



Archdiocese of Birmingham

Section 48 Inspection

ST THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC ACADEMY

Part of the All Saints Catholic Collegiate, a Multi-Academy Company

Longton Hall Road, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, ST3 2NJ

Inspection date	28 th -29 th November 2016
Reporting Inspector	Janet Mellor
Assisting Inspector	Steve Burns

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Academy
Age range of students	11-18 years
Number on roll	1034
Appropriate authority	Board of Directors
Chair of Governors	Mrs Carol Knight
Telephone number	01782 882900
E-mail address	office@stmca.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	July 2013
DFE School Number	8615400
Unique Reference Number	140304
Headteacher	Mr Mark Rayner
Previous inspection:	3
This inspection:	2

DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Evidence

- The inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors.
- The focus of the inspection was the quality, leadership and impact of the school's provision for Catholic life, collective worship and religious education (RE).
- The inspectors observed teaching across 11 RE lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with students to evaluate their understanding of Catholic life, worship and the impact of teaching on their learning over time.
- Meetings were held with governors, including the chair of the board of directors and other directors, the chair and members of the academy committee, the headteacher, senior leaders, the person in charge of Catholic life (PICCL) and progress data, the subject leader, priest chaplain and lay chaplains, as well as a range of other subject teachers and groups of students.
- The inspectors attended two assemblies and form time, a form Mass, and they undertook a learning walk with senior students, during which they met with the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo)
- The inspectors reviewed a range of documents including teachers' planning, the data about students' attainment and progress, RAISEonline, the school's self evaluation, and the development planning.

Information about the school

- The school is situated in the parish of St Gregory, Longton, and serves mainly the southern area of the city of Stoke-on-Trent. There are currently 1034 students on roll.
- There is a higher percentage of ethnic minority students than the national average.
- The percentage of Catholic students is currently 33%.
- The proportion of students who are disadvantaged is above the national average.
- The percentage of students with special educational needs and disabilities is well above the national average.
- On entry to the school the attainment of students is overall below the national average, though improving. There are three year groups when attainment on entry was significantly below the national average.
- Since the last inspection the school has become an academy as part of the All Saints Collegiate, Multi-Academy Company (MAC). There have been new appointments to the posts of headteacher, subject leader for RE, and second in the RE department. There is a new full-time lay chaplain.
- Since 2013 the building project has been completed, allowing RE teaching rooms to be suited. A new chapel and an auditorium have been built, and there is now a chaplaincy centre at the heart of the school.

Main Findings

- Since the last inspection the school has moved forward and can now be regarded as good in its Catholic life and RE with many outstanding features. Its motto 'Aspire to be More' is not limited to the students but covers all aspects of the school in its ambition to improve.
- The appointment of the headteacher has been crucial in giving the school a new direction and clarity in its forward planning for Catholic life and RE. He is an

uncompromising witness to the Faith and fulfils his leadership role with vigour and determination.

- The Catholic life of the school is developing rapidly with many initiatives to involve students as leaders. The team of staff with direct responsibilities for Catholic life work successfully with the PICCL who is a senior leader and is meticulous in analysing feedback, in monitoring and evaluation, and in his thorough planning. The response of students is very positive and they grow in knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith, able to reflect on its implications for their own lives and take responsibility for their actions.
- Collective worship is a priority in the school and is a key way in which the spiritual lives of the students is developed. Attention is given to excellence in the twice weekly morning acts of worship. Form time worship has been developed along innovative lines to increase student planning, participation and monitoring.
- Senior leaders share in the responsibility for the Catholic life of the school. Experience of teaching RE enables valuable contributions to the issues surrounding new schemes of work and assessment.
- Chaplaincy is a strong feature of the school. The caring role of the lay chaplains contributes to the pastoral work of the school, and the Savio centre is a very positive development, giving extra opportunities for prayer. The priest chaplain is frequently in school and is highly supportive of initiatives. The links with his parish are long established and ever increasing.
- The school is benefitting from its new status in the All Saints Catholic Collegiate through joint in-service training days, and other events which bring the schools together for liturgical events and meetings. The academy committee members regard Catholic life as the priority and require regular updates about that and the work of the RE department. They have the experience and expertise to challenge reports and are fulsome in their support of the new developments in the school.
- The RE department is working hard to embrace the new schemes of work and assessment structure with a team approach. The head of RE is proactive in his own training and able to cascade information to colleagues.
- Teaching in RE is mostly at least good and there is some outstanding work. Students are mostly very diligent in lessons and are keen to achieve well. There are very good relationships within the classroom, leading to good outcomes.
- Outcomes at GCSE in RE are in line with diocesan averages from a low attainment level on entry to Year 7, making progress rates very good. Careful tracking and analysis of results means that teachers are aware of how they need to plan for improvement. At A level there is a steady rise in uptake of the philosophy and ethics course and very positive results in the examinations.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

Catholic life, collective worship and spiritual, moral and vocational development: provision and outcomes

- The school judges its Catholic life to be good and inspectors confirm that evaluation, having found many examples also of outstanding innovative practice. The school has a clear Catholic ethos which permeates all that the inspectors viewed during the days of the inspection. The very neatly phrased school motto 'Aspire to be More' is a tribute to the school's patron whilst indicating also the stress on raising aspirations in an area of deprivation, although the subtlety of the capital letter is not always recognised.

