



## Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection report for St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School

URN: 141835

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

Date: 7-8 December 2022

Overall effectiveness The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school.....	1
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.....	1
Religious education (p.5) The quality of curriculum religious education.....	1
Collective worship (p.7) The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school.....	1
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	Fully

### Summary of key findings

#### What the school does well

- Staff, governors, and pupils use a common language to articulate the mission of the school, that Christ is at the centre of their learning community.
- The school is proud of its knowledge-based curriculum which extends to religious education, through which all pupils are able to achieve, and many excel.
- Leaders have introduced an ambitious and inspirational virtues curriculum, permeating the school's work. Although this is in its infancy, it is already having a major positive impact on the school community.
- There is an environment in which behaviour is exemplary and staff set a tone which is totally conducive to learning.

- In response to Pupil Voice, a greater provision of engaging and creative experiences, which are diverse and inclusive, has been made. For example, pupils have opportunities to wear their national dress, and pray in their first languages during Feast Day Masses.

What the school needs to improve:

- Evaluate and embed the virtues curriculum to ensure it fulfills its aim, to define 'how staff and students live, love, and learn' at St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School.
- Further develop adaptive teaching techniques and resources in religious education to supplement the knowledge-based curriculum, particularly for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Extend pupil leadership even further, including their systematic evaluation of all aspects of Catholic life and mission, and collective worship.

## 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:.....

1

### Pupil outcomes

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

1

### Provision

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

1

### Leadership

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

1



Students value, embrace and actively contribute to the school's Catholic life and mission, as evidenced by the work of the very large Chaplaincy Change group. Students' confidently enhance the school's mission through their contributions to activities such as choir practice, which are fully inclusive and inspiration, involving students from across the age and ability ranges. Consequently, they are happy and secure members of the school community. Students' behaviour is always exemplary, showing the respect they have for themselves and others, as God's creations. Students already talk about the recently introduced virtues curriculum, referring to values including integrity, service, and eloquence, and express a good understanding of how this impacts their lives, demonstrating their moral development. For example, on a day of prayer, fasting and charity, students knew why the school was promoting such an event, and they linked it to the living virtue of compassion, enabling them to articulate the theology underpinning their actions. Students participate in numerous fundraising activities, which enable them to respond to the demands of Catholic Social Teaching in a practical and enjoyable way.

Christ is at the centre of the community, 'like a stick of rock', and clearly impacts the school's life. The mission is a clear expression of the educational mission of the Church. Staff commitment at all levels is exceptional; they readily serve the community and participate in activities and routines which promote the school's high standards, and especially those which reinforce the virtues curriculum. The provision for relationships, sex, and health education (RSHE) meets all statutory requirements and is firmly rooted in Church teaching. Careful planning is assured because RSHE is delivered by both teachers of religious education and form tutors; these lessons are very much valued by the pupils. The pastoral care of students

is excellent, with an explicit commitment to meet students' needs. The provision of care from the safeguarding team, supported by in-house care from the St Joseph's, Billie Jayne and Emmaus centres typifies the way staff live out the school mission. Staff are exemplary role models and, in all their dealings with students, they show respect and compassion for the individual; this is also shown in the consistent provision of high-quality form time. The wholehearted involvement of staff in chaplaincy activities such as choir, charity work and family Masses further witness to the flourishing of every member of the community. Although the school environment does reflect the school's catholic character, including a beautiful chapel and a developing peace garden, there is some inconsistency in the quality of prayer spaces in classrooms, which leaders have acknowledged.

Leaders are energised, joyful and determined in their duty as guardians of the Catholic life of the school. The principal and vice principal drive the school forward in developing its mission and positive affirmation for their work is universal amongst all community members. The promise of a cohesive Catholic curriculum achieved through the marriage of the knowledge-based and the virtues curricula, which is already beginning to blossom, is indicative of the high aspirations leaders and governors have for the school. Exemplary leadership further inspires pastoral leaders in their roles; for example, the school has made great and successful efforts to reach out to parents, parishes, and feeder schools through use of social media and newsletters; subsequently, there has been an increase in the number of Catholic students applying to join the school. Pupil evaluation takes place largely through the large Chaplaincy Change group, however, a more systematic pupil evaluation after each event would promote greater pupil leadership and ownership of Catholic life and mission.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade:.....

1

### Pupil outcomes

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

1

### Provision

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

1

### Leadership

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

1



Students respond well to the knowledge-based curriculum which is delivered consistently by experienced and highly skilled staff. Students enjoy their religious education lessons, and value the retrieval resources provided which enable them to self-assess their progress to great effect. In Key Stage 4, students are thoroughly prepared for examination by making regular reference to exam criteria and techniques in lesson activities and respond well to opportunities for practice questions. This extends to 'period 6' provision, which has excellent levels of attendance, further demonstrating the interest and enthusiasm students have for the subject. As a result of these developments, recent exam results for GCSE are good, with attainment and progress in-line with national and diocesan averages. Success in Key Stage 4 has led to increased uptake at A level and strong examination results with most students achieving the highest grades and making excellent progress. The quality of work and its presentation in students' exercise books was consistently of high-quality and comparable with other core departments in the school. Great emphasis is placed on religious literacy and is successful as students are confident in using specialist vocabulary in their written and oral work, demonstrating their ability to reflect spiritually and ethically on what they have learnt.

