



St Thomas More Catholic Academy

Lynn Road, North Shields, Tyne and Wear, NE29 8LF

School Unique Reference Number: **137734**

Inspection dates:	11 – 12 December 2014
Lead inspector:	David Lewis
Team inspector:	Dan Murray

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Catholic Life:		Outstanding	1
Collective Worship:		Outstanding	1
Religious Education:		Outstanding	1

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Thomas More Catholic Academy is an outstanding Catholic school because:

- The Catholic Life of St Thomas More Catholic Academy is outstanding in the way it lives out its mission to the school and wider community, its commitment to the prayer and liturgical life of the school, the excellent links with the diocese and parish communities, and the remarkable commitment of the headteacher and governing body to Catholic education;
- Religious Education is outstanding because pupils and students make outstanding progress over time, the quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding, and leaders and managers have the vision and determination to maintain these outstanding outcomes in all key stages.
- Collective Worship is outstanding overall with a wide range of liturgies, the highest priority given to prayer and Collective Worship across the school, and the tireless commitment of the Religious Education team, including the chaplain, to ensure a deep understanding of the traditions of the Church;

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

- St Thomas More Roman Catholic Academy is an above average sized mixed school whose pupils come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. 73% of the pupils are Catholic.
- The governing body took the decision to convert to academy status in December 2011.
- The majority of pupils come from a white British background with below average numbers from ethnic groups and a minority of pupils with English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium is slightly below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion of pupils supported through school action plus or with a statement of special education needs is below average.
- Attainment on entry into the school is usually well above national average.
- St Thomas More Roman Catholic Academy is a member of the Hexham and Newcastle Catholic Partnership.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Improve Collective Worship by:
 - Developing the, undoubtedly, strong commitment to prayer and Collective Worship to provide more opportunities for pupils, students and staff to grow and reflect their enthusiasm for Collective Worship within the school, particularly in form time.
- Improve Religious Education by:
 - Increasing the curriculum time allocation for Religious Education to 10% in key stage three and key stage four;
 - Ensuring consistency in assessment, marking and feedback, where there is some outstanding practice, to raise standards further and maintain outstanding outcomes for all pupils and students, particularly in A Level Religious Studies;
 - Ensuring all pupils further develop evaluative skills, so that they always have the knowledge and understanding necessary to fully inform their evaluations.

CATHOLIC LIFE

THE QUALITY OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

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- 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.
- How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

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

- Pupils and students spoke articulately, movingly and profoundly about their part in the mission of the school and its Catholic ethos. When the inspector provocatively asked what pupils would do if Religious Education was removed from the curriculum with the additional time given to English and mathematics, they replied unanimously “We’d protest” - so strong is the extent to which pupils themselves identify with, contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.
- During the inspection, pupils and students were observed leading prayer, liturgies, music worship, and spoke volubly of their commitment to the less fortunate in the local area as well as around the globe: a great testament to the tangible support they continually maintain including substantial charity fund raising.
- Behaviour was never less than excellent in lessons and around the school, and pupils and students spoke with great insight about Christ as the model of justice and support for others both within and beyond their school community.
- The discussions when meeting pupils and students as part of the Pupil Voice were remarkable for their quiet yet unwavering and completely secure understanding of their spiritual growth and their profound understanding of the importance of supporting others in their spiritual and emotional growth.
- St Thomas More Catholic Academy is warm, welcoming and supportive of those who are not Catholic. This calm yet real sense of belonging pervaded every discussion with pupils, students and staff with very real examples of service to others. These include the post-16 charities committee, fund raising for the Samaritans, shoe box appeal, St Oswald’s Hospice, British Legion, breast cancer, Meningitis Trust, St Vincent de Paul (‘Mini Vinnie’), St Cuthbert’s Care, CAFOD, and fund raising for the partner Catholic school in Rwanda (Apedi).
- Links with the diocese and parish communities are well developed and St Thomas More Catholic Academy is regularly asked to lead diocesan events including Youth Village events and liturgies at headteacher and deputy headteacher conferences.

