



# Archdiocese of Birmingham

## Section 48 Inspection Report

### ST THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Part of the Lumen Christi Catholic Multi Academy  
Horse Shoes Lane, Sheldon, Birmingham, B26 3HU

Inspection dates:  
Lead Inspector:

13-14 July 2022  
Ben McArdle

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**OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS:****Good**

Catholic Life:

Outstanding

Religious Education:

Good

Collective Worship:

Outstanding

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*Overall effectiveness at previous inspection:**Outstanding*

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

This is a Good Catholic school because:

- Pupils' behaviour has been transformed by strong Catholic leadership, focusing on ensuring everybody understands the need to 'live, love and learn together' because they are creations of God.
- There is a powerful sense of community at all levels. Parents are exceptionally grateful for the open-door approach that the principal adopts and the speed with which she responds to their communications.
- Efforts to embed Catholic social teaching across the curriculum underpin the school's continual efforts to reach out to those in need.
- Most teachers deploy resources well in their teaching of Religious Education.
- Staff utilise a variety of approaches to prayer, which develop pupils' confidence when worshipping.

It is not yet Outstanding because:

- The intended curriculum isn't always implemented consistently in classrooms, meaning some pupils do not develop the knowledge and skills leaders want them to know.
- The monitoring and evaluation of Religious Education is not always rigorous or accurate enough.
- Pupils sometimes struggle to articulate the effect of prayer on their spiritual and moral development.
- Some teachers restrict opportunities for pupils to design and lead acts of worship.

**FULL REPORT****What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Consistently provide opportunities for pupils to demonstrate the depth of their knowledge when measured against the Religious Education curriculum.
- Improve the rigour and accuracy of the monitoring and evaluation of Religious Education at all levels.
- Enable pupils to reflect on prayer's impact on their spiritual and moral development.
- Further embed good practice of pupil-led Collective Worship so that they are genuinely autonomous in their design and leadership of prayer.

**THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL**

| <b>The quality of the Catholic Life of the school</b>   | <b>Outstanding</b> |
|---|--------------------|
| The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school                     | Outstanding        |
| The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school  | Outstanding        |
| How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school | Outstanding        |

**CL1 The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school****CL2 The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school**

- All pupils know the mission statement. This is because it is routinely referred to by staff, who have instilled a working understanding of it. Consequently, pupils can articulate its meaning and the variety of ways it is promoted within the school.
- Through regular pupil voice activities, sometimes run by the pupils themselves, pupils are enabled to contribute towards evaluating Catholic Life. For example, pupils recognised that the class saints were mainly older, white European men who do not reflect the diversity of the school community and the work undertaken regarding this in other areas of the curriculum. As a result, some new class saints have been introduced, including St Josephine Bakhita, St Charles Lwanga and Blessed Carlo Acutis.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. This is because staff have embedded an understanding that all humans are part of God's creation; consequently, they treat each other with respect and are acutely aware of the need for high behaviour standards at school.
- Caritas and Growing in Faith Together (GIFT) ambassadors competently embrace opportunities to lead aspects of school life; in these ways, the chaplaincy provision is effective. The Caritas group of pupils focus on demonstrating 'love in action' by seeking opportunities to show care for people by resolving problems. For example, pupils grilled their MP over the controversial refugee bill and wanted to encourage everyone to reduce their use of single-use plastics. In response to these initiatives, Caritas pupils have devised an action plan, though they are not all aware of its strategic action points.

