

Diocese of Middlesbrough

Inspection of Religious Education  
(Section 23 of 1996 School Inspections Act)

**ST MARY'S COLLEGE  
KINGSTON UPON HULL**

**DATE OF INSPECTION : MARCH 12-16 2001**

**Basic Information about the school**

Name of School: St Mary's College

Type of School:	Mixed Comprehensive
Status:	Voluntary Aided
Age Range of Pupils:	11-18
Number on Roll:	1432
Headteacher:	Mr Michael Walsh
School Address	Cranbrook Avenue Kingston-Upon-Hull HU6 7TN
Telephone:	01482 851136
Chair of Governors	Mr M Withers
Inspector of RE	Mr K Robinson
Date of Inspection:	March 12 <sup>th</sup> - 15 <sup>th</sup> 2001

### **Characteristics of the school**

St Mary's College is the only Catholic secondary school in the Hull area and serves a large number of parishes and feeder schools. It is also the only 11-18 school and enjoys sports college status. The school has recently accepted an invitation from the Department of Education and Employment to become a Beacon School. The school is very popular and oversubscribed. Consequently it is a larger than average secondary school drawing students from a very wide area. Many of these students are transported in from outlying districts. Over 65 per cent of them are from Catholic families, though other Christian groups are represented within the school.

The school has a broad comprehensive intake, drawing students from a wide variety of socio - economic backgrounds including a number from deprived areas as well as students from more favourable residential areas. There are few students from ethnic minority groups and only 4 students have English as an additional language. 17 % of the students are eligible for free school meals, which is broadly in line with the national average. 241 students (17%) are on the Special Educational Needs register which is above national average and 1.5 % have a statement of Special Educational Needs which is broadly in line with national averages.

There is a wide, comprehensive range of academic attainment among the students on entry but overall the level is average.

The Catholic character and ethos is at the heart of all the school stands for and the daily life of the school rests on the five pillars of encouragement, concern, mutual respect, reconciliation and forgiveness.

### **PART A**

### **ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL AS A CATHOLIC COMMUNITY**

## **2. The Mission of the School**

The school prospectus states that the fundamental foundation stone of St Mary's College rests on lived gospel values. These will be promoted through the liturgical life of the College, the pastoral community of each year group, the work of the College Chaplains and the teaching associated with religious education.

The mission statement sets out the intention to create within the daily life of the school an ethos of encouragement, concern, mutual respect, reconciliation and forgiveness. These statements provide an appropriate expression of elements of the mission of the catholic school. However, the statement should be reviewed, as is the intention of the school, to draw out and express more clearly the evangelising mission of the catholic school to the secular world. This is a mission, which is shared by governors and senior managers of the school. This needs to be developed with the involvement of governors, staff, parents and pupils and inform all future documentation.

The practical commitment of the school to the achievement of its mission, as presently seen, is very clear. The school invests significant curriculum time and staffing into religious education, places great importance on the developing work of the chaplaincy team and in involving all staff and pupils in the liturgical life of the school.

The school is being successful in the pursuit of its mission. The school community is built on the gospel values of care, concern, and reconciliation, which is shown by the way staff relate to each other and to the pupils they have charge of. The pupils themselves are very clear that this is a caring school in which they receive tremendous support from the staff. The school is demonstrating clearly what it means to be a Christian community. A living symbol of the school's success is the outstanding work of the Cornerstone initiative, which relates the work of the social inclusion unit to the mission of Christ to the outcasts and rejected of society.

The evidence from feeder schools that St Mary's is at the centre of a family of Catholic schools, shows the commitment of the school to the wider community. The school has shown itself more than ready to support feeder schools and parishes with practical, curricular or liturgical help. There are now effective curriculum links with feeder schools in religious education.

## **3. Collective Worship**

The school has a planned comprehensive programme of daily assemblies held for whole years in the main hall, for year and smaller groups within social areas and for individual form groups in their bases. This enables the school to fulfil its statutory duty to provide daily collective worship for all pupils.

The year group assemblies observed during the week, in the main hall, were all very well ordered and respectful occasions. The pupils listened attentively and with real interest to themes, presented by senior managers of the school, urging

them to follow their dreams, develop their talents, make good use of their time and to follow Lenten practices. All occasions had time for reflection and prayer in which the pupils were asked to join. However the effectiveness of these occasions could be enhanced with the use of music and more active involvement of the pupils in the presentation of ideas and the leading of prayers. Good practice of this kind often occurs in the assemblies held in the social areas and the pupils speak enthusiastically of the house assemblies, which are planned organised and delivered by members of the sixth form.