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

- Every student, teacher and support staff member has a clear understanding of the Catholic mission of the school. The headteacher is held in very high regard in leading by example the mission of the school, ably supported by the governing body, in its prayer, liturgy, compassion, service, care for every individual (pupil, student and staff), and constantly striving for excellence in every aspect of the life of the school. The school has a clear understanding of its role and contributes widely in the parish, diocesan, Catholic Partnership and wider communities.
- The staff are palpably energised and committed to St Thomas More Catholic Academy and its mission. Relationships at all levels are outstanding, great humour abounds, with a tangible sense of self challenge and motivation, and never a sense of complacency. This Academy is unapologetically a Catholic school with a strong sense of its mission. The school has worked hard to ensure the best possible learning environment despite some limitations of the accommodation.
- Pastoral care is of the highest order with a sense of the school modelling itself on Christ as the Good Shepherd looking after the poor and vulnerable as well as a determination to support the most able. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) and relationship and sex education (RSE) programmes are thoughtfully designed and celebrate Catholic teachings and principles.
- Every pupil, student, and member of staff (teaching and non-teaching) were extremely aware of the liturgical life of the school, and the inclusivity of the school's approach to every member of the community being intimately involved in the liturgical life of the school.
- Behaviour was never less than outstanding and reflected the evident and well-articulated care and compassion for every individual. A remarkable sense of peace and calm throughout the school was evident with well understood systems, sanctions and rewards to promote the highest standards of moral and ethical behaviour. For example, in a Pupil Voice discussion, one pupil stated that in order to forgive someone you needed to show compassion so that they learnt compassion themselves and how to forgive others, as Christ taught us. This response was evidently shared by the school community.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.

- The headteacher, ably supported by a very committed governing body, has a profound and clear commitment to Catholic education. Every person met during the inspection spoke effusively of the witness and personal example of the headteacher whose inspiration and unflinching Catholic leadership is a model for everyone in the school community. So committed is the school to the promotion and development of the Catholic mission and ethos of the school that the governing body committee responsible for standards is named as Catholic Ethos, Standards and Curriculum, thus ensuring the mission and ethos of the school really is the starting point for St Thomas More Catholic Academy.
- The school's self-evaluation is helpfully linked to developing the Catholic ethos of the school, explicitly linking the mission of the school to raising standards and supporting every individual to achieve their best. Improvements are rooted in the values of the gospel which pupils, students and staff spoke of with deep commitment during the inspection.
- The work of key partners within the school including learning mentors, school counsellor, pastoral clerks and learning support assistants is impressive which enables all pupils and

staff to experience a deep sense of belonging and support.

- The Academy works hard to engage with parents and carers and it is testament to the school that pupils spoke openly of the engagement with their parents and that a number of parents had deliberately moved house in order to access the Catholic education offered at St Thomas More Catholic Academy.
- Governors are passionate about the school, regularly visiting lessons unannounced - a strategy that is supported by the staff. They check for themselves that the mission of the school really is lived out each day, that standards of teaching and learning are of the standard judged by the school, and take their role as critical friend extremely seriously as their outward sign of a deep commitment to the Catholic mission and ethos of the school.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

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- How well pupils respond to and participate in the school’s Collective Worship.
- The quality of provision for Collective Worship.
- How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

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How well pupils respond to and participate in the school’s Collective Worship is outstanding.

- A variety of acts of Collective Worship were observed during the inspection, including a staff briefing which began with a prayer led by the headteacher, a sixth form Mass, Collective Worship during a number of form times at the start of the school day, a year nine assembly, a staff liturgy, and a year seven liturgy. The school also regularly leads acts of worship at diocesan and other events including the Lourdes pilgrimage. In discussions with pupils, students and staff, there was no doubt that prayer is central to the life of the school and that it does inspire them to reflect deeply and communicate with God. However, the response observed by inspectors in the school-based acts of worship, particularly in form time, were quiet and reflective rather than palpably enthusiastic. Therefore, the school should develop the undoubtedly strong commitment to prayer and Collective Worship to provide more opportunities for pupils, students and staff to grow and reflect their enthusiasm for Collective Worship within the school.
- Pupils and students regularly lead prayers and Collective Worship both within the school and at diocesan and other events. Prayer and liturgy are central to the life of this Catholic school. At the sixth form Mass, students read the readings and prayers, and led the music. An extensive range of prayers were observed together with the use of religious artefacts. The range of worship was entirely appropriate and well-judged for the differing age groups observed during the inspection. In discussion with pupils, students and staff, it was clear that the Church’s liturgical year is both well understood and forms the basis for the extensive programme of worship, liturgy and prayer at the school.
- There was a deep sense of reverence, care and compassion in discussions with pupils, students and staff. Many of the community spoke articulately and movingly of the impact Collective Worship has made to their lives, the example of Christ as a role model and the need to share their gifts and talents with those less fortunate than themselves.
- The experience of living in this worshipping community has had a profound and visible effect on the development of all pupils, students and staff. The contribution to moral and spiritual development of Collective Worship is outstanding.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship is outstanding.