- GIFT ambassadors successfully strive to show other pupils the 'proper way to follow in Jesus' footsteps' by leading assemblies, organising a blessing of the school doors, and fundraising for charitable causes. They are alert to the needs of others. Their work even extends to families by sending home 'Lent in a bag', which parents reported was a positive initiative.
- A system of prayer buddies is utilised to significant effect. This is evident in how older pupils write personal letters of congratulation to their younger buddies when they make their First Holy Communion. These reflective, joy-filled letters show the pupils' depth of maturity and spirituality.
- The designation of St Thomas More as a 'school of sanctuary' further demonstrates pupils' commitment to helping those in need. The importance of this particularly resonates with those pupils who are refugees, who have shared the positive impact the school's work in this area has made on their lives.
- Despite the disruption caused by the pandemic, pupils have continued to benefit from chaplaincy provisions, which they highly value. Leaders ensured that retreats from OneLife were provided to pupils throughout lockdowns, demonstrating their commitment to the continued development of pupils' spirituality and morality. Since restrictions have eased, pupils have taken part in residential retreats at Alton Castle and a sleepover retreat at school, typical of the school's inclusive approach.
- The quality of pastoral care is outstanding. Because of the time and care invested by staff, pupils are happy and confident at school, secure in their stages of development. One parent told inspectors of the exceptional care afforded to her entire family unit by the principal and how this has changed the dynamic of their home lives. Speaking of the development in relationships between home and school over recent years, another parent said, 'It felt grey before, but it's colourful now.'
- Because the school teaches TenTen's 'Life to the Full' programme in its entirety for relationships, sex, and health education (RSHE) and supplements this with further resources to meet the needs of its context, pupils have an excellent Christian understanding of love and its different forms.
- As a result of a recent drive on vocations, pupils' understanding of the concept continues to grow. Whilst older pupils have a secure knowledge of the various ways God calls to us at any time, younger pupils tend to think of a vocation as something for the future. Leaders have developed dynamic ways to share learning about vocations with families using QR codes that link to instructional videos and interviews.
- Parish links continue to develop following the arrival of a new parish priest during the pandemic. For example, parishioners have recently been invited into school to look at what pupils have been learning about, and they have been invited to help develop pupils' reading skills. There is a definite sense of the school-parish link evolving.
- The school's Catholic Life is outstanding, in part, due to the staff's commitment to it. There is a powerful sense of responsibility demonstrated by the whole team. Staff take part in the many varied activities that promote the Faith, which, in turn, generates passionate enthusiasm amongst pupils. Children at St Thomas More know they are not too small to make a difference in the world.
- The staff are outstanding role models for pupils: they consistently demonstrate the gospel-inspired behaviours and attitudes they wish their pupils to aspire towards.
- St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is a community of prayer; worshipping God is a central feature of daily school life. Consequently, the school is a supportive community full of joy.
- The physical environment is a vibrant expression of the Catholic Faith. Bright, interactive, and visually attractive displays showcase pupils' prayers and the array of projects they are involved in. Even on a purely physical level, St Thomas More is undeniably a Catholic community.

- Catholic social teaching is introduced to pupils in age-appropriate ways utilising CAFOD resources. Staff have identified where some of the teachings from *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti* occur naturally within the curriculum. Currently, aspects of social teaching have not been explicitly mapped into individual lessons; this is the next step that leaders are aware needs to be taken.
- Staff feel well supported by senior leaders, who greatly regard their pastoral well-being. This is reflected in initiatives, such as 'Well-being Wednesdays'.

### **CL3 How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school**

- Leaders are deeply committed to promoting and providing the highest quality of Catholic Life possible. This is reflected in how faith pervades the school community, who live and breathe it. Because of the priority she places on it and the joy it brings to school life, the community is energised by the principal and her leadership team.
- Evaluation of Catholic Life is undertaken at every level. In addition to formal questionnaires and surveys, leaders seize opportunities to gather and respond to informal feedback, which feeds into their development plans. For example, the establishment of prefects in the school hall was born out of conversations with pupils.
- Because the evaluation of Catholic Life is frequent and comprehensive, well-targeted improvement plans are devised, which further drive-up standards.
- Continuing professional development (CPD) relating to Catholic Life is frequent and contributes to leaders' development plans. Staff value the opportunities they are afforded and the opportunity to arrange bespoke one-to-one sessions with colleagues to refine their practice, ensuring all staff contribute to the provision of outstanding Catholic Life.
- Parents' views are also sought when leaders develop action plans. For example, in a recent survey, parents expressed their desire for improved communication regarding school events, which leaders addressed immediately. Parents value the principal's presence at the school gate each day, enabling them to speak informally and providing another way for parental views to be gathered.
- Parents vaguely know the mission statement, though they are more confident in understanding the values promoted by the Catholic School Pupil Profile (CSPP).
- The local governing body (aka the school standards committee (SSC)) prioritises Catholic Life in its work. Leaders benefit from the wisdom of the parish priest, who is also the chair of governors and has secured the service of a local Catholic headteacher, who acts as link governor. Together, they are regular visitors to the school, experiencing Catholic Life first-hand, thus independently monitoring, and evaluating it to support the principal's work.
- Leaders are highly ambitious for the school's Catholic Life. They actively identify opportunities for the mission to be promoted. For example, in a recent outdoor pursuits trip, staff incorporated prayer and spiritual and moral development opportunities, elevating a physical education and well-being exercise into a retreat experience.
- Leaders and governors actively promote the Archbishop of Birmingham's vision for his diocese throughout the school.

