



Archdiocese of Birmingham

Section 48 Inspection Report

ST THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Part of the Christ the King Multi Academy Company
North Street, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST4 7DG

Inspection dates:

3rd & 4th July 2019

Lead Inspector:

Stephen Godber

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS:

Outstanding

Catholic Life:

Outstanding

Religious Education:

Outstanding

Collective Worship:

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection:

Outstanding

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

This is an Outstanding Catholic school because:

- The dedicated headteacher and senior leaders lead Catholic Life with a deep sense of Christian love for the pupils and staff in their care. This is a happy school where pupils, staff and parents feel a valued part of the community.
- The behaviour of pupils is exemplary because they understand that they are called to serve each other as part of their vocation.
- The pupils have an excellent understanding of the school mission statement, 'By following in the footsteps of Jesus we are making the heart, mind and spirit soar.'
- This is a fully inclusive school where pupils of all faiths are fully integrated and respectful of each other.
- All pupils appreciate, value and actively engage in opportunities for prayer. They plan, deliver and evaluate Collective Worship, seeking to improve it further.
- Teachers are excellent role models for the pupils and have excellent Religious Education subject knowledge. All pupils are enthusiastic in Religious Education lessons, with a thirst to learn more about their faith. As a result, they make excellent progress, which results in outstanding outcomes.
- Governors are totally committed to the school and offer a high level of support and encouragement. They are well informed about the Catholic Life and Religious Education in school and regularly attend Collective Worship.

- The new parish priest is becoming fully integrated into the life of the school and is keen to be involved in planning and delivering initiatives with the school which will develop further links with the parish and extend the pupils' experiences of Catholic Life.

FULL REPORT

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Formalise and embed regular and structured written evaluations of Catholic Life and Collective Worship involving pupils, staff, governors and parents to enable good practice to be shared and inform future planning.
- Ensure that pupils have a better understanding of other faiths and cultures through a planned programme of teaching.
- Where teaching is not yet outstanding, find opportunities for teachers to observe good practice and embed this into their own teaching.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the Catholic Life of the school.	Outstanding
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.	Outstanding
The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.	Outstanding
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school.	Outstanding

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

- All pupils show a deep respect for themselves and others, as made in the image and likeness of God. The pupils come from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures and know that they are all highly valued. They recognise that school is part of the Body of Christ, where everyone is welcome. They show respect and consideration towards others every day in the classroom and on the playground.
- All pupils appreciate, value and engage in the Catholic Life and mission of the school. Pupils recognise that we all have a vocation and that God calls us to share our gifts in the service of others. They take full advantage of the opportunities provided for their support and development and, as a result, are happy and confident.
- The school mission statement is clearly displayed around the school environment. The school has a hymn based on their mission statement, which is sung with great enthusiasm by all the pupils. The mission is well known and understood by all pupils.
- Special awards are given out weekly to the pupils who live out the virtues promoted in the Catholic Schools' Pupil Profile (CSPP). As a result, pupils actively seek to live out the virtues. They can explain the meaning of many of them and understand that they show us how to live our lives in the way Jesus calls us to.
- Pupils actively lead and participate in the Catholic Life of the school. They are generous in their response and concerns for the needs of others. They regularly suggest causes to their headteacher that they want to support in the local and wider community. They have initiated and organised a collection of school uniforms for children in the Philippines, a donation of shoes to Africa, the filling of socks for the

homeless at Christmas, collections for a local foodbank and a jumper day to support the homeless in Stoke. The school also carries out charitable fundraising for traditional Catholic charities such as Fr Hudson's Homes and CAFOD. The school choir have sung carols at the local hospital.