- During the inspection, pupils, students and staff spoke of the centrality of prayer and Collective Worship in St Thomas More Catholic Academy. The evidence presented by the school clearly demonstrated that prayer and Collective Worship is given the highest priority both within the school and at diocesan and other events that the school is asked to lead,

including the diocesan conference for headteachers and deputy headteachers. Staff confirmed the importance of prayer at the school as an important personal experience for them all.

- Collective Worship is well organised and follows the liturgical season, is well understood by pupils, students, and staff and is welcomed as an integral part of school life. The themes reflect a very real understanding of the church's mission in education and the different liturgies and acts of worship were appropriate to each age group and designed specifically to meet the spiritual development and growth of each member of the school community. For example, a moving year seven liturgy on the parable of the talents included prayers, music, role play, readings and a sharing of individual pupil's successes in thanks to God. Collective Worship really was cherished by the school community in a rather quiet, understated yet profound manner.
- The chaplain is a key member of staff who is highly regarded and plays a leading role in the school, not only in prayer and liturgical events but also in the role of counsellor and listener. He is a part of the wider team who plan, lead and support the delivery of Collective Worship and ensure it is given the highest possible profile. The team are constantly striving to improve the experiences for the school community so that Collective Worship is both creative and inclusive.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship is outstanding.

- The Religious Education team, ably led by the head of Religious Education, have worked tirelessly to develop their expertise in planning and delivering Collective Worship. The team includes all members of the Religious Education teaching staff, the chaplain, and a number of senior leaders who collectively implement the vision of the headteacher and governors. Pupils and students clearly articulated their appreciation of the expertise of this collegial approach in ensuring a deep understanding of the traditions of the Church and its seasons, rites and symbols.
- Training in the delivery of Collective Worship is an integral part of the start of year INSET programme and is warmly welcomed and appreciated by staff.
- During the inspection, the headteacher led staff in prayer at the start of morning briefing and staff supported pupils and students in all aspects of Collective Worship – prayer, music, singing and quiet reflection.
- Whilst senior leaders and the Chaplain are high profile, they see their role in supporting the pupils and students and other staff in their spiritual development and growth by encouraging participation in the wide variety of Collective Worship. They lead when necessary, but, impressively, more pupil and student-led acts of Collective Worship were observed during the inspection than led by staff.
- The school is keen to continue to develop the quality of Collective Worship. Governors and parents regularly attend liturgical events and the school regularly seek the views of parents/carers, pupils, students and staff by various means including the use of questionnaires, in order to continually assess the impact of and future developments for Collective Worship.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

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How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is outstanding.

- Pupils of all ages demonstrate and articulate their enjoyment of Religious Education and they appreciate the varying styles used to help them learn, including group and paired work. They engage very well in class and have a wide range of learning opportunities offered to them. They present themselves as studious and highly motivated in all lessons. The depth of discussion and passion for Religious Education is tangible to the extent that during the inspection some pupils appeared disappointed when the lesson ended.
- Pupils are religiously literate and enjoy the numerous opportunities to share their views in a climate of mutual trust, respect and understanding. Behaviour for learning is exemplary.
- Progress in lessons observed was outstanding in the majority of lessons. Evidence presented from work scrutiny is indicative of good progress. A forensic and detailed analysis of progress using a variety of data including unvalidated 2014 RAISE and 2014 ADDR confirms overall outstanding progress in GCSE Religious Education.
- Advanced Level Religious Studies attracts very high numbers of students and attainment is high.
- Attainment in key stage four over time is well above both diocesan and national averages.

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is outstanding.

