

INSPECTION REPORT

St Damian's Roman Catholic Science College, Ashton, OL6 8BH

Inspection date 9th March 2016

Reporting Inspectors Mr Kevin Hogan
 Mr Michael Wright
 Mr Leo Conley

Inspection carried out in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Roman Catholic VA High School
URN	106270
Age range of pupils	11 -16
Number on roll	784
Appropriate authority	Governing Body
Chair of Governors	Mrs Elizabeth Jones
Headteacher	Mr Sheldon Logue
Religious Education Co-ordinator	Mrs K. Lowe [SLT line manager]
Date of previous inspection	2011

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades 1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3=Requires Improvement 4 = Inadequate
Overall effectiveness of the school	1	
The quality of Catholic Leadership	1	
The quality of the Word of God community	1	
The quality of the Welcome community	1	
The quality of Welfare	1	
The quality of Worship	1	
The quality of Witness	1	

The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements

CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

St Damian's is an 11-16 voluntary aided Catholic school with 784 pupils. A large majority [82%] of pupils are baptised Catholics. Most pupils join the school from four named feeder primary schools; St Christopher's, Ashton; Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Ashton; St. Stephen's, Droylsden and St. Joseph's, Mossley. The school is heavily oversubscribed. For admission to Year 7 in 2016 the school received 241 first choice applications for 150 places. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic, already high, is increasing. Approximately 30% of pupils receive pupil premium. Over recent years the school has made significant improvements in all areas of provision.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St Damian's is an outstanding Catholic School which has experienced rapid and significant improvement over recent years. This has been driven forward by the vision and commitment of the headteacher, senior leadership team and the governors. Outcomes are significantly above the national average in almost all areas and the school is well set to continue its impressive progress. The school has managed to bring about such improvements whilst remaining faithful to its mission as a Catholic institution. The excellent academic performance is matched by an authentic commitment to developing the spiritual and prayer life of the pupils and staff. This in turn serves to inspire and nurture the school's commitment to charitable work in the local and wider community. The school makes a particular effort to help those in need and reach out to those on the margins of society. It is clear that pupils, staff and governors are united in common purpose to achieve excellence in all areas and they are justifiably proud of all St Damian's has achieved.

THE KEY STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL INCLUDE:

- The inspirational and visionary leadership provided by the headteacher, senior leadership team and the governors which has secured significant and rapid improvement
- The quality of relationships across the school which demonstrates a profound commitment to the dignity and well-being of every individual within the community
- The Catholic life of the school as a worshipping community committed to the service of those in society most in need

THE QUALITY OF CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

Leadership across the school and at all levels demonstrates a clear and coherent, shared vision for St Damian's and the part it plays in the mission of the Church. This shared vision is actively promoted and put into practice through the committed service of the governing body, the headteacher and the senior leadership team. This group has taken all steps necessary to bring about rapid improvement across all areas of school provision. Thorough and systematic self-evaluation and rigorous quality assurance procedures have enabled the school to identify areas requiring improvement and to act quickly in providing the required support. Outstanding leadership has driven forward school improvement at an impressive pace. Last year the school was the best performing school in Tameside at Key Stage 4 and recognised as amongst the top 100 non-selective schools in the country. In all areas the school is driven to excel. Last year the headteacher and governors established the 'United in Faith' committee, made up of governors, senior leaders and members of the RE department. This group is responsible for the strategic development of the Catholic and spiritual life of the school and has made impressive progress since its beginning in June 2015. Pupils are provided with many opportunities to develop their leadership skills through participation in a number of groups such as the liturgy group or the pupil learning forum. Pupil levels of engagement in extra-curricular groups, especially those explicitly linked to the Catholic life of the school, are very impressive. In all areas of school life the school motto '*in omnibus fidelis*' [faithful in all things] is apparent and Christ is very much at the centre of all the school does.

THE QUALITY OF THE WORD OF GOD IS OUTSTANDING

An unrelenting focus on improving provision for all learners at the school underpins the excellent achievements recorded by St Damian's over recent years. Teaching is well matched to the needs of the pupils and high levels of challenge were evident in lessons observed across the curriculum. Assessment procedures and marking policies are used with impressive consistency to support learning and enable pupils to make excellent progress. Over recent years the school has made exceptional improvements in Key Stage 4 outcomes. In 2015 St Damian's was identified by the Department for Education as being in the top 100 non-selective state-funded schools in England [5+A*-C incl. English and Maths]. Outcomes in RE are amongst the best in the school and significantly above the national average with 83% achieving A*-C in 2015. The RE department is staffed with well-qualified, committed, effective practitioners whose high expectations and attention to detail has enabled the department to make rapid and sustained progress over recent years. The leadership of RE is outstanding. Schemes of work, assessments, monitoring and quality assurance procedures across both key stages, demonstrate a robust and rigorous approach to departmental improvement. The sustained focus on excellence has helped to ensure that RE is rightly recognised as a leading department within the school. The department is well resourced and the school meets the Religious Education Curriculum Directory requirement of 10% curriculum time at Key Stage 3, exceeding the allocation at Key Stage 4 with 12%. The department has taken steps to ensure that it is well prepared for the impending changes to the GCSE RE specifications. Exceptional levels of Religious literacy were apparent across the age range. Pupils in a Key Stage 4 class demonstrated sophisticated skills in using a variety of scripture reference from both Old and New Testaments to support their arguments in relation to addressing moral problems. The RE department has recently reviewed Key Stage 3 schemes of work and increased the focus on the pupils' use of Scripture. Levels of pupil engagement were observed to be excellent with pupils demonstrating a real desire to be involved in the learning process. It was evident that pupils are challenged to address 'Big Questions' in many areas of the curriculum. A Year 7 class were observed grappling with the issue of the 'Problem of Evil'. Pupils in the class were able to demonstrate a developed understanding of the concept of free will in dealing with this question. Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural education is well developed across the school through both curriculum and extra-curricular provision.

