



St Thomas More Catholic School, Blaydon

Croftdale Road, Blaydon, Tyne & Wear, NE21 4BQ

School Unique Reference Number: **137851**

Inspection dates:	27 – 28 February 2014
Lead inspector:	Barry Parkin
Team inspector:	Philippa Ronan

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

- The overall effectiveness of the school is outstanding. Strong, purposeful leadership ensures that the mission of the school is lived out in all aspects of school life. The Catholic Life of the school is given prominence and this ensures that students enjoy and achieve in an atmosphere of mutual trust, supported through prayer and worship.
- The Catholic Life of the school is outstanding. Students recognise the distinctiveness of the school and feel respected and involved in their community. The school's mission statement is visible and lived out in the actions of the community. Students articulate gospel values and the ongoing training of staff to enrich the Catholic Life of the school is recognised. The leadership and governance of the school regularly monitor the Catholic Life of the school in order to ensure future progress.

- Collective Worship is outstanding. Prayer and worship are central to the life of the school. Students are regularly involved in prayer and worship and respond positively. Senior leadership involvement in Collective Worship is strong and resources are of a high quality. Liturgies and Masses are prepared to a high standard and are stimulating. Careful monitoring is undertaken and training is made available to staff in order to continually enhance the provision and quality of Collective Worship.
- The quality of Religious Education is outstanding. Students enjoy Religious Education and achieve very well in all key stages. Teaching is carefully monitored and is never less than good and often outstanding. Outstanding leadership ensures an appropriate curriculum is in place. Robust tracking systems bring about swift action to tackle any underperformance, thus ensuring high standards of learning and progress. Assessment is rigorous and frequent and marking is a real strength of the department.

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Thomas More Catholic School is a larger than average Catholic secondary school with a large sixth form. It is situated in Blaydon and recruits its pupils from twelve parishes. The vast majority of pupils are white British. The proportion of students supported through school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The proportion of students eligible for pupil premium funding is also below average. Attainment on entry is above average. St Thomas More Catholic School converted to an academy in February 2012.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Further improve pupil outcomes in Religious Education by:
 - making differentiation a more explicit element of all teaching in order to ensure that all students access the materials provided by staff and are challenged in such a way as to further maximise their progress.
- Further improve teaching of Religious Education by:
 - spreading the outstanding teaching in relation to questioning and independent learning across the department.

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.

- Students speak passionately about the benefits of belonging to a distinctive, Catholic community and one which values them as unique individuals and which is designed to nurture them in their personal growth. They know what makes this a Catholic school and feel very privileged to belong to what they recognise as a different, caring, and deliberately inclusive community.
- Pupils have regular opportunities to be involved in shaping the future of their school through a very well-orchestrated school forum and they feel that their opinions are not just heard, but acted upon e.g. by nominating charities for fund raising and by asking for, and receiving improvements in school meals provision.
- Students value the shaping of their lives through the opportunities offered to them in terms of spiritual, moral and cultural awareness and genuinely articulate the benefits of this for their future life's journey.
- Students talk with pride and enthusiasm about the opportunities offered to them to be involved in a diverse range of high quality experiences that allow them to grow as young people. These experiences include a programme of retreats, well prepared liturgical celebrations and a wide range of fund raising opportunities that they themselves nominate and organise.
- Students value the high quality pastoral support offered to them. They appreciate the calm atmosphere that permeates both classrooms and corridors and believe that this demonstration of mutual respect and tolerance of individual difference allows them to both succeed academically and to grow spiritually.

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

- The headteacher speaks with confidence about the fact that the school is run on principles which allow this community to be open and honest about itself, and it is this openness and trust that allows for the risks and creativity that help to make this an outstanding school.
- The school's mission statement is in evidence throughout the building and symbols such as crucifixes and religious posters are displayed as a witness to the ethos of the school and to its core purpose.
- An effective house system supports the growth and development of students. High quality pastoral care is a positive feature of the school. All students interviewed were confident

that there was always someone to talk to if they needed help.

