



Archdiocese of Birmingham

Section 48 Inspection

ST THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Darlaston Lane, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV14 7BL

Inspection date 29th - 30th June 2016
Reporting Inspector Mr Paul Nutt

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	1481
Appropriate authority	The Governing Body
Chair of Governors	Mr R Dalton
Telephone number	01902 368798
E-mail address	postbox@st-thomasmore.walsall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	January 2011
DFE School Number	335 5401
Unique Reference Number	104259

Headteacher **Dr S J Hatfield**

Previous inspection: 2

This inspection: 2



Evidence

- The inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors.
- The focus of the inspection was on the quality, leadership, and impact of the school's provision of 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. All of these lessons were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- The inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils to evaluate their understanding of Catholic life, worship, and the impact of teaching on their learning over time.
- Meetings were held with the chair of governors, the headteacher, deputy head in charge of Catholic life (PICCL), the subject leader, head of 6th form, and lay chaplain.
- The inspectors attended 2 year group assemblies and 1 form assembly, and undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of learning and teaching in RE, the presentation of the Catholic life of the school, and pupils' behaviour.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of documents including the school's self evaluation, data about pupils' achievement and progress, RAISEonline, the development plan, teachers' planning.

Information about the school

- The school is a large, oversubscribed mixed comprehensive serving the communities of Walsall and Wolverhampton.
- The number of non-White British students is comparable to similar schools nationally.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils is currently 23%.
- A large minority of students in Years 7-11 are categorised as disadvantaged; the school serves the most economically deprived areas in Walsall and Wolverhampton.
- The number of SEND students is slightly below the national average.
- Attainment on entry is broadly in line with national levels.
- Since the last inspection the headteacher, her 2 deputies, and the RE subject leader have changed.

Main Findings

- As suggested in the school's self-evaluation, Catholic life is a real strength: all students, Catholic and non-Catholic, gain a great deal as their knowledge and understanding develop. They demonstrate an appreciation of its value to their lives, and a sense of responsibility for their actions, showing a maturing sensitivity to and respect for others within and beyond the school.
- The Catholic Faith and ethos of the school are promoted and celebrated by school leaders, staff and governors, through personal example and encouragement.
- Collective worship is good, especially as there is not currently a parish priest. The lay chaplain and his team work very effectively to ensure positive experiences; they regularly monitor and evaluate worship, as do members of the leadership team, and this feeds into ongoing planning for improvement.

- The RE department is well led and now has procedures in place for monitoring and evaluation that feed into school improvement planning. Progress is generally good and improving.
- Outcomes in Key Stages 4 and 5 require improvement to be good, though the department is anticipating significantly better results on the basis of its monitoring, evaluation and intervention strategies.
- Leadership is good, emanating from a strong and supportive senior team, well led by the headteacher and supported at middle management level and through the lay chaplaincy. Governors are keenly engaged with school improvement, challenging to ensure that standards are maintained or improved.
- The standards of behaviour in school are outstanding: all students demonstrate very positive attitudes in all aspects of their life and interactions; everyone is made to feel welcome, valued and respected in a truly inclusive school community

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

Catholic life, collective worship and spiritual, moral and vocational development

- The SVP group, though quite small in number, plays an outstanding part in the Catholic life of the school, through personal example, organisation and providing a valuable link between students across year groups and leaders. They make a major contribution to the evaluation and development of the school's mission and ethos.
- All students, Catholic and non-Catholic, most of whom have very limited prior knowledge of the Faith where they have not attended Catholic primary schools, gain a great deal from the Catholic life of the school as their knowledge and understanding develop. They demonstrate increasingly an appreciation of its value to their lives, and a sense of responsibility for their actions. They show a maturing sensitivity to and respect for others within school and the wider community.
- As their understanding and confidence grow, there is a greater willingness to take on responsibility and engage with the wider community; the school's involvement with works of charity reflects this understanding of mission and vocation.
- Older students engage willingly with supporting and guiding those in lower years, contributing significantly to the levels of behaviour and mutual respect. Instances of conflict are rare and managed effectively and appropriately.
- The school council and chaplaincy team, amongst others, are actively engaged in the planning, evaluation and development of the Catholic life of the school. They play a significant role in maintaining the high level of behaviour and positive attitudes for good.
- Catholic values, often referred to as British values, are prominently displayed; references to them are frequent around school and in the classroom, and students in all years show understanding and commitment appropriate to, and sometimes beyond, their age and experience.
- The Catholic Faith and ethos of the school are promoted and celebrated by school leaders, staff and governors, through personal example and encouragement. Students and parents respond positively to their lead, and cohesion is strong within and beyond the school.
- The SVP group and chaplaincy team, whose work is so valuable in propagating and developing students' understanding of the Catholic Faith and opportunities to

