

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

URN: 139517

Carried out on behalf of the Right Rev. David Oakley, Bishop of Northampton on:

Date: 12 -13 October 2023

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The school is fully compliant with the curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference	x
The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop	x
The school has responded fully to the areas for improvement from the last inspection	x

### Summary of key findings

#### What the school does well

- The sense of community is tangible and is built on its Catholic foundations within this richly diverse school
- The explicit use of Catholic Social Teaching and Virtues as a vehicle for personal and community development is to be celebrated
- The approach to collective worship reflects the passion and engagement of the lay chaplain and school leaders and ensures that prayer remains a key focus of daily life for all students and staff
- The RE department is celebrated as a beacon department in terms of their relationships, leadership across the school, support of assemblies and enabling the students to live out their sense of social justice.

What the school needs to improve:

- School leaders should further use pupil evaluation of the Catholic Life and Mission to contribute towards it's development, therefore providing increased opportunities to allow students to lead and plan collective worship.
- Increase the academic rigour of post-16 RE provision in the "See, Judge, Act" programme.

## 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 are rightly proud of their diverse Catholic school and recognise and celebrate other faiths, diversity, race and cultures. They value the strong sense of community, enjoy being part of this community and have a clear understanding that they are valued and cared for. Students show a deep respect for their own dignity and the dignity of others and take a leading role in responding to the demands of Catholic Social Teaching. A virtues rewards scheme has been introduced and even in its infancy, the positive impact on the students is evident. Students support many national and local charities, with each year group choosing different ones, and have annual activities to support these. The three SVP groups live out the school mission of “Serving God First”, through preparing food for the local soup kitchen and raising money. Students value the school’s chaplaincy provision and actively participate in and contribute to opportunities provided by the school. Staff and students attended World Youth Day in Portugal this summer.

The provision of Catholic life and mission is rich . Staff are clear role models as witnessed in the engagement and service in Mass and their positivity around the explicit use of Catholic Social Teaching across the whole curriculum. Professional development ensures that there is clarity on how the mission statement can be applied on a daily basis. The sense of community in this school is outstanding. The most vulnerable are included in all provision of the school as witnessed through their attendance and participation in Mass, assemblies and the St. Vincent de Paul groups. The pastoral care of the school is to be celebrated and a phrase that was repeated was that the school ‘catches the students before they fall’, staff go the extra mile in helping students and enabling them to reach their full-potential. The Emmaus Centre is an excellent example of inclusion, demonstrating clearly the most important values of Catholic education. The headteacher is the driver of leadership in this area. Relationships between staff and students are

exemplary; students highlighted to Inspectors the value they place on the efforts made by staff and the positive relationships that staff are keen to engender. The school environment is outstanding; the mission statement is highlighted everywhere and displays clearly illustrate the Catholic identity. There is a dedicated prayer room which is well used and appreciated by all. The RSHE programme meets all the statutory and diocesan requirements.

Leaders in this school are fully committed to a distinctly Catholic vision of education. Governors and the Trust are enthusiastic and place Catholic life and mission at the heart of all they do. They are ambitious for the school and monitor the Catholic life of the school through visits which are reported. The school works closely with the diocese and local parishes, which are visited annually by the leadership. Catholic Social Teaching is lived at St Thomas More and there is a clear and profound understanding of this across the whole school and how this links to all that they do within and without of school, as well as in all lessons and social times. Governors understand fully their responsibility to hold senior leaders to account and provide appropriate challenge when necessary. Leaders know their school self evaluation is at the heart of driving improvements in Catholic life across the school. New staff to the school are clearly supported in their understanding of working in a Catholic school through a coherent induction programme and ongoing continuous professional development throughout the year, and they value the openness and inclusivity of the approach.

## 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 enjoy and value their RE lessons and show good levels of religious literacy. They are engaged in lessons and are keen to participate and answer questions. Work is of a good quality and students know what they need to do to improve. Some independence is shown in the response to home learning tasks. Core RE is delivered through the 'See, Judge, Act' course which is valued and enjoyed by all students. One student commented on the central importance of RE: 'helps me learn about my religion'. Outcomes at GCSE RE are slightly below national average, but in line with Maths and English in the school, and at A-level have recently dropped. There is robust internal data and action plans that demonstrates an appropriate response to the 2023 outcomes in order to support the 2024 cohort.

