



DIOCESAN CANONICAL INSPECTION REPORT

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL, RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

St Thomas More Catholic Voluntary Academy

Palace Fields, Buxton, SK17 6AF

School URN:	146128
Inspection Date:	03 April 2019
Inspectors:	Mr Neil Lockyer and Miss Caroline McGrath

Overall Effectiveness	Previous Inspection:	Good	2
	This Inspection:	Requires Improvement	3
Catholic Life:		Good	2
Religious Education:		Requires Improvement	3
Collective Worship:		Good	2

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Thomas More Catholic Voluntary Academy is a Catholic school that requires improvement.

- The overall effectiveness of the school requires improvement. This is as a result of standards in Religious Education. Progress for Religious Education for the last three years has been less than good because it has been below, or significantly below, national average. Attainment has been erratic over the past three years. The improvements made by leaders – for example in the assessment of Religious Education – are embryonic and have not yet had the chance to demonstrate the impact needed.
- The Catholic Life of the school is good. The headteacher has a strong, clear vision for the school and he is a caring, supportive and well-respected leader of the community. Pupils understand the mission of the school clearly and are able to articulate it very well. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and this is rooted in their deep respect for themselves and each other. The school offers many opportunities for personal development and most pupils respond well to these.
- The quality of Religious Education requires improvement. Whilst most pupils clearly enjoy their work and their learning in Religious Education and have tremendous respect for their RE teachers, the progress they are making over time has been insufficient over the last three years. In some lessons, the level of challenge and the pace of learning were insufficient. Whilst local governors do receive regular reports from the head of Religious Education, they are unclear about the current rates of progress of pupils.
- Collective Worship is good. There is regular, planned pupil leadership of the preparations for, delivery of and evaluation of Collective Worship. Pupils have a clear understanding of different types of prayer and it is clear that worship is very inclusive at this school. Staff are supported in helping pupils to plan and deliver quality worship. This grading is particularly commendable as the school has achieved these high standards, despite being unable to recruit a lay chaplain.

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

- St Thomas More is a smaller than average secondary school with 433 pupils on roll.
- In 2018, Year 7 pupils came from 18 different feeder primary schools. The school's two main feeder primary schools are St Anne's, Buxton and St Mary's, New Mills.
- On 1 September 2018, St Thomas More joined the recently formed St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi-Academy Trust.
- The school serves the parishes of St Anne's, Buxton, St Mary's, Marple Bridge and New Mills, Sacred Heart, Whaley Bridge, and St John Fisher and St Thomas More, Chapel-en-le-Frith.
- 33% of pupils attending the school are baptised Catholics. 42% are from another Christian background. 6% are from other faith backgrounds and 19% have no religious affiliation.
- The percentage of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium (21%) is above the national average, 9% of pupils are at the 'school support' stage of the special needs and/ or disabilities register, and 10 pupils have an EHCP/ support plan.
- Since September 2018, the headteacher has been the executive headteacher over both St Thomas More, and St Anne's Catholic Voluntary Academy (primary).

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Catholic Life:
 - Continue to seek to recruit a lay chaplain to add capacity to the leadership of Catholic Life within the school.
 - Review and update the Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) policy and resources, ensuring that they fully prepare pupils for the next stage of their physical, emotional and spiritual development.
- Religious Education:
 - Fully embed the current developments in Religious Education so that assessment has impact by: fully informing future lesson planning; focusing pupils on areas for improvement; and enabling pupils to respond to it.
 - Increase the level of pace and challenge in Religious Education lessons so that pupils make good progress.
 - Actively involve local governors in the evaluation of Religious Education, ensuring that they are providing challenge as well as support to the school.
- Collective Worship:
 - Ensure that Collective Worship is accessible to pupils in a contemporary context, with clear explanations of the mission for young people based on the theme of the act of worship.
 - Actively involve local governors in the evaluation of Collective Worship, ensuring that they are providing challenge as well as support to the school.