- The teaching of Religious Education at St Thomas More Roman Catholic Academy is highly effective in enthusing pupils and ensures that they make at least good and in a significant number of cases, outstanding progress. The teaching is invariably good and a significant proportion is outstanding most notably with less able pupils. An innovative year eight lesson for pupils with complex needs seen during the inspection was indicative of the high quality and effective differentiation on offer which contributes enormously to the pupils' enjoyment and achievement.
- Teachers have very high expectations of all pupils and demonstrate a zeal for, and devotion to, Religious Education. Their expertise, experience and evident team-spirit facilitate well-planned and highly effective lessons which enable pupils to be actively involved in their learning. As a result, pupils across the ability range make at least good and, in a significant number of cases, outstanding progress. The provision for the pupils with special educational needs and those who are disadvantaged is outstanding; a year eleven lesson seen during the inspection further demonstrated the commitment to high quality differentiation and effective teamwork between classroom teachers and learning support assistants.

- Teachers communicate effectively, especially in relation to the sharing of lesson objectives and success criteria linked to levels and grades, and in the best lessons the pace of learning is both rapid and sustained. What is most notable however is that, in these lessons, the pace was controlled by the pupils to considerable positive effect. The evident rapport with pupils further reflects the school's climate of mutual respect.
- Independent learning, challenging group work and high quality questioning contributes effectively to progress. Pupils demonstrated highly developed interpersonal and evaluative skills, however in some lessons pupils lacked the knowledge and understanding necessary to fully inform their evaluations.
- The quality and frequency of marking is variable. In the majority of cases, books are marked thoroughly and regularly, however the marking practice is not consistent. In the best examples feedback sheets and marking prompts such as www (what went well) and ebi (even better if) elicit excellent pupil response. In these cases the recent introduction of a purple pen response is effective. During the inspection, this was not, however, found to be consistent across the department. Therefore, the department should ensure the consistency of assessment, of which there is some outstanding practice, in order to raise standards even further and maintain consistently outstanding outcomes for all pupils and students.
- Teachers use praise well and pupil feedback indicated achievement is an important aspect of school life.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is outstanding.

- The leadership of the Religious Education department is strong and the head of department has a vision of the direction needed in order to maintain outstanding outcomes and he is ably supported by his senior leadership team link who offers insight and experience whilst also securing accountability.
- Schemes of work are detailed and clearly laid out in order to ensure a clear direction for all teachers in the department. Regularly reviewed, shared resources are helping to ensure on-going improvement in terms of teaching styles and pupil outcomes.
- This high-profile department has a considerable impact upon the spiritual and moral development of the pupils and is highly respected in the school community. The department's contribution to Collective Worship and the Catholic Life of the school is notable. The positive learning environment evinces high quality displays which catalogue the numerous additional opportunities offered to the pupils including pilgrimage to Rome and Lourdes, and retreats to Ampleforth Abbey amongst others.
- The Religious Education department plays a pivotal role in the spiritual, moral and cultural education of the pupils.
- The Governors, headteacher and senior leadership team provide excellent support and direction to the Religious Education department. Self-evaluation processes provide a detailed picture of past performance and areas for improvement, however a clear link between self-evaluation and development planning is not documented in a readily accessible manner.
- The Religious Education curriculum across all key stages is well-designed to match the range of pupil needs. The GCSE units are well-chosen and deemed appropriate to the school community. Religious Education does not currently meet the 10% time allocation required by the Bishops' Conference. This remains unaddressed since the last inspection.
- A highly commended and well-designed general RE programme is well received by sixth from students in both years 12 and 13, who appreciate its topicality and relevance.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

HOW EFFECTIVE THE SCHOOL IS IN PROVIDING CATHOLIC EDUCATION:

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CATHOLIC LIFE:

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

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

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

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COLLECTIVE WORSHIP:

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How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship.

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The quality of provision for Collective Worship.

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

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

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How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

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The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education.

1

How well leaders and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education

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SCHOOL DETAILS

School name	St Thomas More Catholic Academy
Unique reference number	137734
Local authority	North Tyneside
This Inspection Report is produced for the Rt. Reverend Séamus Cunningham the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle Diocese, (c.f. Code Canon Law, 804, 806), and for the Governing Body of the school (Education Act 2005, Section 48). The inspection schedule follows criteria set by the National Board of Advisers and Inspectors.	
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