The broad themes of worship for the year are planned but individual leaders tend to choose their own topic and this does lead to a lack of co-ordination. No formal system of evaluation exists.

It was apparent from observations and the evidence of the pupils that the quality of the worship within the form groups varies greatly. In some groups no prayer or worship is taking place, while in others, tutors make considerable efforts to provide a meaningful time for prayer and reflection at the start of the day. It is some years since training in this area for all staff took place. The school should ensure by policy, support and monitoring that the quality of the experience is more consistent for all pupils.

The practice of collective worship should be reviewed within a policy for spiritual development to evaluate the overall quality of the experience being offered to the pupils.

#### **4. Spiritual and Moral Development**

##### **4.1 Spiritual Development**

The school's provision of opportunities for spiritual development is excellent. The messages on the walls and displays boards of the school uplift the spirits and proclaim the importance to the school of the spiritual. Before school begins morning prayers, to which all are welcome, are held in the school chapel and the daily staff briefing begins with prayer and reflection setting a spiritual context for the whole life of the school. The mass or eucharistic service is celebrated each lunchtime. Attendance of staff and pupils is very small but the occasions are extremely uplifting and valuable for those who do attend. Even with small attendance it is important to maintain the regular celebration of the mass at the centre of the school day as a key symbol of the life of the school. The College is very fortunate to have the service of a number of priests and should do more to encourage attendance perhaps by publishing more widely particular intentions for daily masses to encourage groups to attend. Regular masses and liturgical celebrations take place for all pupils throughout the year and are well appreciated.

There is open access to the chapel during the day. Pupils speak enthusiastically of the importance of the chapel, how they value it and have used it at certain

times of stress and bereavement.

The developing work of the chaplaincy team lies at the heart of the provision for spiritual development. The dedication and enthusiasm of the lay co-ordinator is evident and the effectiveness of her work apparent. Her developing role involves many facets including classroom support, individual counselling and organising the liturgy. The aims and objectives and manner of working need to be brought at some point into a formal job description which will take forward the focus of her work. The chaplaincy team benefits from the breadth of its membership, including students. The regular presence of priests in the school who can relate well to young people is a great bonus in fuelling their spiritual development.

An extensive programme of reflection days and retreats organised by the chaplaincy group give the opportunity for all pupils and staff to experience times of spiritual renewal. The pupils speak positively of these experiences as being valuable and enjoyable occasions. The take up from the pupils is very extensive.

Within the themes and topics, studied in curriculum religious education, the pupils regularly have the opportunity to further their spiritual development by considering, for example, the mystery of the Kingdom of God, the concepts of faith, hope and personal commitment, the meaning of love and the problem of suffering. The teachers are skilled in encouraging personal reflection. Other curriculum areas make valuable contributions; for instance in Art where there is an emphasis on the awakening and understanding of self and in Drama and IT where the development of feelings of mutual respect are paramount.

Though there is this very effective implementation of spiritual development the school has no formal written policy. This should be pursued to enable regular review by governors and senior managers, and to enable all areas and departments of the school to evaluate their contribution.

#### 4.2 Moral Development

The school's provision for moral development is very good. It has its basis within the school ethos of care for each other generated by the staff who are excellent role models for the pupils. Their example is followed by the pupils whose behaviour generally, in classrooms and around the school is excellent and demonstrates real concern for others. Any occasional oppression of individual pupils is dealt with very effectively through the anti-bullying policy, which is displayed prominently in the school and is being promptly acted upon

This concern for others and particularly those in need is shown by the way the pupils respond to the numerous opportunities to support the work of CAFOD and other charities and for example in the enthusiasm for the young St Vincent de Paul group who are beacons of what the school stands for.

The pupils have the opportunity to address moral issues within the Personal and Social Education programme carried out in the Tutorial period each week including personal issues within health education. Consideration of personal values and morality is an ever-present theme within religious education.

The school has a policy on sex education, which offers pupils appropriate information and the opportunities to consider personal values within science, PSE and religious education. However, the school has begun to consider this provision and should pursue the review to ensure that the opportunities are adequate and sufficiently co-ordinated to enable all pupils to have relevant up to date information appropriate to their ages and the opportunities for comprehensive discussion and personal value clarification at appropriate stages of their development.