engage with it, afford support for leadership of a high order. They work very closely with the lay chaplain, whose unstinting personal efforts ensure cross-school understanding of the importance of the life of the Church in all its facets.

- The school offers a strong and coherent programme of staff induction, development and focused training opportunities throughout the year, so that all share an agreed understand of the mission. Informal discussion with key senior staff is also welcomed.
- Catholic life is reflected across the school, both formally, through aspects of the taught curriculum, and through the prominence of displays and artefacts.
- The school's chapel is a calm and reverent space. It is very significant to the life of the school, well used, always available, and centrally situated. Staff and students are encouraged to avail themselves of it and many do.
- All students show reverence and respect during opportunities for collective worship. They listen carefully to readings and what is said; they respond appropriately to prayer, and the standard of singing is good.
- The chaplaincy team supports the programme of worship and liturgy, and encourages students to take an active role in planning and delivery. Students respond well to these opportunities.
- Students have an understanding of, and engage with, different forms of prayer; they demonstrate a responsible attitude towards worship, which in turn contributes to their spiritual and moral development.
- During their visit, the inspectors were able to enjoy a thoughtfully prepared and powerfully delivered year group assembly on the theme of vocation and service; delivered in part by members of the cadet corps, it linked Catholic values to the national commemoration of the Battle of the Somme.
- A conscious effort is made to link themes for worship in this way with liturgy and scripture from the weekend Mass, with opportunities for charitable support, and with local or national events.
- The school provides a varied programme of opportunities for worship, which is linked to the liturgical year and reflects the ethos and faith distribution of the school.
- Collective worship is good with outstanding features, especially as there is not currently a parish priest. The lay chaplain and his team work very effectively to ensure positive experiences; they regularly monitor and evaluate worship, as do members of the leadership team, and this feeds into ongoing planning for improvement.
- Students are offered additional opportunities for collective worship and prayer through a programme of retreats which is continually being extended. They speak positively about their enjoyment and enhanced understanding of the importance of Faith in their daily life and of vocation: what God wants us to be.
- The prayer life of the school, supported through the taught curriculum, is good with some that is outstanding; students become familiar with a range of appropriate purposes and responses, which engage their interest and enhance their involvement. They are encouraged to write their own prayers for particular purposes.
- The school has adopted St Thomas More's motto "God's servant first" into its mission statement, and it is central to the ethos and life of the school.

- The Jesuit Pupil Profile is evident in several places; however, during the inspection, there were more references made to British values than to “Catholic” or “Gospel” values. These are included in the mission statement but, in line with DES policy, the school should ensure that Catholic values are promoted explicitly, encompassing where appropriate British values.
- In order to accelerate the development of the younger students spiritually and morally, the introduction of spirituality lessons has been very effective. The impact of the curriculum and ethos of the school are more readily recognisable, and progress more rapid, than baseline assessment outcomes might suggest. Many of the students are able to talk with reasonable confidence about vocations beyond the priesthood and religious life: what God wants us to be and how we can serve.
- The school places great importance on preparing all students for life in the 21st Century. Catholic Christian values are prominently displayed around the building, often together with photographs of significant people to encourage aspiration in the community or other types of exemplar materials. During the visit, inspectors witnessed a number of occasions when reference was made to them, for example in the Year 10 assembly.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership of Catholic life and Collective Worship

