



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL AND SIXTH FORM COLLEGE NUNEATON

Inspection dates	20 th - 21 st November 2012
Reporting Inspector	Terence Dillon
Assisting Inspector	Yvonne Brennan

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	11-18 years
Number on roll	918
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mr John Martin
School address	Greenmoor Rd Nuneaton Warks CV10 3EX
Telephone number	02476 642 400
E-mail address	admin@st-thomas-more.net
Date of previous inspection	February 2009
DCSF School Number	937 4803
Unique Reference Number	125758

Headteacher	Mr Francis Hickey
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DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors. The focus of the inspection was on the effectiveness and use of the school's self-evaluation of Catholic life and religious education (RE). To validate the school's self-evaluation of teaching and learning, the inspectors observed 11 RE lessons and one PSHE lesson. In addition, the inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils and sixth form students to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time. They held meetings with two governors, senior staff, and the chaplain. They observed a Mass, two class worships, and a year assembly. They looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self-evaluation such as RAISEonline, the school and departmental development plans, a departmental review, teachers' planning and the documentation of several other departments. Alongside the validation of school self-evaluation, the inspectors gathered evidence about school development planning, evidence which will be shared with other diocesan schools.

Information about the school

St Thomas More is an 11-18 voluntary aided Catholic secondary school and sixth form college in Nuneaton in Warwickshire. It draws pupils from across the social range from Nuneaton, Bedworth, Atherstone and north Warwickshire, including the towns of Coleshill and Kingsbury. There are 918 pupils on roll, including 125 in the sixth form. Ninety per cent of the pupils are baptised Catholics. The proportion for whom English is a second language, at 5%, approximates with the national average, whilst the proportion on free school meals is below average. The overall attainment of the pupils in mathematics and English on entry is well above the national average, though in religious education (RE) it is in line with the diocesan average. The proportion of pupils on the school's special educational needs (SEN) register is below the national average whilst the proportion with statements of special educational needs is in line. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities is below the national average, though recently there has been a marked increase in pupils of Polish origin. The school has a small number of pupils from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community, which is the largest of any school in Warwickshire.

Since the previous inspection the school has added a sixth form. The current headteacher, having previously been a deputy headteacher at the school, took up post at the beginning of this term. Staffing in the RE department has been stable over recent years.

Main Findings

The school judges itself to be an outstanding Catholic school and the inspection found that it provides excellent experiences in the Faith for its pupils. As a result, there is a very positive response to what the school provides and a strong desire among pupils and staff to contribute to the common good. Their response to charities at home and overseas is impressive and reflects the school's excellent commitment to community cohesion.

The senior leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The senior leadership team and the governors have a strong Catholic vision for the school and fully recognise the responsibility they have for the spiritual development of the school's pupils. Leadership of the RE department is effective and has a significant impact on RE provision. The department is adequately resourced and has a good scheme of work, which ensures that pupils enjoy a worthwhile curricular experience. However, the proportion of curricular time in Key Stage 4 is below the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. The monitoring and evaluating of provision in the department is regular and provides sound feedback on how well the department is performing. The school and the department would benefit from more strategic development plans.

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good with many outstanding and some satisfactory lessons. Teachers are knowledgeable and have excellent relationships with the pupils. As a result, there is a positive learning atmosphere in most lessons. The approach to the assessment of pupils is thorough and helps teachers identify strengths and weaknesses. Generally, pupils take care with their written work and teachers support learning with regular marking. Teachers could provide more

systematic support, especially in Key Stages 3 and 4, if they recorded clearer guidance in exercise books on how work could be improved, and then check later work to establish whether or not progress has been made in the areas that have been identified.

Pupils make good progress in RE year on year. They make noticeable improvement in attainment by the end of Key Stages 3 and into Key Stage 4; the most recent results at GCSE improved and were slightly above the diocesan average. SEN pupils generally make good progress, though there are gaps in the provision of different work for pupils of different abilities.

School Self Evaluation

Inspectors agree with the school's evaluation of the quality of its monitoring of provision. It has a carefully constructed programme of lesson observations and book trawls to help judge the quality of teaching and learning. It also has effective systems for ensuring feedback on the broader aspects of the school, such as its provision for the care of pupils and the fulfilment of its Catholic mission.

The school's lesson observation records are in line with the judgements of the inspectors, and its summative judgement in its self-evaluation (SEF) on the quality of teaching and learning agrees with that reached by the inspectors. In its self-evaluation, the school rightly judges pupils' attainment in RE on entry to be in line with the average for other schools in the diocese. Inspectors agree with this. They also agree with the school's judgement that the pupils make progress and improve their attainment in RE year on year. Inspectors observed overall good attainment and progress in lessons and recognise that pupils' achievements in GCSE are marginally above the diocesan average for 2012. The school's monitoring systems, which include targeted assessments, indicate that GCSE results in 2013 will be much better than in 2012. This is supported by the inspectors' observations and by Year 10 modular results in 2012. Results at AS level are satisfactory according to the Advanced Level Performance Systems (ALPS) but lower than the school forecast.

