

St Thomas More Catholic High School

URN: 137310

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Brentwood

23–24 January 2025

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

1

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

1

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

1

Collective worship (p.7)

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

1

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

Yes

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

Yes

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

Fully

Compliance statement

- St Thomas More High School is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference
- St Thomas More High School is fully compliant with any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop
- St Thomas More High School has responded fully to the areas for improvement from the last inspection

What the school does well

- St Thomas More High School is a supportive community where students feel that staff genuinely care for their wellbeing and development.
- The religious education department is led with integrity, passion and a clear vision for excellence.
- Behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, is exemplary at all times.
- The weekly celebration of the Eucharist and the overall chaplaincy provision enables students' faith to flourish.
- There is a clear commitment to others, especially the most vulnerable, with the range of charitable events and the opportunities offered through the outdoor adventure programme.

What the school needs to improve

- Enable students to explore links between Cafod's 'LiveSimply' campaign and the theology underpinning all of the principles of Catholic social teaching.
- The best practice teaching and learning observed should be applied consistently across the religious education department.
- Create opportunities for more students to plan, present and evaluate prayer and liturgy.

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

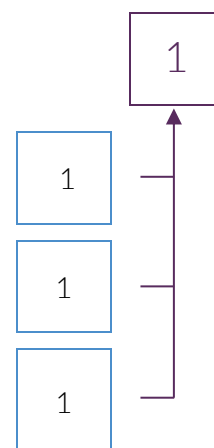
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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



Students live out the distinctive charism of their patron, St Thomas More, by embracing their responsibility for others through servant leadership. The mission statement, 'God's servant first', is understood and lived out in the actions of students across the school. The transmission of the school's charism is passed down and reinforced from generation to generation with 28 alumni presently employed as staff. St Thomas More High School is an inclusive welcoming community where students are nurtured and cared for. A student confirmed this when she stated, 'It has been a surreal experience coming to a place where I feel valued'. Students take every opportunity to serve the community, flourishing as a result. They raise awareness and fundraise for a variety of charities. Much work has been done in developing the Cafod team and the 'LiveSimply' campaign has enabled the school to engage students and encourage them to accept their personal responsibility for our common home. This has culminated in the school being presented the prestigious 'LiveSimply' award. The school now has the perfect opportunity to explore further the theology underpinning all of the principles of Catholic social teaching. Students are happy and safe knowing they are loved and cared for as unique individuals. A parent commented, 'The teachers are incredibly supportive, always approachable and genuinely interested in the well-being and progress of the students.' The mutual respect between students and staff is palpable.

The school excels at being a community based on Catholic tradition and practice. Students know and say the school prayer with pride. This was reinforced by a parent who commented, 'If you want to know how good this Catholic school is, listen to a hall full of young men sing the school hymn with passion and power. The Leavers' Mass for Year 11 was overwhelming.' Staff embrace the school mission and readily implement it across the whole of school life with some even taking

part in charity events out of school hours such as the Southend 10K and the London Marathon. The school goes out of its way to provide an exceptionally supportive and joyful community, valuing all without exception and acknowledging Christ's presence in all. This was reiterated by a parent who said, 'Every time I contact the school or speak with staff, I am always impressed and think how lucky we are to have such a supportive and hardworking team of teachers'. Parents and students appreciate the high level of pastoral care provided by staff. It is truly genuine and sincere. The relationships, sex and health education provision meets statutory and diocesan requirements and is faithful to the teachings of the Church. The students appreciate opportunities to ask their tutors questions both publicly and privately in relation to sensitive topics in this area.