- The staff are very caring and regularly support each other and parents through acts of kindness. For example, they helped a sick parent to see the Northern Lights and raised money for cancer charities in support of a sick colleague.
- The school has invested in the environment so that it clearly reflects a richness of Catholic Life and worship. Displays are fresh and well presented. The colours of the liturgical year are well used and reflect the themes of the Church's year. During the inspection, displays celebrated SS Peter and Paul, The Sacred Heart and St Thomas the Apostle.
- The Year 6 Prayer and Liturgy Support Group (PALS) make valuable contributions to the Catholic Life of the school through their regular and efficient monitoring of prayer areas and displays. They report any issues which need addressing to the Religious Education subject leader and carry out further visits to ensure improvements have taken place. They also support the practical arrangements for Catholic Worship and plan and present worship themselves.
- Prayer is at the centre of school life and starts every staff, pupil, governor and parent meeting. The pupils have a good knowledge of the required prayers for each year group and can recognise how they relate to the liturgical year. All classrooms have a class prayer book where pupils record their own prayers for use in Collective Worship. However, these are not used consistently well in all classrooms. Pupils are also encouraged to write their own prayers in their books. The school has an impressive display of prayers written by pupils following the PALS saints Collective Worship programme.
- Strategies to improve pupils' knowledge of traditional prayers have been successful. A prayer of the month, such as The Angelus, The Magnificat and The Creed, is displayed in classrooms and used daily. As a result, pupils have a good knowledge of these prayers.
- The staff enthusiastically participate in Catholic Life training and times of prayer. They give support for many out of hours school and parish events. Several staff are active members of the parish who encourage pupils and their families to take part in church activities.
- A significant number of pupils, parents and staff attend the parish church regularly and contribute in many ways to parish life. Many pupils serve the parish as altars servers and choir members.
- Parishioners often attend events in school, where they are made welcome. Parishioners speak highly of the schools' involvement in the parish. Parish links are excellent and continue to develop.
- The new parish priest has recently joined the governing body and is keen to offer further opportunities to develop the Catholic Life experiences of the pupils. He wants pupils to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation more often and to experience a Corpus Christi procession and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. The parish priest attended the recent vocations week and was impressed with the questions he was asked by the pupils about his vocation. The pupils greatly benefitted from his involvement, which improved their understanding of vocation and the priesthood.
- Senior leaders and teachers are very aware of the needs of individuals and families in the school. They communicate well with parents who speak positively about the care they receive and the availability of staff. The school has good home-school liaison and uses the services of a Fr Hudson's counsellor who attends school once a week. Parents who spoke to the inspectors spoke positively about the school saying, "There is excellent communication between home and school", "Teachers are excellent at this

school and deal with any concerns in a quick and sympathetic way”, “I haven’t anything bad to say about this school,” “My child feels happy and well supported”.

- Sacramental preparation is carried out well in school. The new priest is keen to become more involved in future preparation and wants to encourage greater participation from parents. He intends to offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation to year groups after each school Mass. The previous parish priest felt, “The programme for First Confession and First Communion was taught with enthusiasm and commitment by the class teacher.”
- Provision for relationships and sex education is developed at an appropriate level for all pupils. It is consistent with the teachings of the Church following the ‘All That I Am’ programme of study. Staff are also attending appropriate diocesan training to further develop RSE.
- Pupils in Year 3 and Year 6 have recently had the opportunity to take part in a religious retreat at Alton Castle following recommendations and encouragement from governors.
- The pupils’ positive experience of Catholic education at St Thomas Aquinas, as well as the school’s support of pupil and parental commitment to an ongoing Catholic education, supports the vast majority of pupils to transfer to Catholic Secondary Education.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school.

- School leaders are deeply committed to the Church’s mission in education. They are enthused and inspired in the tasks they perform and feel greatly blessed that they can serve the school.
- The headteacher has a clear and focused understanding of her role as leader of Catholic Life. Her vision and enthusiasm inspire and invigorate the whole community. As a result, the pupils experience of Catholic Life is rich and meaningful. Staff and governors speak highly of her leadership.
- School leaders ensure all staff fully understand their role as teachers in a Catholic school. Appropriate Catholic Life performance management targets are set annually for all. Staff speak highly of the ongoing and generous support from the previous and current Religious Education subject leaders. Quality professional development is provided in school and through the MAC and diocese. As a result, teachers are enthused and inspired to support Catholic Life.
- The Catholic Life of the school is regularly monitored and evaluated by senior leaders and governors. Pupil interviews, held this year, show that pupils make an important contribution to the faith life of the school. They know how the Faith is shared with them and how it influences the way they care for each other and develop a love of God.
- Catholic Life is seen as a priority for governors and is discussed routinely at governor and MAC meetings. The Religious Education subject leader meets regularly with the link governor. The link governor is aware of all developments and able to contribute to improvement planning, providing both support and challenge to the school.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The quality of Religious Education.	Outstanding
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.	Outstanding
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.	Outstanding
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.	Outstanding