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

| <b>The quality of Religious Education</b>   | <b>Good</b> |
|---|-------------|
| How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education                             | Outstanding |
| The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education                             | Good        |
| How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for Religious Education | Good        |

**RE1 How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education****RE2 The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education**

- Data shows that pupils make excellent progress in each key stage. Pupils enter the school with exceptionally low starting points. Still, by the end of Key Stage 1, they make tremendous progress, as demonstrated in their written responses to tasks, where they can articulate their thoughts with coherency.
- Pupils' attainment is also excellent. For the last three years, the proportion of pupils securing and surpassing age-related standards has been on an upward trajectory. Pupils' attainment in Religious Education is now better than in other core subjects.
- The school has responded well to closing the gaps in attainment for different groups of pupils; staff have successfully narrowed the gap between the achievement of boys and girls. This is because of a focus on ensuring diversity in the learning strategies deployed by teachers and of the provision of targeted CPD for teachers.
- The number of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) securing or surpassing age-related expectations has increased by almost 10% over the last three years.
- As a direct result of teachers' focusing on religious literacy and oracy, pupils use age-appropriate specialist vocabulary accurately and confidently. Keywords relating to the unit of work being studied are displayed prominently in each classroom and referred to by pupils and staff. Speaking to inspectors, pupils said, 'It is interesting to learn about Jesus and his disciples; our teachers help us to explain what we have learnt using the words on the focus area.'
- Pupils say they know what they need to do better because their teachers tell them, although feedback in books does not always indicate this. Furthermore, pupils are not routinely involved in assessing how well they are doing for themselves, which prevents them from being able to articulate the specific skills and knowledge they need to improve to make even more progress.
- Because of teachers' commitment to providing a broad range of learning styles, pupils are exceptionally positive about Religious Education. They are enthusiastic about their learning, which they enjoy; subsequently, behaviour in lessons is outstanding, exemplified in the way pupils concentrate during extended periods without direction from an adult.
- The quality of work produced by pupils, in terms of presentation and depth of knowledge and understanding, is generally good. However, not all pupils are challenged by their teachers to think consistently at a deeper level. This is because some teachers overly-rely on questions that require pupils to reflect on what they have learnt from religion (AT2) as greater depth challenges; however, AT2 is an entitlement of all pupils, regardless of prior attainment. Teachers must use the learning outcomes prescribed by the programme of study to ensure all pupils are challenged to think at the next level of depth.

- Teachers have a high level of confidence in deploying their subject knowledge. This is because they always ensure they know the content they deliver, enabling them to answer pupils' questions competently.
- Time management requires improvement in multiple classrooms to ensure good learning in lessons and across sequences of lessons. On several occasions, inspectors witnessed too much time spent with pupils sitting on the carpet or passively at their desks: teachers need to engage pupils in their learning sooner to ensure opportunities for greater depth are fully exploited as routine.
- Pupils' learning is often improved because of teachers' use of questions. Questioning is at its most effective when teachers plan questions and target these to specific pupils, depending on their individual needs.
- Teachers support learning with good-quality resources, which are generally matched to the needs of most pupils. However, more able pupils are not always challenged rapidly enough.
- Teaching assistants are generally deployed well. In the best cases, they support learning in every lesson phase, including during periods when teachers talk. However, because some teachers spend too long talking, this is not always the case.
- Teachers have high expectations of their pupils: most expect all pupils to actively engage in lessons.
- Achievement and effort are celebrated during Religious Education lessons using verbal praise and house points. Although this further contributes to pupils' motivation, such strategies are not central to teachers' assessment procedures.