THE QUALITY OF WELCOME IS OUTSTANDING

A culture of authentic Christian welcome permeates the entire school community. Procedures for welcoming visitors to school are clear and well understood by staff. The school makes every effort to ensure that diversity is recognised, valued and celebrated. The 2016 celebrations for the feast of St Damian provided an opportunity for the school to organise a wide ranging selection of activities linked to various countries and cultures. The day celebrated 3 Cs - Caritas, Culture and Community. Members of the school community had the opportunity to be involved in activities such as Indian dancing, Irish dancing, taste foods from all over the world or be part of a Chinese dragon dance. At the same time pupils were able to learn more about other religions such as Hinduism and Judaism and reflect on their own faith. Pupils and staff spoke enthusiastically about the day. One pupil said that it helped her realise that 'although people have different cultures, we are all part of one family at St Damian's'. The school's determination to recognise the value and importance of every individual is evident in all policies and procedures. The quality of relationships between pupils and staff was observed to be excellent. A recent Investors in People report [2015] said that St Damian's 'is a very caring community with everyone demonstrating respect and supporting each other.' Pupils and staff are truly proud of their school and its achievements and there is a strong sense of belonging. Parents overwhelmingly support the school as evidenced in the parent surveys that are regularly conducted. The school has effective transition arrangements to welcome new pupils to Year 7. New and recently appointed staff were appreciative of the structured induction programme provided and described how it had helped them to quickly settle into the school community.

THE QUALITY OF WELFARE IS OUTSTANDING

Staff and pupils demonstrate high levels of respect for each other and there is a very strong sense of community and care for all. This is especially true for the most vulnerable members of the school and additional resources are in place for children with additional needs and the provision of dedicated rooms (the Ambrose Suite and Benedict Suite) is a testament to the priority given to these pupils by the school. The care and support for Looked After Children, Young Carers, children with Special Educational Needs and those attracting Pupil Premium is coordinated by dedicated staff who are determined to secure the best outcomes for all pupils and the impact of this work is evident across the school. A summer school provided for vulnerable pupils to aid with transition proved highly effective. Pupils at the school understand the importance of service to the wider community and a great deal of work is done for local, national and international charities (examples Cornerstones – a local homeless charity, Caritas, local Christmas collection). Safeguarding procedures and systems to ensure the welfare of pupils are thorough and effective. Awareness of mental health and issues around child sexual exploitation have been identified as priorities for development and work with external agencies is proving effective in these areas. Lessons demonstrate highly positive relationships between staff and pupils and the respect that pupils showed towards each other is a notable feature in classes and around the school. Respect for diversity and difference was seen in an RE lesson where the issue of racism was addressed in the context of “What it means to be Catholic” and pupils engaged in some thoughtful discussion with care and sensitivity. The Pupil Learning Forum provides an excellent vehicle for older pupils to express their opinions and to help younger pupils with social and emotional needs as well as acting as mentors in literacy and numeracy. The emphasis placed on the welfare of pupils and staff at St Damian’s is a major strength of the school.

THE QUALITY OF WORSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

Prayer and worship are very much at the heart of the community of St Damian’s. The spiritual formation of both staff and pupils is ably overseen by the United in Faith (UIF) committee, with representatives from the staff, parents and governors. There is a vibrant Liturgical Group recently recognised for their work with the prestigious ‘Diana Award’. This consists of 30 pupils from all year groups (8 of whom have been commissioned by the Bishop) who are at the forefront of organising the college’s extensive range of Masses, assemblies, celebrations and liturgies (some attended by parishioners). The pupils take part in a daily act of worship in their form groups. Form tutors are equipped with a prayer file and other resources to help ensure consistent quality. Expectations of staff and support available are clearly laid out in the school’s comprehensive document: ‘The Prayer Life of St Damian’s’. All form tutors are given the opportunity to lead ‘Chapel Assemblies’ during the course of each term and feel confident and supported to do so. There are weekly assemblies led by the relevant Head of Year, often supported by external bodies and frequently led by pupils. The assemblies observed were characterised by a quiet, calm, reflective atmosphere and appropriate music, readings and prayer. In all cases the pupils were engaged, relaxed and prayerful. There was a palpable sense of togetherness and trust which clearly demonstrated how much the pupils valued prayer and reflection. The school chapel is beautifully appointed, is located at the heart of the college and benefits from reservation of the Blessed Sacrament. The college is planning to further develop more traditional devotions such as Stations of the Cross and to display professional signage in departments which focuses upon scriptural quotes and images to celebrate St Damian’s as a Catholic community.

