

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



**INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL
CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

**THOMAS BECKET CATHOLIC
SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Becket Way, Kettering Road North,
Northampton, Northamptonshire, NN3 6HT
DfE School No: 928/4703
URN: 142747

Headteacher: Mr Mark McLaughlin

Local School Committee Chair: Mr Chris Atkin

Reporting Inspector: Mr Peter Ward

Associate Inspector: Mrs Laura Maw

Date of Inspection: 27 and 28 June 2019

Date of Report Issue: 18 July 2019

Last Inspection: October 2013

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and part of the
St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Academies Trust

Information about the school

Thomas Becket Catholic School is a coeducational 11-18 academy in the St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Academies Trust. Of the 683 pupils on roll, 135 are Catholic. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs supported through school action is above the national average at 16%. The number of statemented pupils supported by the school is about the national average. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds; however, 31% are from other ethnicities. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language, is above national average at 38.7%. The proportion of pupil premium pupils is 29.5% which is above the national average. The school's intake of disadvantaged pupils who are supported by the school is above the national average. There are 41 full time equivalent teachers of whom 9 are Catholic. Since becoming part of the St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Academies Trust in April 2016, the school has had some instability within its leadership team. Supported by St Joseph's Catholic High School, the school has restructured its leadership team and established a new headteacher. In February 2019, the school had an Ofsted Section 5 inspection, which recognised this has 'strengthened the [leadership of the] school,' the 'moral purpose' of senior leaders and identified the strength in the 'clear vision' for school's future and long-term success.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

Thomas Becket Catholic School is a good Catholic school. An energetic and committed headteacher and senior leaders are effectively re-establishing a strong Catholic ethos where 'Christ's Love is our Foundation' is rooted in a powerful routine of communal prayer and worship. The practice of prayer and worship, led by the headteacher and senior leaders and embraced by form tutors and pupils, has created a real community where teaching and learning can flourish and individuals realise their potential. Pastoral care for members of the school community is a strength of the school. Religious education contributes significantly to both the academic and personal development of pupils.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

Since the last inspection progress in the areas identified for improvement has been strong. Provision for Catholic life including prayer and worship has been considerably strengthened. This has had a significant positive impact on the Catholic identity, culture and ethos of the school. Prayer is a central feature of school life because the headteacher leads the school in prayer three times a day. Daily collective worship in tutor and year groups led by senior staff and tutors following the gospel theme resources for the week is regularly monitored and reviewed. Catholic life has been significantly enhanced in various ways including regular school liturgies and celebrations of Mass for groups of pupils.

Curriculum time has recently been increased to 10% in Year 7 and now meets the Bishops' Conference requirement throughout Key Stage 3. General religious education has been reintroduced into the sixth form and a well-planned programme is to be introduced from September 2019. Teaching and learning in religious education are stronger as a result of professional development and coaching of teachers.

The quality of the self-evaluation undertaken by the school is strong. The realistic appraisal of the current position regarding all aspects of the Catholic life of the school in The Self-Evaluation Form for RE [SEF RE] demonstrates that school leaders have a good understanding of the school and of areas that need to be improved. These are being addressed realistically in the school development plan.

The headteacher is totally committed to ensuring the school returns to being a leading Catholic school that serves the local Catholic and wider community and he has a clear vision to achieve it. To this end he is fully supported by the Local School Committee of the Trust and by an enthusiastic and committed leadership team, working together under the leadership of the executive headteacher and with significant support from St Joseph's Catholic High School Slough.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the school's Catholic character so that most pupils fully engage in its Catholic life including prayer and worship.
- Ensure that religious education fully conforms with the requirements of the Bishops' Conference as laid out in the Religious Education Curriculum Directory
- Increase the quality of teaching and learning in religious education so that much is outstanding so that pupils' attainment rises each year.