Leaders and governors place Catholic life and mission at the centre of all they do. They are energised, joyful and determined in the pursuit of this mission and a source of inspiration for the whole community. All policies and procedures clearly reflect the priority given to the school's Catholic identity, so much so that the school already has its own policy for Catholic life and mission. The school has effective strategies for engaging with parents to the benefit of students. The high volume of responses to the survey revealed how much parents understood the school's mission and how supportive they are of it. One said, 'The school puts Catholic morals and guidance at the heart of everything they do. I could not have chosen a better school.' The links with the local parishes are strong, as witnessed by the provision of a weekly Mass and opportunities for students to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation in school during Advent and Lent. All staff interviewed, including early career teachers, were extremely positive about working at the school. A staff member stressed, 'The community spirit and companionship is evident throughout each day and it is a joy to come to work.'

Religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

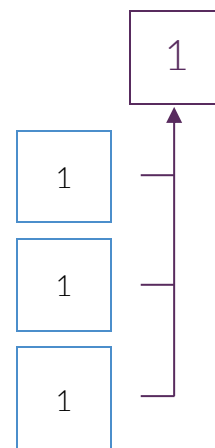
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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



The quality of curriculum religious education

Students are developing excellent knowledge, understanding and skills that reflect the learning required for the *Religious Education Directory* as evidenced in lessons taught, exercise books, and discussions with students. Fully focused in all lessons observed, students repeatedly spoke about how they enjoyed the subject. In an excellent Year 8 lesson on the 'Miracles of Jesus', the teacher's use of questioning enabled students to consolidate their knowledge and move the learning forward. Students wanted to learn because the teacher had thought of innovative ways to engage them, including kinaesthetic learning, by getting them to come up to the board to write their responses. The strong behaviour for learning is fostered through extremely positive teacher-student relationships. This was supported by a parent who said, 'My son told me he cannot wait for his RE lessons as he finds them good for his soul and wellbeing.' Students' attainment is above average at GCSE religious studies when compared to national data for boys' attainment. This has been sustained for a number of years and the retention of students at Key Stage 5 is most impressive, with healthy numbers studying A level religious studies. The popularity of the subject is a reflection of the excellent teaching and results as confirmed by a student who said, 'I chose religious studies A level because the teachers are so enthusiastic about the subject'.

Staff are committed to the subject and to the teaching of a Catholic curriculum which is seen within the school as the 'core of the core.' Where learning is at its best, teachers use questioning skilfully to elicit articulate responses and to consolidate and develop knowledge and understanding. In the best lessons, learning moves at pace and there are opportunities for students to be challenged in depth. Going forward, the best practice observed should become commonplace across the department. Students' efforts do not go unnoticed and are acknowledged by teachers in celebration assemblies, positive comments, stickers, and reward

points for attitudes to learning. Engaging and well-planned extended learning tasks ensure that students enjoy the subject and approach their lessons with enthusiasm and interest. This was supported by a parent who commented, 'I love the way the school updates me on research tasks. It gives my son the chance to deepen his knowledge and understanding of his religion as well as building his self-confidence when he feeds back his findings to the rest of the class'. Nearly all students have a good understanding of how well they are doing, what they are working towards, and how to get there. The recently introduced core RE programme is well planned and offers spiritual, ethical, philosophical and practical formation to students including placements at the SVP centre, a local care home and feeder primary schools.

Leaders and governors place the utmost importance on religious education; there is absolute parity between religious education and other core subjects. In 2020 the department moved into a new purpose-built block with a suite of rooms. Leaders have provided a comprehensive offer of professional development for staff including its own faith development course. Early careers teachers were extremely positive about the support they had received from school colleagues. New staff are inducted effectively into the department and meet with the subject leader regularly. In addition, the religious education department avail themselves of every opportunity to attend subject specific training and to work closely with other Catholic schools. The subject leader has an inspiring vision for religious education which is shared by the department and supported by the senior team.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

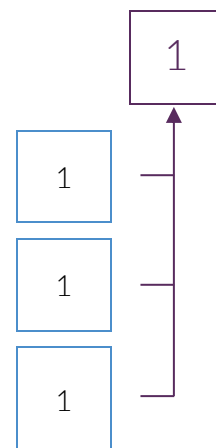
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship



Prayer is at the heart of this school. Students are respectful and attentive when prayers are said in form time, religious assemblies, at the start of religious education lessons and at the end of every day. The Latin proverb *Bis orat qui bene cantat* ('He who sings well prays twice') would attest that St Thomas More is a truly prayerful school as students and staff sing with confidence and joy during Masses and other liturgical events. Students in the chaplaincy leadership team play an important role in the delivery of form time prayer each morning, assisting the chaplains with reflections in the chapel as well as weekly Eucharistic Adoration. A parent noted, 'The school has provided great opportunities for my son to grow in faith, particularly the Divine office each day'. During registration a tutor made links to the feast of Saint Francis de Sales and the Gospel reading of the day in an engaging way which had the full attention of the class. The school is aware of the need to further develop strategies to increase the involvement of students in preparing and leading prayer and liturgy as well as self-evaluating its quality. This is an important development that will further enhance the quality of provision.

The school has a carefully planned calendar for prayer and liturgy. The year begins with a welcome Mass for new parents and one commented, 'I didn't expect to feel as involved in my son's school life as I do. Already I have attended a welcome Mass, a Mass for the deceased in November, and an Advent service. During the Mass the responses were displayed on a large screen and the priest explained the meaning of various parts of the Mass. This made the service more engaging for non-Catholics in attendance.' Registration and religious education lessons begin with prayer and the school day ends with the prayer of St Thomas More. Students know the school prayer and their house saint prayer. However, this can restrict the diet of prayer available to students and greater use should be made of the wide variety of prayers in the prayer and liturgy policy and elsewhere. Staff are comfortable and confident in leading prayer and as a

result are inspiring role models to students and each other. The senior leaders and chaplains are dynamic, professional and caring in their approach to prayer and liturgy. This was supported by a teacher who said, 'The school has a strong sense of community. It provides an environment in which all of its members are enabled to explore and embrace their faith and spirituality.' The school band, folk group and choir are another strength of the school. Their musical expertise has enabled them to use their gifts to enhance prayer and liturgy. Parents are kept well informed with the weekly newsletter, 'Contact', which includes a prayer of the week, an explanation of Sunday's Gospel, chaplaincy news as well as local news from the parishes.

Key events and seasons are celebrated in school and in local parishes. For example students will make their Sacrament of Confirmation in their own parish but this is also recognised and celebrated within the school. Staff interviewed by inspectors valued the professional development programme, including how to pray with students. They are confident in leading worship. A teacher said, 'I feel blessed to work in such a caring environment both for students and staff. I have been given the opportunity to lead prayer with the whole staff which I found amazing.' Staff, including senior leaders, are inspiring models of exemplary practice, engaging in prayer and liturgy that is genuine and authentic. The school works hard to secure a flourishing partnership with parents which was echoed when one said, 'My son continues to be active in his parish but his real inspiration comes from the school. He enjoys being part of assemblies and loves being part of St Thomas More.' Leaders and governors have put a lot of investment into chaplaincy with a full-time chaplain and a part-time chaplaincy development officer. This has reaped dividends with the formation of chaplaincy leaders who promote and strengthen the prayer life of the school. Staff repeatedly stressed the important role that the chaplains play in promoting and supporting prayer as well as the spiritual sustenance they provide to all.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Thomas More Catholic High School
School unique reference number (URN)	137310
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8825447
Full postal address of the school	St Thomas More Catholic High School, Kenilworth Gardens, Westcliff-on-Sea, SS0 0BW
School phone number	001702344933
Headteacher	Gemma Ackred
Chair of local governing body	Daniel Cauchi
School Website	www.st-thomasmore.southend.sch.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Assisi Catholic Trust
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Boys (mixed sixth-form)
Date of last denominational inspection	18 October 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

The inspection team

Dermot O'Neill	Lead
Bernie Woodcock	Team
Patrick Harrison	Team
Andrew Bull	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