Religious education is at the centre of the school's curriculum and is represented in all aspects of school life. The core purpose of St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School is reflected in the students' knowledge that they are made in the image and likeness of God and are known and loved, and they are reminded of this at every opportunity by the committed religious education department staff. Teachers effectively use questioning to maximise learning for students by always developing their specialist vocabulary. Whilst students always volunteer to answer questions or read aloud, not all responses are used to benefit the learning of the whole

class because teachers do not insist on students speaking with clarity or repeat their responses so that everyone can hear them. Subsequently, teachers do not consistently celebrate students' successes. Lessons are well-prepared and technology is used very effectively to model answers and texts. Adaptive teaching, with effective use of specific resources, works well, and this good practice needs to be developed further so that all students' needs are consistently met. Planning ensures that students acquire the necessary knowledge and basic skills to respond to activities in verbal form and in written assessments; in particular, teachers skilfully challenge students to extend their sentences with sub clauses, prompting them to provide further detail and reasoned evidence. Feedback is very effective and adheres to policy.

The subject leader has a clear vision for teaching and learning and high level of expertise in securing this vision; the department is committed to majority mixed ability teaching ensuring all benefit from her high expectations. The subject leader meets weekly with the department's link senior leader to discuss the department's work, including students' progress and teaching and learning. As a direct result of this, 'period 6' intervention has been developed for all Year 10s, with targeted intervention for Year 11s. The subject leader leads high-quality weekly training to her colleagues and externally provided courses are also utilised to develop staff; this has enabled new teachers to be compassionately nurtured. Leaders, including the link governor, work well with the subject leader, resulting in well-targeted strategic development planning; for example, the curriculum has been adjusted in the light of the pandemic to meet the needs of different groups of students, with a focus on students with SEND for which the use of adaptive teaching techniques to deliver it must continue to develop.

## Collective worship

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

Religious education key judgement grade:.....

1

### Pupil outcomes

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

1

### Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school .....

1

### Leadership

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

1



Students' responses and participation are outstanding. During form time, students read prayers and passages from Scripture, showing deep reverence and conscious participation. In the celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, they led music by playing instruments and leading singing. Students collaborate effectively with staff and each other to plan and deliver well-constructed experiences of prayer and liturgy, which respond well to feedback from pupil evaluation. For example, requests for greater diversity have been planned for by permitting students to wear their national dress and pray in their first languages during Feast Day Masses. Furthermore, students confidently undertake liturgical ministries during liturgies such as the Year 7 Welcome Mass, and Year 11 and Year 13 Leavers' Masses. The quality of the singing is inspirational, with the music provided by the student musicians enthusiastically led and coordinated by the music department and lay chaplain. The sheer number of students actively engaged in the Chaplaincy Change group is evidence of their willingness to collaborate with others, including staff and pupils in feeder schools.

There is a rich tradition of prayer which is diverse and inclusive. The school ensures that traditional prayer is used alongside more contemporary forms; for example, the Examen is prayed at the end of each day, as well as in some lessons. Prayer is naturally embedded into the school's daily life, which reflects the prayer life of the Church. The delivery of prayer is consistently high-quality and frequently leads to truly innovative, inspirational, and spiritual moments of reflection. The chapel, which is at the centre of the school, is always open and used regularly for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and weekly class Masses. There has been investment in performing arts provision to enable music to thrive and significantly add to the collective worship experience. Great efforts have been made to include families in the school's commitment to evangelising the Gospel, for example,

by inviting them to Family Mass, and the provision of a 'Journey into Faith' course, run by the lay chaplains in collaboration with the parishes, to offer catechesis to families and pupils who wish to become members of the Catholic Church.

Senior leaders inspire others throughout the school, through their modelling of exemplary practice. This ensures common messages are delivered through prayer and consistently high standards of worship are experienced by all. Governors' commitment to the prioritisation of prayer and liturgy is evidenced by their investment in two lay chaplains, who provide models of excellent leadership through their provision. Their leadership of the Chaplaincy Change group inspires student leadership by offering opportunities for students to develop their skills and confidence to construct and lead liturgy. Governors also visit the school, attending whole school masses and visiting key staff to quality-assure the accuracy of information provided to them. Training delivered by senior leaders and linking with external partners, ensures that all staff understand the centrality of prayer and are supported in developing their skills in providing high-quality collective worship. Consequently, there has been a transformation in the quality of prayer provided by the school. Holy Days of Obligation and other significant days are always prioritised by ensuring outstanding quality prayer and liturgy are available to all. Leaders prioritise the evaluation of collective worship and have acted promptly on their findings, such as by providing new resources for staff and improving the consistency of delivery throughout the school. As a result, Scripture is now at the centre of all celebrations and a four-part structure, 'gather, listen, respond, go forth, now provides form tutors with a framework through which prayer can be provided.

## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Thomas Aquinas Catholic school
School unique reference number (URN)	14183541835
Full postal address of the school	Wychall Lane, Birmingham, B38 8AP
School phone number	0121 464 4643
Name of head teacher or principal	Chris Martin
Chair of governing board	Peter Vince
School Website	www.stacs.org
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Lumen Christi Catholic Multi Academy
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy
Age-range of pupils	11-19
Trustees	Archdiocese of Birmingham
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	September 2016
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

## The inspection team

Stephen Burns	Lead inspector
Luke Salkeld	Team inspector
Marina Smith	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