- Behaviour inside and outside the classroom is exemplary; consequently, the atmosphere created allows students to develop in a safe, and harmonious environment. Students articulate Gospel values which are embedded in the school, and value the second chance approach that characterises this school as a community of forgiveness.
- An induction programme for all staff ensures everyone is clear about expectations of them as members of a Catholic community. The school recognises the importance of training and have responded to requests to improve the overall quality of Collective Worship. Staff, students and governors talk warmly of a sense of belonging.
- The school leadership is generous in directing resources towards the enhancement of Catholic Life; these include a chapel, a chaplain, and an ethos coordinator. It is not surprising that both staff and pupils feel comfortable witnessing their faith to others.

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

- The school mission statement forms the bedrock of the principles that govern this school and the headteacher is fully aware, that for the vast majority of students, school is indeed for them, their only experience of the Church. As a result, a considerable amount of time and energy have gone into producing a very detailed monitoring and evaluation programme that ensures that the school will continue to grow and develop in its Catholic mission.
- The Annual Review document is used to identify the needs of the school and to ensure high quality provision. Indeed, it would be fair to say that no stone goes unturned in order to ensure the outstanding nature of provision. Views are sought from across the school community on a regular basis and the competent analysis of these views allows the headteacher, his staff and governors to set meaningful priorities for future growth and development.
- Governors are committed to their role, and, as a result, they play a key role in holding the school to account by asking questions about academic performance and about the ongoing development and progress of the school. They respond positively to reports presented to them on Catholic Life and evidence exists of them asking probing questions which demonstrates their understanding of the day to day business of the school and how best to assist in future progress.

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.

- Collective Worship in its varying forms is central to the daily life of the school. Students are used to participating on a regular basis in both formal and informal prayer; in reflection in form period, at the start of afternoon lessons; as well as in assemblies and in Masses and liturgies.
- Students participate willingly in prayer and show a deep respect for something which is at the heart of this community.
- They value the opportunity to lead, listen to, and participate in prayer and particularly like the opportunities to pray for those around them who may be in particular need. Students are involved in the writing and reading of the bidding prayer for weekly class Masses as well as being encouraged to celebrate their gifts as musicians and dancers for larger school group Masses held at key times during the school year. Reverent and whole hearted responses during a year seven class Mass demonstrate how comfortable students are in prayer and worship.
- Such inclusive experiences are designed in such a way as to ensure a rich, prayerful and memorable experience for all who attend.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship is outstanding.

- A considerable amount of time and energy has been devoted to the enhancement of Collective Worship by the school chaplain and school ethos coordinator.
- The well-furnished school chapel is at the heart of the school life and offers a quiet and calm sanctuary for any students who wish to take time to reflect or pray.
- A well designed programme of Collective Worship exists to guide staff. Weekly resources have been produced at the request of the staff in order to ensure prayer remains central to school life.
- School assemblies are well led by the headteacher and heads of house and include high quality visual stimuli designed to capture the minds of young people as they go about their daily life. Students particularly like the deliberate effort made to relate prayer to everyday experiences and to what is going on in the world and this helps to shape them.
- Masses are very well prepared by the chaplain and tutor and include the involvement of students. Senior students particularly play a key role in designing end of year and leavers' Masses which are also supported from Information and Communications Technology (ICT) staff that help to ensure a stimulating experience.

- Masses are supported by local clergy and these celebrations offer ready opportunities for the sharing of talents in music, dance, drama and reading.
- Local clergy, parents and governors comment frequently on the reverence and high standards of behaviour. Photographs illustrate the success of such events where students can be seen actively engaged and enjoying these prayerful community experiences.

