Prayer is central to school life at St Robert’s. Staff and pupils pray together at the start of every day. The experience of this prayerful community appears to have an impact on the sense of belonging and identity of those who work and learn at St Robert’s school.
- Acts of Collective Worship are well resourced and detailed planning goes into Collective Worship throughout the school year. Almost all students and pupils spoken to described

their experience of Collective Worship positively. There are many opportunities and a variety of forms of Collective Worship all of which are themed or based on response to current events, for example recent national tragedies.

- Themes are chosen by worship leaders and sometimes by pupils and are always supported by the lay chaplain and his teams.
- The strong links with local parishes mean that there are usually other adults in attendance at certain services or liturgies. The school welcomes this strong connection with the parishes and supportive clergy.
- Class teachers help pupils plan assemblies and their own Mass. They are involved in the year group retreats and engage with Collective Worship during these. They have a good understanding of the various forms of Collective Worship and know who to ask if help and support are needed.
- The Religious Education department teachers have a great deal of experience in leading and supporting Collective Worship and both lead and facilitate liturgies. They and the lay chaplain have excellent knowledge of the Church's liturgical heritage and calendar, its rites and seasons and together they ensure the students and pupils in their care have the opportunity to engage in meaningful worship experiences.

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

- The community at St Robert's benefit from leaders and managers, including middle leaders and the lay chaplain, who are adept at planning and delivering good quality experiences of Collective Worship. Staff CPD has Collective Worship as a focus. Opportunities exist for staff to participate in their own spiritual formation. An increase in the numbers of staff holding Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies is one outcome of this.
- Leaders understand the rites and seasons of the Church's year and plan for events to reflect this. Events are both engaging and stimulating and the pupils' response to these events is largely good.
- Leaders and managers and the lay chaplain often lead Collective Worship, modelling good practice for staff and the pupil body.
- Regular reviews of Collective Worship take place as part of the self-review process. The high priority given to Collective Worship is demonstrated by the recent appointment of a Section 48 lead. The head of Religious Education has been tasked to take a lead role in Section 48 review. As part of this role a review of all section 48 documentation was undertaken. An action plan has been drawn up in concert with the lay chaplain. This review was reported to governors who continue to monitor it.
- The leaders and managers seek the views of the whole school community including its parents/carers, governors, and staff regarding the quality and significance of Collective Worship. The chair of governors sees Collective Worship as the heart of the school and brings a wealth of experience to his role in monitoring its quality and impact.

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.

- An overwhelming majority of pupils at St Robert’s said that Religious Education was one of their most important and most enjoyable lessons. Without exception behaviour for learning in lessons observed was outstanding. All lessons seen proceeded without incident or interruption. Pupils concentrate very well and are rarely off task. Pupils are ambitious and work hard to make progress in their lessons.
- A variety of lessons were observed. A variety of approaches by staff to the delivery of the lessons was appropriate to the set being taught, with both appropriate differentiation and effective planning seen. A creative approach and breadth of pedagogies demonstrated a sound understanding of the needs of the pupils and the efficacy of teaching using appropriate styles. The Religious Education department’s GCSE results last year were outstanding – 84% A*- C, very much greater than the national average of 71%. A three year upward trend in results was seen in progress documentation: 73%, 82%, 84%. The Religious Education results were the highest GCSE results of any subject last summer. At key stage three pupils are making very good progress. Pupils are aware of their own levels of progress and attainment and what to do to improve. Displays on the Religious Education classroom walls support learning. Pupils from disadvantaged groups, including Pupil Premium, make very good progress. Results show that this group outperformed all other subjects at Religious Education GCSE last summer. A level data at key stage five for L3VA results are positive. In 2014 and 2016 A Level Religious Studies results were well above National averages at A* - B (63%) and A* - C (82%). There was a dip in 2015 below national averages. This has resulted in changes to recruitment of students to the newly reformed A level course following the decoupling of AS and A2 nationally.
- Pupils observed were quick to acquire knowledge and asked appropriate questions when they did not understand. Pupils are developing a wide range of skills and are able to demonstrate retention of information, originality of thought and independence in their learning. Pupils enjoy their learning and say proudly that they make excellent progress in Religious Education.