- School leaders at various levels promote the Catholic life of the school through their personal example and faith. They meet regularly with representatives of the student body and parents, and maintain a visible presence around the school.
- There are robust and reliable processes in place for monitoring and evaluating Catholic life. These have a positive impact in school, and are fed into school improvement planning and staff training. They include regular meetings of the chaplaincy group, questionnaires for parents and students, with outcomes recorded
- The headteacher presents regular written reports to governors, and minutes of meetings indicate the level of challenge that holds leadership to account. However, it would be appropriate if questions were asked by a wider range of governors, not least to provide for absence and succession planning.
- Governors are involved at every stage. They take a hands-on approach to their responsibilities, and strike a good balance between challenge and support. They visit school, when commitments allow, always with a clear, agreed focus, and feed their findings back to governing body meetings. They make an input to documents and plans, and retain sound knowledge of agreed outcomes.
- At the last inspection, an area for improvement was to increase the involvement of students in planning liturgies and leading worship. This has been addressed, though it continues to be an ongoing area for further development.
- Leadership and governors are kept regularly updated about the quality and effectiveness of collective worship: processes and procedures are in place for monitoring and evaluation; these are regularly reviewed by the chaplaincy group, and termly by strategic chaplaincy meetings, feeding into the chaplaincy development plan which identifies future developments.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**Leadership, outcomes from and provision for religious education**

- The department has a published cycle of monitoring activities, which are supplemented by informal learning walks and occasional visits by governors. These include lesson observations, book trawls, viewing planning and oversight of student progress. Outcomes are fed back to teachers, individually and collectively, and are included in subsequent improvement planning and performance management discussions.
- Data is regularly collected and analysed. This is used to identify underperformance and develop intervention plans for individual students or groups, alongside targets included in the departmental plan.
- One third of students arrive from Catholic feeder primary schools; prior knowledge is, therefore, limited in each succeeding year group. However, the school is aware that progress in Key Stage 3 needs to be accelerated and improvements can be seen since the last inspection. Progress in RE is now good and the picture year by year improving.
- Outcomes in Key Stages 4 and 5 require improvement to be good, though the department, which has a track record of accurate forecasting, is anticipating significant improvement in results.
- Students generally enjoy their learning in RE; they can see a wider application of the knowledge and understanding they gain, and speak well of the range of learning styles and opportunities to discuss.
- The RE curriculum is broad and balanced, accessible to all, and complying with requirements. It is inclusive and teaches about other major world religions, providing continuity across years and key stages and supporting students' learning.
- An additional spirituality lesson was introduced into Years 7 and 8 in September 2014. This supplements and broadens students' learning and is shown to have had a positive impact on their understanding and progress. Many students in these years demonstrate an encouraging readiness to apply learned information. In a year 7 lesson, the theme of happiness was explored, inviting students to consider the importance of material things in their lives, and incorporating prayer and reference to scripture. Students were encouraged to apply learned knowledge to their everyday reality.
- In line with other curriculum areas, there is a positive drive in RE to support students' literacy. There are clear indications, through the use of assessment for learning strategies and feedback in exercise books, of positive benefits. However, the quality of written work is still inconsistent with some indications that more extended pieces should be included. Orally, however, many students demonstrate a good level of understanding and confidence.
- The quality of teaching over time, and in both key stages, ranges quite widely, with much that is good or better, but some, identified by the school with appropriate interventions in place, requiring improvement. Subject knowledge and planning are good, relationships and behaviour a very sound basis for learning. Again extended

questioning is well used in many lessons, but, in some cases, closed questions predominate.

- Data is used to inform planning, but greater consistency is needed to avoid low expectations and achieve real challenge for all, especially the most able. Differentiation requires attention.
- Assessment procedures are generally well understood, though not always well used. Similarly marking and feedback are embedded in departmental practice, but not always well applied. More focused use of the exemplar materials available within the department could be encouraged.

Recommendations

- Raise the quality of teaching consistently over time by using internal best practice, with particular emphasis on questioning and differentiation, to ensure all is at least good.
- Drive forward the identified introduction of a chaplaincy improvement plan, to coincide with the arrival of the new parish priest.
- Strengthen the impact and effectiveness of marking.