

St Thomas More Catholic Voluntary Academy

URN: 146128

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Nottingham

20–21 November 2024

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

Catholic life and mission (p.3)

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

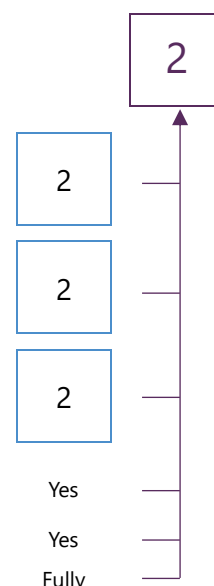
Collective worship (p.7)

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

The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference

The school is fully compliant with any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop

The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection



Compliance statement

- The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' conference.
- The school is fully compliant in relation to any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop.
- The school has responded fully in relation to previous areas for improvement.

What the school does well

- The mission statement, 'Aspire not to have more, but to be more', has transformed the school. All stakeholders live out the school's mission on a daily basis and use it as a tool of inspiration to better themselves.
- Leaders are driving a genuinely authentic Catholic school which is truly appreciated by students and staff, as well as the wider community. There is an extremely strong family feel to St Thomas More; this is an inclusive and welcoming community.
- At the heart of the pastoral care systems are the students; as a result, students feel they are cared for and loved.
- The subject leader for religious education has a clear vision and has worked relentlessly to ensure that students have every opportunity to progress in this subject.
- The chaplaincy provision provides all staff and students with time and space for their own spiritual growth and development.

What the school needs to improve

- Create opportunities for students to be able to confidently articulate the significance of the mission statement in relation to wider Catholic values.
- Create robust systems in response to assessment data to allow both staff and students to know what needs to be done to improve student progress in religious education.
- Establish effective routines to create a prayerful atmosphere for students so that they can take responsibility for their own participation in prayer.

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

Pupil outcomes

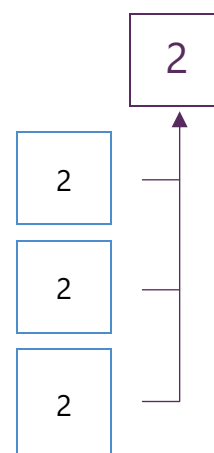
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school



The school's motto of 'Aspire not to have more, but to be more' underpins all aspects of life at St Thomas More and is the driving force behind the relentless focus on developing student character. Staff and students are visibly aligned with the mission of the school, saying that it aids them to be better people. Students have respect for themselves, and all members of the school community. In turn, their behaviour reflects the values the school holds dear: being authentic, sacred, passionate, inspirational, resilient and empathetic. Whilst the ethos and vision are clear, most students do not recognise how the school's identity is distinctively Catholic, which reflects the school's journey to this point. The three student chaplaincy teams are deeply committed to their work: Bosco, Acutis and Faustina each have a clear focus and complement each other in contributing decisively to Catholic life and mission. A meticulously planned character curriculum encompasses the holistic approach to education, recognising the importance of educating the whole child in their own personal, moral and spiritual journey. Students at St Thomas More have a voice; they feel listened to and supported. The student council play an integral role in the school and feel extremely valued for their contributions.

There is an extremely strong family feel at St Thomas More; its welcome is extended to all and the school is seen as a safe, loving place for young people. One student says that, 'it feels like home'. Staff are genuine role models for students and for each other, actively promoting the mission statement for all to see. Pastoral care provides students with the 'warmth and loving arm' they need to thrive in their education. Students are known on an individual basis and feel the value of the relationships they have with staff. Although provision does not enable students to confidently link the school's Catholic values with the mission, the chaplaincy provision provides a range of well-planned and effective opportunities for spiritual and moral

development which encompasses the school's focus on Catholic social teaching. The strong chaplaincy provision provides many ways for students to be involved in charitable works, such as organising a Christmas party for senior citizens and collections for the High Peak food bank, as well as caring for the environment through attending local climate conferences. As a result of thoughtfully planned opportunities, students are highly motivated in their desire to make a difference to people's lives and the community. However, students are unable to recognise that their actions are living out Catholic social teaching as the provision around the school's mission has not explicitly focused on the fact that this is rooted in Catholic tradition and practice.

Leaders have prioritised the mission and vision of the school, which has become the cornerstone of rapid improvement across many areas of the school. The school has a working partnership with the local parish and the parish priest acknowledges that the school is both 'living the light and sharing the light with the people of Buxton'. Catholic social teaching was a central tenant to the revisioning of the school's mission and has been cascaded down from senior leaders to all staff. The 'Catholic curriculum' has been developed at pace and the impact of this is visible throughout the school; however, links to core Catholic values within wider subject areas are at an early stage. Leaders of the St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi-Academy Trust work tirelessly alongside school leaders to bring about sustained improvement to the Catholic life and mission of the school; in addition, an Interim School Improvement Committee is working well in place of the local governing body. The impact of this work is that leaders, at all levels, are ambitious and acutely aware of their next steps for making further progress at the school.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

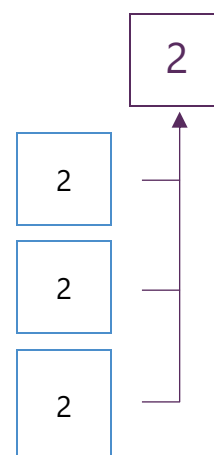
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for religious education



Students speak enthusiastically about religious education; a culture of celebrating achievement has created an atmosphere of willing participation and positivity. They recognise the importance of religious education not only as a core academic subject, but for how it teaches them values of respect, tolerance and equality, helping them to have a clearer understanding of the world around them. Students are developing a secure understanding in religious education, allowing them to make progress through knowing and remembering more, and in turn becoming increasingly religiously literate. The whole school focus on 'Teaching and Learning 7' (an approach which focuses on seven specific aspects of teaching and learning across the school) has resulted in high levels of engagement from students. This includes 'Do it now' and 'DIRT' (dedicated improvement and reflection time) tasks to revisit prior learning, as well as providing students an opportunity to improve their work. Students express their gratitude for having a renewed consistency in the teaching of religious education: they enjoy studying world religions and discussing contemporary issues in relation to the Catholic faith. Students are very well behaved in lessons with instances of low-level disruption being extremely rare. Opportunities for independent work are plentiful, often following examples that have been clearly modelled by their teacher.

