



Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection report for St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Belmont

URN: 148705

Carried out on behalf of the Most Rev Malcolm McMahon, Archbishop of Liverpool and Apostolic Administrator of the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle on:

Date: 28 June 2023

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The school is fully compliant with the curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference	✓
The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop	✓
The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection	Fully

Summary of key findings

What the school does well

- The school mission, 'Family, Aspiration, Love', is at the heart of the school community.
- Relationships throughout the school are based on the highest levels of pastoral care where everyone is welcomed into the school family.
- The school has invested heavily in the school environment providing quality resources for prayer and liturgy and creating a prayer garden for pupils to use.
- 'Family Friday liturgical prayer' provides the opportunity for parents and pupils to pray together in school.

- The relationship between the school and Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust and the support provided has stabilised the school community to allow it to provide a Catholic education to the families it serves.

What the school needs to improve:

- Leaders and governors to ensure that an effective cycle of monitoring and evaluation accurately identifies strengths and areas of development which results in strategic action and well targeted planning in RE.
- Staff model good practice to other staff and pupils as participants in and leaders of prayer and liturgy using a wide range of prayer styles.
- To include pupils in the evaluation of prayer and liturgy as part of the school cycle of self-evaluation.

Catholic life and mission

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

Catholic life and mission key judgement grade:.....

2

Pupil outcomes

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

2

Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

2



Pupils at St Thomas More have a good understanding of the Catholic mission of their school, 'Family, Aspiration, Love'. This mission is known, lived out, and witnessed throughout the school community. Pupils know that this distinctive Catholic nature makes their school special. They describe it as a place of friendliness and joy. They welcome new pupils with open arms into their school family. Pupils are proud of their school and of their religious backgrounds and beliefs. All community members embrace the mission. Pupils say that they love their school, and they feel safe. The pupils know that they are loved and well-cared for by the staff team. Staff know all pupils by their name. The school goes the extra mile to provide a joyful and welcoming community. This is evident in the quality of relationships. Pupils recall St Thomas More day, donating food to charity, and planting new trees in their forest school. However, they cannot yet articulate the theology or scripture that underpins their actions. One pupil described the school as 'a wonderful and joyful place'. The behaviour of all pupils throughout the school is exemplary with pupils displaying great care and respect for one another.

Staff are role models for pupils and bear witness to the school's Catholic life and mission. The school provides care and support for pupils, including those with additional needs. The environment effectively witnesses its identity, mission, and charism. Sacred spaces are visible in each classroom and the school has a prayer garden that is at the heart of the school building. Pupils and staff can access this space to spend some of their social times in quiet reflective prayer. School provides a high level of pastoral support, and this is a celebrated aspect of the life of school. The children talk about the role of the 'Heads Up Ambassadors' and how they help others to take care of their mental health. The 'Positive Futures' advisor is there to support any pupils that need additional support. Parents and carers are extremely positive about the school and are

very supportive of its work. One parent commented, 'St Thomas More is a great, welcoming family school which has supported both of my children to grow not only academically but spiritually and emotionally.' Another stated that their child is inquisitive about God and this curiosity comes from his learning in school. Parents value the opportunity to join the pupils and staff during 'Family Friday Liturgies' and these are well attended. Leaders confirm that pupils are provided with many enriching opportunities, ensuring that they live out their mission to serve others through charitable causes, for example raising money to buy a defibrillator and campaigning on the issue of river pollution.

Staff have accessed training to support the delivery of the relationships and health education curriculum. Effective use of the Ten:Ten materials are contributing towards a good moral and social education. The headteacher and governors are dedicated to ensuring that all pupils experience a Catholic education which helps them to be the best they can be. However, self-evaluation is not always robust. The headteacher is passionate with an infectious enthusiasm for Catholic education. Governors are supportive of the school; they want the school to be successful and attract new pupils. The governors have played a vital role in the success of the school and recognise the support of Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust in securing its future. Governors are frequent visitors to school, providing challenge and support for leaders. New staff complete an induction programme and professional development focuses on the Catholic life and mission of the school.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade:.....	2
Pupil outcomes How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education.....	2
Provision The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education.....	2
Leadership How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for religious education.....	2



Pupils are developing secure knowledge and understanding and the skills that reflect the learning required by the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory 2012*. They are developing the skills that enable them to reflect spiritually, think ethically and theologically, and are becoming more aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life. Pupils say they enjoy their lessons because they 'love to learn about God and Jesus'. They are enthusiastic and work well in lessons applying themselves to the tasks set and working in collaboration with peers. Pupils can remember what they have been previously taught. Children in Early Years Foundation Stage are inquisitive and ask questions that demonstrate their curiosity. Pupils across all age groups demonstrate excellent behaviour for learning. Most pupils across the school make good progress with no significant variation between groups of learners. All lessons revisit prior learning to help the pupils secure new knowledge. Challenge slips provide planned questions that structure tasks for pupils. However, this can sometimes hinder learning for some pupils. Pupils contribute to the lessons through discussion and group tasks, with some pupils being able to express what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils talk respectfully about other world faiths that they have learned about in their religious education lessons. Attainment in religious education is in line with core subjects, with most pupils meeting age-related expectations by the end of each key stage.

Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and recently benefited from training to ensure teaching is of good quality. Within lessons, most teachers offer a range of teaching styles to motivate and encourage pupils' enjoyment of, and enthusiasm for, religious education. Links are increasingly being made between religious education and other areas of the curriculum. Catholic Social Teaching is being delivered through Education for Global Responsibility lessons in key stage 1 and 2. Lessons are usually planned around pupils' prior knowledge. However, because all tasks are scaffolded heavily, pupils do not often have the opportunity to write at length and

demonstrate a deep understanding. Teachers mark work in line with the school's marking policy. However, pupil self-assessment is not always completed consistently. The school is beginning to monitor pupils' progress and achievement, but this is not yet used to support teaching and learning.

Leaders and governors ensure that religious education programmes, resources, and timetabling fully meet the requirements of the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory 2012*. The head teacher is the current religious education leader, and he is extremely enthusiastic about this role. Leaders are well-informed of current developments in religious education. A new religious education leader has been appointed to join the staff team next academic year. This will create further leadership capacity within the small staff team. Monitoring is carried out at the start of the academic year. However, it is not yet fully developed and evaluated to contribute to impact, strategic action planning, and a clear vision for teaching and learning. All staff, particularly the most recently appointed, benefit from excellent support, both for their own spirituality and to secure their subject knowledge. This results in good outcomes for pupils which have parity with other core subjects. Leaders' self-evaluation of religious education is informed by monitoring and limited self-challenge. The head teacher and governors understand the school strengths and areas for further development. They ensure that staff access quality training from the diocese and trust to secure further improvements. The governors are very involved and are thorough in their challenge and evaluation of the school. They are highly ambitious and relentlessly strive for the very best outcomes possible.

Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school.

Collective worship key judgement grade:.....	2
Pupil outcomes How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship	2
Provision The quality of collective worship provided by the school	2
Leadership How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship	2

St Thomas More school is a calm and welcoming school and this is reflected in the pupils' excellent behaviour and consideration shown during prayer times. Pupils demonstrate interest and engagement in prayer and liturgy in response to age-appropriate stimuli; their singing and participation is both thoughtful and reflective. Pupils demonstrate confidence in praying in creative ways, including meditation and joyful singing. They are developing a good knowledge and understanding of the liturgical cycle. Pupils talk about learning from prayer and liturgy and finding out about ways they can follow Jesus. They understand that prayer is their opportunity to talk to God and to learn how to follow the life of Jesus. One pupil commented, 'Weekly missions help us to be better people, living out what Jesus wants us to do'. A recent focus on prayer and liturgy has developed pupil's capacity to plan and lead prayer in their class. Their developing knowledge, understanding and confidence in leading worship demonstrates that they can make links between Gospel messages and daily life. However, pupils are not yet evaluating their experiences of prayer.

Prayer and liturgy are central to the life of the school and make a good contribution to the moral and spiritual needs of the pupils. Praying together is part of the daily experience for all pupils and staff, which has a positive impact on the school's sense of community. The whole school community talks enthusiastically about 'Family Friday liturgical prayer'. During this time, pupils enjoy finding out what pupils in other classes have been learning about and these are well-attended by parents. There is a policy for prayer and liturgy which is planned and resourced to reflect the liturgical year. The small staff team work collaboratively to ensure that pupils are developing their skills, appropriate to their developmental age, in understanding, participating and preparing liturgies and celebrations in school and church. The use of chosen music and visual images around the school help to provide engaging acts of worship across the whole school. Staff are developing their skills in this area so that all can model good practice to pupils. Scripture

passages are central to prayer and liturgy and are chosen to reflect the liturgical season. Sacred focal points are evident in all classrooms providing further encouragement for independent reflection and prayer. Masses take place in school throughout the school year as the school welcomes the parish priest to celebrate Mass with the school family each term.

One parent commented on the great sense of community spirit at St Thomas More, whilst another parent said, 'It is a special place and it is a family'. Parents are very supportive towards the school, and they value highly the contribution it makes to the spiritual formation of their children. Leaders display a secure understanding of different ways to pray, which is relevant to the school community and is reflected in the good quality planning of worship. They are models of good practice for staff and pupils in planning and providing quality acts of worship. All staff are provided with regular opportunities for professional development that includes liturgical formation. New staff are well-supported in the planning and leadership of prayer and liturgy and have accessed professional development from the diocese to help them in their role. As a result, staff understand the importance of prayer and liturgy. Leaders are developing an understanding of the strengths and areas for further development of prayer and liturgy within the school. However, this monitoring does not take account of pupil views and pupil evaluations of child led prayer and liturgy.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Thomas More Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	148705
Full postal address of the school	Thorndale Road, Belmont, Durham. DH1 2AQ
School phone number	0191 3864761
Name of head teacher or principal	Tom Hunt
Chair of governing board	Chris Tate
School Website	https://www.stthomasmorebelmont.durham.sch.uk/
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy
Age-range of pupils	3 to 11
Trustees	The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	November 2015
Previous denominational inspection grade	2

The inspection team

Louise Nealings	Lead inspector
Lianne Peart	Team inspector

Key to grade judgements

Grade	England	Wales
1	Outstanding	Excellent
2	Good	Good
3	Requires improvement	Adequate and requires improvement
4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and in need of urgent improvement