



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Denominational (S48) Inspection Report

Name of School: St Thomas More High School
Local Authority: Southend
Inspection Date: 18th October 2018
Reporting Inspector: Damian Fox (Lead Inspector)
Tom Cahill (Associate Inspector)

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005 and 2011.

Type of School:	Secondary	School Address: Kenilworth Gardens
School Category:	Academy	Westcliff on Sea
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18	Essex
Gender of pupils:	Boys\Mixed 6th Form	SS0 0BW
Number on roll:	1027	
Appropriate Authority:	The Governing Body	Tel. No. 01702 344933
Date of previous inspection:	October 2013	Headteacher: Mrs Gemma Ackred
		Chair of Governors: Mrs Nuala Kelsey-Cashell

Information about the school

St Thomas More High School is in Westcliff on Sea. It is in Southend Local Authority and the Diocese of Brentwood. The school serves the parishes of St Helen's, Westcliff on Sea; St Peter's, Eastwood; Sacred Heart, Southend on Sea; Our Lady of Lourdes, Leigh in Sea; St George's, Shoeburyness; St John Fisher, Prittlewell; St Teresa's, Rochford; Holy Family, South Benfleet; Our Lady of Ransom, Rayleigh and Our Lady of Canvey, Canvey Island . 10.2% of Catholic pupils come from parishes outside the Deanery. There are currently 1027 on roll. The 6th Form roll is 240.

54% of pupils are from White British and 13% are Black British with over 20% speaking English as an additional language. 153 pupils are eligible for the pupil premium. 25 pupils have an EHC plan. 61% of pupils are Catholics with the remainder coming from other Christian denominations, other faiths or none. 51% of the teachers are Catholics and ten have the CCRS or similar qualification. This includes one LSA. The proportion of pupils with special needs is around the national average. In 2011, the school converted to Academy status. It is part of the Deanery Multi Academy Trust.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Thomas More is an outstanding Catholic school.

Leadership at all levels is highly effective. Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and demonstrate excellent leadership. They play an active role in supporting and developing the Catholic nature of the school. The leadership ethos is one of service to pupils to enable their spiritual, social and moral development through Christ's love. Since the last inspection, there has been sustained development of the religious life of the school. The Headteacher's vision for the continued growth of the faith of the school and outcomes in Religious Education (R.E.) is clearly articulated. It is understood and shared by teachers and pupils. The vision of St Thomas More, "God's servant first", permeates every aspect of school life and provides a strong foundation for the school's strong spiritual and caring ethos. It is understood and lived by pupils and teachers. Pupils appreciate the care they receive from staff. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the care and education their children receive. Outcomes in R.E. are excellent and continue the upward trend over recent years, reflecting the high profile the subject has in the school. Leadership of R.E. is highly effective. The subject leader has developed a strong and expert team of Catholic teachers. Pastoral care is a significant strength of the school. It is totally inclusive of pupils with different qualities and challenges. Pupils respond respectfully and willingly to the school's mission to serve. Relationships are excellent. Sixth form students are effective role models and show maturity and a high level of care for others.

What the school should do to improve further:

- Ensure curriculum time for Religious Education for Key Stage 3 and General RE is in line with the requirements of the Bishops' Conference
- Continue to develop teachers to maintain an increase in outstanding standards of teaching and learning.
- Improve outcomes in R.E. further by developing pupils as independent learners, especially the more able.

Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the Catholic Life of the School and derive huge benefit from attending St Thomas More. Their understanding of his words, "God's servant first", is evident throughout the life and work of the community. The word "family" was used by many pupils to describe the school. Pupils know their concerns will always be addressed. They carry a bullying card with guidance on what to do when it occurs. Pupils spoke warmly of the way teachers support them in the classroom and beyond. One pupil said of teachers, "they have time for you". Pupil leadership is a strength of the school and contributes to creating an environment in which pupils know they are safe and cared for. Pupils show great pride in serving others as prefects and peer mentors. The school is very supportive of pupils who have unique challenges that make it difficult to learn and to feel part of the school. For example, they told the Inspector that they were encouraged to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh trip and that they were made to feel welcome. As a result, they have grown in confidence and feel part of the family. Pupils understand that in the local and wider community, others have greater need. They participate in fundraising for organisations such as CAFOD, foodbank collections, Nazareth House Christmas hampers and the campaign for the Southend homeless people. Year 9 pupils recently experienced a retreat with the Parish Priest and CAFOD exploring the "Share the Journey" campaign. These events give the students a practical focus to their Christian mission of service and ensures that pupils are aware of their responsibilities towards others. Last year, the Justice and Peace Group was re-launched through the R.E. department and the Chaplaincy to engage pupils in raising awareness of war and injustice in the world. Pupils benefit from the links with the wider Church through the BCYS. Three teachers of R.E. were involved as young people and two pupils are team members. Parents overwhelmingly strongly agree that St Thomas More is a school which serves their children's needs well. They appreciate the way the school cares for and educates their children. The school is supported by the Parish Priest who is a regular and welcome visitor. He is supported by Deanery priests in the weekly celebration of Mass and the major feasts of the year.