CATHOLIC LIFE

THE QUALITY OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL	2
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- The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.
- The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.
- How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

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The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school – outstanding

- Pupils love and have a great respect for their school. Many of those spoken to were very positive about the support they are offered by a wide range of adults across the school. Those of the Catholic faith, other Christians, members of other world faiths, and those of no faith all positively expressed how inclusive the school is.
- Pupils are very clear about the school's mission statement (FARE – Faith, Achievement, Respect and Enjoy), and can both articulate it and relate it to their lives within school and beyond.
- Behaviour in the school is exemplary and demonstrates the respect that pupils have for their school, themselves and each other. There is a strong sense of community at all levels within the school; the pupils hold the staff in the highest regard.
- There is a strong sense of restorative justice within the school. Pupils are able to explain the importance of forgiveness and understand the importance of support and reconciliation when people make poor choices in life.
- The prayer life of the school is strong and is constantly developing. Recent professional development for staff has further deepened their understanding of the sacred place of the Mass and other liturgical activities.
- The area of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) is dealt with sensitively, appropriately and with a focus on the Christian understanding of sexual love. The resources are somewhat dated however and should be reviewed.
- Pupils value the school's link to the local parish (St Anne's, Buxton), and a number have responded to the support and development offered in preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation. This has included a retreat at the Briars Diocesan Youth Centre in Crich.

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school – good

- There is a strong sense of Catholic Social Teaching in this school. This is demonstrated in the curriculum including, and well beyond, Religious Education. Examples of this were seen in the exceptional art work produced by pupils, dealing with such topics as the injustice of the Holocaust, and giving wonderful opportunities for spiritual reflection.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to reflect on their faith, both within school and also by benefitting from the various retreats offered by the school. Recent examples include retreats to the Briars and to Iona. Pupils spoke about how this 'time away' helped them to think about their faith.
- The Catholic Life of the school is present and tangible throughout the building, with displays demonstrating the work of pupils tagged with one of the four pillars of the mission statement. All classrooms have crucifixes and, in most cases, reflective displays inspiring prayer. All staff – teaching and non-teaching – have written their favourite scriptural verses around the building, creating curiosity and interest among the pupils.
- Despite the difficulties the school has had in recruiting a lay chaplain, there is a clear programme of opportunities for pupils to engage with and develop from. This includes the work of the chaplaincy team which is made up of members of all year groups.
- There is excellent pastoral care for both pupils and staff in this school. For pupils, this includes pastoral programmes and Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons which are well planned, well delivered and reflect Catholic teaching and principles.
- There is a clear commitment by the school, reflected in policies and procedures, to protect, nurture and support the most vulnerable members of the community. This includes those young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school – good

- School leaders, including the headteacher, have a very clear, Catholic vision for this school, and are determined to ensure that it is implemented. The local parish priest described them as having 'Catholic hearts and values', explaining that every child is valued. Members of the school community have had a number of very difficult circumstances to deal with in recent times; the response of school leaders in supporting those pupils and members of staff has been exemplary and has demonstrated the Catholic ethos in a very tangible way.
- School leaders give Catholic Life a high priority in this school, and pupils are able to articulate the impact of this. They describe their school as 'a very friendly community where everyone is welcome', and 'very supportive'. Pupils report that their teachers and other staff are strong role models, and that prayer and worship is both natural and inclusive at the school.
- The school has responded well to the Bishop's priorities for education, including the diocesan spiritual themes. In addition, the school is working in close partnership with the new St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi-Academy Trust (CMAT) to which it belongs. In particular, the school has been fully involved in the CMAT networks to further various aspects of school life.

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- School leaders and local governors, fully supported by the CMAT, undertake a range of effective evaluation and monitoring activities around the Catholic Life of the school. This has included obtaining feedback from pupils and 'ethos walks' assessing the impact of the Catholic Life of the school on its physical environment.
- Local governors are clearly very committed to the success of the school, and are very supportive and trusting of school leaders. However, there is a lack of sufficient challenge enabling the school to develop further as a result.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION	3
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- How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.
- How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

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How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education – requires improvement