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

- The quality of teaching of Religious Education at St Robert's is outstanding. It is highly effective and a strength of the school. It enthuses pupils and engages them to make sustained and rapid progress. Leaders and teachers set high expectations for learning, communicating both enthusiasm and passion for their subject.
- Lessons are well planned and provide a wide range of teaching strategies in order to facilitate learning for all pupils and students.
- The quality of monitoring and assessment in Religious Education is outstanding. Assessment for learning is embedded. Pupils were seen doing peer assessment and feeding back to their partners. Pupils from years seven to nine use assessment booklets which were found to be very well used and effective.
- The head of department ensures that schemes of work are in line with Bishops' Conference and meets regularly with his team to ensure the shared vision and ambition are delivered. Three times a year data is gathered and progress is evaluated and reported to the SLT and governors. Staff performance is monitored through lesson observation, learning walks and book monitoring. Monitoring and assessment files are kept up-to-date and include tracking data from all classes. Pupil performance is assessed through assessment booklets, learning walks, lesson observations and scrutiny of pupil books all of which take place throughout the year.
- Lesson observations by senior staff ensure creative and appropriate teaching methods are being used. Support is given where necessary.
- Homework is regularly set and effectively marked using the school's marking policy. This is a particular strength helping the pupils to make progress and where appropriate identifies areas for support or challenge. Discussions with pupils reinforced the view that they are aware of their progress and attainment and what to do to make progress. Pupils are listened to and their ideas are treated with respect. They are given opportunities to respond to their marking or test results and encouraged to plan for improvement.
- Pupils are praised for their achievements. A reward system was seen in operation. The Religious Education department's "Golden Tickets" are highly sought after rewards.

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

- Leaders at St Robert's are ambitious for their students and pupils. They are aspirational and have high expectations of behaviour and outcomes for those in their care.
- Ambitious standards of progress and attainment are agreed by the SLT and the programmes of study in Religious Education and subsequent targets reflect these ambitions. For example the gap between boys and girls performance, highlighted in the previous Section 48 inspection, is a focus and boys are now moving closer to girls in performance at all levels across the school.
- Self-evaluation of Religious Education is encouraged by the leaders and managers. It is rigorous and challenges the staff and pupils to be the best they can be. Targeted planning has enabled the Religious Education department to continue to raise standards over time. A series of outstanding results for pupils makes for high morale amongst the Religious Education department and also across the school community. It has a profound impact on

the moral, spiritual development of pupils and on their own ability to discern their own unique vocations. The Religious Education department deserves its high profile within the school. Religious Education staff are actively involved in whole school initiatives. For example taking a lead on INSET days.

- Creative use of resources, imaginative and detailed curriculum planning and key staff appointments are ensuring the Religious Education department are meeting the needs of all pupils. Religious Education is well resourced in terms of staffing with highly qualified specialists delivering a strong curriculum. Changes to A level and GCSE rubric have posed problems which have been addressed very effectively. Religious Education is a high performing department with a strong communal feel. Religious Education is afforded curriculum time in accordance with the Bishops' Conference requirements. Years 12 and 13 students have general Religious Education lessons weekly. Pupils at St Robert's have access to the sacraments of Holy Communion and Reconciliation. Excellent links with parishes ensure a flow of cooperation and information between the school and parish.

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:

2

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

2

The quality of provision for Collective Worship.

2

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

2

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 Robert of Newminster Catholic School and Sixth Form College
Unique reference number	108870
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.	
Chair of governors	Reverend Father Tony Cornforth
Choose School Leadership Type	Mr Dean Juric
Date of previous school inspection	April 2012
Telephone number	01912193810
Email address	school@strobertofnewminster.co.uk