## **PART B CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

### **5. Standards achieved by pupils**

#### **5.1 Attainment and progress**

The standards being achieved by the department at A level are exceptionally high with a 100% pass rate at levels A-E in recent years, though the size of the groups are smaller than would be anticipated which is a cause of concern to the department. These standards are reflected in the work of a number of students inspected. This showed high level grasp of such concepts as the relationship of Jesus' miracles to the revelation of the Kingdom of God, the distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of Faith, and the understanding of the synoptic problem. Within the classroom the students demonstrated high ability to comprehend philosophical moral positions and the issues they give rise to. The analysis of the value added from GCSE to A level gives testimony to the very good progress made by the pupils. Though the number of A level students is small the department has a comprehensive programme for all the sixth form within general studies. The quality of the work presented by the students in this area was also exceptional demonstrating comprehensive grasp of complex moral issues and high technical ability in presentation.

At GCSE in Key Stage 4 the pass rate at A\*-C is above the national average even when the whole of the year 11 cohort is considered and in 2000 it reached 62% of the large entry. These results also look very favourable when compared with other core subjects in the school. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls. The small numbers of pupils not entered are well catered for with a well-structured and successful certificate course. Extending the attainment at either end of the ability range was an issue for the department in the last inspection. This is now being well addressed with the success of the certificate course and the large number of A\*s being achieved in the GCSE examination. The high standards are demonstrated in the Key Stage 4 lessons observed. The higher ability pupils were able to show a good grasp of the mystery of the Kingdom and comprehensive recall of details of parables studied. The lowest ability were able to relate the outline story of parables and understand the relevance for modern life. The middle band groups are attaining at an above average level compared to national achievement. Very good progress is being made.

At Key Stage 3 the standards vary across the mixed ability group but overall they are distinctly above average nationally. These levels were displayed in a Year 7

class' ability to describe the symbols on the Easter candle and to relate them to the concept of reconciliation and the movement from darkness to light. A year 8 group grasped the differences between an apostolic and a contemplative ministry and Year 9 pupils showed understanding of the concepts of stereotyping and xenophobia and how Jesus reacted to them.

These standards testify to the very good progress being made generally by pupils across the key stages in the understanding of the teachings of the church and their significance for their lives.

## 5.2 Attitudes to learning

The pupils' attitudes to learning were never less than satisfactory. In most lessons they were good and frequently very good or excellent.

The behaviour of the pupils generally was very good, to the point of some groups appearing rather passive, though this may have been the result of the inspection situation. They were very attentive to teacher inputs and usually showed a willingness to respond to questions and to input their own ideas and opinions. In a year 7 lesson on the metaphorical concepts of light and darkness they were ready to movingly share their experiences of sad times in their lives and in a Year 10 lesson to engage in lively discussion about whether you could love everyone. The pupils showed a willingness to ask their own questions for clarity, to gain information and occasionally to challenge the teacher respectfully.

The opportunities for collaborative work were limited but when given the chance they worked well together in pairs and small groups.

They applied themselves well to individual tasks set during the lessons showing good ability to research texts, tell stories and frame opinions in writing. Greater opportunities for more independent, less guided research would have increased the quality of the learning.

In virtually all lessons the pupils displayed genuine interest in the topics covered and enjoyment in the learning. They have very positive attitudes to the subject.

## 6. Quality of Religious Education Provided

### 6.1 The quality of teaching

The teaching was never less than satisfactory. In more than 80% of the lessons it was good or better and in 40% it was very good.

The first strength of the teaching is the very evident commitment of the teachers to the importance of the subject and their confidence in the subject area. They know the subject well and are enthusiastic in its delivery. Consequently their inputs are authoritative and build the confidence of the pupils.

The very good relationships with pupils are evident. There is a warmth and affection between staff and pupils, which creates a safe environment in the classroom in which the pupils can offer personal opinions and ideas and risk

being wrong. Teachers are ready to talk appropriately about themselves and their own lives, which stimulates the personal reflections of the pupils. Class management is good and minor misbehaviour is effectively and sensitively dealt with.