Teachers at St Thomas More have high expectations of students and good subject knowledge. The structure of lessons is clear and at GCSE level a focus on exam questions is a focus as part of the pattern of learning. Teacher feedback is timely and appropriate and students understand what they need to do to make progress. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent. RE teaching pedagogy and assessment is in line with the whole school strategies as evidenced in the school development plan and witnessed in lessons. Support staff are well used in lessons and show excellent knowledge of the needs of the students. Catholic Social Teaching is central throughout.

Leaders have ensured that the RE curriculum faithfully follows the Directory and are on track to continue to implement the Religious Education Directory, beyond year 7 over the coming two years. There is good evidence of innovative approaches for building the breadth of knowledge i.e. including Biblical Greek. Lessons are appropriately sequenced ensuring that subject content is developed systematically across the year groups. Since the last inspection the Sixth form

core RE programme has been revamped and is much improved, with observed lessons focusing on lively student debate and discussion, challenge at this level is needed. All teachers in the RE Department are subject specialists and resourcing is on a par with other core subjects. Leaders help provide excellent professional development opportunities for staff both at school and Trust level, and these are well received. The RE subject leader has successfully led on important recent improvements and staff talk warmly about the strong sense of community and collaboration in the department. Parents are very appreciative of the work done by the RE department with one parent commenting, 'A wonderful school, teaching its children the importance of faith and living a life of virtue'

## Collective worship

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

Religious education 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



Behaviour during prayer and liturgy is good and students respond well to the experience provided by the school through their engagement and reverence. Students are given opportunities to reflect, to which they respond appropriately. However, active participation is limited, and there is some passivity, and the opportunities for student leadership in prayer is also limited.

Opportunities to lead are starting to reach a wider range of students through the passion plays and opportunities to choose and read daily prayers. The best examples of prayer life involve active participation and inclusion as seen with the Year 7 signed and sung community song and of Tutor prayer. This involved focused prayer, a prayer record, discussion and the use of form scrap books to chart their journey through school from one year to the next, giving students a clear identity in this prayer community. Faith Ambassadors look after the worship record and lead prayer as a service. They all value the chaplaincy provision; as reflected through them expressing, "I'm able to represent the school and get closer with Christ" and "It means I'm being a representative of faith and a role model". The school environment reflects the school mission and values with faith, hope and love displayed throughout, along with foci for prayer and reflection. A consistent approach to assemblies has enhanced the provision through always praying the Lord's Prayer at the beginning and closing with the school prayer. The virtues reward programme is well received and celebrated by staff and students.

Planned prayers are central to the life of the school and daily prayers are shared for all to follow by the school chaplain. The school prayer room is a sanctuary within the school for staff and student reflection. Links with parishes are good and the local clergy support the liturgical life of the school through celebrating mass. Staff training and monitoring systems are being used to develop staff skills in facilitating prayer to enhance the quality of daily prayer. Staff model acts of

collective worship for students to create a positive student experience of worship. The chaplain is new to post, however, has already established himself and has a clear vision to 'bring the prayer room out of the prayer room' and makes a significant positive contribution in leading prayer and liturgy. Students are given opportunities to experience prayer and retreat delivered during lessons under the lead of the chaplain. Parents are invited to attend the weekly morning mass and weekly praying of the rosary.

Leaders are clear that all activities in school can give 'Glory to God' and develops a pupil's virtue in line with Catholic Social Teaching. Leaders provide clear resources to support staff in offering an appropriate diet of prayer and liturgy for students. A new initiative of Meaningful Mondays has added an extra dimension of focus at the beginning of the week. The training and staff support programmes are designed to promote staff engagement and leadership of prayer, liturgy and formation in their role. Staff spoke enthusiastically about the quality of this development and as a result staff understand the importance of prayer and liturgy for all. Governors and trust leads monitor the provision of prayer and liturgy during visits and meetings where the senior leadership link and chaplain provide an update of provision. Governors are invited and regularly attend school wide acts of prayer and worship.

## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Thomas More Catholic School
School unique reference number (URN)	139517
Full postal address of the school	<b>Tyne Crescent, Bedford. MK41 7UL</b>
School phone number	01234 400222
Name of head teacher or principal	Martin Bonner
Chair of governing board	Cathy Piotrowski
School Website	<a href="http://www.st-thomasmore.org.uk">www.st-thomasmore.org.uk</a>
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Our Lady Immaculate Catholic Academy Trust
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy
Age-range of pupils	11-18
Trustees	OLICAT
Gender of pupils	Co-educational
Date of last denominational inspection	March 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

## The inspection team

Andrew Bull	Lead
Philip Turnham	Team
Peter Fahey	Team

## 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