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.**The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.**

- Almost all pupils make very good progress in Religious Education at each key stage and many make outstanding progress. Different groups of pupils achieve well.
- Pupils attainment in Religious Education is outstanding and has been sustained over the last three years. Pupils' attainment and progress exceeds that of other core subjects.
- Baseline assessments show that most children enter the school with very little faith experience or knowledge. As many children have poor language skills, it is difficult to assess their understanding at this stage. However, once they are in school, their language skills quickly improve, enabling them to make sustained progress.
- Teachers are very confident because they have excellent Religious Education subject knowledge. They plan lessons well, with a clear understanding of pupils' individual learning needs and understanding.
- Good pace in lessons, ensures that pupils are constantly moving from one activity to another and never become distracted or waste time.
- Most teaching is outstanding and leads to pupils being highly motivated and able to sustain high levels of concentration. As a result, all pupils are inspired to learn and make excellent progress.
- Teachers questioning is well targeted and matched to the needs of the individual. Open ended questioning allows pupils to develop their skills to apply what they learn and leads to interesting and thoughtful discussion.
- All pupils clearly enjoy their learning in Religious Education. They speak with enthusiasm about their work and are very proud of their achievements. Their behaviour is almost always outstanding.
- Pupils confidently discuss their learning in Religious Education and demonstrate good knowledge of the values and virtues taught in school and how they relate to their everyday lives.
- Pupils regularly use Bibles and enjoy finding references and quotations. They have an excellent and appropriate knowledge of scripture and can recall many parables and miracles. They reflect on how these show God's love for us all and the love we must show for others.
- All pupils have excellent knowledge about their school patron saint and, since the introduction of the saints themed pupil-led Collective Worship, are well informed about many other saints and how their examples guide and support our faith.
- Pupils are less well informed about other faiths. They have some experience of the Jewish faith through their work on the Passover but knowledge about other faiths is minimal. The annual Roots Week enables pupils to see and meet people from other cultures, faiths and traditions but this is not followed up by developing a deeper awareness of other faiths.

- The pupils have an excellent understanding of vocation. The annual vocations week, where pupils experience visits from seminarians, the Sisters of Mercy, the Dominican Sisters, parish priest, deacon, governors and church members, has deepened their understanding of what vocation means. Pupils were particularly inspired by listening to the new parish priest talking about his own challenging faith journey.
- Pupils have many opportunities to engage in extended writing tasks, which allow them to reflect on how they are called to live out their faith in the world today. In Years 5 and 6, pupils are beginning to use a range of Biblical and other quotations to support arguments and make considered judgements.
- Teachers' lesson planning consistently includes key religious vocabulary and a rich variety of activities. Regular use of music, art and drama enhance the learning experience of all pupils. Inspectors saw Year 2 pupils independently and enthusiastically plan and present a drama about St Peter being released from prison. This helped them to empathise with each of the characters. In a Year 5 lesson, the teacher made effective use of a popular song to emphasise how God keeps his promises to us. In a Year 3 lesson, a subtle picture of a tree was used to reflect on the meaning of each phrase of the Our Father. The pupils explained that they saw the tree as a strong and growing symbol of the love God has for us with its roots firmly grounded in faith.
- All pupils value Religious Education and want to do well. This is reflected in the high standards of presentation in their books. Although teachers have high expectations of pupils, the challenge offered to higher ability pupils could be increased. More able pupils in Year 5 are regularly challenged, but this is not embedded across the school.
- There are some very good examples of pupils assessing their own and other pupils' work at the end of units of work. The teacher also assesses the work and show if they agree or disagree with the pupils' judgements. This helps pupils to know how to improve and progress.
- Different levels of challenge are offered to pupils in Religious Education and pupils are encouraged to aspire to next level of challenge.
- The higher-level challenges ask pupils to reflect on the impact of their learning and Catholic faith on their own and others' lives.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

