

THE DIOCESE OF SHREWSBURY



Ellesmere Port Catholic High School

URN 111451
DCSF No 875 4811

26/27 March 2009

**Report on the
Inspection of Denominational Education**

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

DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL

Ellesmere Port Catholic High School is a very popular and oversubscribed voluntary aided school. Its students represent the full range of social backgrounds and academic abilities. The school has a thriving sixth form with 160 students. There are 1062 students on roll of which 77% are Catholic, 19% are from other Christian faiths and 4% are from other or no faith background. 60% of the school's 65 teachers are Catholics.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

GRADE 1

Ellesmere Port Catholic High is an outstanding school. The living out of its mission statement is evident in all aspects of school life. The collective worship and the prayer life of the school are outstanding. The teaching, learning and leadership in Religious Education are of the highest quality and attainment is good and improving.

IMPROVEMENT SINCE THE LAST INSPECTION

Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Issues raised at the last inspection concerning pupil representation, consistency in providing periods of reflective prayer, attainment and assessment and lesson planning have all been resolved very successfully.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE AND ETHOS

GRADE 1

During the inspection there was clear evidence that staff, governors and students strongly felt that the aims of the school which are set out in the Mission Statement and the core values that flow from it are acted on and lived in the daily life of the school. The headteacher and the senior leadership team have a clear understanding of the mission of the school as a Catholic school in the area in which it serves. Staff and students actively respond. This is evidenced in the excellent relationships between staff and students. All spoke of the school as a 'welcoming community'. This is an outstanding feature of the school which was much appreciated by all staff including newly qualified teachers and students. They all felt welcomed, respected and supported. The behaviour of students as they moved around the school, as they entered and left the assemblies and in the playground was very orderly. Students were friendly and helpful.

The pastoral care of all students is of a very high quality and the result of careful teamwork of teaching and non-teaching staff. Some excellent care is provided particularly for students with special needs by those who manage the 'Place of Development' (the POD). There is a clear system of rewards and sanctions which is known and appreciated by staff, students and parents. In line with what is stated in the Mission Statement achievement is recognized and celebrated through the system of merits, commendations, letters home and the evening of celebration in the Civic Hall. The sixth formers were especially appreciative of and grateful for the help and support of the staff.

There is an effective student council which works to improve conditions in the school. The involvement of students in activities for various deserving charities in the local area and in other parts of the world is another outstanding feature. This was evidenced in the considerable sums which were collected through activities for Cafod, the Fashion Show organised by sixth formers and the Staff Panto written by students. The school has links with other schools in Africa and elsewhere in the world. Older students are involved in the life of the school for example in helping younger students as mentors to Year 7, in undertaking prefect duties. All of this is the Mission Statement in action: 'we will strive to share in the life of the local and wider community, to promote justice and peace'.

A high quality of spiritual and moral development is clearly evident in the religious education curriculum, in cross curricular work with other departments such as science and history, among others. In a short space of time the development of the school's humanities specialism is making an outstanding contribution to this aspect of school life by developing community cohesion through the cross curricular work of departments, by invitations to outside speakers and by various educational trips. The work of the chaplain makes a very significant contribution to school life. He is available, provides resources for the prayer and liturgical life of the school. His work is greatly appreciated by staff and students.

Some excellent work is done in making the transition from primary to secondary school easier and less threatening for students. There are good relationships with the partner primary schools and with the local parishes. There is a strong and effective governing body whose members take part in the liturgical services, in invigilation and other activities. They are aware of the strengths and areas of development within the school. While we did not meet any parents it was clear from what we heard from staff and students that they were generally happy with the education which the school provides for their children. They are kept informed of their children's progress. Parents evenings are well attended.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

GRADE 1

The overall quality of Collective Worship is outstanding. The chaplain and religious education department provide excellent materials which support staff in this area. There is a group of students who actively support liturgical celebrations and collective worship. One of these liturgical celebrations was observed during the inspection. It was conducted in the school's chapel which is used often and very well. There is a quiet and reflective atmosphere in the room and this is clearly appreciated by the students who enter silently and respectfully. The liturgy was very well planned and there was excellent use made of IT, slides and music. During the service the students were given space and time to reflect, think and share their emotional responses. The students participated willingly and responded very well. During assemblies the acts of collective worship are distinctive features and separate from the rest of the assembly business. The students enter the hall in silence and are very well behaved and participate willingly in prayer. There is consistent use of prayer at registration. This, again, is well planned and delivered and all of the students readily participate.

