

THE DIOCESE OF SHREWSBURY



St Nicholas Catholic High School, Hartford

URN 111450

DfES No 875 4610

17th October 2007

**Report on the
Inspection of Denominational Education**
(under Section 48 of the School Inspections Act 2005)

**Lead Inspector : Mr J Toye
Link Inspector : Rev J Gallagher, SDB**

**The inspection of the denominational education of
St Nicholas Catholic High School, Hartford,
was carried out at the request of the Governors of the School
in fulfilment of their obligation under the requirements,
and according to the directives of, the School Inspections Act 2005. The
school was inspected within the framework
approved by the Bishop of Shrewsbury
for the conduct of inspection of the denominational education of
Catholic Secondary Schools within the Diocese.**

Key for Inspection Grades

Grade 1	:	Outstanding
Grade 2	:	Good
Grade 3	:	Satisfactory
Grade 4	:	Inadequate

DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL

St Nicholas Catholic High is a larger than average school situated in a mixed socio-economic area. Ninety percent of students are of White British heritage. There is a rising proportion of students from Eastern Europe, particularly Poland, admitted to the school who speak little English.

- 4 The school has five/six partner primary schools covering a number of parishes in a fairly wide geographical area. Over ninety percent of students are Catholic; the remainder are of other Christian denominations. Just under 50% of the teaching staff are Catholic. Students entitled to free school meals and students with learning and /or disabilities are below the national average.

The school has a Business and Enterprise specialism. It holds the Eco-schools green flag and has been awarded Healthy School status and has achieved the Inclusion Quality Mark.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 1

St Nicholas Catholic High School is an outstanding school which serves the needs of all of its students both pastorally and academically. The heart of the mission statement "Everyone Matters" is made a reality in the day to day life of the school which is truly student centered.

IMPROVMENT SINCE THE LAST INSPECTION

Grade 1

The school has succeeded in addressing all the recommendations made in the last inspection.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE AND ETHOS

Grade 1

St. Nicholas is an outstanding Catholic school. There is evidence of a clear vision of the mission of the school as a Catholic school in the way it serves the students, their families and the local and wider, global community. The vision is clearly expressed in the Mission Statement which is displayed prominently throughout school; it is projected on screen before every Act of Collective Worship; it is known by staff and students many of whom can quote it with recognisable appreciation, especially the phrase 'Everyone Matters'. It is a vision which is not merely stated, staff and students acknowledge that it is lived; it is experienced by them and by parents and others who visit the school. The leadership, example and enthusiasm of the Headteacher, the Senior Leadership Team, Heads of Key Stages and curriculum departments and many others is key to upholding and translating this vision into practical educational policies and strategies which inform all aspects of the education offered by the school.

Students feel valued, respected and supported. They acknowledge the constant help offered by teachers who go out of their way to encourage them and enable them to achieve well academically and to develop as persons 'celebrating uniqueness and diversity' (as is stated in the Mission Statement). Relationships between staff and pupils and between the pupils themselves are very good and are clearly 'based upon trust and respect' as is stated in the Mission Statement. The school provides excellent opportunities for the spiritual and moral development of pupils. This is evidenced in times of prayerful reflection, in the religious education and other curriculum content, in the general atmosphere of the school and the excellent displays throughout the school. The pupils give generously to many charities which meet a variety of needs locally and globally. They are actively involved in organising fund raising events and are aware of the need for and the purpose of such charitable activity. Older pupils take on responsibilities within the school and undertake mentoring of younger pupils. Pupils take seriously their responsibilities on the Student Council. They feel that they have a voice and are listened to.

The recently revised system of rewards and sanctions is still being developed. On the whole staff and pupils are of the opinion that it is a positive development. They appreciate the fact that it

stresses the rewarding of good behaviour and effort. The system is known by staff, students and parents; it is clearly presented in the 'pyramids' displayed in all classes. The pastoral care of pupils is of a very high quality. The recent setting up of the Inclusion Resource Centre provides very good care for pupils with a variety of problems and enables their reintegration into normal school life. It is further evidence of the school's attention to the needs of all students – 'Everyone matters'.

From talking to pupils and staff it is clear that parents appreciate all that the school does for their children. They are kept well informed through the school's Newsletters and other contacts. Parent evenings are well attended.

The Governing Body are fully active in supporting the school and upholding its Catholic ethos. An outstanding feature of the school is the relationship with local clergy and parishes. There are meetings each term of clergy and the Headteacher in which relevant matters are discussed and recorded.

