



DIOCESAN CANONICAL INSPECTION REPORT

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL, RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

St Thomas More Catholic Voluntary Academy

Newstead Road, Leicester, LE2 3TA

School URN:	138185
Inspection Date:	18 November 2019
Inspectors:	Mr Anthony Harrison and Mr Gregory Hughes

Overall Effectiveness	Previous Inspection:	Good	2
	This Inspection:	Good	2
Catholic Life:		Outstanding	1
Religious Education:		Good	2
Collective Worship:		Good	2

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Thomas More Catholic Voluntary Academy is a good Catholic school.

- St Thomas More is a welcoming and happy school where faith is central to the learning environment. The headteacher provides a clear vision and is passionate about providing an inclusive Religious Education. All stakeholders are eager to support the nurture of pupils and are fully supportive of diocesan initiatives. They work closely with the rest of the St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Multi-Academy Trust. Parents hold the school in high regard and pupil behaviour is exemplary.
- The Catholic Life of St Thomas More is outstanding. 'Love one another as I have loved you' is St Thomas' mission statement; it is clearly lived out by pupils and adults alike. Pupils feel safe and respected, and in turn, show kindness and empathy towards each other.
- Teaching and learning in Religious Education at St Thomas More are good. Systems for monitoring and assessment are in place. Pupils enjoy their lessons and teachers prepare lessons which are engaging and age-appropriate. Pupils produce good quality work in line with diocesan guidelines. Over time, pupils make good progress broadly in line with diocesan averages in both key stages. Assessed work is accurate and reflects the good progress of all ability groups.
- Collective Worship at St Thomas More is good. The chaplaincy team is established and the school's new chaplain is in place supporting the quality of delivery of class and whole-school worship. Pupils show confidence in delivering liturgies to their peers. The environment for Collective Worship is reverential and prayerful.

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

- St Thomas More Catholic Voluntary Academy is a slightly larger than average primary school. It became part of the St Thomas Aquinas Multi-Academy Trust on 1 September 2018. The school serves the parish of St Thomas More, Leicester.
- There are currently 274 pupils on roll. 82% are baptised Catholic; 11% belong to other Christian faiths; 7% identify with other world faiths and 1% have no religious affiliation.
- 10% of the school population has SEND (special educational needs and/or a disability), this is below the national average.
- 8% of the pupils on roll are in receipt of additional pupil premium funding (the pupil premium funding is additional government funding that schools receive to support those known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority); this is below the national average.
- A new headteacher and senior leadership team is in place. Indeed, there have been 4 different headteachers and 3 different deputy headteachers since the last inspection.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Catholic Life:
 - Ensure that key leaders maintain and sustain the quality of provision for Catholic Life, embracing new diocesan initiatives in a timely manner.
 - Continue to develop collaborative partnerships within the St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Multi-Academy Trust and throughout the diocese.
- Religious Education:
 - Ensure that writing frames and worksheets in both key stages are not restricting pupils' written responses, so that they are able to develop their thoughts in greater detail.
 - Ensure that the rationale behind using *driver words* is understood by all pupils, allowing them to improve the quality and depth of their written responses. In so doing, ensure that self-assessment is fully embedded.
- Collective Worship:
 - Enable all pupils to develop a greater ownership of Collective Worship in both whole-school and class liturgies, so that they are all participating in and evaluating worship independently.
 - Continue to work with the St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Multi-Academy Trust lead lay chaplain in order to develop more creative and imaginative pupil-led worship.

CATHOLIC LIFE

THE QUALITY OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL	1
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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 governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for 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 – outstanding

- Pupils appreciate, value and actively participate in the Catholic Life and mission of the school. Almost all pupils willingly engage in the chaplaincy team’s activities to promote the Catholic mission of the school. The team’s advocacy and leadership has led to pupils developing a strong sense of belonging and understanding of the demands of their faith.
- Behaviour is exemplary with pupils showing a deep respect and tolerance for themselves and others.
- Pupils take an active role in the school’s Catholic Life and mission both in their local community – including support for the Leicester South food bank, the local hospice – and further afield by supporting national and global charities such as: Macmillan, the Poppy Appeal, CAFOD and Mission Together.
- Strong links with the parish and the diocese enhance the faith development of all members of the school community.
- Pupils value the opportunities provided by the school to find out about other faiths such as Islam and other religious festivals such as Diwali. They speak enthusiastically about visits to other places of worship (recently visiting a mosque) and the relationship formed with the local Imam.
- The Catholic traditions of the school have been established over many years – they are clearly much loved and respected by all, as witnessed in the vibrant and colourful displays which help to enrich pupils’ sense of belonging to the Catholic community.