- Attainment in 2016 and 2017 has been below the national average for Religious Education, although it has improved in 2018, in which the attainment of pupils met the national average. Progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 has reflected a similar pattern of below expected progress, although, again, the gap is closing. In particular, there has been a significant improvement in the number of pupils reaching a grade 7 or above at GCSE. Attainment for 2018 (based on the revised specifications for GCSE) is below the diocesan average.
- The relative underachievement of boys is a departmental priority and the head of department has carried out research and begun a programme of implementing strategies to address this.
- Observations of lessons demonstrated how most pupils are actively engaged in lessons, participating well and showing commitment to improving their learning as individuals and as members of a group. They approach their lessons with interest and respond well to activities. Behaviour in lessons is excellent and evidences warm and positive relationships between teachers and pupils.
- Pupils are religiously literate and can use their skills to reflect on and express a range of ethical and religious ideas. This understanding has been greatly enriched by the trips provided by the department to deepen pupils' awareness of how faith is 'lived out'. Pupils greatly appreciate these trips and feel that they offer opportunities to empathise with the values and history of other people.
- The quality of pupils' current written work in response to tasks is good overall.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education – requires improvement

- Teachers have reviewed the assessment requirements at GCSE level to amend the style of assessment activities at Key Stage 3 so that pupils become familiar with the 'driver' words used in examinations. They are using acronyms to train pupils to give appropriate responses to high value questions in the exams and pupils have shown a good degree of understanding of these.
- Pupils' books show that there are a variety of ways of recording information being used in order to create notes that will be clear for revision purposes. There is good evidence of extended written pieces being set and accurately graded.
- Teachers use a combination of individual and collaborative work in lessons and this leads to good levels of motivation. The resources used in activities are well chosen to match the needs and abilities of pupils. However, the pace of some activities needs to be improved in order to maintain stretch and challenge for all pupils and to allow for further progress to be made.
- Questioning in lessons leads to some good responses from a number of pupils but there remains scope for further improvement of questioning to check learning and to extend answers. Pupils need to be encouraged to make deeper links between topics they have learned.
- Pupils' books are regularly marked and a system of feedback and response is being applied. This is, as yet, not fully embedded and requires more specific comments from teachers. Pupil response to feedback is inconsistent and, at times, superficial. It does not yet evidence that they know how to improve in line with the expectations of the assessments.
- Self and peer assessment could be used more systematically to develop pupils' understanding of how to improve.

The extent to which leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education – good

- Leaders and local governors have ensured that the Religious Education curriculum time meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in every key stage and that Religious Education has full parity with other core subjects. Local governors fully support the priority of Religious Education as a core subject but would benefit from a deeper understanding of the performance of the department for monitoring and evaluation purposes.
- The head of department has worked closely with the diocese to ensure that the revised GCSE requirements are fully understood and that the provision at Key Stage 3 is appropriate grounding for their studies. The current cohort of Key Stage 3 pupils has, consequently, shown greater progress.
- Leaders have identified areas for improvement and groups of students upon which to focus, namely boys and the increase of grades 3 to 4 at GCSE. The head of department carries out quality assurance in line with the school's policy.
- Moderation with other schools in the diocese has taken place to ensure accuracy of marking, and this was evidenced in the accurate marking reflected in the work scrutiny.
- Despite low outcomes in recent years, strategies for driving improvement in written work have been identified and have begun to be implemented; these now need to be further embedded and consistently used across the department so that measurable progress can be made.

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- The head of department is also a senior leader with a clear and committed vision of the importance of Religious Education both on a spiritual and an academic level. She fully embodies the values and faith she promotes and has the unwavering support of teachers across the school, pupils, leaders and local governors, to the extent that people outside of the department willingly give up their time to support trips that promote Religious Education and Catholic Life. Religious Education has a prominent profile within the school.

- Pupils who would be unable to access the requirements for GCSE have been provided with an Entry Level Certificate course. The head of department and classroom teacher liaise with teaching assistants effectively to ensure that pupils studying this course are appropriately supported. Activities are well chosen to ensure that pupils can study alongside their peers whilst carrying out different external assessment tasks.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP	2
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- How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.
- The quality of provision for the Collective Worship.
- How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

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How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship – good

