



**DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION  
REPORT**  
(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

on

**THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL  
AND  
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

**School:** St. Thomas More Catholic Secondary School

**Address:** Palace Fields  
Buxton  
SK17 6AF

**Telephone Number:** 01298 23167

**Email address:** [bhickey@st-thomasmore.derbyshire.sch.uk](mailto:bhickey@st-thomasmore.derbyshire.sch.uk)

**School URN:** 112971

**Headteacher:** Mr Brendan Hickey

**Chair of Governors:** Rev Dennis Higgins

**Inspectors:** Mr Paul Martin  
Mrs Marcella Gillespie  
Mrs Sarah Lockyer

**Date of Inspection:** 20 September 2013

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The inspection of this school was carried out on behalf of the Bishop of Nottingham under Canon 806 of Canon Law and Section 48 of the Education Act 2005 in accordance with the Diocese of Nottingham Schedule for Section 48 Inspections. 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, 1 Act of Collective Worship and 3 registration form periods. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the head of the Religious Education department, the teacher in charge of chaplaincy, the assistant headteacher (data manager), the inclusion coordinator, the special educational needs co-ordinator, the chair of governors, pupils and a parent.

The inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including school and departmental documentation including school improvement plans, policies, planning and assessment files and minutes of meetings. Inspectors also examined pupils' written work Religious Education books.

## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

St. Thomas More is a small, 11 – 16 mixed Catholic comprehensive school. It has two main feeder primary schools, St. Anne's Buxton and St. Mary's New Mills. The school serves the parishes of St. Anne's, St. Mary's, Ss. Thomas More and John Fisher and Sacred Heart (in the Diocese of Shrewsbury). As a Catholic school, pupils are drawn from a large catchment area. The published admissions number per year is 80; attainment on entry is broadly average. Many students move on to Aquinas College for post 16 learning. Approximately 60% of the students attending the school come from Catholic households although this ranges from 50% in Year 7 to 62% in Year 9. Most students are from White British backgrounds and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is very low. The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium is much smaller than average.

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# INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

**OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

2

**CATHOLIC LIFE**

2

**COLLECTIVE WORSHIP**

2

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

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## KEY FINDINGS

- It is clear on visiting the school, that this is a religious community where the teachings of the Catholic Church are central. The headteacher has created a learning and a caring community where staff are very supportive of one another and work effectively together as a strong team for the benefit of all pupils.
- Pupils' behaviour and their caring nature towards those less fortunate than themselves, both within and beyond the school, are outstanding.
- The school does not have a lay chaplain and there is no permanent chapel resource. A sacristy is used as a prayer room at present.
- There has been an inconsistent level of achievement in Religious Education at Key Stage 4 since the last inspection ranging from 50% to 75% approximately with no consecutive two years showing sustained progress.
- Not all areas for development identified at the last Section 48 inspection have been addressed successfully.

## WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- To address issues of capacity surrounding 'chaplaincy' in order to ensure rapid implementation of actions detailed in the school improvement plan.
  - To continue to develop opportunities for pupils to play an active role in developing the Catholic Life of the school.
  - To continue to develop monitoring and evaluation systems that will lead to sustained and improved outcomes in Religious Education at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.
  - To put in place systems that will make all aspects of the Catholic Life of the school areas of excellence.
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# CATHOLIC LIFE

## THE QUALITY OF 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.
- The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.
- How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

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Pupils are very passionate about their school community and are very keen to support one another. Their caring nature towards those less fortunate than themselves, both within and beyond the school, is outstanding. Pupils across all year groups are involved in a wide range of activities in response to the needs of others. Behaviour is outstanding and pupils are eager to congratulate and to forgive in equal measure. One excluded pupil commented that 'St Thomas More is a great school' and that pupils and staff have 'helped him to cope with and improve his behaviour'. Many pupils take part in a wide range of activities to further their personal development and spiritual growth including annual retreats. Some pupils are involved in preparing First Holy Communicants at the local Catholic primary school.

Some success has been achieved since the last Section 48 inspection and the school's mission statement is clear and concise with staff committed to its implementation. However, pupils have a limited involvement in shaping this mission. There is clear evidence of an outstanding provision with respect to pastoral care, support for individual learning, behavioural needs and personal, social, health education. The headteacher has created a learning and a caring community where staff are very supportive of one another and work effectively together as a strong team for the benefit of all pupils. Pupils are fully aware of the school's expectations regarding behaviour and as a result, take responsibility with understanding and due regard for forgiveness.

The headteacher took up post just before the previous Section 48 inspection and since then, has led on all aspects of the Catholic Life of the school. He is supported by other leaders and managers and collectively, they are well regarded by pupils, staff and parents alike. Improvements in the provision of the Catholic Life of the school are included within the school's recent school improvement plans. Leaders are beginning to ensure that pupils take an increasing role within this and are supporting them in developing leadership skills, for example, within the chaplaincy team. However, there are issues of capacity that need to be addressed to ensure that all actions within the plan are successful and which could drive the school towards being an outstanding Catholic school. Key staff provide an outstanding level of provision by bridging the gap between school and home where problems exist and thereby supporting vulnerable pupils who would otherwise not be engaged at school. No one at St. Thomas More is overlooked. Governors take an active role in supporting and challenging the headteacher and other leaders in shaping the direction of the school.

# COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

## THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

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- How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship. 2
- The quality of provision for Collective Worship. 2
- How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship. 3

Pupils act with reverence and are keen to participate in Acts of Worship. They reflect in silence, join in community prayers appropriately and with confidence. Outstanding behaviour was witnessed during a Key Stage 4 Act of Worship which included some members of the newly established pupil chaplaincy team promoting their leadership role. Prayer is a key feature in daily form time and also at the end of the school day where pupils take a turn at reading out their own prayer. Pupils are beginning to have opportunities to prepare and lead worship with a developing sense of confidence and enthusiasm. Pupils are keen to be involved in liturgies through drama, music and reading and are starting to become less reliant on adults. They are keen to show an understanding of their own sense of identity whilst also being aware of other religions within the school and the wider community. Members of the pupil chaplaincy team talk passionately about their work, for example, in seeking immediate feedback from their peers regarding a recent celebration and how this could result in future changes. Although this is a recent innovation, it bodes well for the future.

There are opportunities for praying together and this is part of the daily experience for all, including staff briefings, registration, assemblies and in lessons at the end of each school day. The headteacher has increased the centrality of the school's provision for Collective Worship since the last inspection by introducing a weekly year group Mass. The chair of governors has worked hard to support this provision by committing more time to the school than is usually seen. An Act of Worship visited by an inspector, included relevant worship around the school's mission statement, the Year of Faith and Mary, *Woman of Faith*. Pupils speak positively about the provision and the opportunities they have to reflect and learn about their spiritual development. The main hall, previously the school's gym, is used for Collective Worship for large groups and is also used as a dining room. This has been developed from funds made available from the school's Parent Teacher Association. There is no permanent chapel resource, a sacristy is used as a prayer room. This is a very basic resource and further work is needed to ensure that a *quality* place of quiet prayer and reflection is available to all. It is strongly recommended that the school urgently finds a solution to this issue.

Leaders and managers across the school play an important role in planning and delivering a good experience of Collective Worship for pupils and staff. The school has begun to plan for opportunities to enable all staff to receive formation in the development of their spiritual and liturgical understanding. Systems have now been implemented where managers can appraise the quality and impact of Collective Worship within the school and more recently, in seeking the views of pupils. In the short time that the chaplaincy coordinator has been in

role, she has already started to have a positive impact. She articulates a clear vision of pupil led liturgy, recognising the need to ensure that it becomes an integral part of the whole community.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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- How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.
- The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education.
- How well leaders and managers (including governors) monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

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Results in Religious Education at GCSE in 2013 showed a big improvement across all levels. Compared with English results, more pupils achieved A\*/ A grades in Religious Education but progress was below for those pupils in the middle to lower ability bands. Results for gifted and talented pupils have been consistently outstanding over the last 4 years. Overall, however, there has been an inconsistent level of achievement at Key Stage 4 over the last 5 years ranging from 50% to 75% approximately with no consecutive two years showing sustained progress. Most pupils enjoy Religious Education and confirm that there has been a change in teaching and learning activities to include more opportunities for discussion and group work. They are now developing a range of skills including the ability to reflect, evaluate and engage with religious ideas. Teaching assistant support was observed to be exemplary and evidence shows that pupils with special educational needs achieve well in Religious Education.

When teaching was good, most pupils were making good progress over time. When teaching was not good, there was a lack of both immediate engagement and pace. All teachers were, however, confident in their subject knowledge and used a range of resources and teaching strategies to generally promote a good standard of learning. At Key Stage 3, the curriculum shows implementation of the Curriculum Directory and the use of the Levels of Attainment. In order to ensure that all lessons are good or better, learning activities need to be differentiated by task rather than outcome, with opportunities for pupils to take a greater lead in their learning. All pupils need to be involved in evaluating how well they are progressing and reflect and act upon teachers' feedback.

There needs to be increased rigour on the part of the Religious Education department in tackling underachievement of middle ability groups. The headteacher has acted wisely in removing some inadequacy within the Religious Education department thereby improving the provision. The chair of governors is well briefed and has supported and challenged leaders at both school and departmental level. The school is confident that the provision they now have in place will be successful. A discussion with the data manager and examination of the tracking data for Religious Education suggests that the monitoring and tracking of pupil progress is becoming more embedded and that underachievement is being tackled more effectively. However, these systems have not yet resulted in sustained impact

on outcomes for all pupils especially those within the middle ability range. Sharing of the teaching responsibilities across the ability range would help in managing this issue along with the development of a greater understanding of performance data within the department. The department has taken on board Key Stage 4 pupil feedback and has recently implemented a new unit, moving from studying Luke's Gospel to Philosophy of Religion. Careful monitoring now needs to take place to ensure that the life of Christ remains central to the Key Stage 4 curriculum. The head of the Religious Education department was well informed of developments in Religious Education and diocesan initiatives.

## WHAT INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS MEAN

Within the report, the following grades are used:

<b>Grade 1</b>	Outstanding
<b>Grade 2</b>	Good
<b>Grade 3</b>	Requires improvement
<b>Grade 4</b>	Inadequate

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

<b>Grade 1</b>	Outstanding	The school is a highly effective Catholic school. Pupils' needs are exceptionally well met.
<b>Grade 2</b>	Good	The school is an effective Catholic school. Pupils' needs are met well.
<b>Grade 3</b>	Requires improvement	The school is not yet a good Catholic school, it is not inadequate however, there are aspects that require improvement.
<b>Grade 4</b>	Inadequate	There are features in need of urgent and immediate attention. The school is not meeting the basic minimum requirement for adequacy. The school will receive a monitoring visit within twelve months.