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school – outstanding

- The school is a joyful and strongly supportive community where the quality of relationships between colleagues and pupils echoes the mission statement, ‘Love one another as I have loved you’.
- The learning environment of the school is a key feature in promoting the school’s Catholic character; including well-developed displays and places to reflect and pray.
- Displays creatively celebrate pupils’ work and exemplify the depth of their faith. Messages from both the Pope and the Bishop are prominent and illustrate the school’s faith in an engaging way to pupils and parent, including a ‘Bible Challenge’ to promote the Year of the Word.

- 'Statements to Live By' are clearly displayed throughout the school – in the staffroom and in all classes, which support pupils' social, emotional and moral awareness.
- The school's behaviour policy is adhered to closely. The written policy reflects the core Catholic values of forgiveness and reconciliation. Together, the school tackles and raises awareness of issues around racism and prejudice through effective and contemporary strategies which help to embed key Christian moral teaching (e.g. the 'show racism the red card' strategy).
- The mission statement reflects the welcoming environment which greets visitors and all stakeholders at St Thomas'. As the headteacher told inspectors: 'All are welcome here at St Thomas More'.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school – outstanding

- The school mission statement is clearly linked to the educational mission of the Church. Since her appointment, the headteacher has had a major impact on the school. Her vision and passion for the promotion of good relationships has given the school further drive and direction which has empowered all stakeholders both within the school and parish.
- At the beginning of each academic year, leaders have implemented staff liturgy and training. They have ensured that this continuing professional development has been aligned to diocesan events as well as the Bishop's directives. This has impacted positively on the school's newly qualified teachers who are knowledgeable and effective in all aspects of their work.
- The school has an active and supportive parish priest who is a regular visitor to the school. Pupils engage in both theological and every-day life conversations with him which helps to further enliven and enrich the Catholic Life of the school.
- The school is promoted by active and knowledgeable local governors who are keen to ensure that the quality of Catholic Life remains high. They discharge this duty through formal monitoring systems which are effective in assisting the school to continually improve in this most important aspect of school life.
- Leaders and local governors benefit from high-quality training and effectively monitor the continuing professional development of staff. Together, they are fully committed to the Catholic Life of the school.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION	2
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- How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.
- How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

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How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education – good

- Pupils enjoy Religious Education. They are settled, ready to work and show good listening skills. The school uses talk partners as an effective learning strategy. Pupils are increasingly articulate and books are well presented. Pupils say they like Religious Education because ‘we have discussions that help to give us ideas’.
- The quality of pupils’ work in terms of output and coverage is good. There is some evidence of extended pieces of writing in Religious Education books, however, pupils now need further opportunities to be able to write at greater length, capturing their rich conversation and discussion more fully.
- Behaviour for learning is good. Pupils are respectful of each other and listen intently to each other’s thoughts and opinions. Teaching assistants are well deployed and support pupils to access their learning. Pupils with special educational needs and/or a disability are integrated skilfully into lessons and participate at an appropriate level of learning.
- Pupils enter St Thomas More from a low starting point in religious knowledge and understanding. Data is collected regularly and accurately which evidences good progress. Taking into account their low baseline starting point, standards of attainment in Religious Education are broadly in line with diocesan averages at both Key Stages 1 and 2. There is a high proportion of Catholic pupils and they quickly develop their religious vocabulary.
- Pupils enjoy learning about other faiths and are respectful of other beliefs. They have a clear understanding of Gospel values and follow the diocesan prescribed RSE (Relationships and Sex Education) curriculum, ‘Journey in love’.
- Pupils in some classes are unsure of their current level of attainment and how to achieve their next step targets. There needs to be a greater school consistency with all teachers explaining to pupils how to improve their current level of achievement and what their next steps in learning are. Diocesan initiatives such as the use of *driver words*, key lesson vocabulary and the use of the ‘big questions’ are evident but now need to be fully explained and become embedded vehicles for enhancing pupils’ written work. Pupils need to understand that the *driver words* facilitate the development of their responses. Similarly, they need to fully understand that the symbols of the head, heart and cloud will help to develop their critical thinking and their response to the different attainment targets in Religious Education.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education – good