### **RE3 How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for Religious Education**

- The Religious Education curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in every respect and each key stage, as evident in the coverage of subject content.
- Leaders and governors ensure that at least 10% of curriculum time is allocated to teaching Religious Education.
- The subject has full parity with other core curriculum subjects regarding status and staffing. Particularly impressive are the governors' financial commitment to developing the subject and the amount of CPD provided for teaching and support staff.
- Because *Learning and Growing as the People of God* is taught, and lessons are not blocked together on the timetable, leaders and governors are ensuring that the subject meets the additional requirements of the Archbishop of Birmingham about Religious Education.
- Leaders and governors ensure that the subject is monitored and evaluated; however, the processes are neither rigorous nor accurate enough. This is because the full range of monitoring activities is not consistently utilised, and their findings are not always analysed to generate well-informed improvement plans. When actions intended to bring about improvements are identified, they do not always clearly correspond to the findings of previous monitoring activities.
- The various areas of expertise of teachers within the school need to be further harnessed to continue to improve overall standards throughout the school.
- The subject leader for Religious Education has a vision for teaching and learning in the subject and is working towards embedding it throughout the school. He is a hard-working, dedicated staff member passionate about



ensuring all pupils experience high-quality Religious Education. Further consideration of the subject's progress against the inspection framework's criteria is needed.

- Leaders ensure that units of study are sequenced carefully against the Church's liturgical year. As a result, Religious Education supports the pupils' understanding of the seasons and feasts within the Catholic Church.

## COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

| The quality of Collective Worship  | Outstanding |
|--|-------------|
| How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship                      | Good        |
| The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school   | Outstanding |
| How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship | Outstanding |

### **CW1 How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship**

### **CW2 The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school**

- During prayer, pupils almost always display reverence and are keen to partake. This is demonstrated in the quality of silence and the joy with which they sing. In the vast majority of cases, they show a sense of spirituality and respect. This is because they are almost always provided with outstanding opportunities for prayer. Younger pupils lose interest and become distracted on rare occasions when this is not the case.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to prepare and lead a variety of acts of worship. For example, pupils lead assemblies in the school hall and classrooms, voluntary prayers at prayer stations sited around the school, and the GIFT ambassadors contributed towards the blessing of doorways throughout the school as part of their Christmas celebrations during Advent. Consequently, they are mostly confident in preparing prayer.
- Much attention has been given to ensuring pupils enjoy experiencing a wide variety of prayer styles. This has included teaching the traditional prayers of the Church, which are displayed in each classroom, and more contemporary methods such as guided meditation. In the Early Years, sensory prayer is used by enabling pupils to draw sorrowful prayers in sand, which they can then wipe away to represent God's forgiveness and unconditional love; in the main foyer area of the school, pupils are invited to pick up pieces of a puzzle and reflect on whether they are willing to let Jesus hold the pieces of their life today. At Pentecost, pupils used lots of different languages in their prayers. These exciting opportunities help nurture enthusiastic attitudes towards worship, particularly amongst pupils who find traditional ways of praying challenging to engage with.
- Because prayer is always linked to the liturgical year, almost all pupils can speak age-appropriately about the Church's seasons. Even amongst the youngest pupils, knowledge of the Church's calendar goes beyond liturgical colours.
- Pupils sometimes struggle to speak about the impact that prayer has on their spiritual and moral development beyond what their teachers explain to them during

acts of worship. Sometimes, teachers do not provide enough time and space to reflect on this. Pupils' articulation of how prayer positively impacts their growth as human beings is an area that requires further attention.

- Prayer is central to school life, a highlighted feature of daily life, and is at the heart of all school celebrations. Because of the high priority placed on the provision of prayer, the overwhelming majority of pupils and staff speak positively about it.
- All acts of Collective Worship have a clear purpose, theme, and message. Consequently, pupils understand why particular things are prayed about at certain times of the year. For example, pupils can articulate why a Marian Procession was held in the outdoor prayer garden during the month of May and why prayers to the Holy Spirit are said at Pentecost.
- High priority is given to planning prayer: a standard planning sheet is used by staff and pupils, helping to ensure consistency in the way prayer is framed within the school. Consequently, pupils are confident when given the opportunity to plan prayer and para-liturgies.
- In some classrooms, staff remain in tight control of prayer intended to be led by pupils. This stifles their growth and is at odds with pupils' capabilities. Teachers need to be confident to 'let go of the reins' and allow pupils to become genuinely autonomous in their preparation and leadership of prayer.
- Parents and parishioners are invited into school to join in worship; they appreciate these opportunities and are keen for these opportunities to continue to grow once again following the disruption caused by the pandemic.