Strong teacher input punctuated with targeted questioning and a welcoming of pupil response characterised most lessons observed. In a Year 10 lesson this led to the pupils engaging in a very real and intense discussion about what Jesus meant by "loving your neighbour" and who were the "first" and "last" in our society. In the best lessons the questions posed were challenging and the pupils were allowed to struggle for the answers rather than being spoon-fed solutions.

Clear lesson objectives and content planning led to progressive learning for the pupils. In a Year 7 lesson they were taken step by step from understanding the notion of a 'witness' to recounting the story of Jesus' appearances after the resurrection. The use of the Icons scheme of work in Year 7 greatly assists this process but this is best seen when the scheme of work is absorbed by the teachers and made their own rather than slavishly following the text book.

The use of whole class teaching with teacher and text book input and question and answer session with the pupils is generally well done and leading to effective learning. However the department should look to the use of a greater variety of strategies, particularly at Key Stage 4 where the pursuit of coverage can lead to a narrow diet. They should look to more regular use of a variety of resources- videos, music, poetry, art and artefacts to stimulate the imagination and emotions of the pupils. The use of these in a Year 7 lesson on light and darkness and a Year 9 lesson on the contemplative life greatly added to the richness of the learning. A Year 7 lesson on the appearances of Jesus in which pupils used word processing to build up their own accounts showed how effective a tool it can be for the subject when led by a competent teacher.

Teachers should look to setting out the learning objectives to the pupils at the start of lessons and returning to these at the end to evaluate the success of the learning.

## 6.2 Curriculum and assessment

Religious education enjoys 10% of curriculum time across Key Stage 3 and 4 which is in line with the recommendation of the Bishops' Conference and demonstrates the school's commitment to the subject.

The department's schemes of work are being gradually reviewed and updated so that the Icons scheme becomes the basic structure for the delivery of the subject at Key Stage 3. This will provide comprehensive coverage of the curriculum directory as well as ensuring that teachers review their teaching strategies. This is already evident in the Year 7 curriculum. The Key Stage 4 GCSE and certificate courses are appropriate and serving the pupils well.

The implementation of the Icons scheme has meant that the department has had to review the scheme of assessment, which was an issue in the last inspection. A much more structured and consistent approach is now gradually developing

which enables a clear picture to emerge of the pupils' levels of attainment and will prepare the way for national levels of attainment. Senior management have reviewed the department's marking policy but the recommendations of that review should be more consistently implemented. There is a great variety in the quality of marking across the department. In particular all teachers should look to make the marking more diagnostic to assist the learning process and influence future teaching.

## **7. The Management of Religious Education**

### **7.1 Leadership and management**

The department has very good leadership. The head of department shows tremendous commitment to the subject and vision for its place at the heart of the Catholic school. His expertise in the new Icons initiative is enabling comprehensive schemes of work to be put in place and the teachers to be developed appropriately. The very large department is very well administered. Individual members of the department are encouraged to make their own particular contributions to on going developments and an ethos of shared support has been created and nourished.

### **7.2 Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

The department has a large number of skilled, experienced and committed religious education specialists. They are well deployed to share the teaching across the Key Stages, across examination groups and levels of ability. Their expertise is being constantly updated with an abundance of professional development opportunities within and beyond the school. The department is being appropriately supported with teacher assistants in several classes and makes its own contribution to the Cornerstone unit.

The department has a suite of classrooms near the centre of the school and with proximity to the chapel. All are adequate for purpose though at times quite cramped. Most have been made very attractive and conducive to learning with excellent displays of posters and pupils' work. The department is well resourced. Having received generous capitation from the school budget. Much of this is being effectively invested in building up text books and support materials for the Icons scheme at Key Stage 3 and to support the development of new A level courses. An extremely valuable resource is being developed using the expertise of one member of the department. This is a religious education web site, which is proving a rich fountain of materials, which can be accessed by staff and pupils at school and home. It is an exciting development for the future.

**Issues for the department:**

The department should:

- raise further the quality of teaching by

more regularly using, particularly at Key Stage 4, a wider variety of teaching strategies and resources to stimulate the imagination of the pupils,

setting out to pupils learning objectives at the start of lessons which can be returned to for evaluation at the end,

seeking to provide more opportunities for pupils to engage in more independent, less guided research

- ensuring that the Icons scheme of work is absorbed and adapted appropriately by individual teachers
- reviewing marking policy to make it more diagnostic to assist the learning process and influence future teaching.