A revised approach involving senior leaders teaching religious education has seen the profile of the subject raised so that it is genuinely viewed as 'the core of the core'. Teachers are deeply committed to religious education and are confident in their subject knowledge; non-subject specialists have been supported by the religious education lead and leaders in the St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi-Academy Trust to upskill themselves so they can effectively deliver well-planned lessons and foster an environment where students have the desire to make progress. Teachers skilfully use a range of questioning techniques to further enhance student

understanding, addressing gaps in knowledge and targeting misconceptions. In the best lessons, planning for students' needs is evident and, as a result, the pace is conducive for making progress. The inclusion of prayer in religious education lessons allows for the spiritual and moral development of students, providing students time for reflection, as well as linking their learning to relevant aspects of prayer. There has been a considerable focus on raising the outcomes for GCSE students, with staff and leaders acknowledging the need for robust and effective systems to be put in place as a result of lower than average Key Stage 4 external outcomes. A substantial amount of work has been carried out on the assessment process to implement key expectations such as 'what went well' and 'even better if'.

Leaders are deeply committed to ensuring that religious education provides students with a genuine and authentic Catholic education. Alongside the St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi-Academy Trust, leaders have made the status of religious education a priority, elevating it through senior leaders teaching the subject. This has been a significant investment, and one that is appreciated by students who hold great value for the subject. Both leaders in the school and the executive team in the trust have committed to relevant professional development to support staff with the effective teaching of all key stages, including for the implementation of the new Religious Education Directory. The new Key Stage 3 curriculum has been planned and implemented in Year 7 and 8, with planning already in the process for Year 9 for the next academic year. The subject leader has implemented an effective vision for the department, with a plan in place to bring about sustained improvements for the religious education outcomes. Through various quality assurance systems, the subject leader is able to effectively monitor and evaluate the current progress of students across all year groups.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

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

2

Students at St Thomas More experience a variety of prayer as a part of their daily routines and through celebrations of the word and liturgical celebrations. This offer includes opportunities for silent reflection and communal prayer. When students sing hymns together, they create a vibrant, faith-filled atmosphere where those involved are filled with joy and enthusiasm. Students who are a part of the chaplaincy teams and student council have opportunities to plan and deliver prayer and worship to their peers. They are confident in their delivery and take ownership of key decisions about the content of worship. For example, students express key messages for the theme of anti-bullying which are steeped in their own values linked to the mission statement. Whilst students display reverence and respect, they do not experience full and active participation in prayer. This means that students recognise the importance that prayer plays as an essential part of the school routines, but they are unable to explain how their prayer experiences can shape their lives. Students also experience prayer in their religious education lessons where they are able to make clearer links to the wider life of the school when the prayer corresponds with their learning.

The beginning and end of the school day is rooted in prayer. The richness of the Catholic tradition is seen through the daily themes for prayer. Each day of the week has its own prayer focus which reflects the liturgical year and important faith events. For example, students are able to learn about and commemorate 'Red Wednesday'; on a Thursday, students have the opportunity to further understand traditional prayer and its meaning. Scripture is a central aspect of prayer; this has been skilfully embedded by the lay chaplain and supported by the senior leadership team, allowing staff to continue to gain confidence in delivering prayer and liturgy. Resources provided for prayer are of a high quality; they are meticulously planned, and are appealing and engaging for young people. The student chaplaincy teams also provide a valuable contribution

to the prayer life of the school, employing students' individual skills and interests to enhance prayer experiences for all. This includes students promoting prayer through the use of technology, explicitly displaying their Catholicity through art work and focus points. The chapel is at the heart of the school; it provides a designated space for prayer as well as hosting a range of spiritual activities which students thoroughly enjoy.

Leaders have a vision to create an authentic experience of prayer and liturgy for students and are committed to working with the parish and families to create opportunities for participation and collaboration. They are working hard to secure further opportunities to celebrate the Eucharist together as a school community. Occasions such as the Year 7 Welcome Mass and year group celebrations of their saints' feast days have taken place in the parish and are spoken of highly by all those involved. Leaders have implemented an appropriate policy for prayer and liturgy which is currently at the early stages of becoming embedded through the prayer practices in the school. Those who plan and resource prayer and liturgy have the relevant skills to be faithful to the traditions of the Catholic Church. They have also helped to deliver key professional development alongside the diocese and the St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi-Academy Trust, to ensure that all staff have a shared understanding of the expectations around prayer and liturgy. Quality assurance of prayer and liturgy takes place through the work of the lay chaplain which enables spiritual leaders in the school to accurately plan the next steps to strengthen provision.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Thomas More Catholic Voluntary Academy
School unique reference number (URN)	146128
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8304601
Full postal address of the school	St Thomas More Catholic Voluntary Academy, Palace Fields, Buxton, SK17 6AF
School phone number	0129823167
Headteacher	David Redfern
Chair of local governing body	An Interim School Improvement Committee is in place
School Website	www.stthomasmorebuxton.srscmat.co.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi Academy Trust
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	11-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	3 April 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	3 – Requires Improvement

The inspection team

Rosa Flanagan
Danny Sheehan

Lead
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