In the regular weekly meetings between the head and the head of RE, and the head of RE and the chaplain, the Catholic life of the school is monitored. These meetings form part of the evaluation process. Further monitoring is carried out through regular discussions with various groups of pupils and the chaplaincy council, as well as carefully monitoring the response of pupils to the opportunities provided by visits to Soli House and Alton Castle. The link governor also plays a part in observing what the school needs to do to improve its Catholic provision. The recent commitment by the governors to improving the chapel is an outcome. The school, therefore, is able to judge with some confidence that the Catholic life of the school is outstanding. The inspection supports this. A strong Catholic ethos is evident and it has been bolstered by the recent appointment of a part-time chaplain. The spiritual, moral, social, cultural, and vocational development of pupils is rightly judged by the school to be outstanding. The school is able to reach this evaluation through the pupils' willingness to contribute to the school's liturgies, the respect they show to one another, and the commitment they have to the common good. Pupils' understanding of the need to relate positively to their own culture and that of those from different backgrounds is measured through their responses across the curriculum. For example, they discuss the moral justification for war in history, the cultural aspects related to different societies in geography, and the spiritual aspects integral to the work of different artists in art.

The school's evaluation that the leadership and management at the most senior level in the school are outstanding is in line with the findings of the inspectors. The Catholic vision is very strong and clearly supported by the staff, as demonstrated by their relationships with the pupils and one another. The school's view that it has excellent systems for inducting new staff and pupils into what is expected in a Catholic school is supported by the findings of the inspection. New staff and newly qualified teachers are helped to understand the importance of prayer and of reflection. It was clear to inspectors that there is a strong feeling of belonging throughout the school. Governors are highly committed to furthering what the school offers to the whole school community, pupils, staff and parents. They are well organised, with appropriate committees and link governors ensuring that they can successfully evaluate and comment upon the quality of the school's provision and of its outcomes.

The school development plan is a very detailed document. It needs to highlight more clearly the school's main priorities and the strategies through which they are to be achieved, particularly in relation to the school's overall Catholicity. This is particularly important in relation to the way it intends to respond to the growing number of non-Catholics in the sixth form, which the school fully recognises.

The school's self-evaluation judges that the head of RE is highly committed to the department's success. His work is monitored by the head through discussion and observation, as well as a post examination meeting to discuss overall results. For his part, the head of RE works hard to ensure that RE is seen as of significant importance in the curriculum and contributes to the development of the pupils. Teaching and learning are monitored and evaluated in line with the school's effective procedures. The head of department observes lessons, inspects pupils' written work and meets regularly with staff to discuss ways of improving the department's provision. There is still some way to go to ensure that all teaching is of the quality to match the best, which the school demonstrates in its lesson observation records. The departmental development plan has appropriate priorities for teaching and learning, and for developing the Catholic life of the school. It also includes an evaluation of the department's work. Rather like the whole-school development plan, it is not precise enough in identifying key priorities and the ways in which they are to be achieved.

The head of RE relates to the school chaplain effectively. Using its knowledge of the regular opportunities for prayer and liturgical celebration, the school rightly judges that they are successfully developing further the outstanding opportunities for collective worship and through this they are providing strongly for the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. The school rightly sees itself as part of its Catholic and wider community and has an excellent commitment to community cohesion.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

The school carefully monitors pupils' progress and achievements. Through baseline testing the school judges that pupils' attainment in RE on entry is average, which is in line with the findings of the inspection. Regular assessments by the school indicate that pupils make good progress year on year, so that there is a noticeable improvement in attainment by the end of Key Stages 3 and into Key Stage 4. As the school indicates, this has not yet been reflected in examination results. Attainment in GCSE in 2012 was marginally above the diocesan averages, but below the school's expectations. Results at AS level were in line with the diocesan average, but again below the school's expectations. The school's evaluation rightly indicates that this was the result of the unexpected low grades of a very small number of pupils adversely affecting the overall performance of the cohort.

As the school's monitoring indicates, pupils are responding very well to the demands of the new GCSE syllabus, with the number of pupils gaining A*-A grades being higher in 2012 than in previous years. Generally, girls outperform boys, but the school, aware of this, has worked successfully to narrow the gap in performance. It is the first year that the school has had results at AS level and so it is not possible to compare with previous years. Pupils in the sixth form perform well during the year, as indicated by their written work, and inspectors agree with the school that this promises well for the future.