Catholic life

Grade 2

Pupils know and understand the new mission statement 'Christ's Love is our Foundation' having participated in the collaborative process by which it was developed. They increasingly feel part of the school community and show in many ways that they recognise that they are loved. Pupils who joined the school during the year told inspectors how they were welcomed and supported by established pupil members and also by the headteacher who personally meets each at the start and end of their first day. Pupils and parents told inspectors that the school felt like a family. 'We chose it because of its sense of community and love' wrote one family. Pupils are well mannered and display good behaviour, one pupil explaining to inspectors how they were always welcomed by fellow pupils on entering a classroom. Sixth formers are taking the lead and setting an example of service for the common good in a wide variety of ways. In school they have led collective worship in Year 9 while native speakers provide language support for those still mastering English. Besides leading collective worship in local Catholic primary schools, other initiatives include fundraising for a local hospice and supporting a local foodbank, which made a great impression on those involved. Pupils in other years are becoming increasingly involved, for example the new choir went carol singing at Christmas while others participated in the shoebox appeal. An increasing number of pupils apply to become members of the ethos group and take up other opportunities to serve the school community in a variety of capacities. These pupils manifestly benefit and grow as individuals as a result of the responsibilities and opportunities that these roles provide.

Pupils benefit from the high standard of pastoral care that seeks to support them when they experience significant pressures. For example, one student was able to achieve his goal of going on to university for which he was academically qualified because the school provided timely personal support. The recent well-judged initiative to consult the whole school community to develop a new mission statement led to a succinct statement that admirably encapsulates the school's contemporary mission. All parties fully subscribe to 'Christ's Love

is our Foundation;’ and staff are engaged in implementing the school’s pro-active application of the principle that pupils ‘know that they are loved’. Pupils appreciate their engagement in this development and display growing self-esteem. The school provides well-planned induction and professional development complemented by role-modelling by school leaders that contributes significantly to growing staff appreciation of the Catholic life of the school and of how to promote it. Staff are committed to its implementation across the curriculum, with core subjects English and science referencing it in their teaching. Senior leaders, with strong support of staff, have successfully fostered the development of an inclusive and prayerful community rooted in the school’s mission statement. Prayer and worship are central to school life. It provides the locus from which the cardinal virtues are shared and inspires the school community to recognise the dignity of the human person and to prompt service of neighbour within and beyond the school community. Leaders continue to develop the range of opportunities for service, building upon the significant example of sixth form students. The most appropriate focus for charitable giving is currently being reviewed.

The school boldly proclaims its Catholic identity and mission through its website and throughout the school environment. The chaplaincy provision is significant in supporting and promoting the Catholic life of the school as a whole and also seeks to accompany individuals on their own journey of faith and belief. There is a clear sense of community evident throughout in the quality of relationships between and amongst most pupils, teachers and support staff. The school is a supportive community. Pastoral care of pupils and staff is a strong feature of the school. A senior team meets daily to review pupil well-being and seeks to act promptly, in association with the pupil’s family where appropriate, to address needs. Staff are committed to supporting the personal development of pupils through a strong emphasis on rewards while retaining a clear structure of sanctions. Inspectors observed teachers in various contexts seeking to identify opportunities to reward pupils and were told that the new behaviour policy had significantly reduced the number of transgressions. Relations and Sex Education reflects Catholic teaching and principles. It is based on a proper understanding of personal relationships taught principally through national curriculum science and religious education lessons supplemented by personal, social and health education.

Leaders and governors are committed to the educational mission of the Church. They recognise the central importance of developing the Catholic life and character of the school in securing the future of the school. It is a key element of the school development plan with clear specific objectives that are being realised. Governors are committed to the school’s mission, are involved in its evaluation and are alert to challenge as well as providing support where necessary. Staff confirmed that they are growing in their understanding of the Catholic educational mission of the school and its benefits for pupils as a result of well-judged staff induction and professional development. In consequence, staff engage increasingly in facilitating the Catholic life of the school, which is prominently led by the headteacher and senior leaders with the active support of governors. School leaders are constantly attentive to the Catholic life of the school and have effective monitoring and review procedures in place including staff and pupil surveys. Thus they are well informed and react promptly when needed while also undertaking careful evaluation with the support of governors in order to make more strategic changes. Pupils’ spiritual and moral development is one particular focus that regularly benefits from the voice of pupils on the ethos group who contribute their views in a structured way. The school has a full range of contemporary media channels through which it communicates with the parents and carers of pupils and with the wider community. It has

established a parents' focus group to explore areas of common concern. Support staff including a family support worker seek to engage with pupils' families as necessary in order to provide personal pastoral support.

