



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD



Inspection Report

Name of School: St Thomas More High School

Unique Reference Number: 137310

Inspection Date: October 14, 2013

**Reporting Inspectors: Dr. Michael Sutherland-Harper and
Mr. Derek Kelly**

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

**Type of School: Academy converter
School Category: Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils: 11-18
Gender of pupils: Boys. Mixed sixth form.
Number on roll: 1017
Appropriate Authority: The governing body
Date of previous inspection:
15.5.2009**

**School Address: Kenilworth Gardens
Westcliff-on-Sea
SS0 0BW.
Tel. No. 01702 344933
Fax No. 01702 436990
Chair of Governors: Michael Barry
Headteacher: Gemma Ackred**

Introduction:

The Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education (Schools) Act 2005 by two inspectors appointed by the Diocesan Bishop at the request of the Governing Body of the School.

The Inspectors acknowledge and are appreciative of the full support, co-operation and courtesy they enjoyed from the Governors, Headteacher, Staff and Pupils of the School both before and during the Inspection. The Inspectors wish to express their gratitude to all concerned.

The focus of the Section 48 Inspection was:

- Classroom Religious Education
- The Catholic nature of the School through:
 1. Worship
 2. Links with the Catholic and wider community
- Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development

The Section 48 Report

**St Thomas More High School
Kenilworth Gardens
Westcliff-on-Sea
SS0 0BW.**

Head Teacher: Gemma Ackred

Date of Inspection: October 14, 2013

Description of the School:

St Thomas More High School is an 11-18 Academy Trust secondary school for boys from 11-16 and with a mixed sixth form. The school serves the Catholic families from the ten feeder parishes within the Southend deanery. The school is situated in Westcliff-on-Sea in the county of Essex and the diocese of Brentwood. The new headteacher took up the substantive post in April 2013.

Record of Evidence Base:

Two Diocesan Inspectors were in the school for the equivalent of two inspection days.

- The study of pre-inspection documentation including the Self-Evaluation Form/ Denominational Provision (SEF/DP).
- The observation of ten lessons.
- Participation in Mass and an assembly.
- Scrutiny of pupils' written work.
- Meetings with the Headteacher, the Deputy Headteacher, the Head of Religious Education (R.E.), the Chair of Governors, a local parish priest and two groups of students.
- Observations of registration activities and of R.E. displays in the classrooms and around the school.

What the School does well:

St. Thomas More High School is a good Catholic school.

The school is working steadily and successfully to keep the Catholic ethos at the centre of the lives of its community of staff, parents and students. Conscious of its responsibilities in a Christian and Catholic setting to be 'truly God's servant first', the school is also determined that every student should fulfill his or her educational potential.

The school recognizes that some areas of attainment have been less than expected but has been working effectively to improve provision and outcomes at all levels in Religious Education (R.E.). With the appointment of a new deputy headteacher and of an R.E. co-ordinator, who have begun to work closely in tandem, results, attitudes and assessment procedures in Key Stage 3 are the current focus so that results there parallel those at Key Stages 4 and 5. At Key Stage 4, the school has worked hard to raise results in 2013 after a dip in 2012 and to ensure that they are at least as high or better in 2014. On this basis, and from the lessons seen during the inspection, students' achievement and enjoyment in R.E. is good. In interview, students praised many of the approaches to the subject while they were also prepared to suggest how their learning might be improved. Marking of work is at present inconsistent in expecting that students will always respond to teachers' comments. Target setting is at an early stage of development. Target stickers, and 'working at' levels are not dated.

The quality of students' learning and progress in R.E. is good. Strengths include a readiness to contribute in many lessons. Students are articulate and keen to supplement their studies with activities related to the whole school promotion of R.E. and the Catholic ethos. In a few lessons, progress and understanding are not closely enough monitored or recorded to enable students to progress as quickly as they might otherwise. Links to literacy are developing well.

Students have good opportunities to contribute to, and benefit from the Catholic life of the school. They raise significant sums for charity and serve as ambassadors for the school in a variety of settings. The reputation of the school has risen in its local community because of efforts like these. The school is looking at ways of surveying students' opinions of how they might contribute even more in and out of school. Student and staff commitment was exemplified by very good attendance at the Monday Mass in the chapel. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Students' responses were good but more variable in an assembly observed during the inspection. The topic of 'modern heroism' was relevant and interesting but students need further training on voice projection in assemblies and the singing was much less from the senior years, whom the school might justifiably expect to take a lead. The school is currently looking at ways to increase staff leadership of assemblies, where a high staff presence sets a very good example, and to develop links with parishes.

Leaders, governors and managers are working well together to promote, monitor and evaluate provision for the Catholic life of the school. The headteacher is deeply committed to the school and leads by example. She has a clear vision for the school as a place where achievement and teaching in R.E., as elsewhere, continually develop and improve. Improvements, which include the development of R.E. as a subject and of the Catholic ethos, are accurately identified where needed. Implementation is at an early stage for a number of initiatives but the signs are very promising. The deputy headteacher and head of R.E. are working closely together to implement the new chaplaincy system, always having at the front of their minds what is best for the school. Identification and sharing of best practice within the school, and with other schools, is at an early stage. The newly re-structured senior leadership team is well supported by an experienced governing body. Governors have an accurate picture of the school and parish priests are helping well to develop its spirituality.

Teaching requires improvement. While there is a solid core of good teaching, a number of lessons do not offer enough challenge for the more able, questioning is too closed with few requests for reasons for answers and expectations are not high enough in some lessons. As a result, students' engagement with the subject is sometimes less than it might be and teachers have not taken sufficient account of strategies which might engage students more in bringing R.E. to life. That said, there are signs that improvement is already taking place across the department.

The curriculum on offer is good but a work in development. The school had recognized the need to develop students' understanding at Key Stage 3 and to review course and sex and relationship education in response to a recent student survey. Not all departmental development plans incorporate departmental contributions to R.E. and the school's Catholic ethos. The courses on offer meet the expectations of the diocese, bishops' conference and Catholic Education Service. The school conforms to both the national and diocesan requirements for the allocation of curriculum time for taught R.E. Provision follows the diocesan programmes.

What needs to be improved?

- **Review and develop assessment procedures in R.E.**
- **Share best practice in R.E. teaching across the department and school**
- **Provide more challenge for the more able and ensure that expectations are consistently high across all lessons**
- **Ensure that student voice is incorporated in the development of R.E. provision as per the impact already seen in Years 12 and 13 from such a consultation.**

The Inspectors endorse the areas identified by the school for improvement in the Section 48 Self-Evaluation Form.