



Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection report for St Thomas More Catholic Academy

URN: 140304

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

Date: 29-30 March 2023

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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

- The head teacher and his team are passionate in their commitment to the Catholic identity of the academy and have created a nurturing and inclusive community that genuinely has Christ as its centre.
- Students and staff demonstrate a deep sense of belonging to this welcoming community. They feel valued and cherished; they appreciate all the academy offers them.
- The leadership of religious education is strong and effective. The subject leader has created an ambitious and united team, determined to achieve the best for every student.
- Leaders and chaplains are enthusiastic and active in providing and growing prayer opportunities that include increasing numbers of students.

- Students embrace the many opportunities to live their faith through positive action and involve themselves in various enrichment activities and charitable works.

What the school needs to improve:

- Increase the rigour of the monitoring and evaluation of the academy's Catholic life and mission, religious education, and collective worship.
- Extend the range of ways pupils can express their learning in religious education, to improve their resilience and progress further.
- Increase regular opportunities for students, especially older ones, to plan, lead, and evaluate prayer and liturgy.

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

1

Leadership

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

2



Students demonstrate a strong understanding and sense of belonging to this inclusive Catholic community enriched by its ethnic diversity and the high quality of relationships between staff and students. These are underpinned by its powerful pastoral provision embedded in Gospel values. Students are active in their commitment to the academy's mission, *'Aspire to be more'*, which is evident in their engagement with a wide range of charities and initiatives linked to the demands of Catholic Social Teaching. Students are enthusiastic about their involvement with Cafod, the Alice Charity, the local food bank and caring for the environment. However, their ability to articulate the theology of their actions linked to Catholic Social Teaching is not yet fully developed. Students' behaviour and attitudes in lessons and around the academy are good. They have a strong sense of self-worth and demonstrate respect and care for others. Students are positive about the leadership opportunities that exist in the academy and serve as leaders in faith, excellence, and respect. Student leaders reflect the diversity of the academy community.

The mission statement is at the academy's heart. There is a deeply embedded culture of inclusive welcome, and leaders are proactive in ensuring that all groups represented in the academy are recognised and celebrated. The quality of care shown to all members of the community is outstanding. The pastoral team is highly skilled in providing excellent support for vulnerable students and their families. The academy is also very attentive to staff needs and has sound systems in place to support them. The academy environment and the student house system effectively reflect its Catholic identity. For example, the school chapel and the Savio Centre are central to the varied, daily chaplaincy programme available to all students. This programme is ably led by the full-time lay chaplain and supported by the parish priest, who generously gives his time. Personal, social, and health education (PSHE) and relationship, sex, and health education (RSHE) are carefully planned to reflect Catholic teachings and principles and holistically develop each student.

Leaders and governors are committed to the academy's Catholic life and character and exercise their duty as its guardians. They promote the archbishop's vision for his diocese, ensure that the whole curriculum contributes to students' spiritual and moral development and that the academy's mission is explicit in all its policies and key documentation. The head teacher is an inspirational role model in ensuring the academy's Catholic identity underpins every aspect of school life. He and his leadership team work closely with staff, who share the understanding of their work as not only a vocation but also part of their faith journey. Leaders of all curriculum areas map the contribution made by their subjects to the key areas of Catholic Social Teaching, resulting in the provision of a fully-rounded Catholic curriculum. Leaders and governors continually strive to build on the academy's strong Catholic tradition and solid links with the parish. The academy is committed to supporting and working closely with parents and rightly continues to explore ways to increase parental engagement in the faith life of the school. The Catholic life and mission of the academy are regularly monitored by leaders and governors and reported to the Catholic life, mission, and strategy committee. However, this monitoring does not yet benefit from more systematic evaluation and identifying success criteria linked to the school improvement plan. Training opportunities are varied and valued by staff, who also appreciate the annual opportunities to participate in staff retreats.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade:.....

2

Pupil outcomes

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

2

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 develop secure knowledge and understanding in their learning of religious education, which is the most successful core subject in the academy. Overall, most students, from their varied starting points, make progress in each key stage, with outcomes in GCSE and A level being particularly high in the previous examination season and showing an improving trend in recent years. The religious literacy of students at A level is particularly strong but more variable in Key Stage 3. Students across all year groups effectively understand the application of faith to daily life. Students' attitudes to their learning in religious education are consistently positive. They enjoy their lessons, participate willingly, and take pride in their work. They have many opportunities to make notes and recall previous learning but say they would welcome the opportunity to present their understanding in a greater variety of ways, particularly at Key Stage 3, to increase their resilience and progress further. Students are assessed regularly and receive feedback on their work. Subsequently, the system for students to further improve their work is well-embedded and understood by students. The majority know how well they achieve in religious education, although some struggle to articulate what they specifically need to do to improve their overall progress.