- The school is conscious of the reduction in numbers of Catholic students, although the school is oversubscribed in Years 7 and 8. Close cooperation with the four primary schools in the MAC is inspiring very positive initiatives, for example the 'graduation' ceremony when primary pupils receive their St Thomas More tie.
- Catholic life is the first priority of the collegiate and this emphasis leads to joint in-service training for teachers across the schools as well as common initiatives through the work of the very strong spirituality committee. The school benefits also from cooperation with other secondary schools in the area, and from the role of staff as leaders of the Catholic Association of Teachers, Schools and Colleges.
- The insistence on Catholic values which permeate the curriculum, subsuming British values such as respect and tolerance, creates a vibrant community where there is great respect for faith. The school makes inclusive provision for its students. Work has begun on the diocesan Catholic Schools' Pupil Profile. The school's approach in examining how the values included in this profile can be mirrored in practical ways in the school is an excellent beginning and shows that the school is already on the way to integration of the pupil profile.
- Initiatives to ensure that Catholic values are paramount in all departments have been thoughtful and inspiring, for instance in the adoption of a patron saint and a special prayer for each department. This has encouraged thinking about role models in scripture and in the history of the Church, with, for example, St Martha chosen as the patron of the food technology, St Gabriel for media studies and St George for history. However, students are as yet not totally familiar with this because it is not yet embedded. There are prayer boards for each department and a prayer focus in each classroom. Further dedication to saintly role models is seen in the naming of forms, and the various buildings of the school.
- The school has developed leadership roles for students including that of student spiritual director, with responsibilities extending to the MAC spirituality meetings and leadership of student groups in the school, such as the St Vincent de Paul Society. Formal application is required for this role, together with that of the head boy and head girl, and of the senior prefects. Together they act as a sixth form leadership team, and are role models for the rest of the school. The process of shortlisting and voting introduces students to the world of job applications and democratic processes.
- The impact of the Catholic life on the students is evident in their development during their time at the school. Parents speak of how the school shows students from the outset how to have high aspirations. Students are rewarded for effort and grow in self-confidence and in an awareness of the needs of their own community, as well as the locality and beyond. By the time they reach the sixth form they are well-rounded and ambitious, determined, thoughtful and caring. An example of students' ability to put faith into action is the recent 'Night Fever' when the doors of St Gregory's church were opened wide at the start of the local Christmas lights. Students and staff invited those viewing the lights to come into the church, and light a candle and offer a prayer. Eighty people accepted the invitation and students learnt something of the needs of others.
- Collective worship has many outstanding features and is the key way in which the spiritual development of the students takes place. The new auditorium creates the possibility of two acts of collective worship every week each with two year groups.

The assemblies, referred to most insistently as 'acts of worship', are well planned and monitored. They are regarded as opportunities for reflection with multi-faceted input.

- During the inspection the theme was the beginning of the season of Advent, using drama and visual presentation, reflection, prayer and the lighting of the first candle on the Advent wreath. There were many references to sacred scripture and an impressive portrayal of the prophet Isaiah during the drama. The theme was common to all the schools in the collegiate. A literacy emphasis was included in the explanation of the word 'Advent' which was the word of the week. Students enjoy this start to their day, respect the time of prayer and for those who participate more specifically it is an opportunity to grow in self-confidence.
- The school sees the regular input of more music, in particular singing, as an area for development, and there are indications that this is being actioned.
- For other days of the week, the school has developed an initiative entitled 'fifteen minutes of faith', whereby form groups prepare form time worship which is then used throughout the school. This is a highly innovative manner of developing student participation, and the school has responded thoughtfully to the recommendation concerning this in the last inspection report. Students are involved in the creation of the material around themes and there is also participation in the way that other groups' material is delivered in the form time. There are opportunities for discussion following an input for example from a video clip, a link to scripture or the catechism, ending with time for prayer.
- Form tutors are well supported by the lay chaplains, and students from the chaplaincy team are involved in monitoring.
- Inspectors found that students are hesitant to respond in discussion and ways need to be found to encourage more contributions. Although many opportunities for reflection and prayer are afforded, intercessory prayer and traditional Catholic prayers arising from the chosen themes and reflections were not included.
- The impact of the calendared Year 7 form Masses in the school chapel is particularly significant, because the students recognise that this is special time given to them. The priest chaplain celebrates with an excellent understanding of how the theme fits into the programme for collective worship, and the homily is well prepared, good humoured and focused on clear teaching objectives. There is a prayerful atmosphere and very good student participation including musical accompaniment, and singing, which is a growing feature of the school, with planned hymn practices.
- For Masses on key feasts of the Church, students attend Mass in St Gregory's parish church, thereby ensuring close links with the Catholic community.
- The sacrament of reconciliation is an established feature of provision for Catholic life and the priest chaplain, as the local dean, brings together a number of priests able to cover the needs of three whole year groups during the seasons of Advent and Lent. It is fully inclusive, in that students may seek the sacrament or ask simply to talk to a priest. Likewise at Mass, all students are included by receiving a blessing if they are not Catholics receiving Holy Communion.
- Provision for retreats and pilgrimages covers all year groups. Year 7 students visited the Door of Mercy at a church in Newcastle-under-Lyme, and there is extensive use of the diocesan retreat centre at Alton Castle and Soli House. The Lourdes