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

- In this prayerful community, the headteacher and senior staff regularly lead, and are involved in significant parts of Collective Worship, including weekly assemblies such as that experienced by years 11, 12 and 13 during the inspection which included an appeal to continue assisting with a building project in India.
- In addition, leaders value the importance of reflection and, as a result, provide opportunities for both students and staff to take part in regular retreat programmes, thus ensuring a diversity of experience in relation to prayer and reflection.
- Collective Worship is recognised as being an integral part of school life and it is continually enhanced by the high quality training on offer. This is provided by members of the school community and by bringing into the school trainers who can further enhance and enrich the quality of provision.
- Collective Worship is now regularly monitored as part of the school's monitoring cycle and feedback from members of the school community continues to feed into the schools culture, ensuring a cycle of continuous improvement.

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.

- Students enjoy Religious Education as demonstrated by their tangible enthusiasm and interest in lessons. In most lessons students were eager to participate and were visibly enthused and engaged in their learning. Most students concentrate well and are rarely off task.
- Students are religiously literate and can articulate their ideas with clarity and precision using subject specific language. Even in the lowest ability classes students have the confidence to express their opinions. Students value Religious Education and consider it as a core subject.
- Progress in most lessons is sustained and is rapid in the very best lessons. Students make at least good progress over time in all key stages and levels of progress at key stage four were well above average in results achieved in 2013. High positive projections for both progress and attainment for the August 2014 results are supported by robust and reliable data.
- A level results demonstrate positive value added with students doing as well as, or better in Religious Education than in other A level subjects. From observation and work scrutiny pupils at each key stage make above average progress.
- Religious Education is a popular choice at key stage five both at AS and A level. Attainment for GCSE for August 2013 at both A*-C and A*-A were above national averages. A level performance for A*/A grades is high.

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

- Teaching of Religious Education is consistently good across all key stages, with outstanding lessons observed at every key stage. In the very best lessons students work collaboratively and purposefully, group and paired work is an embedded teaching style.
- In-depth planning is a strength of the department, catering for all learners and ensuring both enthusiasm and interest. In all outstanding lessons questioning and independent learning were a strength.
- Staff employ a range of teaching styles to motivate students.
- Differentiation was always evident in planning, but is occasionally too subtle and left as a choice for students and only had an impact on progress for some. Planning is linked with pupils' learning and assessment is central to the planning process, informing next steps in teaching.
- Homework is clearly an integral part of student learning and consolidates learning.

- Marking and feedback is an outstanding feature of the department.
- The overwhelming majority of students at all levels take pride in their work.
- Special educational needs students are well supported by support staff and in the provision of small classes. The amount of work that students produce is vast and high quality extended writing is a strength.
- Assessment is rigorous and feedback to students is frequent, purposeful and often challenging. Students are given time to respond to feedback and reflect on how to improve. All students are acutely aware of their current level and the progress they are making. The departmental 'flight plan' and generic strategies for peer and self-assessment are a great strength.

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

- The Religious Education department is well led and well-resourced and has equal prominence with other core subjects.
- The head of department, supported by her second, leads by example and provides both inspiration and support to staff and students alike.
- The senior management team, and specific Religious Education link, support the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching through regular joint observations. Record keeping is robust and evaluation thorough and of a high quality.
- The curriculum is designed to suit the needs of students: an increase in curriculum time at key stage three since the last inspection, and a further planned increase at key stage four supports this.
- The very best practice is embodied in the work ethic and classroom practice of the head of department.
- Exemplary behaviour is fostered through the establishment of excellent relationships between staff and students.
- Monitoring of student progress, and the desire for students to achieve their very best, is a feature of the school and department, and is equally monitored with diligence.
- The school's data tracking and intervention systems identify barriers to learning. The head of department is swift to intervene and provide support strategies for both students and staff.
- The department is involved in sacramental preparation, most notably confirmation.
- Effective evaluation by the head of department of curriculum provision and of teaching and learning ensures that student's individual needs are met and that they achieve in line with, or beyond their potential.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

HOW EFFECTIVE THE SCHOOL IS IN PROVIDING CATHOLIC EDUCATION:

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CATHOLIC LIFE:

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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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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 School, Blaydon
Unique reference number	137851
Local authority	Gateshead
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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Head teacher	Mr Jonathan Parkinson
Date of previous school inspection	March 2007
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