



# Archdiocese of Birmingham

## Section 48 Inspection

## ST THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC SCHOOL

### Part of the Lumen Christi Multi-Academy

Wychall Lane, Kings Norton, Birmingham B38 8AP

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Inspection date	26 <sup>th</sup> -27 <sup>th</sup> September 2016
Reporting Inspector	Janet Mellor
Assisting Inspector	Andrew Maund

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Type of School	Academy
Age range of students	11-18 years
Number on roll	1175
Appropriate authority	Board of Directors
Chair of Governors	Annette Duffy
Telephone number	0121 464 4643
E-mail address	enquiry@stacs.bham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	October 2011
DFE School Number	3304616
Unique Reference Number	141835

**Headteacher** **Miss Clare Madden**

Previous inspection: 1

This inspection: 1

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DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



## Evidence

- The inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors.
- The focus of the inspection was the quality, leadership and impact of the school's provision for Catholic life, collective worship and religious education (RE).
- The inspectors observed teaching across 9 RE lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They also observed one Citizenship lesson.
- The inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with students to evaluate their understanding of Catholic life, worship and the impact of teaching on their learning over time.
- Meetings were held with two governors, including the chair of the academy committee, the headteacher and senior leaders, the person in charge of Catholic life (PICCL), the subject leader, priest chaplain and lay chaplain, as well as other teachers holding responsibilities for pastoral work, special needs and progress data.
- The inspectors attended a form Mass, a house assembly and tutor time and undertook a learning walk with a former student, now studying at university.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of documents including teachers' planning, the data about students' attainment and progress, RAISEonline, the school's self evaluation, and the development planning.

## Information about the school

- The school is situated in the parish of SS Joseph and Helen and serves the Kings Norton area of south-west Birmingham. There are currently 1175 students on roll.
- There is a higher percentage of ethnic minority students than the national average.
- The percentage of Catholic students is currently 48%.
- The proportion of students who are disadvantaged is well above the national average.
- The percentage of students with special needs is about in line with the national average.
- On entry to the school the attainment of students is usually around the national average.
- Since the last inspection the school has become an academy as part of the Lumen Christi Multi-Academy. There have been new appointments to the posts of headteacher and faculty leader for RE, and there is a new priest chaplain.

## Main Findings

- Catholic Life is outstanding. The school centres all of its work uncompromisingly on the teachings of Christ. Students rapidly become part of the family of St Thomas Aquinas School, and benefit from the unstinting care which they receive. There is wide provision for growth in Catholic Christian values and students develop into well informed thinking young adults.
- Collective Worship is a priority for the school day. Students respect and value this as a time for reflection. Staff plan carefully to focus attention on themes such as compassion and mercy. They enable students to participate actively. Students learn the importance of prayer in their own lives.
- Senior leaders know the strengths and areas of weakness of the school. This comes from the emphasis on team work, which enables a wide contribution to monitoring and evaluation. Subsequent improvement planning is developed into working

documents which support leaders in moving the school forward with purposefulness and a generosity of spirit.

- RE has a full complement of 10% of curriculum time in Years 7 to 11.
- The RE faculty enables most students to make very good progress in Years 7 to 11, and attainment in GCSE is usually above the diocesan average. Teachers' excellent planning and the high quality of resources lead to the students' enjoyment of lessons. This results in a large uptake of the A level course, by far the most popular course in the sixth form, which shows outstanding achievement rates.
- The high quality of the sixth form General RE course enables students to engage in informed discussion and to develop key skills in preparation for study in higher education.
- Leadership of the RE faculty shows dedication to the progress of each and every student and the ability to create an open, collaborative and creative approach to the teaching, which responds to the needs of students and the requirements of the new examination syllabuses. The RE faculty is rightly considered to be a central focus for the development of the Catholic life of the school.
- School leaders have successfully raised the profile of spiritual and moral development and awareness of vocation since an audit in 2014. They have recognised the need to evaluate what has been achieved.
- Students greatly value the dedication of staff and identify quickly with the school community, especially with their house and form group.