The Catholic identity and spiritual nature of the school is evident in a range of religious symbols and images found throughout the school. Its mission, to be "God's servant first", is encapsulated in the lives of teachers and pupils who work and pray together. They are comfortable serving others in school and in the wider community. This leads to a school that prays together and in which pupils have a genuine regard for the needs of others. The impact of Chaplaincy is evident in the worshipping nature of the school and the way pupils respond positively to opportunities to pray individually and collectively. Chaplaincy provides outstanding service to staff and pupils in engaging them in the preparation of and participation in Collective Worship. The Chaplain and Director of Religious Life are highly effective in the growth of the spiritual life of the school. Teachers are provided with resources to enable them to lead prayers with their forms. The Headteacher has worked with other schools and the Diocese to sustain the effectiveness of chaplaincy provision.

Governors are deeply committed to the Church's mission in education. They are ambitious for the growth and efficacy of the Catholic and spiritual life of the school. Governors support the school and are fully informed of progress and areas for development. They demonstrate excellent leadership in all areas. The school's self-evaluation is an accurate assessment that shows an understanding of the effectiveness of the school and an awareness of areas that need developing. Governors monitor the quality and impact of Catholic Life through formal reports from the Link Governor and the Headteacher. The Parish Priest is the Link Governor and is in the school every week for Mass and discussions. He feeds back through the Community and Catholic Ethos committee. The links between the school and parish are very strong. The appointment of a Director of Catholic Life to work with the chaplain reflects the vision of governors and leaders for a school of service. They are dedicated to the spiritual and emotional welfare of their pupils. The Headteacher has a significant impact on the growth of the Catholic Life of the School. Her personal faith and vision are manifest in the strong family and Christian feel which is evident throughout the school. "God's servant first" is a strong foundation. The Headteacher has built up a national support network through Educare to develop her own spiritual formation. She is strongly supported by teachers who demonstrate their own deep understanding of service in the way they conduct themselves and ensure that all pupils are included and cared for. They are an integral part of prayer and fundraising that is a significant part of school life. The whole community willingly participates in ensuring that the needs of others are recognised and addressed.

Levels of attainment on entry are broadly in line with national averages. From their varied starting points, pupils' standards of attainment and progress are at least good, with many making outstanding progress. R.E. is a strength of the school. Over the last three years, outcomes have risen, from 59% A*-C in 2016 to 81% 9-4 in 2018. The A*-A figure has risen from 18.8% in 2016 to 28% for grades 9-7 in 2018. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are outstanding and reflect the inclusive nature of lessons. The subject progress index of +5.7 is significantly above the school's overall score. At Key Stage 3, pupils make significant progress over the shorter two year programme. R.E. is one of the lead departments in the school and is a model of good practice in teaching, learning and assessment. Pupils who met inspectors said they enjoyed their lessons and spoke warmly about the challenge and support the teachers give them. A member of the school council described the department as "one of the best in the school". Students' written work is generally of a high standard. Most pupils take pride in their work and are enthusiastic about learning. In all lessons, pupils were engaged and demonstrated a commitment to their learning. Behaviour was excellent.

Teaching is consistently good with examples of outstanding practice. The school is a member of the Agnus Dei Teaching Alliance as part of its commitment to learn and improve. Their aims are to develop new teachers and to make teachers skilled across all key stages. During the inspection, lessons were well planned and linked to current assessment so that pupils would learn how to improve their answers. Good quality feedback led to pupil engagement, interest and progress, although lessons were generally predominantly teacher-led. The school should consider ways to help pupils develop further as independent learners, for example with the use of ICT. Effective lessons were characterised by teachers' excellent subject knowledge and whole class feedback. Outcomes reflect the school's ambitions for each pupil. High expectations show the determination of the school for pupils to achieve at least expected outcomes in R.E. Pupils said they enjoy their lessons and are proud of their achievements. There is a detailed and robust process of assessment and tracking which provides information on each pupil. Challenge and support are put in place as appropriate. There are unit tests every half term. Pupils are informed about their progress and how to improve through marking and dialogue with teachers. The effectiveness of feedback was seen in the lessons Inspectors observed. In the GCSE preparation lessons, for example, the focus on the high mark questions helped pupils identify how to improve their answers and guided them for their revision. Pupils knew their current level and their targets for the next assessments. Marking at KS4 is accurate and confident.

