

Best practice

St. Joseph's RC High School, Newport

Number of pupils: 1480

Age range: 11 - 18 years

Date of Estyn inspection: January 2013



Area of sector-leading practice which has been identified during inspection and relates to a particular quality indicator:

Key Question: 3

Quality Indicator: 3.1 and 3.2

Aspect: 3.3.1 and 3.2.3

The high quality and very successful training and development of middle leaders.

Context and background to sector-leading practice:

St. Joseph's RC High School, Newport, is a voluntary-aided, mixed, 11-18 school, in the city of Newport and within the Catholic Archdiocese of Cardiff. There are 1480 pupils on roll with 320 students in the sixth form. Most pupils come from the city of Newport and a small minority come from Risca, Caldicot and Chepstow. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. A total of 15.6% of pupils are entitled to free school meals. This is slightly below the national average of 17.4% for secondary schools in Wales. Around 29% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales.

The school recognises that good middle

leadership is an important factor in improving standards. Over the last three years, the school has been committed to supporting and developing experienced, recently appointed and aspiring middle leaders as part of its improvement journey.

Nature of strategy or activity identified as sector-leading practice:

There is a fundamental link between the high quality of senior and middle leadership at St Joseph's RC High School and the excellent outcomes for pupils. The school is committed to 'growing' leaders and it is this culture that permeates the school.

Over the last three years over 30 teachers have undertaken leadership and management training provided by the school and supported by high quality external leadership training. Many of these teachers are new, recently appointed or aspiring middle leaders. The training focused on improving the skills necessary for successful management, self-evaluation and improvement planning. The impact of this training on the quality of work carried out by heads of department and heads of year is reflected in the consistently high standards achieved by pupils.

The school's initial aim was to provide a training package for newly appointed middle leaders who were effective classroom practitioners but had little experience of leading or managing other people.

This programme started in 2010 with a group of 15 teachers. Training took place during twilight training sessions and

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focused on the role of middle leaders in:

- tracking pupil progress and the effective use of data;
- how to carry out lesson observations; and
- the role of pupils' voice in self-evaluation.

During the summer term of 2010, further external training was provided as a part of a two day middle leader development training event. This training focused on leadership and management skills and included sessions on providing effective feedback, team development, coaching and mentoring. The success of this programme led to the development of a second cohort of 15 teachers in 2011-2012. Many of these were TLR post holders or those aspiring to middle leadership positions. Over the last year, the school has developed a tailored programme for heads of year and is developing further opportunities for middle leaders who aspire towards senior leadership roles.

The senior leadership team work very closely with middle leaders to develop departmental self-evaluation and improvement planning. During heads of department meetings, middle leaders review filmed lessons and discuss the quality of teaching and the standards achieved by pupils. Through discussions with staff, the school has agreed a common vocabulary in order to evaluate teaching and learning. These discussions led to the construction of a new lesson planning form and lesson observation form. All department reviews are carried out jointly, with middle and senior leaders undertaking lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and listening to the views learners. The evidence from these reviews and the cycle of self-evaluation undertaken by departments feeds directly into the high quality departmental self-evaluation reports and improvement plans.

This developmental work with middle leaders is matched to half termly link meetings between senior leaders and middle leaders. The department improvement plan, progress against actions and their impact, are standing agenda items at these meetings. The headteacher attends each of these meetings, providing a quality assurance role and gaining an overview across all subject areas.

• **Impact on provision and learners' standards:**

• The quality of middle leadership is an outstanding feature of the school which has resulted in:

- high quality teaching and learning across the school;
- very high standards in all key stages; and
- high levels of pupils' wellbeing.

• Nearly all middle leaders, including heads of year and heads of department, make an outstanding contribution to the success of the school and have a strong understanding of their role. There is a very well developed culture of accountability for standards, undertaking of self-evaluation and planning for improvement. Middle leaders are very effective in the support and challenge they provide to their teams. There are very strong and purposeful working relationships between middle leaders and their link senior colleagues. Effective communication and high levels of trust have been significant factors in continuing to raise standards.

• The outcomes from this work are recognised in our most recent inspection report which states:

- 'The standards achieved by pupils are outstanding. The school has sustained high levels of performance over the last five years and there are a number of very strong features. These include the outstanding progress and achievement of all pupils including boys and more able pupils'; and
- 'Attendance levels over the last five years are outstanding and consistently place the school in the top quarter of similar schools in Wales. This is an outstanding feature. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are courteous and relate very well to one another as well as to all staff and visitors.'