The department consists of committed teachers who are ambitious for their students. The excellent relationships teachers encourage promote positive attitudes amongst pupils and a genuine interest in the subject. The quality of teaching and purposeful learning within religious education is typically good. Teachers effectively teach Catholic values, promote, and celebrate progress, and grow resilience in their students. The subject leader has a clear vision of effective teaching and learning and high expectations of herself and her team. She has built a consistent team approach and, being a positive role model, offers guidance and support relating to lesson planning and delivery. Lessons are, therefore, well-sequenced, resourced and clearly linked to schemes of work. Teachers have a clear planning framework, enabling them to prepare lessons to consolidate and extend pupils' learning. This is further enhanced through regular opportunities for joint planning. Most lessons have a good pace, ensuring pupils remain focused throughout the lesson. When questioning is used

effectively, it provides appropriate challenge and promotes higher-level thinking. However, this is not consistent throughout the department.

Leaders and governors maintain religious education at the curriculum's heart. They ensure that the subject meets the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory* requirements and that the required amount of time is given to religious education. Provisions for GCSE and the sixth form core religious education programme have been improved to ensure they comply with diocesan directives. Careful consideration has been given to the intent and implementation of the religious education curriculum, leading to effectively sequenced, enhanced and built-upon learning. The curriculum design is rooted in the academy's Catholic identity and commitment to inclusion. Leaders have established a system of regular, pertinent training and updates which are well-received and appreciated by staff. Leaders understand the importance of monitoring and assessment and have subsequently designed a calendar which covers all curriculum areas, including religious education. The subject leader undertakes observations of learning, work reviews, seeks the views of students and analyses student progress data to inform her evaluation of the department's achievements. Findings are regularly reported to a senior leader and incorporated into the department improvement plan. Governors review summary reports regarding religious education but do not systematically scrutinise the progress of individual year groups and specific groups of students in religious education, meaning their understanding of the subject's achievements is not as forensic as it could be.

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

Prayer is central to the academy's daily life and is part of every gathering of students and staff. The school prayer is said at the start of each day, and all staff meetings start with prayer. A variety of different prayer styles is used, including traditional Catholic prayers as well as those written by students. Students demonstrate respect and reverence during worship. Students, particularly those in Year 7, are active in the prayer opportunities available in the school chapel or Savio Centre daily. The lay chaplain seeks to create opportunities for student involvement and has successfully increased the number of older pupils involved in voluntary opportunities, as evidenced in the recent Stations of the Cross for schools in the All Saints Catholic Collegiate. Students in Year 7 regularly plan 'Fifteen Minutes of Faith', an act of worship which they lead with their year group. These are linked to the liturgical calendar and the themes of Catholic Social Teaching. Opportunities for older students to plan and lead prayer are more limited, and they do not routinely do so. The academy is committed to remedying this and has plans to do so, but it is too soon to determine their impact. Students of other faiths articulate that they feel supported in observing their prayer practices in this inclusive community.

Liturgy and prayer are designed to be inclusive and help clarify the links between faith and life for students. The lay chaplain is highly visible to students and a model of excellent practice. The chapel is a calm space that is accessible to all members of the academy community. A weekly schedule offers numerous opportunities for quiet prayer, a voluntary Mass, and a 'Light Fever' gathering to adore the Blessed Sacrament. A quiet room is made available to support the prayer life of those of other faiths. The head teacher, lay chaplain and leadership team members are strong role models in the prayer life of the academy, leading by example and encouraging participation and reflection. The parish priest also provides weekly, valued support. Collective worship is linked to the liturgical calendar and includes reflection on each Sunday's Gospel reading and a call to put faith into action. The music and art departments proactively support the prayer life of the school: the school choir is going from strength to strength and enthusiastically supports worship, and a

whole school priority on increasing the amount of student artwork to support prayer and worship is currently being developed to further reflect the riches of the Church by providing enhanced experiences of prayer.

Leaders clearly understand what determines high-quality prayer, as expressed in the recently updated academy prayer policy. Together with the lay chaplain, they are highly knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and committed to further developing the academy's prayer life. They seek to ensure this is presented to students in accessible and appropriate ways. They have compiled a whole school calendar which ensures that the themes chosen for prayer reflect a good understanding of the Church's liturgical seasons and the academy's Catholic character, as well as having a clear purpose and message. Leaders effectively communicate the value of prayer to students. The governing body is kept accurately informed of developments through the head teacher's report, the link governor's work, and visits to the academy to experience it first-hand. However, the monitoring does not routinely lead to the evaluation of prayer's impact throughout the academy. Parents and students also have an opportunity to share their views regarding prayer through questionnaires.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Thomas More Catholic Academy
School unique reference number (URN)	140304
Full postal address of the school	Longton Hall Road, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, ST3 2NJ
School phone number	01782 882900
Name of head teacher or principal	Mark Rayner
Chair of governing board	Anne Middleton-Hill
School Website	https://www.stmca.org.uk
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	All Saints Catholic Collegiate
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy
Age-range of pupils	11 to 18
Trustees	Archdiocese of Birmingham
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	November 2016
Previous denominational inspection grade	2

The inspection team

Basia McLaughlin	Lead inspector
Elizabeth Bryant	Team inspector
David Bayliss	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