- The quality of teaching is good. In the early years, adults model activities and expectations well. Key thoughts and questions are targeted appropriately. Theological discussion is strong and teacher subject knowledge is clearly evident in some classes. This expertise needs to continue to be shared and modelled in order to support the improvement of teaching throughout both key stages.
- Teachers prepare lessons carefully. There are examples of supportive resourcing and preparation. The *Come and See* programme for Religious Education is being used throughout the school and there are examples of activities such as role play and artwork supplementing written tasks. Lessons using 'I can statements' and sharing of learning intentions along with the use of *driver words* to improve writing, ensure that pupils are fully engaged. This now needs to be embedded throughout the school.
- Teachers allow sufficient time for talk partner discussions. However, when the opportunity comes to write, there is scope for far fewer 'scaffolded' worksheets and writing frames in order to allow pupils the ability to develop their knowledge and thoughts. The use of these frames can be restrictive, particularly for pupils aiming for greater depth answers. There is scope for independent learning to be promoted with higher ability pupils who have a clear knowledge of areas taught being encouraged to begin their work at an earlier part of the lesson.
- Assessment of pupils' work in Religious Education is accurate and is captured on a regular basis. The new tracking system is effective as it allows quick analysis of vulnerable groups. This in turn allows senior leaders to provide feedback, support and ways forward for the class teachers.

The extent to which leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education – good

- The headteacher works closely with her subject leader, senior leadership team and local governors. They are eager to develop staff and to continue to build on current practice to deliver quality curriculum coverage. Evaluation of Religious Education in the diocesan SEF is accurate and areas for development are correctly identified. Monitoring activities such as learning walks, individual lesson observations and scrutiny of work enable critical feedback which in turn is supporting increasingly confident teaching staff.
- The senior leadership team has provided good quality support for staff. The Religious Education subject leader has engaged fully in diocesan training. She is committed to school improvement and has cascaded diocesan initiatives back at school level. She has become increasingly empowered in her role and is confident in her accuracy of assessing pupils' work supported by the headteacher and increasingly, the rest of the staff.
- The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development. Displays are thought provoking and well presented. There is a drive to ensure pupils have a moral awareness of fairness and to tackle racism and be wholly respectful of other faiths. Leaders and local governors ensure that the episcopal requirement to provide 10% of curriculum time to Religious Education is followed.
- Local governors have regular contact with the headteacher and ensure that there is critical support. They understand the way in which pupils' work is assessed and have participated in diocesan training allowing them to ask the right questions and to challenge leaders effectively.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP	2
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- How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.
- The quality of provision for the Collective Worship.
- How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

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How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship – good

- At St Thomas More, pupils act with reverence and are keen to participate in Collective Worship. The chaplaincy team is in the early stages of planning and leading the whole school in worship. They are proud of their work which results in other pupils being appropriately engaged. The whole school community is now beginning to benefit from the worship opportunities provided by the chaplaincy team.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the religious seasons and feasts of the Church. They are able to adapt their plans accordingly to deliver appropriate themes and messages. During a whole-school liturgy, pupils planned readings, music, religious artefacts and reflective prayers around the statement of the week: 'I can work, play, rest and pray each day'. In addition, the NDCYS 'Extra-Ordinary' resources are displayed across the school – this helps to support weekly teaching and worship.
- Collective Worship is central to the life of St Thomas More. The school prays regularly together in classes and in small groups. Each day is punctuated by prayer. This is enhanced where pupils own prayer books. Where this is the case, there is evidence that they are able to compose their own prayers, in addition to learning the traditional prayers of the Church.
- Throughout the school, pupils are able to lead worship with varying degrees of confidence and enthusiasm. Ample opportunities are provided, but these should now be timetabled in every class to ensure that all pupils gain experience of leading worship. Where they are most familiar with the planning and leading of Collective Worship, pupils show increasing skill and independence.
- Monitoring and evaluation of Collective Worship by pupils is in its infancy. When embedded, the school will be able to further improve its provision within all year groups so that a more consistent approach is adopted by all classes when planning and leading their own liturgies.
- In a whole-school Act of Worship, the chaplaincy team were beginning to make choices in the liturgy and were taking an active part in the readings, prayers and music; ably supported by their teacher. Evaluation was evident – and plans are in place to further develop pupil leadership in the evaluation of Collective Worship with the involvement of the St Thomas Aquinas Multi Academy Trust lead lay chaplain.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship – good