## **PART C      MAIN FINDINGS AND KEY ISSUES**

### **8. Main Findings**

The school prospectus states that the fundamental foundation stone of St Mary's College rests on lived gospel values. The mission statement sets out the intention to create within the daily life of the school an ethos of encouragement, concern, mutual respect, reconciliation and forgiveness. The practical commitment of the school to the achievement of its mission, as presently seen, is very clear. The school is being successful in the pursuit of its mission. The school community is built on the gospel values of care, concern, and reconciliation. The pupils themselves are very clear that this is a caring school in which they receive tremendous support from the staff. The school is demonstrating clearly what it means to be a Christian community.

The school has a planned comprehensive programme of daily assemblies. The year group assemblies observed during the week in the main hall were all very well ordered and respectful occasions. Good practice with the involvement of pupils often occurs in the assemblies held in the social areas and the pupils speak enthusiastically of the house assemblies, which are planned organised and delivered by members of the sixth form. It was apparent from observations and the evidence of the pupils that the quality of the worship within the form groups varies greatly.

The school's provision of opportunities for spiritual development is excellent.

Before school begins morning prayers, to which all are welcome, are held in the school chapel and the daily staff briefing begins with prayer and reflection setting a spiritual context for the whole life of the school. The mass or eucharistic service is celebrated each lunchtime. . The College is very fortunate to have the service of a number of priests. Regular masses and liturgical celebrations take place for all pupils throughout the year and are well appreciated. The developing work of the chaplaincy team lies at the heart of the provision for spiritual development. The dedication and enthusiasm of the lay co-ordinator is evident and the effectiveness of her work apparent. The pupils speak positively of the programme of retreats and reflection days as being valuable and enjoyable experiences. Within the themes and topics, studied in curriculum Religious Education, the pupils regularly have the opportunity to further their spiritual development.. Though there is this very effective implementation of spiritual development the school has no formal written policy.

The school's provision for moral development is very good. It has its basis within the school ethos of care and concern for each other generated by the staff who are excellent role models for the pupils. Their example is followed by the pupils whose behaviour generally, in classrooms and around the school is excellent and demonstrates real concern for others. The pupils have the opportunity to address moral issues within the Personal and Social Education programme carried out in the Tutorial period each week including personal issues within health education. Consideration of personal values and morality is an ever-present theme within religious education.

In curriculum Religious Education, attainment at A level is exceptional. It is above average at GCSE in Key Stage 4 and also at Key Stage 3. Teaching is good and pupils' attitudes very good. The department has very good leadership and has developed well since the last inspection.

## **9. Key Issues for Action**

To raise further the quality of Religious Education and spiritual and moral development the governors and senior managers should:

- review and update the mission statement to more clearly reflect the school's evangelizing role within the modern world
- draw up a written policy on spiritual development which clearly identifies the role of the lay chaplain, offers to all areas of the school an understanding of spiritual development against which they can assess their contribution and enables regular review of provision by governors and senior managers
- ensure by support monitoring and evaluation that the high quality daily collective worship is more consistent for all pupils
- continue to review the provision of sex education to ensure that all pupils have the opportunity for personal value clarification at appropriate stages of their development
- support the RE department in addressing its identified issues.

## **10. Programme of Inspection**

The Inspection was carried out by one inspector. The inspector spent four days in the school from March 12-15<sup>th</sup> 2001. During this time he

- observed 14 religious education lessons;
- attended morning prayers, three main school year assemblies, celebrations of the Mass and an eucharistic service;
- a staff briefing;
- had formal interviews with the headteacher, the chair and members of the governing body, the lay chaplain of the school, students from Year 7, Year 10, Year 12 and 13, the head of the Religious Education department, the headteacher of a feeder primary school
- spoke informally with all members of the RE department and other staff and to many pupils in the lessons visited. He also viewed all the main documentation of the school and particularly that of the RE department and a large sample of pupils' work.

470 parent questionnaires were returned.

## **11. Data**

There are currently 1432 students on roll:

Girls: 753

Boys: 679

Standard Admission Number: 240

Students on Special Educational Needs Register : 222

Students with a statement of Special Educational Needs : 21

There are      62% catholic children in Year 7  
                  73% catholic children in Year 8  
                  71% catholic children in Year 9  
                  65% catholic children in Year 10  
                  65% catholic children in Year 11  
                  71% catholic children in Year 12

73% catholic children in Year 13