The school also celebrates whole school Welcome and Leavers Masses which are much appreciated by all who participate. The quality of collective worship is an important factor in the spiritual and moral development of students.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

GRADE 2

Progress at the end of Key Stage 3 is measured using comparative data from English and History. Results in Religious Education compare well with results in other subjects. The department now uses key levelled pieces of work which measure progress and attainment more accurately and the recently introduced attainment levels produced by teachers in the diocese are helping in consistency of judgments. The department plans to introduce baseline assessment for religious education in September 2009. This should give more accurate levels from which to monitor performance.

In lessons at KS 3 student attainment and progress is always satisfactory and more often good. In Y7 they had good knowledge of the significance of Holy Week, in Y8 the students already had good knowledge of the Passover and they were developing their understanding of Jesus as the new Passover Lamb.

At KS4 the school enters all of its students for GCSE RE. The results show a marked improvement over a four year period. There has been a 25% increase over this time at 68% A* - C and 98% A* - G these results are good and compare well to both school and national averages. The standards in lessons observed were good and the department expects to achieve even higher results in the next examinations. The department, based on Y10 results, predict 75% A* - C next year

At KS5 the results at AS level have been mostly good but were more variable. The department has analyzed in detail the reasons for any dip in performance and has introduced strategies aimed at improvement. At A2 results have always been good but because of problems with the marking of AS results some of the students were disenchanted and the results dropped to almost 60%. Again this situation is being rectified. Currently all students in KS 5 undertake a General RE course. This course is well matched to students needs, is well regarded by students and is externally verified. The department expects 80% of its students to meet the requirements of the qualification.

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

GRADE 1

The quality of teaching and learning is never less than good and it is more often outstanding. All teachers have good subject knowledge and are committed to the delivery of RE. They clearly focus on raising student achievement and attainment and this has borne fruit in the rising trends in examination results.

All lessons are very well planned with clear learning objectives which are apt for the age and experience of the learners and reflect the needs of the courses being followed. These learning objectives are always shared with the students who clearly understand what it is that they are required to learn. Teachers plan for and deliver differentiated learning by both task and outcome to meet the needs of all. These learning objectives drive the lessons forward and capture the students' interest. All of the teachers have good classroom management skills and enjoy very good relationships with their students. Hence, behaviour is very good and all lessons are able to be conducted at a brisk pace. In many lessons there is very good use of IT and visual aids which enhance learning. The materials used for lessons are of a high quality and are well prepared. Teaching caters well for different styles of learning. The teachers use questioning effectively to assess learning but the use of extended questioning to further enhance both learning and understanding is more limited.

The students enjoy their RE lessons and acknowledge that they are making progress in their learning. They respond readily to the tasks and challenges set and remain on task throughout the lessons. They are well motivated and make clear gains in their knowledge and understanding. A key feature of all lessons is the use of paired learning. It is used at relevant intervals and the students clearly enhance each other's learning by explanation, questioning and the mutual completion of tasks. There are good displays of students work in the classrooms which celebrates their success in learning.

The deployment of a teaching assistant was very well planned and carefully thought out and very effectively helped the learning of less able students

A feature of many lessons was that the students were given time to reflect and share their thoughts with others. They respond readily to this and make clear gains in knowledge and understanding. Overall teaching and learning are outstanding.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE R.E. DEPARTMENT

GRADE 1

The Head of Department has a very strong and clear vision for the development of this department. This vision is wide in so far as it is centred on all students achieving their maximum potential both academically and personally and on wider aspects of RE including liturgy and work with and for the local and international community. This last aspect is enhanced by the school's humanities specialism and planned for by a member of the RE team. All of the teachers subscribe to this vision and the department is, therefore, forming a strong team.

The management of the department is outstanding. There is a clear structure for management which is evident in many aspects of its work. There are very good management strategies with structured, fruitful meetings, discussions and shared expertise. Lesson planning follows a consistent format, always states learning objectives which are shared with students in every lesson. The good use of IT is evident in many lessons and the work is very well planned. The teaching includes work to suit different learning styles and work has been done in order for these things to happen. There is clear evidence of differentiation by task in all lessons. Target setting is beginning to impact on student achievement. The marking by all teachers indicates to students what they have to do to improve their attainment. The department is constantly reviewing the courses it offers to achieve the best outcomes it can for the students, for example, at the time of the inspection the staff were revising the content for the KS 3 scheme of work. The staff handbook for the department is both very helpful and very good. The monitoring by the Head of Department is of a very high quality. The leadership and management of the Religious Education Department is, therefore, outstanding

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The department should:

- further improve the use of extended questioning in lessons in order to enhance learning.
- continue to develop the RE aspect of the humanities specialism, particularly the community dimensions.

CAPACITY FOR DEVELOPMENT

The self evaluation produced for the inspection demonstrates that both the department and the school understand accurately their strengths and areas that need further development and that they have good strategies in order to achieve these improvements.