



Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection report for St Mary and St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School, Blaydon

URN: 149052

Carried out on behalf of Canon Peter Leighton V.G., Diocesan Administrator of Hexham and Newcastle on:

Date: 01-02 March 2023

Overall effectiveness	
The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school.....	1
Catholic life and mission (p.3)	
How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.....	1
Religious education (p.5)	
The quality of curriculum religious education.....	1
Collective worship (p.7)	
The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school.....	1
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 commitment of pupils to the school's mission, 'Together we strive for excellence, inspired by the joy of the Gospel', and their pride in belonging to this school is a strength; their behaviour is exemplary and the respect and care shown for all is an outstanding aspect of the school.
- The quality of relationships at all levels is outstanding and contributes to this being a happy and harmonious school where Gospel values are unashamedly at the centre of school life.
- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders show clear ambition for the school to be exceptional and are relentless in ensuring that all pupils flourish.

This Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection was carried out under canons 804 & 806 of the code of canon law. For maintained schools and academies in England it fulfils the statutory requirements of s.48 of the Education Act 2005. For maintained schools and academies in Wales it fulfils the statutory requirements of s.50 of the Education Act 2005.

- The school enjoys exceptionally strong links with the parish community and beyond; these enable pupils to bear witness to Gospel values beyond the school.
- The Catholic life and mission of the school underpins every interaction and initiative and the school improvement plan. Pupils benefit from the holistic Christ-centred approach.

What the school needs to improve:

- Further improve outcomes in religious education for all groups of pupils through the provision of consistently high-quality teaching
- Plan for subject leaders to enhance teaching and learning about Catholic Social Teaching by embedding principles and content across the wider curriculum

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:.....

1

Pupil outcomes

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

1

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

1

The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They have a deep-rooted respect for everyone in their community. Pupils treat everyone with care and dignity, and they value the uniqueness of everyone. As a result, pupils are very happy. They feel safe and confident in their relationships. They regularly take on leadership roles within prayer and school events, voicing their recommendations for opportunities they would like to see offered in their school. Older pupils confidently and enthusiastically lead the Wednesday Word each week and share assemblies with younger pupils. They are central to the shaping and formation of the Catholic mission of the school. Pupils have a deep understanding of Jesus' teaching, and they readily embrace opportunities to help others in the local community and global community. In a Mini-Vinnies meeting, children were keen to support the local foodbank during Lent by donating Easter eggs so that all people could celebrate Easter. Children are deeply aware of the service they can give to their local community through Mini-Vinnies and Faith in Action groups. They support the local foodbank and care home and lead the local community in the annual Remembrance service. They donated to the Ukraine appeal which has led to the ongoing support for the appeal by families. As a result, children are highly motivated to work for the common good and to help those in need.

All staff are fully committed to the mission of the school. They embrace the Gospel values readily throughout school life. Staff are exemplary in their relationships. The love and care they show for pupils and their provision of the highest levels of pastoral care, is widely appreciated by parents. Parents know that their children are safe and cared for. This care is demonstrated by the way in which every child is known and greeted each day. The school environment witnesses to the Church's liturgical year through religious displays, interactive indoor and outdoor focal points, the chapel and Gospel Garden, and classroom prayer areas. Relationships and sex education is

planned and taught in line with diocesan requirements and is rooted in the teachings of the Church. The school proudly celebrates and nurtures the whole child. One parent stated that the school 'help[s] children to be strong, spiritual people and are giving them the best start in life'. Christ is truly at the heart of this community.

All leaders, including governors, are highly ambitious for the school. They relentlessly strive for the best outcomes possible. They ensure that Gospel values are unashamedly the foundation of all aspects of school life. Governors are thorough in their challenge and evaluation of the school. They ensure that continuous improvement is ongoing and given the highest priority. New staff are fully supported in their induction and all training is tailored appropriately. All leaders are inspirational role models, creating a highly supportive culture, where the well-being of all staff and pupils is paramount, resulting in an ethos of mutual respect and growth. Leaders truly embrace and encourage parents in being the first educators of children. Parents speak of the school with enthusiasm and are strong in supporting the school's mission for their children. They attend weekly assemblies and liturgical prayer and they receive the weekly 'Focus'. The school has fostered strong links with the parish, regularly visiting church and inviting the parish into school. The parish priest visits the school daily. As a result, this is a flourishing and vibrant community where everyone feels welcomed, valued and truly lives out their mission.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade:.....

1

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education.....

1

Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education.....

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for religious education.....

1

Pupils demonstrate very good subject knowledge and understanding in religious education lessons. From variable starting points most pupils make good progress in each key stage with no significant variation between groups of learners. This leads to outstanding outcomes. Pupils are exceptionally well engaged by religious education lessons and are highly articulate about their previous learning and their current learning. Pupils have outstanding religious literacy which begins in Nursery and continues to develop strongly to Year 6. As a result, pupils are confident and knowledgeable and can explain how their learning in religious education helps them to be the best they can be. Most pupils produce written work of a high standard with excellent presentation and content. Pupils take pride in their work. They talk eloquently about their learning about other faiths.