pilgrimage is a long-standing feature of school life and students are well prepared by the chaplains and in conjunction with the local parish. Those students who have participated speak of its great spiritual and emotional impact, resulting on one occasion to a student being received into the Catholic Church, and to students' participation at the funeral Mass of one of the sick pilgrims that they had helped during their time at Lourdes.

- Students at the school develop a very good sense of moral issues, and know right from wrong. This comes from work in RE where ethical issues begin to be discussed in Year 7 and from work across the curriculum. Students see moral decisions as arising from their spiritual development. This indicates clearly that, for the students of this school, faith forms the key to a moral life.
- Vocational awareness is developed particularly in Year 9 with an emphasis on service to others arising from faith. There is representation from the priestly and religious life, as well as for the vocation of marriage, professions and other careers. The school also invites local charities to the vocations day so that students gain an awareness of voluntary work as well as paid work, and there are opportunities offered for work placements, such as for the Teenage Cancer Trust. Students therefore begin to see vocation in terms of their whole lives and responsibilities for those less fortunate.
- Support of charities is also seen as arising from faith. Year groups are linked to charities and speakers are invited to Mass before delivering a talk about their charity. Students are keen participants in fund-raising as was recently shown in the bag-packing at the local supermarket, raising nearly £500 for the Lourdes pilgrimage.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership of Catholic life and Collective Worship

- Leadership of Catholic life and collective worship is outstanding and the headteacher plays a particularly prominent role. The priority given to the Catholic life of the school is driven by his own personal faith and there have been very sound improvements, which are well recognised by the community of the school as a new and very positive direction, with a long-term vision for the future. His aim to engage the whole community in moving forward is shown in the posting of the summary of the whole improvement plan in each classroom and around the school.
- The headteacher is supported in an excellent manner by the PICCL and the priest and lay chaplains especially, and by the other members of the leadership team, other staff in the RE department and across the school. Staff training is focused on inspiring confidence to contribute to the apostolic core, with the aim that Catholic life becomes part of everyone's daily work.
- Evaluation of the Catholic life of the school is highly programmed, honest and thorough. There is detailed analysis of feedback, including from students as part of the Youth Chaplaincy Team elected by form groups. The careful planning shown in documentation is made real in actions.
- Leaders plan rigorously for collective worship, ensuring that the liturgical life of the Church is fully respected.

- Governors have adapted well to their new role within the MAC and give support and challenge to the headteacher. They know about the strengths of the school and the areas for development not only through reports from the headteacher and other staff, but because they are part of the community and engaged in the life of the parishes.
- The impact of working with primary schools enables governors to have a vision of the continuity of provision for Catholic education. They have a variety of skills enabling them to analyse data and outcomes, and they give time to recruitment of staff, to visit the school for learning walks and for a variety of events. Their system of committee work and reporting ensures detailed analysis of progress of development planning.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Leadership, outcomes from and provision for religious education

- Leadership, provision and outcomes in RE are overall good. The department has moved forward with determination since the last inspection, by focussing on data analysis and responding to students' needs.
- Leadership of the RE department is gaining ground rapidly. There is close cooperation with the PICCL who line-manages the department and gives very good support. The need for the RE department to work more closely with the chaplaincy team has been recognised by the school.
- The head of department is coordinating the development of the new schemes of work and resources at a time when the introduction of new syllabuses at all stages is heavily dependent on team work and a cohesive approach to the challenges.
- There has been a very good analysis of the outcomes in RE, enabling focused action planning with measurable success criteria, but as yet there is a lack of clarity in planning about how monitoring of teaching within the department is feeding specifically into improvement.
- Teaching in RE is largely good and effective with students mainly keen to learn and making good progress. Some teaching has outstanding features.
- On the whole there is very careful planning with a variety of resources and tasks, and an emphasis on literacy.
- Students behave well and are engaged in learning. Pair work and group work are generally well developed.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge particularly in the areas of Catholicism, philosophy and ethics, and Judaism. The head of RE has successfully cascaded his own training within his team, and teachers are making a sound effort to develop new strategies and centralised resources. Their enthusiasm and positive rapport with students mean that many students say how much they enjoy RE and want to achieve well.
- There is a well developed assessment policy but implementation is inconsistent. Some books are very thoroughly marked with useful formative comments to which the students respond in green pen during allocated time in lessons. Much work is completed on work sheets with writing frames which support learning, and these are included appropriately in books. Many students have a great sense of pride in their