## **THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL**

- Catholic life is judged by the school to be outstanding and this is accurate. It is the vibrant driving force of the school and recognised as such by staff, students, governors and parents. The school is fully aware of the challenge of adapting to a decline in the number of baptised Catholic students and has retained an inclusive approach, with the RE faculty taking a lead in ensuring that those students who do not have a Catholic background are fully equipped to contribute to the Catholic life.
- The school's new status in the Lumen Christi Multi-Academy (MAC) has led to an invigoration of the Catholic life through working together with five primary schools. For example, there is a new family life policy for the whole MAC, and opportunities for governors and staff to worship together, thereby strengthening links and developing a natural progression route from primary to secondary.
- The school's policies clearly reflect Catholic Christian values. Work with the diocesan Catholic Schools Student Profile is beginning with the recognition that many values are strongly emphasised in the school already. In particular the school's policy and practice of bringing teachers and students together for reconciliation meetings after breaches of the discipline code shows mercy and forgiveness in action.
- Evaluation of the school's mission week in January 2013, with 150 invited external participants, shows that its impact was far reaching. The prayer book developed by the Junior Leadership Team is still currently being used in the school.
- Inspectors confirm the school's judgement that collective worship is outstanding. Students value the time for reflection and behaviour is excellent. Although in assembly they may not always take an active part, their attention and feedback clearly show the quality of the impact. The choice of resources is very appropriate, for example a hard-hitting film showing a British student transposed into the

situation in Syria and then fleeing as a refugee, bringing home to students the plight of their contemporaries in the war torn Middle East.

- In the smaller forum of form time prayer there are a range of ways in which students more actively participate, including in discussion. The school has so far judged the vertical arrangement for form groups positively and younger students speak of how contact with older students in their forms has helped them to settle quickly. Tutors for whom teaching in a Catholic school is a new experience spoke of the highly effective induction provided to assist them in leading prayer and discussion.
- The impact of the calendared form Mass is particularly significant, and there is very good preparation and student participation. The Mass attended by inspectors had an atmosphere highly conducive to prayer and reflection and it included music played by a student. The sacrament of reconciliation is usually available after Mass. Students speak of the joy of the school coming together for house and whole school Masses with music and singing. These Masses enhance their sense of belonging to a caring community where all are valued.
- Students respond to situations of need with a generous desire to engage in fund raising. They choose both local and national charities and are supported by tutors and the lay chaplain. Over the past three years £61,000 has been raised.
- The school has made a significant and thorough evaluation of provision for retreats. Students recognise that retreats are effective in providing opportunities for spiritual development. Planning focuses on year group retreats to enable appropriate age-related activities.
- The audit of spiritual and moral development and vocational awareness in 2014 brought about a new focus on the inclusion of these elements in lesson planning and the need for further staff training. Analysis of documentation and interviews with staff from a range of faculties shows an increasing awareness of how these aspects of the curriculum can be developed within subject areas. There is a positive recognition that the time is ripe for a further audit to check progress.
- Students' sense of right and wrong is acute and they manifest the values of respect and tolerance. There is discussion of ethical issues across a range of subjects, empowering them to stand up for their values, rather than being mere bystanders to injustice and intolerance. Vocational awareness is developing rapidly from career choice to a sense of how God can be served through all kinds of work, for instance when a police officer who serves on the governing body worked with students to discuss his sense of vocation. Prayer is undoubtedly a very important feature in the daily life of the school. Spiritual development is very sound, but a firmer definition would give clarity to future planning.

## **LEADERSHIP**

- The headteacher is outstanding in her leadership of the Catholic life of the school. She is sensitive and generous in leading a team which is highly committed to establishing God's kingdom in that place, by working in accordance with Catholic Christian values, respecting every person in the school as created in the image and likeness of God and providing the best opportunities for all to grow in the knowledge and love of God.

- There is honest and thorough evaluation of Catholic life. Leaders have identified issues including improving the students' understanding of the Mass. Action planning is practical and there is evidence that solutions are beginning to be effective.
- Governors are adapting to their new role within the Multi-Academy whilst maintaining support and challenge to the headteacher. They have a range of skills and knowledge in order to be able, for example, to ask pertinent questions about examination outcomes. They know the school and the community very well.
- Leaders plan rigorously for the provision of collective worship, and there is a clear programme for form groups, for assemblies and for the Masses. Themes for the week are based on the previous Sunday's gospel reading. This ensures coherence with the Church's liturgical life and greatly enhances parish links.
- Support for tutors and those planning assemblies is a key focus for senior leaders as well as for the RE department and the chaplains. There is sensitivity and openness in working towards the common goals of developing spirituality and caring Catholic Christian values. Staff feel well supported in working with the established planning and have opportunities to evaluate it.
- Monitoring of assemblies and tutor group worship is thorough and supportive. The lay chaplain has a leading role in helping tutors to prepare for form Masses and in checking that criteria are met for student involvement. This means that there is a culture of constantly seeking improvement in responding to students' needs, especially for time for reflection and for a growth in self-awareness.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