- Leaders and governors ensure that Religious Education meets the requirements of the Bishop's Conference and that it has full parity with other core subjects in terms of finance, resources, staffing and professional development. Religious Education receives the recommended minimum 10% of taught curriculum time.
- All staff are trained and well supported in assessing pupils' learning and progress in Religious Education. This is particularly evident in the support given by the Religious Education subject leader to new teachers. They speak positively of the quality of her advice, rigour and support given in quality assuring end of unit assessments. The MAC Religious Education subject leaders also meet to monitor and moderate assessments.
- Standards of religious education are monitored and evaluated by the subject leader. They are reported to and discussed with the link governor and taken to full governors and MAC meetings by the headteacher for further scrutiny.
- Although Governors are well informed and knowledgeable about standards in Religious Education, they would benefit from recording their own monitoring and evaluation activities and comments more frequently. Governor challenge needs to be more evident in records of link governor and full governor meetings.
- Support for new staff is very strong in all respects. Within a short period of time newer members of staff feel confident and inspired in delivering Religious Education lessons.

- The senior leadership team follow a comprehensive annual monitoring schedule for Religious Education. Book scrutinies identify areas of strength and areas for development, which are then reviewed at the next scrutiny to evaluate impact. Learning walks by senior leaders focus on the learning environment, teaching, pupils' behaviours for learning, the use of assessment and marking.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

The quality of Collective Worship.	Outstanding
How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.	Outstanding
The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school.	Good
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.	Outstanding

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship. The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school.

- All pupils show reverence and enthusiasm for Collective Worship. From the youngest to the eldest they are reverential and calm during all aspects of Collective Worship.
- They are keen to participate in the planning and delivery of worship and are highly supportive of each other. For example, the PALS have organised and delivered lunch time prayer opportunities on the Stations of the Cross and The Rosary.
- All staff have an excellent understanding of the liturgical year, seasons and feasts which is reflected in the range of themes delivered throughout the year.
- All pupils are knowledgeable about the liturgical year and recognise the liturgical colours they see at Mass and in their classrooms. They understand the significance of the different seasons of the Church's year and, for example, understand that Lent and Advent are times for deeper prayer and acts of charity.
- Pupils have the opportunity to reflect on what they have experienced during times of prayer and to consider how it helps them to live out their faith.
- The pupils have taken part in the Crowning of Mary during May and a Corpus Christi procession between the Church and school. This procession was initiated by the new parish priest.
- Pupils use a good range of scripture, religious artefacts and prayers to plan Collective Worship well.
- The enthusiastic and committed leadership shown by the Year 6 PALS is a strength of the school. This dedicated team have delivered Collective Worship throughout the year about the saints. As a result, all pupils know more about a range of saints and how they can bring us closer to Jesus. Many Year 5 pupils are keen to stand in elections to be the next years' PALS and are already preparing for this role.
- Mass is central to the Collective Worship of the school and is celebrated twice a month in school. The new parish priest is keen to increase the celebrations of Mass so that it takes place weekly. There are also plans for different classes to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation after Mass.
- Inspectors attended a whole school Mass led by Year 5 pupils. This was well prepared by the pupils who read confidently and clearly, served and wrote the bidding prayers. The pupils were very respectful and are at ease when joining in with the responses without prompting. The pupils responded very well to the questions asked by the

parish priest during the homily. The whole school joined in with great enthusiasm during the singing, especially with the hymn based on the school mission statement.

- During the Mass, younger pupils had to sit quietly for a long time at the distribution of Communion. Consideration could be given to singing some age appropriate hymns for them to join in with at this point and/or increasing the number of Eucharistic ministers.
- Pupils complete a Mass reflection sheet after each Mass, which helps them to consider what they have learned and the impact it could have on how they live their life. This is well embedded in key stage 2. Reflections were also made about the Holy Week liturgies delivered by pupils.
- The Mass celebrated during the inspection was well attended by parents and members of the parish, who speak highly of the pupils' behaviour and singing. They feel very welcome in school and appreciate the tea and biscuits, which are always provided for them at the end of Mass.
- Inspectors attended a meaningful and spiritual Year 1 Collective Worship on the theme of discipleship and the feeding of the five thousand. The pupils planned the worship to include a central focus with fishing nets and a candle. A bell sounded to mark the start of prayer. They listened attentively to each other read the gospel and their own prayers about the quality of a disciple. Everyone, including staff, took part.
- Pupils are very familiar and engaged with Collective Worship. They know and use structures for planning and participate fully in the activity, behaving well and showing reverence and respect for their faith and each other.
- The staff make very good use of the IT resources provided for daily class Collective Worship. These are developing pupils' understanding of how they are called to serve God.
- The large outdoor environment provides a lovely natural environment where pupils can pray. There is a peaceful prayer area, in memory of a past teacher and parishioner. Pupils can pray here quietly on their own or as part of class Collective Worship. Some further development of this area would focus the pupils in prayer more fully.
- The school now needs to ensure that classroom Collective Worship is given the same priority as Mass and assemblies. The use of the additional support and training given this year and the establishment of the new Religious Education subject leader should help the school meet its growing expectations for class worship.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

