



Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection report for St Thomas More Catholic School

URN: 104259

Carried out on behalf of the Most Rev. Bernard Longley, Archbishop of Birmingham on:

Date: 23-24 November 2022

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school.....

3

Catholic life and mission (p.3)

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.....

2

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education.....

3

Collective worship (p.7)

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school.....

2

The school is fully compliant with the curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference



The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop



The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection

Partially

Summary of key findings

What the school does well

- St Thomas More Catholic School offers a full, inclusive welcome to all. The relationships between staff and students are characterised by Gospel values, which the head teacher inspirationally demonstrates at all times.
- The level of pastoral care provided to all community members is excellent. It is a living expression of the school's mission and contributes significantly to the happiness and well-being of all.
- Religious education contributes significantly to students' spiritual and moral development. Teachers regularly and thoughtfully plan opportunities for this in their lessons.

- Leaders ensure that training opportunities are available to staff, so they are fully aware of the school's expectations surrounding prayer and liturgy and are well-equipped to meet them.
- The school is very much at the service of the local parish, which is evident, for example, in the provision of a Christmas party for senior citizens and its active support of the parish food bank and sacramental preparation programmes.

What the school needs to improve:

- Raise expectations for all students in religious education so that they consistently build upon prior learning through appropriate levels of challenge.
- Embed the feedback policy in religious education so that pupils are confident in knowing what they need to improve upon to attain the best possible outcomes.
- Establish a culture of pupil evaluation regarding Catholic life and mission and collective worship so that they are empowered to lead aspects of school improvement in these areas.

Catholic life and mission

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

Catholic life and mission key judgement grade:.....

2

Pupil outcomes

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

2

Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

2

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

2

Students desire to extend their compassion and selflessness towards others because they understand that everyone is a creation of God and deserves to be loved and cared for. For example, following their recent participation in the Molineaux Sleepout, contributing towards the school's Live Simply pledge, students were inspired to donate hats and gloves to those in need throughout winter. They best understand the school's mission through the values of responsibility, care, and confidence. Because of the emphasis placed on Gospel values, students understand right and wrong and can speak about the theology that underlies their actions. Although students cannot identify examples of Catholic Social Teaching when asked, they can talk about its themes because of how school activities are framed; sixth formers are especially confident about this. Students respond well to chaplaincy provision, particularly the Youth SVP and liturgy groups, who are responsible for most pupil-planned prayer in school.

Staff are entirely on board in supporting the school's mission. They offer a variety of initiatives which reflect the life of the school, such as coffee mornings for the local community, reward breakfasts for those making special efforts to improve their learning or attendance and basing behaviour management strategies on the concept of restorative justice. The physical environment reinforces the inclusive nature of the school. In the reception area, there are books and games for young children to use whilst families are speaking with school staff, and welcome signs written in the many languages spoken by community members are prominently displayed. Each year group has a patron saint, motto, and prayer, whilst individual tutor groups have composed their own prayers, which are used regularly. Sixth formers recently introduced a culture day so everyone could express their unique identities; the day

was a great success, with sixth formers already planning another celebration of the community's diversity.

Furthermore, the head teacher greets all students by name as she passes them in corridors; these strategies typify the culture of inclusive welcome that permeates the school. Relationship, sex, and health education (RSHE) fulfils statutory and diocesan requirements, contributing to the well-rounded development of students. Consequently, students, especially older students, can confidently speak about what they have learnt in these lessons. Teachers of religious education, who are most confident in Church teachings, deliver RSHE to all.

Leaders and governors ensure there is a good working relationship with the diocese, resulting in the school promoting the archbishop's vision for his schools. The relationship between the parish and school is excellent; both priests associated with the school speak incredibly highly of the school's leadership and the way the Catholic faith is lived throughout the school. Parents are well informed of the school's life and mission through 'More News', published regularly; they feel well-supported in their vocation as parents. The school has built a strong and proudly Catholic reputation in the local community, which is reflected in the level of oversubscription for school places. Leaders and governors ensure a very high level of pastoral care for their colleagues, which is highly valued by all; catering staff provide refreshments on Fridays for staff who have experienced challenges in their personal lives, for example. All subject areas are actively working to deliver their curricula through a Catholic lens; a clear and concrete plan is in place to embed this aspect of the school's work. Currently, however, there are not enough planned opportunities for students to evaluate Catholic life and mission.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade:.....

3

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education.....

3

Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education.....

2

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for religious education.....

2



Students unanimously enjoy religious education and show interest in the subject. They told inspectors that 'lessons feel different to other subjects; they're peaceful and help us develop as people'. As a result of a recent departmental focus, they can use subject-specific vocabulary to improve their writing and are developing as religiously literate young adults who contribute to ethical discussions. Students are not secure in remembering more and doing more with the knowledge they learn; consequently, they are not achieving as well as they should. That said, they speak confidently about what they are learning at any given moment. Students have little understanding of how well they are doing and of what they need to do to improve, which further limits their progress. Students can work independently and most follow their teacher's instructions as a matter of routine, resulting in good concentration levels. However, because they spend a significant amount of time copying notes, there are few opportunities for students to show initiative and creativity. Quality work is modelled to mostly good effect using visualisers to raise standards, though the standard of work produced by students is variable. Whilst attainment has marginally improved, in line with other core subjects, it remains low compared to national data.

Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge, imparting it with confidence. They are committed to the subject's value and communicate this to pupils clearly, who respond well. Questioning in lessons is purposeful and helps staff to assess students' understanding; it engages most in learning. Teachers provide a variety of learning activities for students – in the best lessons, different tasks are used to sustain a conducive learning environment. Teachers' planning is not always linked to students' needs because too much time is spent writing notes, which prevents those with higher prior attainment from applying their knowledge to different

situations, enabling progress. For example, whilst learning about abortion, higher achievers in Key Stage 4 were not challenged to apply Catholic teachings on the sanctity of life to other issues of life and death. Teachers provide time and space for reflection in lessons. Following recent evaluation, teachers have adopted a new approach to feedback which students appreciate. However, it is not yet embedded deeply enough to ensure students understand what they need to do to make progress.

The curriculum accurately reflects the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. The resourcing of religious education is comparable to that for other core subjects in curriculum time, staffing, and accommodation. Teacher training opportunities are secured regarding subject knowledge, teaching, and learning. Leaders desire to validate the accuracy of their assessments through moderation with other Catholic schools, though this is yet to happen. The subject leader has a clear vision for the development of the provision and outcomes of religious education and is effectively supported by senior leaders in her desire to drive forward the progress of the team. When classes are split between different teachers, planning needs to give more regard to sequential progression through the curriculum, which also impacts progress. Leaders ensure that enrichment activities are offered that enhance the curriculum, such as Candlelight Conferences for students with higher attainment and a 'Philosotea' group, which meet at lunchtime to hone further higher-order thinking skills and aims to improve recruitment onto the A-level course. Self-evaluation informs the department's strategic direction, as evidenced by the department improvement plan, which is monitored carefully. Governors are generous with their time and work effectively with the department to validate the accuracy of its self-evaluation and offer leaders both support and challenge.

Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school.

Collective worship key judgement grade:.....

2

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

2

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

2

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship

2

Students engage in prayer and liturgy with reverence; they participate confidently and can reflect silently on the various themes they are presented with. Students say it is easy to pray at St Thomas More and that prayer is an integral part of the school day. There is a variety of worship available to students, and many undertake ministries that enhance the quality of prayer, such as using artwork, providing music for Mass, and singing in the choir. Although Scripture is routinely referred to in worship, its use is not prominent: for example, quotations and ideas are referred to without the accompanying passage being heard. Prayer that is planned and led by students occurs within the school, mainly through the Youth SVP and liturgy groups, but it is not yet embedded throughout the school. Students speak readily about how school life and specific topics within the curriculum influence their prayers and how this inspires them into action.

Worship is a core feature of the school's Catholic identity. There is a natural daily pattern of prayer, which always compliments the prayer life of the Church; for example, in November, prayers were offered for the repose of Holy Souls, not reflecting solely on the theme of remembrance. Much work has been done on developing the range of ways of praying that are used in school; this is especially evident in tutor group prayer times, where there is growing confidence amongst staff in personalising the prayers that are provided each week by the lay chaplain so that they relate even better to the needs and experiences of each tutor group. Prayer is always in keeping with the Catholic tradition. Scripture is not explicit in prayer, despite being referred to. All staff are models of good practice regarding prayer: they demonstrate high standards to pupils and each other in the way they participate in gestures and responses – a clear routine is embedded in their practice. The lay chaplain is well-skilled in helping

students prepare prayer and liturgy and shares resources with the whole school community each week; these are also shared online so that parents are supported in developing the prayer life of students. Space is used well to ensure that prayer time is special; effective use of lighting, music and religious artefacts are used to transform the school hall into a sacred space for weekly assemblies, for example. Key stage leaders actively ensure space is used equally well in individual classrooms whilst tutor groups pray together.

Leaders have a prayer and liturgy policy that clearly sets out their expectations in terms of prayer. There is a planned review of this so that the school remains compliant with the new requirements of the bishops when published. Currently, there is no clearly defined strategy for developing the prayer skills of students as they progress through the school. However, leaders plan to address this when they review the prayer and liturgy policy. Leaders work effectively with the priest chaplain and parish priest to ensure that all Holy Days of Obligation and other significant days are celebrated in school, almost always with Mass. A day of spiritual reflection and formation for staff is provided on the Feast of St Thomas More in June each year, which helps to develop the staff's knowledge and understanding of prayer. Governors resource worship well, demonstrated in their commitment to appoint a lay chaplain, and, together with leaders, give it a high priority by ensuring that there is a chaplaincy improvement plan, which strategically informs further improvements.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Thomas More Catholic School
School unique reference number (URN)	104259
Full postal address of the school	Darlaston Lane, Willenhall, WV14 7BL
School phone number	01902 368 798
Name of head teacher or principal	Siobhan Bowen
Chair of governing board	Richard Dalton
School Website	https://www.st-thomasmore.walsall.sch.uk
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Not applicable
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age-range of pupils	11 to 18
Trustees	Archdiocese of Birmingham
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	June 2016
Previous denominational inspection grade	2

The inspection team

Ben McArdle	Lead inspector
Philip Gray	Team inspector
Jen Rogers	Team inspector
Rachel Waugh	Team inspector

Key to grade judgements

Grade	England	Wales
1	Outstanding	Excellent
2	Good	Good
3	Requires improvement	Adequate and requires improvement
4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and in need of urgent improvement