- Pupils, including those in the chaplaincy team, regularly prepare, deliver and evaluate Acts of Worship in the school. An example of this was given by Year 11 pupils who had been investigating and choosing appropriate readings, hymns and prayers for their forthcoming 'Leavers' Mass'. Pupils relish, and are grateful for, such opportunities to lead worship. They acknowledge that they have been given far more opportunities to take the lead in planning worship in recent times.
- Pupils' response to Collective Worship in the school was seen to be reverent, respectful and appropriate. A strong example and clear expectations are set by members of staff.
- Pupils have a good awareness of the liturgical year of the Church and were able to articulate its meaning. For example, in acknowledging the season of Lent, pupils spoke about how their charitable activities were linked to the idea of almsgiving.
- There is a variety of forms of worship evident within the school. An Act of Worship was observed which focused on the Stations of the Cross and involved a number of pupils from the nearby feeder primary school. Liturgical dance has recently been introduced, which has given an opportunity for older pupils to teach and work with younger pupils successfully.
- Worship is highly inclusive on this school. One pupil commented, 'even though I'm an atheist, I always feel included and welcome'.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship – good

- Pupils explained that there is a programme of daily prayer which is themed by the liturgical calendar and/or key events (for example, International Women's Day). One pupil commented that 'we pray as a community'.
- There is evidence of the impact of the CMAT lead lay chaplain in producing resources and supporting the school in the development of Collective Worship (for example, the daily prayer resources). This support has been particularly needed in the absence of a school lay chaplain.
- Although the current prayer room is very small and underused, the school has benefitted from funding from the parish which is leading to the creation of a new chapel. This will be an excellent and much needed addition.
- The school engages with the parish in a number of different ways to create opportunities for worship. There are current plans underway for a joint celebration of St Thomas More's feast day.
- Local governors play an active role in the Collective Worship of the school. This includes attending Masses and other liturgies, working with the head of music to discuss appropriate hymns and music for worship, and attending staff development sessions (for example the CMAT session on 'Understanding the Mass').

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship – good

- The headteacher, head of Religious Education and other staff plan and deliver quality Collective Worship and fully understand how to support pupils in doing the same. They have a strong and clear understanding of the Church's liturgical year, seasons and feasts.
- Staff are very well supported and are given opportunities to receive liturgical formation and support in planning Collective Worship.
- Staff are encouraged to both use the resources available for daily prayer with their groups, and also to personalise worship and share experiences as appropriate. An example of this was observed in which a teacher shared his experience of a recent retreat with his tutor group. This provided the pupils with a very tangible context in which to understand the reading they had heard. Contextualising worship remains an area of development for the school.
- Although pupil evaluations of Collective Worship are well-established, there is not yet consistency in the evaluations of school leaders and, particularly, local governors.
- Staff questionnaires are distributed after whole-school Acts of Worship and the responses are acted upon. Staff describe school leaders as encouraging a strong prayer life within the school which, as a result, is highly inclusive.

SCHOOL DETAILS

School Name	St Thomas More Catholic Voluntary Academy
Unique Reference Number	146128
CMAT	St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi-Academy Trust

The inspection of this school was carried out on behalf of the Bishop of Nottingham under Canon 806 of Canon Law in accordance with the *Evaluation Schedule (September 2018)* for diocesan canonical inspections in the Diocese of Nottingham. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the school is in providing Catholic education. The process begins with the school's own self-evaluation and the inspection schedule is in line with the criteria set by the National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers (NBRIA).

During the inspection, the inspectors observed 4 Religious Education lessons and 4 Acts of Collective Worship.

Meetings were held with the headteacher, the subject leader for Religious Education, the chair of governors, the CMAT Director of Performance and Standards and the parish priest. Discussions were also held with pupils and other staff.

The inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including reports of the local governing body, action plans, the school development plan, monitoring forms, assessment information and parental response forms. Inspectors also examined the work in pupils' Religious Education books.

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Headteacher:	Mr Brendan Hickey
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WHAT INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS MEAN

Within the report, the following grades are used:

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires Improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

In the context of the whole school, the overall effectiveness grades have the following meaning:

Grade 1	Outstanding	The school is a highly effective Catholic school. Pupils' needs are exceptionally well met.
Grade 2	Good	The school is an effective Catholic school. Pupils' needs are met well.
Grade 3	Requires Improvement	The school is not yet a good Catholic school, it is not inadequate however, and there are aspects that require improvement. There will be a monitoring visit within the next 18 months and the school will be re-inspected within 3 years.
Grade 4	Inadequate	There are features in need of urgent and immediate attention. The school is not meeting the basic minimum requirement for adequacy as a Catholic school. The school will receive an annual monitoring visit and will be re-inspected within 3 years.