- All school leaders regularly lead Collective Worship in school. This provides models of good practice which support all staff.
- Leaders have an annual schedule to monitor the provision of Collective Worship. Evaluation of this monitoring has shown that clear progress has taken place, which has impacted spiritually on the pupils and staff. Leaders have an accurate view of where further development needs to be targeted.
- Governors are well informed about the quality of Catholic Worship in school. They have attended Mass and assemblies. They have been involved in learning walks and provide feedback at governors' meetings. As a result of recommendations from governors this year, retreats have been arranged at Alton Castle for Year 3 and Year 6.
- The link governor has provided written evidence of her monitoring and evaluation of whole school Mass, but this needs to be further developed and embedded. She meets at least twice a year with the Religious Education subject leader to monitor and evaluate the Catholic Life, Religious Education and Collective Worship. As a critical

friend, she asks challenging questions and suggests how further improvements can be made. She shares the findings from her visits at governors' meetings. The chair of the MAC has also observed Collective Worship in school.

- The school has been instrumental in establishing opportunities for shared Masses with the other MAC schools. A Year 4, Year 7 and sixth form Mass with representatives from all the MAC schools has successfully taken place.
- All staff have recently attended MAC training about Collective Worship, support in school about vocations, prayer and the history of Catholic Education and diocesan training about pupil-led worship.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Unique reference number	140805
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
<i>This inspection was carried out under canon 806 of Canon Law and under Section 48 of the 2005 Education Act.</i>	
Type of school	Primary
School category	Multi Academy Company
Age range	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	227
Appropriate authority	The board of directors
Chair	Mrs Teresa Stedall
Headteacher	Mrs Pat Bekalo
Telephone number	01782 234919
Website address	www.st-thomasaquinas.stoke.sch.uk
Email address	Office.sta@ctkcc.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	July 2014

INFORMATION ABOUT THIS SCHOOL

- St Thomas Aquinas is a one form entry Catholic Primary School serving the parish of Our Lady of the Angels and St Peter in Chains in Hartshill.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils is currently 69%
- The percentage of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average.
- The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average.
- The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic origins is 66.2%.
- The percentage of pupils with English as an additional language is above the national average.
- Attainment on entry is below average.
- Since the last inspection there have been several significant changes. A new headteacher was appointed in 2015. There have been two changes in the parish priest with the last being appointed in September 2018. Two changes in the Religious Education lead teachers with the current one being appointed in January 2019. The Chair of Governors also changed in July 2018.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION

- The inspection was carried out by two Diocesan Inspectors - Stephen Godber and Rebecca Nash.
- The focus of the inspection was on the impact, quality and leadership of the school's provision of Catholic Life, Religious Education and Collective Worship.
- The inspectors observed teaching across seven Religious Education lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Most of these lesson observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- The inspectors completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils to evaluate their understanding of Catholic Life, the impact of Religious Education teaching on their learning over time and their experience of Collective Worship.
- Meetings were held with the governors including the Catholic Life link governor and MAC representative, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the Religious Education subject leader, parish priest, parents and parishioners.
- The inspectors attended a whole school Mass, class Collective Worship and undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of learning and teaching in Religious Education, 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' attainment and progress, Analyse School Performance (ASP) data, the school development plan, the Religious Education action plan, teachers' planning, as well as Catholic Life, Religious Education and Collective Worship monitoring and evaluation evidence.