work, which is fostered by teachers. On the other hand there are examples of unmarked and unfinished work, and this has a bearing on learning.

- Central tracking of students' progress is meticulous. The head of department has worked hard to develop more accuracy in predicting grades for GCSE and the department now has a greater sense of how the students progress, despite uncertainty about grade boundaries for the new examination.
- There is inconsistency in students' awareness of their own working grades and targets, especially in Years 7 to 9. That is because the progress charts are not always completed, and overall there is inconsistency in information in exercise books. There is, however, evidence from work and lesson observation that students in Years 7 and 8 are making good progress.
- The detailed analysis of student progress led to outstanding examination performance in 2016 for those students for whom the school receives extra funding. The gap between their attainment at GCSE and the attainment of other students was narrowed and this is an achievement of which the school can be proud. In addition those students who do not have English as their first language achieved very well, as did girls overall.
- The school has rightly judged that the focus needs to be on three areas, which are the achievement of boys, that of special needs students whose results in 2016 were below national averages, and that of the most able. In this latter case the school was below the national average for the top grades. However, the overall attainment in GCSE in 2016 improved from the previous year and is now in line with diocesan averages. That represents very good progress from low attainment on entry to the school.
- The school has responded to boys' lower achievement at GCSE by creating two higher ability single sex groups in Year 11, and there is an emphasis on boy-friendly strategies in the teaching. Both groups of students speak positively about this and the school is carefully monitoring outcomes, as well as creating competition between the groups.
- Strategies are also in place to improve the support given by teaching assistants for the least able students. In these ways the school is responding to the analysis of previous GCSE results.
- The curriculum provides a variety of topics which engage the interest of students. There is very good progression in the scheme of work, but there is some discrepancy in the topics studied by classes in the same year group, making whole year assessment incoherent.
- The school has a very good inclusive approach to the curriculum and during the inspection there was excellent involvement of students of other faiths in the work on Advent in Year 7.
- There is good emphasis on scripture and the teachings of the Church, as well as other faiths, especially Judaism. Students are given opportunities to reflect and discuss during lessons, for instance those studying the Jewish Sabbath rules were asked to apply them to themselves and determine what it would mean for them.
- Other students were seen studying vocation as 'jobs from God' and a student spoke of how his musical skill has made a positive contribution for good, following the teacher's personal testimony of a vocation to teaching.

- However, students do not yet see fully the link between the RE curriculum and the Catholic life of the school.
- Encouragement is given to students to become independent learners and there is an emphasis on long-term project work, rather than regular short pieces of homework. Consequently, during the book trawls, inspectors found little evidence of work done between lessons to develop learning and reflection, and no long-term project work was available for inspectors to enable them to make a judgement on the policy. It is therefore important that the impact on learning is reviewed by the department.
- The A level philosophy and ethics course is steadily growing in popularity as an option choice in the sixth form. Students from another school in the Trinity Collegiate are well integrated. Teaching is of a very high standard and lessons have a very good pace. Students are extremely well supported in dealing with complex ideas and outcomes are very good and rapidly improving. This is a very successful area of the RE department's work and students are enthusiastic about their course. There are opportunities to apply learning to students' personal lives in the ethics part of the course but less so in philosophy.
- General RE is taught across the sixth form and deals with ethical topics of current interest. The ability of students to consider arguments surrounding such topics has resulted in a team winning a debate at the University of Derby, and therefore representing Staffordshire in a further competition in the spring of 2017.

Recommendations

In order to improve the school should:

- Further develop teachers' skills in delivering the material for the 'Fifteen Minutes of Faith' so that students are more confident to share in discussion and that intercessory prayers based on the themes and reflections as well as traditional prayers, are included
- Find ways of reinforcing links between the RE department and the Catholic life of the school, so that students make more immediate connections
- Ensure consistency in the application of the assessment policy, so that all students have formative marking to which they respond, and are aware of their working grades and targets
- Review the policy for homework to enable teachers to gain a clear view of the effectiveness of long-term projects
- Work as a team of RE teachers to consolidate resources and strategies for the teaching of the new schemes of work, ensuring that monitoring of lessons and book trawls have a precise impact on how to move forward