

INSPECTION REPORT

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**Inspection carried out Under Canon 806
and in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005**

Name of School: St Thomas More Catholic College, Town Lane, Denton, Manchester, M34 6AF

Inspection date: 13 June 2019

Reporting Inspectors Martin Reynolds, Leo Conley, Dennis Harrison

Type of school	Secondary
URN	106271
Age range of pupils	11-16 years
Number on roll	760
Appropriate authority	The Governing Board
Chair of Governors	Maureen Snee
Headteacher	Huw Brophy
Religious Education Subject Leader	Jane Bennett
Date of previous inspection	27 September 2013

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades
Overall effectiveness of the school	1	1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3=Requires Improvement 4 = Inadequate
The quality of Catholic Leadership	1	
The Catholic Life of the school (incorporating Welcome, Welfare and Witness)	1	
The quality of Religious Education (incorporating Word)	1	
The quality of Worship	1	
The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements		

CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

St Thomas More Catholic College is a mixed Roman Catholic High School in Denton with 760 pupils on roll. The school, which is oversubscribed, also houses a Local Authority ASD unit. 23% of pupils on roll fall into the Ever 6 FSM category. The school has an above average percentage of pupils requiring SEND support. Attainment on entry is variable with some year groups above the national average and others broadly in line with the national average. 4% of pupils have English as a second language. 92% of pupils are Roman Catholics and 40% of teaching staff are Roman Catholics. The Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher and an Assistant Headteacher are newly in post having been appointed in September 2018.

THE KEY STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL INCLUDE:

- **The exceptional quality of inclusive pastoral care, founded on a clear mission that is lived and loved, permeates the whole school.**
- **The opportunities for pupils to give witness to their faith through acts of charity and service are extensive.**
- **The outstanding quality of leadership and teaching in Religious Education is a strength of the school.**
- **The new headteacher, supported by governors, and a newly formed senior team, provides calm and exemplary leadership. They create a happy and harmonious community faithful to its mission.**

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL IS OUTSTANDING

St Thomas More Catholic College is an outstanding Catholic school. Its powerful mission is centred around what the school calls the 4 Cs: community, commitment, communication and communion. The mission is known by all in the community and is the driver for all the school does from governor decisions to everyday interactions. Under the excellent leadership of the headteacher and his senior team, the school has moved further forward since its previous Section 48 Inspection in 2013. A vibrant GIFT chaplaincy team and newly formed stewards group are making a significant contribution to the Catholic life of the school. Staff are motivated and passionate about their mission in the school and go above and beyond to ensure all pupils feel uniquely valued. There is a palpable joy in the school which has created a harmonious and purposeful catholic community. The head of Religious Education delivers outstanding leadership and presides over a Religious Education curriculum which produces exceptional standards. Pupils enjoy Religious Education and acquire high levels of knowledge and understanding. With highly developed SMSC permeating all areas of the curriculum, pupils are confident and articulate in describing the relevance of Religious Education to the modern world. The school's impressive charity fund raising activities exemplify its commitment to communicate 'the Gospel values of peace, love, truth and justice'. The GIFT team, under the dedicated leadership of the Liturgy Co-ordinator, are fostering strong parish and feeder-primary links. They play a significant role in bearing witness to the Church's evangelising mission and are poised to do even more in further developing the prayer life of the school.

THE QUALITY OF CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

The headteacher has provided a seamless transition from his predecessor and with a newly formed senior leadership team has created a happy school in which the mandate of the school's powerful mission statement is being lived out daily by all. The sense of shared endeavour from the buzz of a prayerful staff briefing to the tangible levels of mutual care and respect across the school, is outstanding. This creates a community more like a family in which staff and pupils unanimously voice a sense of belonging. Pupils are very proud of their school and can articulate confidently the source of the school's distinct nature being its Catholic ethos. Knowledgeable and committed governors guide the school well and ensure material resources prioritise the Catholic life of the school. The dedicated Religious Education subject leader leads a strong team of specialists who collectively promote and achieve high standards. All staff fully support the Catholic life of the school and intuitively signpost SMSC learning across the school which is exceptionally well-developed. School systems and policies reflect the core catholic and highly inclusive values of the school's mission. Pupil leadership is exceptionally effective and

inclusive. They thrive in their leadership roles, especially GIFT chaplains and Stewardship leaders, knowing their commitment and enthusiasm is valued and respected across the school.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL (incorporating Welcome, Welfare and Witness) IS OUTSTANDING