Governors are ambitious for sustaining high standards of teaching and learning. They have an excellent understanding of how to deliver further sustained improvements in outcomes. Data trends are discussed formally every year and through the regular visits of the Link Governor and the Interim Chair of Governors who line manages the Head of Department. They have established a team of teachers who are Catholic and understand curriculum and assessment in R.E. Four teachers have other Catholic qualifications in Theology and Catholic leadership. In total, there are nine teachers and one LSA with CCRS certificates. Two teachers are GCSE examiners. This is strong foundation for the planned increased roll. The Headteacher is proud of the stability the school enjoys. It is a popular choice for Catholic families, some of whom choose to travel long distances. Her leadership has ensured a sustained increase in the the quality of teaching and learning for pupils of all abilities. She is effectively supported by a senior team who understand and share her vision of excellence for all.

Leadership of R.E. is outstanding. The Head of Department has a high level of expertise and a clear focus on how to improve teaching and learning. Effective monitoring and assessment systems are established. Termly assessments at Key Stage 3 and half termly at Key Stage 4 provide detailed information for each pupil. Appropriate strategies follow that address areas of concern so that each pupil is given every opportunity to learn. Curriculum time is 10% for years 9 and 10, 9% for year 11 and 8% for years 7 and 8. For A Level it is 18%. General RE is one hour a fortnight which does not meet the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. The school is committed to addressing the allocation for September 2019 to ensure that R.E. continues to be successful and part of the core curriculum. It has a profound impact on the moral and spiritual development of pupils.

Pupils respond reverently and respectfully to the many opportunities there are to experience and participate in daily prayer and worship. They are at ease and act with integrity when praying with others who have different beliefs and attitudes to spirituality. A KS 3 assembly occurred during the inspection. Pupils led the reading and bidding prayers. Pupils were respectful and responded prayerfully. The assembly was enhanced by the concluding hymn. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 sang a hymn in two parts in the form of a canon. Pupils, irrespective of faith, happily joined in. This reflects the impact of the spiritual ethos of the school that inspires all pupils to respond and participate. Pupil Chaplaincy leaders play an important role in preparing and leading Masses and assemblies. A visiting priest said that pupils were “extremely reverential and respectful” in their form and year Masses. Chaplaincy leaders play an important role in preparing and leading acts of worship.

The quality of Collective Worship is outstanding. It is central to the life of the school, providing extensive and varied religious experiences for staff and pupils. St Thomas More is a community that prays together. The experience of prayer and worship has a visible impact on the calm respectful manner in which pupils work and pray together. A visiting Priest described the school as “very recognisably Catholic”. A full liturgical calendar of Collective Worship reflecting the seasons of the Church, reflects the value of prayer and worship to the school. In the weekly Mass and the Headteacher’s assembly the Gospel is proclaimed, hymns are sung and prayers offered. Mass is celebrated together once a term and on special occasions throughout the year, such as the Feast Day. In November, the community reflect on the sacrifices made in war with an assembly and a Mass for the Deceased. Mass was offered when a pupil suffered a bereavement. Teachers and pupils responded with sensitivity and in prayer for the family. Chaplaincy is a significant strength. The Catholic Life of the School is not the remit only of the Chaplain. It is the responsibility of all teachers. The school is fortunate to have the services of local clergy. The Parish Priest confirmed that there is a rota of priests who offer the weekly Mass, liaise with the Chaplain and prepare pupils for the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Lent. Pupils confirmed that the prayer life is very strong. Apart from daily prayer in the form room, there are weekly assemblies, daily Angelus, weekly Mass and daily Rosary. Pupils acknowledged that prayers were “essential to St Thomas More”. The pupil planner has the order of the Mass and the Rosary at the back.

Leaders and Governors are deeply committed to the growth of a distinctly Catholic community. They ensure that Collective Worship is an integral part of the daily life of the school. The Parish Priest is the Link Governor. He is a weekly visitor and is therefore able to ensure that prayer and worship are daily and provide meaningful experiences for staff and pupils. Governors monitor the quality of Collective Worship further by attending Mass and seasonal liturgies. They evaluate and plan through the Community and Catholic Ethos Committee. The Headteacher and senior staff are very visible as leaders of Collective Worship within the school and draw upon their formation and experience as Catholic leaders to ensure pupils experience meaningful daily prayer and worship. The range of opportunities to celebrate Mass and come together for prayer reflect the highly effective leadership and the Director of Religious Life. They inspire enthusiasm as seen with vibrant team of pupils across the school. The chaplain is currently studying for the Bishops’ Conference Certificate. The links with local parishes are very strong. The Parish Priest said that he was “privileged to have witnessed the school advance in its spiritual life” over recent years.