THE QUALITY OF WITNESS IS OUTSTANDING

Pupils are actively engaged in regularly reviewing the school’s mission statement in order to ensure that it is relevant and practical. Pupils were able to clearly articulate what the mission statement meant for them and how it informed the work of the school in all areas. The governors, staff and pupils of St Damian’s are keenly aware of what it means to be part of a vibrant Catholic community and also their responsibility to share their faith with each other and the wider world. Levels of engagement in the liturgy group, chaplaincy and justice league are impressive and demonstrate a willingness on the part of the pupils to celebrate and witness to their faith and beliefs. Numerous opportunities are provided throughout the school for pupils to engage in charitable activities. Such activities include raising funds for a local hospice, involvement in the Key 103 appeal and providing back packs filled with educational materials for children unable to attend school in Africa. Pupils were eager to share with inspectors their experience of involvement in such activities and how

it made explicit their commitment to the service of God and neighbour. Pupils from the liturgy group were able to express in a reflective, confident and mature manner how the opportunities provided by the school had enabled them to 'grow in faith' through their involvement with various charitable activities such as the 'big sleepout' to raise funds for Cornerstones. Pupils also described how they had been involved in writing letters to foreign governments and ambassadors pleading for the rights of persecuted Christian minorities. A strong and active sense of social responsibility, shaped and guided by Gospel values, is evident throughout the school. The United in Faith committee provides clear and coherent leadership in continuing to develop the aims and activities of the school as a community of witness at the service of the Church.

AGREED AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- Continue to develop schemes of work in order to ensure Scripture is embedded at KS3
- Continue to develop KS4 schemes of work in preparation for the introduction of new GCSE specifications
- Continue the excellent work of the United in Faith committee in developing the school as a community of faith

Letter to pupils

17th March 2016

Dear Pupils

Thank you so much for the very warm welcome you gave us when we came to visit your school. We were very impressed with how proud you were of St Damian's, all the work it does and all it stands for. You all play your part in helping to make St Damian's an outstanding Catholic school. We certainly came away with a feeling of everybody in the school community having a strong sense of unity and purpose.

Your work is of a very high standard and we could see that you take your learning very seriously and are proud of your achievements. You have outstanding RE teachers who are clearly helping you to feel confident in your learning and ability to discuss complex religious and moral issues. We were particularly impressed by the way in which you were able to reflect on serious matters of belief and values and discuss them in an open, honest and mature manner.

Mr Logue and the governors are determined to continue developing the RE curriculum and revisions to schemes of work at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 will ensure that provision continues to be outstanding.

We were particularly impressed with your commitment to helping those who are in need. The charitable work completed at St Damian's demonstrates a real commitment to Gospel values and does you, your parents and your school great credit.

We wish you well for the future and are confident that you will continue to live out the school motto to be 'faithful in all things'.

God bless you all

Kevin Hogan
Michael Wright
Leo Conley
[Section 48 Inspectors]

Summary report for parents

On the 9th March 2016 the school was inspected in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005. The full report has been made available to the school and can also be accessed via both the school website and the Education section on the website of the Diocese of Salford.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL IS OUTSTANDING

St Damian's is an outstanding Catholic School which has experienced rapid and significant improvement over recent years. This has been driven forward by the vision and commitment of the headteacher, senior leadership team and the governors. Outcomes are significantly above the national average in almost all areas and the school is well set to continue its impressive progress. The school has managed to bring about such improvements whilst remaining faithful to its mission as a Catholic institution. The excellent academic performance is matched by an authentic commitment to developing the spiritual and prayer life of the pupils and staff. This in turn serves to inspire and nurture the school's commitment to charitable work in the local and wider community. The school makes a particular effort to help those in need and reach out to those on the margins of society. It is clear that pupils, staff and governors are united in common purpose to achieve excellence in all areas and they are justifiably proud of all St Damian's has achieved.

THE KEY STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL INCLUDE:

- The inspirational and visionary leadership provided by the headteacher, senior leadership team and the governors which has secured significant and rapid improvement
- The quality of relationships across the school which demonstrates a profound commitment to the dignity and well-being of every individual within the community
- The Catholic life of the school as a worshipping community committed to the service of those in society most in need

AGREED AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- Continue to develop schemes of work in order to ensure Scripture is embedded at KS3
- Continue to develop KS4 schemes of work in preparation for the introduction of new GCSE specifications
- Continue the excellent work of the United in Faith committee in developing the school as a community of faith