Teachers and teaching assistants have very strong subject knowledge, well informed by ongoing training and support from the subject leader. There is a tangible commitment to the subject with ongoing support and reflection on the curriculum resulting from strong leadership. Staff have very high expectations of pupils across learning, progress, participation, and behaviour. Teachers make skilful use of questioning to respond to each pupil's level of understanding. Lessons are adapted to meet these unique needs and are fully inclusive of all. Teachers provide well-matched and timely feedback and pupils have opportunities to respond to this by improving their work. Where feedback is most effective, it enables pupils to move their learning on, to extend their knowledge or to be challenged further. School leaders effectively target actions to support newer staff to ensure that consistently high-quality teaching and learning is evidenced across all year groups. There is strong evidence that this support is enabling improvements in the consistency of delivery although this is not yet fully realised. Staff have an excellent understanding of pupils' prior learning and use the effective technique of the "Power of 3" to enable pupils to remember more of

what they have learnt. Teachers understand the centrality of religious education in the spiritual and moral development of pupils and this results in the high status they give to the subject. Links are increasingly being made between religious education and other areas of the curriculum. For example, pupils develop their knowledge of Catholic Social Teaching through learning about Fairtrade and Windrush in other subjects. The development of Catholic Social Teaching through the wider curriculum is an area that the school now needs to develop.

Leaders and governors ensure that religious education is at the heart of the curriculum. They ensure that the curriculum meets the requirements of the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory 2012* and that it is given at least as high a status as other core subjects in terms of funding and resourcing. Leaders are committed to providing training of the highest quality and are relentless in ensuring that all staff are supported to reach the high expectations for this subject. The support for new staff is exemplary. Leaders use a variety of approaches to monitor the effectiveness of the school's work and have a clear and thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development. They take highly effective action to secure improvements. Governors hold school leaders to account and provide very effective challenge to avoid complacency and ensure that outcomes and provision are of the highest quality.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade:.....

1

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

1

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship

1



Pupils experience a wide variety of prayer and liturgy opportunities. They particularly enjoy singing and do so with great enthusiasm. As pupils progress through the school they develop their capacity to lead prayer and liturgy and as a result, are exceptionally well-skilled in doing so. Pupils present well-planned liturgies with confidence in their class or with other groups. Pupils participate with enthusiasm, reverence and respect. Creative approaches to prayer include the use of drama, music, and video to respond to and tell Bible stories. Excellent use is made of the prayer garden and chapel spaces. Prayer spaces in classrooms and the wider school are cared for and treated with the greatest of respect. Pupils take great pride in celebrating prayer and liturgy at school or Mass in the parish church with the school community. Older pupils readily volunteer to give their own time to plan, lead, and share the Wednesday Word and the weekly SMSTA Radio Show which are broadcast to all classes and are a source of great joy and energetic singing across the whole school.

Prayer and liturgy are the heartbeat of this school community. The school has made exceptionally good use of the physical environment to provide spaces where pupils can gather for shared or quiet prayer or where they can pray spontaneously. One parent described the joy she experienced in hearing the children singing during an outdoor liturgy from her home. Staff are adept at leading prayer and liturgy and are exemplary role models for everyone in the school community. Skilfully-led staff prayer enables staff to connect with the Bible readings which are shared with pupils each week. Parents are regularly invited to school or to church to join their children in prayer and they are very positive about the school's work in nurturing faith. Displays around the school are vibrant and enable pupils to make connections with the themes of prayer and liturgy. All staff are knowledgeable and resourceful in planning creative

prayer for pupils. School leaders model excellent skills in leading prayer and liturgy, enabling teachers and support staff to develop their skills to the same high standards.

The school calendar is well-planned and reflects the cycle of the liturgical year, seasons and feasts. School leaders have a secure understanding of high-quality prayer and liturgy and they ensure that prayer and worship are relevant and have a clear purpose and message. Opportunities to celebrate the Eucharist feature regularly; these extend to involving the wider community. School leaders, governors and the parish priest demonstrate the strongest commitment to ensuring that the Mass is a regular and prominent aspect of school life. The formation of staff and leaders is given the highest of priorities and inspirational training enables provision to be of the highest quality. Excellent induction processes help to support new staff develop their skills and knowledge. This leads to staff being confident in leading prayer and liturgy themselves. The local governing committee is active in its commitment to the prayer life of the school. Governors frequently attend worship, thus enabling them to witness the high quality of provision. The views of pupils and parents are gathered regularly and these help the school to know how well it is doing. Formal and informal methods of monitoring the school's provision are used effectively to review and evaluate how successful the school is. The school effectively uses its budget to resource high-quality artefacts which support prayer and liturgy, and the entire school site is an attractive and well-maintained space that is conducive to prayer.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Mary and St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	149052
Full postal address of the school	Stella Lane Blaydon Tyne and Wear NE21 4NE
School phone number	0191 4143116
Name of head teacher or principal	Elaine White
Chair of governing board	Sarah Meikle
School Website	www.stmaryandstthomasaquinas.co.uk
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy
Age-range of pupils	3-11
Trustees	Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	24-25 September 2014
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

The inspection team

Michael Ewing
 Louise Maitland

Lead inspector
 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