- Religious education is overall outstanding and the school has judged it accurately to be so. It has fully embraced the newly developed whole school progress tracking system in its constant striving for improvement in outcomes for the students.
- Leadership of the RE faculty shows an overwhelmingly high level of commitment. There is a clear passion for the teaching of RE and the promotion of the status of the subject within the life of the students of the school. RE teachers work closely together to share resources and planning, which gives a solid coherence to the overall impact. There is creativity in approaching new developments in the examination requirements and in assessment procedures. The robust team of teachers, with their excellent subject knowledge, has a very strong identity within the school and forms the backbone of its Catholic life, including an evangelising role.
- The quality of teaching has been rightly judged to be at least good. It is often outstanding. Inspectors saw well planned lessons with energetic teaching, a variety of resources and activities, and targeted questions so that most students are firmly focused on their work and achieve well. Where there was some lack of attention it was largely from boys, impacting on their progress. Within the faculty there is analysis of the relationship between behaviour records and achievement, which leads to effective intervention where necessary. In this way students are clear about what is expected of them.
- Students speak of their enjoyment of RE. They are challenged by the inventive teaching, for example on the Holy Trinity in Year 8. They are confident using the Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Relationships in the classroom are very productive and students feel that they are supported by their teachers. In

lessons there are appropriate moments for prayer, so that students have time for reflection and relate the lessons to the spiritual life.

- Progress in RE is rapid for most students. The faculty has made great efforts to develop inclusivity in Year 7, where some students enter the school with clearly no background of a Catholic curriculum. Careful targeting of students enables accelerated learning.
- The faculty has made excellent strides towards the inclusion of Judaism as a main component in GCSE. Personal contact with the Jewish community in Birmingham has led to the development of schemes of work which focus on the living Jewish faith of the twenty-first century. The curriculum also ensures that there is provision for teaching about other major world faiths, so that students grow in respect for their beliefs and practices. This has a leading role in preparing students for life in a very diverse city and beyond.
- Assessment for RE is accurate and enables most students to make very good progress. Marking of students' work in Years 7 to 11 is mostly thorough, though there are inconsistencies which are being addressed. The faculty has worked rapidly within the context of a new system of data collection to bring on board a 'flightpath' to the new GCSE grades. This enables students to know their target, how well they are currently achieving and what they have to do to improve. As students approach GCSE challenging targets are set, leading to some very high rates of progress for a large proportion of the cohort.
- Outcomes at GCSE are usually above both diocesan and national averages, though there was a dip in the overall percentage of A\* to C grades in the summer of 2016. The percentage of A\* and A grades however was outstanding at 42%. As a result of the analysis of the attainment of ethnic groups at GCSE, the faculty judges there to be no relevant statistical differences, though evidence was not provided. Students were seen by inspectors to be achieving well during lessons, regardless of grouping.
- There is forensic analysis of examination outcomes at GCSE with the result that the faculty knows in which areas there was lower attainment. Planning is in place to provide extra support for students with special needs, for boys and for those who have extra funding at the school. The faculty aims to lessen the gap between their achievement and that of the rest of the cohort. Whilst the issues have been largely identified, the improvement planning does not have specific measurable targets, nor has the issue of differentiation in the methods of teaching been included. These are areas for future consideration when the planning is revised.
- The A level Philosophy and Ethics course is by far the most popular sixth form course. The GCSE course inspires students to continue their study within the faculty and they testify to the enjoyment it brings. Many continue to study Theology in higher education, including some students at prestigious universities. As a result of the teaching and the regularity and thoroughness of assessment, students (even those who are less able academically,) make exceptionally good progress. Students attain very high grades in the examination, for example almost half of the cohort of 32 gained A\*-B grades at A level in 2015 and this increased to almost two-thirds in 2016 with a larger cohort. The school rightly judges sixth form provision and outcomes to be outstanding.
- The school has made excellent provision for sixth form general RE so that all students have one lesson a week focusing on Catholic social teaching. Students

were seen discussing the international migrant crisis and in particular the role of the media. Their teacher used provocative material to enable an informed discussion to develop around a Catholic Christian response. Students' extended project work showed a scholarly approach with quotations from leading theologians and an academic style which prepares them well for study in higher education.

## **Recommendations**

### **In order to improve the school should:**

- Embed and evaluate the recently developed system of data collection and the subsequent target setting and intervention, so that all students benefit from a highly individualised approach to teaching and learning.
- Revisit improvement planning to include sharper targets for those areas of concern in GCSE attainment, notably students with special needs, boys and those who have extra funding at the school.
- Ensure that a Catholic working definition of spiritual development is widely incorporated in the preparation for the forthcoming audit of spiritual and moral development and vocational awareness.