Pupils across the ability range make good progress, but the quality of learning is often excellent. The overall behaviour of pupils is also excellent, in line with the school's evaluation. As a result, the atmosphere in lessons is positive, with pupils being prepared to concentrate, and willingly persisting in the tasks they are given. Pupils work effectively on their own or in groups, and their work in exercise books is generally carefully presented. Pupils with SEN work hard along with their contemporaries. They join in group work and try to do well in the tasks set. They would benefit from help in developing their literacy skills by having more opportunities of written work suited to their

¹ As the quality of the school self evaluation has been affirmed, the judgements in this section of the report conform largely to those of the school.

capabilities. The mixed ability classes will remain a challenge for staff unless the issue of differentiation is fully tackled.

The Catholic life of the school is a particularly strong feature. It provides excellent experiences for the pupils. As a result, there is a very positive response to what the school provides. Pupils respond prayerfully in Mass, and most show commitment in class prayers. The range of opportunities is wide, with regular Masses, assemblies and prayers for the Church's seasons, such as the rosary in October and special prayers for the dead in November. The school has a Vocations Day and makes excellent use of the Diocesan retreat centres. Large numbers of pupils seek to be involved in the school's regular visits to Soli House and Alton Castle. Good use is also made of external visitors to the school and the school's own staff, either to talk about their own faith or help develop further the faith of the pupils. The school speaks confidently about the way that pupils contribute willingly to the development of the spiritual life of the school through their involvement in the chaplaincy council, the liturgies and the school assemblies. The work of the school chaplain augments provision; he highly values the encouraging response he gets from the staff and pupils, and the willingness of the non-Catholic staff and pupils to fully integrate into the school's Catholicity.

The senior leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The Catholic vision is very strong and emanates from the headteacher's strong commitment to furthering understanding of what it means to have responsibility for the spiritual development of the school's pupils. The excellent support he provides for the RE department through regular meetings with the head of RE is indicative of his approach.

Governors are highly committed to the school's Catholic ethos. The school recognises that they have a first rate understanding of the school's purpose and provide the strong critical friendship that the headteacher values. Governors have a keen interest in the school's progress and are prepared to question as well as to listen. They willingly express views about the curriculum and the priorities of the school development plan. The recent appointment of an ordinariate priest in the role of lay chaplain is working well and the governors' investment in the refurbishment of the school chapel indicates their commitment to the Catholic life of the school. They have a secure structure for dealing with the needs of the school and the chair and link governor for RE are frequent visitors.

Each subject has a responsibility to support the RE department through what they teach, and their contribution is summarised as part of the RE scheme. The support of staff for the school's Catholic mission is evident.

Leadership of the RE department is effective. The head of department, strongly supported by the headteacher, has fought hard to maintain the place of RE as a core subject in the curriculum. He has been successful other than in Key Stage 4, where the proportion of RE in the curriculum has recently been reduced to eight per cent, lower than that prescribed by the Bishops' Conference. He has ensured that the department is adequately resourced and that staff are guided by a clear scheme of work. The recent move to a different GCSE examining board has been a success, primarily as a result of the head of RE's efforts. The full time staff in RE are all well qualified and they demonstrate an excellent understanding of the topics they teach.

The overall quality of teaching in RE is good with more examples of outstanding than satisfactory teaching. Teachers are knowledgeable and share their knowledge effectively with the pupils. They have excellent relationships with the pupils and manage their classes well. As a result, there is a positive learning atmosphere in most lessons. Teachers plan well and make good use of a variety of activities in lessons. Generally, they keep the pace of lessons brisk, which benefits pupils' learning. The department makes good use of the four rooms that are seen as specialist subject rooms, and other areas such as the school library are also used to good purpose. Teachers use a wide variety of approaches, which include effective use of videos, computers, textbooks, and work sheets. In the best lessons, pace, challenge, and the quality of questioning are excellent; the opportunities given for pupils to work in groups or independently benefit their learning. Where lessons are less successful, too little time is given for pupils to reflect on what they are being asked to learn, which leads to superficial understanding. The work they are given is sometimes too closely controlled, leading occasionally to pupils spending too much time reading around the class. On

occasions, specific help is provided for SEN pupils by the teacher and sometimes a support teacher, though little evidence of different work for pupils of different ability was observed.

Pupils' exercise books indicate that pupils reach good standards for their abilities, with some producing work of outstanding quality. Some of the work is too closely directed by the teacher, and the books contained few examples of research, but there are good examples of extended and imaginative writing. In line with the school's judgement in its SEF, pupils' work is marked regularly and pupils are assessed according to a rigorous timetable, so that teachers can track progress and provide extra support where needed. The assessment procedures are thorough. Careful tracking of progress is carried out by staff and by some self- and peer-assessment amongst the pupils. Marking is also regular, though comments tend to be encouraging rather than helpful in showing pupils how their work could be improved.