### **CW3 How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship**

- Leaders have intricate, expert knowledge of planning and delivering quality prayer and liturgy. Consequently, they are excellent role models who set high expectations for all staff and pupils.
- The principal makes it clear that prayer is raising the heart and mind to God, using this language with pupils and staff. Her expert modelling is helping to raise the standard and quality of prayer in most classrooms. At its best, prayer throughout the school is focused on encounter with Jesus Christ; at other times, despite the principal's modelling, this is punctuated with question-answer sessions, which turn prayer into mini-Religious Education lessons.
- Leaders' knowledge of the liturgical year is extensive, and they articulate this expertly, in age-appropriate ways, to pupils. This helps ensure that pupils' knowledge of the key seasons and feasts of the Church goes beyond liturgical colours.
- A fantastic range of prayer opportunities is available to pupils, which excites and engages them.
- There are numerous opportunities for pupils to prepare worship: from high-profile opportunities designed by the GIFT ambassadors to acts of worship in individual classrooms to small-group and personal instances of prayer in the prayer spaces in communal areas around the school building.
- At least two opportunities for formal CPD relating to prayer are offered each term. This ensures that the staff at St Thomas More can consistently implement the latest strategies promoted by the Archdiocese of Birmingham.
- When governors review Collective Worship as part of the school's self-evaluation processes, care must be taken to synthesise together their findings so they can strategically inform improvement plans at all times.



- Leaders fully embrace the additional requirements of the Archbishop of Birmingham relating to prayer.

## SCHOOL DETAILS

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Unique reference number   | 147017  |
| Local authority   | Birmingham  |
| <i>This inspection was carried out under Canon 806 of Canon Law and under Section 48 of the Education Act (2005).</i> |   |
| Type of school  | Primary   |
| School category   | Academy   |
| Age range   | 4-11  |
| Gender of pupils  | Mixed   |
| Number of pupils on roll  | 352   |
| Appropriate authority   | The board of directors  |
| Chair   | Peter Vince   |
| Headteacher   | Kate Madia  |
| Telephone number  | 0121 743 3289   |
| Website address   | <a href="https://www.sttommor.bham.sch.uk/">https://www.sttommor.bham.sch.uk/</a> |
| Email address   | <a href="mailto:enquiry@sttommor.bham.sch.uk">enquiry@sttommor.bham.sch.uk</a>    |
| Date of previous inspection   | November 2015   |

## INFORMATION ABOUT THIS SCHOOL

- St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is a larger than average two-form school serving the parish of St Thomas More in Sheldon, South Birmingham, close to the border with Solihull.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils is currently 87.5%.
- The percentage of disadvantaged pupils is above the national average.
- The percentage of SEND pupils is above the national average.
- The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic origins is below the national average.
- The percentage of pupils with EAL is below the national average.
- Attainment on entry is average.
- Since the last inspection, the school has converted to become an academy and joined the Lumen Christi Catholic Multi Academy (MAC). The current principal was appointed three years ago, as was the vice principal and subject leader for Religious Education. Most of the local governing body are new in position since the last inspection; there are currently vacancies to fill.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

- Two diocesan inspectors undertook the inspection: Ben McArdle and Karyn Oakley.
- The focus of the inspection was on the impact, quality, and leadership of the school's provision of Catholic Life, Religious Education and Collective Worship.

- The inspectors observed teaching across twelve Religious Education lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. All of these lesson observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- The inspectors completed work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils to evaluate their understanding of Catholic Life, the impact of Religious Education teaching on their learning over time and their experience of Collective Worship.
- Meetings were held with the chair of governors (who is also the parish priest), the link governor, the principal, the Religious Education subject leader, parents, the chaplaincy leader, the Catholic senior executive leader (CSEL) of the MAC, the MAC's head of standards, a selection of school staff and various groups of pupils.
- The inspectors attended classroom-based and whole school acts of Collective Worship. They undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of learning and teaching in Religious Education, the presentation of the Catholic Life of the school and pupils' behaviour.
- The inspectors reviewed various documents, including the school's self-evaluation, data about pupils' attainment and progress, Analyse School Performance (ASP) data, the school development plan, the Catholic Life, Religious Education and Collective Worship action plans, teachers' planning and learning journals.