Pupils and staff have a clear sense of belonging to what is a true Catholic community where the spirit of welcome and mutual respect is tangible. Pupils say they feel safe and cared for and point out 'that staff go the extra mile for us' in a school which one pupil described as 'a very special place'. The school is an outstanding example of Catholic, inclusive education and all staff are clearly 'united heart and soul' in their mission to create 'a community which recognises the worth and dignity of all people.' The care for the most vulnerable pupils across school, including within the ASD Unit, ensures all pupils feel safe and happy in a spirit of gentleness and acceptance. Pupils were able to connect this ethos to Gospel values of compassion and forgiveness. Under the inspirational leadership of the Liturgy Co-ordinator, pupils have exciting opportunities to witness their faith as members of the GIFT team or newly formed Stewards. These two groups, attracting a large membership, are impacting on the Catholic life of the school. The GIFT team partnered with two feeder primary schools and the local parish to develop 'Scriptures in Pictures' – the creation of modern interpretations of Stations of the Cross which now decorate the school hall. There are extensive examples of these groups working together for the common good of school and wider community such as creating a prayer garden and hosting a successful senior citizen's Christmas party. The school's impressive fundraising activities for charity, particularly during Lent, galvanise the whole community and reveal total commitment to its evangelising mission to communicate 'the Gospel values of peace, love truth and justice'.

THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (incorporating Word) IS OUTSTANDING

Religious Education is clearly core of the core curriculum delivering 10% of curriculum time. Through the dedicated leadership of the Religious Education subject leader, teaching is consistently of a very high standard offering high challenge and low anxiety for all pupils. The strong foundations of Key Stage 3 produce learners with high levels of religious literacy and knowledge. Learning in Religious Education lessons is typified by high expectations, excellent relationships and appropriate praise. Strong teaching leads to excellent outcomes at GCSE with girls, in particular, making exceptional progress. Whilst boys' performance in GCSE Religious Education has lagged behind that of girls, there is compelling evidence in observed lessons and books of this gap closing. In a unit on Abortion, for example, there was clear evidence in boys' books of a sensitive and thoughtful handling of the issue through a consideration of different viewpoints informed by Catholic teaching. Scrutiny of pupils' books showed perseverance, pride in work and scholastic excellence. Pupils enjoy Religious Education, particularly the opportunity to debate 'Big Questions'. One pupil in a lesson on suffering and faith pointed out the importance of Religious Education in helping her understand other viewpoints in society. Across other subjects, SMSC education is well-developed. In a Year 10 science lesson on IVF, the teacher made clear links to the religious dimension of the ethical dilemma such that pupils were able to view the issue from multiple viewpoints including church teaching. In another science lesson on sustainable development, links to '*Laudato Si'*' were used to emphasise how we could all be better stewards. In a Year 8 PE lesson, the teacher used pupil pairings to model peer support in improving techniques. An atmosphere of mutual respect, fostered by the teacher, generated a sense of community typical of lessons across the school.

THE QUALITY OF WORSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

Through the excellent leadership of the Liturgy co-ordinator, provision for prayer and worship across school is extensive. A wide variety of materials covering different traditions and forms of prayer are made available to all staff to nurture pupils' spirituality. Staff were very positive about the support and training they received in building confidence in leading Form Prayer and assemblies. Whilst pupil involvement in the planning and leading of assemblies was not evident in the observed assembly, it was evident from the pupils and staff that it is the norm for them to plan, lead and evaluate such sessions. Assemblies and Form Prayer follow a published liturgical calendar which shadows the Church year. Pupils are very respectful during times of prayer and liturgy as witnessed in both the observed assembly and a Year 10 Form time act of collective worship based on the Feast of Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest. Staff begin each year with a liturgy and an INSET day centred on the school mission. Staff briefing, led by the Headteacher, began with an appropriate prayer setting the tone for the day ahead. The school is blessed with over 40 members of a GIFT chaplaincy team who regularly take a lead in planning and leading liturgies. They work with parishes and partner primary schools to develop ideas on prayer and reflection. They have the confidence and desire to take even more responsibility and to lead more independently. They also have the ability

to assist the pastoral team in monitoring the quality of form prayer and worship. School makes good use of its new prayer garden but would also benefit from a dedicated sacred space inside school for Form-based liturgies including the Eucharist.

AGREED AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- **To continue to close the gap between the performance of boys and girls in GCSE Religious Education outcomes so that more boys show exceptional progress.**
- **To entrust more independence in the GIFT Team so that they can exercise more leadership in the planning, delivery and monitoring of prayer and worship.**
- **With the support of Governors, prioritise funding to build a small chapel as a dedicated indoor sacred space for prayer, reflection and the celebration of the Eucharist.**