The school correctly notes that the RE curriculum provides a broad and effective educational experience for pupils. It is carefully structured. It draws upon the diocesan scheme, which has been modified in light of the school's needs. In Key Stage 4 pupils follow the Edexcel syllabus. All sixth form pupils study a general RE course that deals with the Church's teaching on faith in action. A significant number of pupils study an appropriate philosophy and ethics A-level syllabus. Suitable provision is made in personal, social and health education and science, as well as RE for pupils to consider sex and relationship issues.

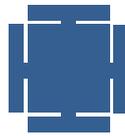
The school is well-served by the new part-time chaplain. The school is correct in believing that he adds to the strong spiritual life of the school. The chaplain ensures that pupils have the appropriate opportunities for prayer, for celebrating the Sacraments, and for individual counselling if that is required. The staff also benefit from his presence in school.

The school has an excellent commitment to community cohesion. It has good links with the local parish and the deacon serves on the governing body. The school also has close links with local schools, and has made excellent use of those links to further its own understanding of the new challenges posed by the addition of the sixth form. The school's support for local, national and international charities is very strong.

Provision for collective worship is, as the school maintains, outstanding. The arrival of the new chaplain, as the school says, has led to positive developments. Pupils have the opportunity for private prayer in the chapel, praying the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross, and participating in the various celebrations of the liturgical year. The weekly Masses for different groups enables full participation by the pupils in prayer and for some the opportunity to assist through serving or reading. Pupils also have opportunities for retreats and various visits such as that made by the pupils to Spain. All of these experiences contribute to the spiritual, moral, social, cultural, and vocational development of the pupils.

Recommendations

1. Improve overall attainment and raise levels of performance, particularly at AS level.
2. Improve the quality of teaching and learning in the good and satisfactory lessons by taking care not to be too prescriptive in the work set for pupils; ensuring that more emphasis is given to providing different materials for pupils of different abilities; sharing outstanding practice; and increasing opportunities for joint planning.
3. The school and RE department development plans need to be re-formatted so that the key development priorities are clear, the means by which they are to be achieved spelled out, and the times at which their success is to be measured indicated.
4. Fulfil the Bishops' Conference wishes by providing 10% of curriculum time for the teaching of RE at Key Stage 4.



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November 2012

Dear Parents and Carers

Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Secondary School and Sixth Form College, 20-21 November 2012

I am writing this letter to share with you the findings of the diocesan inspection of your children's school. Diocesan inspection now explores in detail the school's own view of itself as expressed in its self-evaluation. For this reason, much of the report is more technical than used to be the case. You are still entitled to have a copy of the full report should you want one and it will be available on the school website or by request from the school office.

The school is an outstanding Catholic school and provides excellent experiences in the Faith for its pupils. As a result, there is a very positive ethos and a strong desire among pupils and staff to contribute to the common good. Their response to charities at home and overseas is impressive and reflects the school's excellent commitment to community cohesion.

The senior leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The senior leadership team and the governors have a strong Catholic vision for the school and fully recognise the responsibility they have for the spiritual development of the school's pupils. Leadership of the RE department is effective and has a significant impact on RE provision. However, the proportion of curricular time in Key Stage 4 is below the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. The monitoring and evaluating of provision in the department is regular and provides sound feedback on how well the department is performing. The school and the department would benefit from more strategic development plans.

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, with many outstanding lessons and some no more than satisfactory. As a result, there is a positive learning atmosphere in most lessons. The approach to the assessment of pupils is thorough and helps teachers identify strengths and weaknesses. Generally, pupils take care with their written work and teachers support learning with regular marking. Teachers could provide more systematic support, especially in Key Stages 3 and 4, if they recorded clearer guidance in exercise books on how work could be improved, and set measurable targets to help progress.

Pupils make good progress in RE year on year. They make noticeable improvement in attainment by the end of Key Stages 3 and into Key Stage 4, and the most recent examination results improved and were slightly above the diocesan average. SEN pupils generally make good progress, though there are gaps in the provision of different work for pupils of different abilities.

We have recommended that:

1. The school should continue to work hard to improve overall attainment and raise levels of performance, particularly at AS level.
2. The school should improve the quality of teaching and learning by taking care not to be too prescriptive in the work set for pupils; ensuring that more emphasis is given to providing different materials for pupils of different abilities; sharing outstanding practice; and increasing opportunities for joint planning.
3. The school and RE department should re-format their development plans so that the key development priorities are clear, the means by which they are to be achieved spelled out, and the times at which their success is to be measured indicated.
4. The school should fulfil the Bishops' Conference wishes by providing 10% of curriculum time for the teaching of RE at Key Stage 4.

Throughout the inspection the inspectors were extremely well received by the staff and pupils and I would like to thank them for the positive way in which they viewed the inspection process.

Yours sincerely

Terence Dillon
Diocesan Inspector