

# THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF NORTHAMPTON



## Interim Monitoring Visit 6<sup>th</sup> July 2023

### St. Thomas More, Bedford [URN 109698]

Since the last full Section 48 inspection in March 2017, there have been significant changes in leadership at St Thomas More. The Headteacher took up a substantive post in January 2019 and the Senior Leader responsible for the Catholic Life of the School joined the senior team in June 2023. The Head of Religious Education was promoted to the post in June 2023. The school chaplain has recently left the school. A recent successful recruitment process has meant that a new chaplain will join the school in October 2023. The senior team has worked hard in the interim period to ensure that no momentum has been lost in the excellent range of provision for the Catholic life of the school.

Pupils have a deep understanding of the mission of their school. They can articulate how the mission is put into practice in a variety of ways. Pupils articulate a clear sense of belonging and community. They are rightly proud of the diverse nature of their community and talk about how everyone is made to feel welcome. Pupils talked enthusiastically about a recent 'Cultures Day' and they appreciate opportunities to celebrate the diversity that exists. Pupils are provided with a wide range of opportunities to explore and strengthen their faith in an environment that is open and supportive of this. All pupils reflected on the 'Passion Play' presented during Lent as a rich opportunity to explore their faith. The quality of provision has been supported by a committed team who work in communion to provide focused opportunities for pupils and staff. There has been a recent reconsideration of the school mission statement across the school. Leaders and governors are active in their strategic monitoring and evaluation of provision.

The Religious Education department have worked hard to review schemes of learning to ensure increased challenge and progression to GCSE. During a learning walk, lessons were observed on the units of Islam in Year 8 and Judaism in Year 9. The focus on other religions provides further opportunity to celebrate the diversity that exists within the school community. Pupils were observed to be actively engaged and keen to contribute throughout. Leaders have a clear vision for the subject which is shared widely with staff. It is clearly evident that pupils are at the heart of all strategic decisions about curriculum and teaching. The department secures good outcomes and the team is focused on the achievement of the most vulnerable pupils. Context folders provide clear evidence of adaptation of provision to meet identified need. Leaders have a clear strategy in place to further enhance the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' work.

The provision for prayer and liturgy is carefully planned according to the liturgical calendar and includes reference to scripture. There are a wide range of opportunities for pupils and staff to come together to pray and worship. Mass was celebrated on the morning of the visit and this was well attended by staff and a few pupils. A Year 10 act of worship was observed in which pupils were given the opportunity to consider the nature of leadership. Pupils are respectful during prayer, particularly during services in the local church. Pupils have the opportunity to write and share prayer, particularly during tutorial time. Pupils are appreciative of this time and recognise its importance in supporting the development of their faith. Leaders are committed to evaluating the quality of provision for prayer and

liturgy, making effective use of pupil surveys to provide valuable information about what the pupils want from these opportunities.

The school has addressed all of the areas highlighted in the last inspection report. There has been a strategic review of provision at Post 16 in the Religious Education department which has resulted in a significant increase in student engagement. The new 'See, Judge, Act' course provides a rich and diverse programme of distinct units that are offered on a carousel basis. Students report that the programme is extremely 'worthwhile' and provides an 'excellent opportunity to discuss a range of topics'. Students particularly engaged with the Politics and Leadership modules. The Religious Education department has also conducted a strategic review of the KS3 curriculum to ensure that there is sufficient challenge and preparation of the knowledge and skills that will ensure effective progression to GCSE. This has included a review of assessments and the sequence of learning, and has incorporated a strategic approach to the familiarisation of the language associated with GCSE questions. The strategic review of the KS3 curriculum has ensured that there is compliance with the new curriculum directory in Year 7. The senior team have made changes to the curriculum to ensure that full compliance with the Bishops' requirement to teach 10% RE will be in place in September 2023.

Areas for sustaining improvement should include:

- Implement the new values and rewards system that is planned for September 2023 and then embed this across the school.
- Broaden opportunities for wider active engagement of students in prayer and liturgy in the school.

The inspector would like to thank members of staff and pupils for the very warm welcome and the hospitality accorded throughout the visit.

**Jo-Anne Hoarty on behalf of the Diocese of Northampton.**