The relationship with partner primary schools is very good and there are frequent meetings between Headteachers and other staff. There is a good deal done by staff to ensure that the transition between primary and secondary school is made easier and less threatening to the younger pupils.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Grade 1

The act of collective worship and the time given to prayerful reflection in form time is of a very high quality. Students play an active part in the planning and celebrating of liturgical events throughout the year particularly during Advent and Lent. They enjoy doing so and give generously of their time to the preparation of such celebrations. They highlighted the Year 7 Welcome Mass and the Years 11 and 13 Leavers Masses. Celebrations are prayerful, reflective and youthful addressing the interests, needs, concerns and aspirations of the students. Students and staff speak highly of the Collective Worship which they experience throughout the year. In the newly revised time given to the Form Tutor period there is ample opportunity for prayer and reflection prepared and led at times by teachers and students. It is clear that this is normal daily practice. Relevant resources are made available by the chaplain and R.E. department.

The chapel provides excellent space for reflection and prayer. On Wednesdays Mass is well attended by students and staff. The chapel is well used by various groups and by the religious education department for meditation and other forms of prayer and reflection. Students appreciate this special place

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Grade 1

Standards in Religious Education have significantly improved over the last four years, for example from 60% A* - C at GCSE to over 80% in the most recent results. They are now high and significantly above the national average of 58%. The pass rate at A*-G is 98% this is also high and above the national average. The results in the Sixth Form and in the Key Stage 3 tests also show a significant upward improvement over the same period.

In lessons all students are making and maintaining good progress including those with special educational needs. Students are gaining knowledge, skills and understanding at a very good rate across all key stages. This is due to the work done in the department and the school on improving learning and teaching. Students have aspirational targets set for their achievement in Key Stage 3 and 4 tests and examinations. The students are fully aware of their targets and of what they need to do to improve their standards. The use of target setting is embedded in the work of the department and this is forcing standards up.

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Grade 2

The quality of learning and teaching is always good and sometimes outstanding. All teachers have good subject knowledge, good classroom management skills and enjoy good relationships with the students who respond well to the teaching and remain on task. They enjoy the subject and readily

undertake the tasks set for them. The work matches the full range of students' abilities and tasks are well suited to the needs of all. Lessons are taught at a brisk pace. In one lesson, for example, pace was maintained by the use of music from "Countdown". The quality of relationships in lessons between teachers and students and students themselves is a strength of the school and these motivate the teachers to have high expectations of students who respond well by being willing to learn. Learning Objectives are used consistently by all teachers in lesson planning. These learning objectives are shared with the students and help to drive lessons forward. Some of the learning objectives lack precision in terms of what the students will know, understand or be able to do as a result of the teaching. The quality of learning and teaching would, therefore, be even further enhanced if the learning objectives were defined more precisely in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills. They would then give a punch to the lessons.

Assessment for learning has been redeveloped using the recent diocesan guidance which was produced with the help of the Head of Department. Assessment is good and is used systematically to identify achievement and areas for improvement. This is understood by students and the majority respond well to advice given by teachers. Marking of students' work is good because the teachers indicate how to improve learning on an individual basis.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE R.E. DEPARTMENT

Grade 1

The leadership and management of the Religious Education Department provided by the Head of Department and strongly supported by the Assistant Head of Department are outstanding. This is a relatively new department in terms of the teachers. The Head of Department has a clear vision for its development and this is shared with all members of the team. He is strongly focussed on the worth of individual students, in raising standards for them and in promoting the personal and spiritual development of all students. This vision has created a common sense of purpose among the teachers who now form a strong team. The curriculum has been revised at all key stages to meet more accurately the needs of all learners. The much improved results in tests, GCSE and the sixth form reflect the impact of these actions. The members of the department now set and focus on aspirational targets for students and there are high expectations for all to achieve well. The department is very effectively managed in a way that ensures the very best use of good accommodation, teachers, resources and time.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

1. Continue to develop and monitor recent new initiatives: the system of rewards and sanctions, the longer form period and the Inclusion Centre Resource.
2. In the RE Department the teachers should define learning objectives with greater precision in terms of the knowledge, skills and understanding to be learned by the students.

CAPACITY FOR DEVELOPMENT

There are effective systems in place to ensure continuous development of the Catholic mission and aims of the school. The school's and the department's monitoring and evaluation systems are good and effective.