- Collective Worship is central to the life of the school for all pupils. Praying and worshipping together is part of the daily experience for pupils and staff at St Thomas More.
- Collective Worship is given a high priority in terms of planning and resourcing. Each class has its own prayer area; collectively they are bright and appealing, well-resourced with appropriate religious artefacts and statues to aid pupils' learning and worship.
- Relevant staff have a good understanding of the Church's liturgical year. This is enhanced by the expert theological knowledge of senior leaders and the parish priest. Their knowledge and understanding is disseminated to all staff, and in turn to pupils.
- Opportunities are planned in a manner that facilitates attendance by parents and carers. On the day of the inspection, parents told inspectors that on a Friday afternoon, as many as seventy to eighty parents are present at the worship which is a culmination and celebration of the work of the pupils and of the school. The parish priest explained the positive impact of the Thursday 'drop-in Mass' as well as Sunday Mass, which every third week, is led by pupils from school. Parents commented on the quality of pupils' singing at these events and that provision was made for pupils to learn hymns online.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship – good

- Leaders have an extensive understanding of the Church's liturgical year, seasons and feasts. Together with local governors, they are visible role-models of their parish and school communities, promoting the faith in their work and in working closely with parishioners and the wider community.
- Leaders are models of good practice for staff and pupils. They actively take part and lead Acts of Worship during key celebrations at school. They help to promote the work of the local parish church, especially when visiting for Mass. Together with local governors, they are promoting ever-closer links with parishioners.
- Leaders promote pupils' planning and their leading of Collective Worship. Records show that they offer staff regular opportunities to receive liturgical formation. They acknowledge that more opportunities for all pupils to lead worship and to do this more independently now need to develop.
- Leaders and local governors regularly review Collective Worship as part of their self-evaluation processes. They have accurately identified the need for the chaplaincy team, guided by the St Thomas Aquinas Multi-Academy Trust lead lay chaplain, to train and support pupils in other classes to plan and lead their own liturgies.
- Leaders and local governors are now in a position to further enhance Collective Worship so that pupils respond to and participate in the leadership of liturgies more confidently and skillfully. The Multi-Academy Trust lead lay chaplain has a vision and plan to help move the school to a point where pupils have the ability to develop their worship, (currently based on a 'set' structure), to worship which incorporates more contemporary approaches and which flows with ever greater spontaneity and imagination to worship the divine.

SCHOOL DETAILS

School Name	St Thomas More Catholic Voluntary Academy
Unique Reference Number	138185
CMAT	St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Multi-Academy Trust

The inspection of this school was carried out on behalf of the Bishop of Nottingham under Canon 806 of Canon Law in accordance with the *Evaluation Schedule* (September 2018) for diocesan canonical inspections in the Diocese of Nottingham. 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 9 Religious Education lessons, 1 whole-school and 2 class Acts of Collective Worship.

Meetings were held with the headteacher, the subject leader for Religious Education, the CEO, director of performance and standards and the lead lay chaplain for the St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Multi-Academy Trust, the parish priest and local governors. Discussions were also held with pupils and parents.

The inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including reports of the local governing body, action plans, the school development plan, monitoring forms, assessment information and parental response forms. Inspectors also examined the work in pupils' Religious Education books.

Co-Chairs of Governors:	Mrs Clare Macdonald and Mrs Catherine Gribon
Headteacher:	Mrs Charlotte Crosse
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WHAT INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS MEAN

Within the report, the following grades are used:

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires Improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

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

Grade 1	Outstanding	The school is a highly effective Catholic school. Pupils' needs are exceptionally well met.
Grade 2	Good	The school is an effective Catholic school. Pupils' needs are met well.
Grade 3	Requires Improvement	The school is not yet a good Catholic school, it is not inadequate however, and there are aspects that require improvement. There will be a monitoring visit within the next 18 months and the school will be re-inspected within 3 years.
Grade 4	Inadequate	There are features in need of urgent and immediate attention. The school is not meeting the basic minimum requirement for adequacy as a Catholic school. The school will receive an annual monitoring visit and will be re-inspected within 3 years.