Religious Education

Grade 2

School data shows that for some years pupils joined the school with prior attainment significantly below the national average but achieved broadly average outcomes or above in GCSE Religious Studies (RS). Thus most pupils from their varied starting points make good progress by Year 11. The data also shows that progress is increasing for each successive year group and that pupils are now making good progress from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 and within each year in Key Stage 3. School data reveals some variation in attainment and progress between pupils in different groups but the variations were diminishing. The school regularly welcomes in-year admissions, but pupils often arrive having not undertaken any religious education in their previous secondary school. Pupils who disclosed this to inspectors during lesson observations all stated that they 'had never studied religious education before'. They continued by saying that their teachers were supporting them well and that they felt that they were making progress. During religious education lessons pupils showed that they are becoming increasingly religiously literate and engaged young people. Pupils in a Year 9 lesson confidently explained the term reconciliation and explored the implications of 'Blessed are the merciful' while a sixth form student explained to an inspector the concept of Mary, the Mother of God in clear nuanced terms. Pupils generally participate in religious education lessons with a degree of enthusiasm. Most respond positively to challenging activities and strive to complete learning tasks. Behaviour for learning is good because lessons are calm and purposeful. Pupils told inspectors that generally they enjoyed the subject, one Year 8 student saying "I like RE if it is challenging. Sir is very good at explaining it". Pupils know their standard of work because it is recorded numerically on their exercise book together with a brief 'next steps' statement. The quality of pupils' current oral and written work is at least sound.

Teachers know their students well and plan and deliver lessons that are well designed to encourage and challenge them to advance their learning. Lessons generally follow a common structure that pupils find familiar and helpful as they progressively explore the topic of each lesson. Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and have a good appreciation of how pupils learn. They communicate high expectations to pupils, most of whom respond positively. Good quality resources are employed effectively along with a range of teaching strategies although the range of each in a lesson can be restricted. Teachers may direct pupils to undertake tasks individually, in pairs or larger groups. Tasks may be undifferentiated or differentiated with pupils either directed to or free to select an activity. When appropriate alternative tasks or structured support such as sentence-starters may be provided to selected pupils. Teachers often assess progress and provoke learning and engagement by well-chosen questioning during lessons. This serves to clarify pupils' knowledge and understanding and to prompt deeper reflection, often by thoughtful supplementary questioning. Teachers display patience, encouragement and sometimes persistence when doing this. In addition to questioning, pupils' progress in learning is regularly monitored in various ways including by red-amber-green cards and peer marking during lessons and various forms of plenary assessment at the end of the lesson. Teachers are attentive to the findings and adjust planned activities accordingly in order to consolidate confident learning. Assessment of written work is inconsistent across the department but often includes a brief statement of its strengths and weaknesses and an invitation for the pupils to respond to the written comments which some

pupils do. Throughout lessons teachers clearly follow the school's commitment to 'let the children know that they are loved'. Teachers display courtesy and seek to celebrate achievement and effort through the awarding of e-praise points which are valued by pupils.

Curriculum time currently meets the requirement of the Bishops' Conference that 10% be devoted to religious education after the recent increase in Year 7 following the return of the head of department from maternity leave. One weekly period of sixth form general religious education was re-introduced into the curriculum earlier this year so the whole school now meets the time requirement for religious education of the Bishops' Conference. The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been the subject of change and adjustment during the year. It has been adapted from the diocesan recognised People of God programme but does not currently include the full curriculum envisaged in the Religious Education Curriculum Directory (RECD). The GCSE RS course is the AQA Catholic specification with Judaism as the second religion and meets the requirements of the diocesan bishop. The newly introduced general religious education programme does not fulfil the requirements of the RECD but the plans for 2019/20 are based on schemes developed in the Diocese of Westminster which meet the requirements of the RECD. The on-going adjustments to the Key Stage 3 curriculum and the introduction of GCSE RS in Year 9 mean that it is not possible to confirm the coherence of the KS3-KS4 curriculum but the sixth form GCE AL RS course is an appropriate course to follow the GCSE RS course.

Leaders and governors are very mindful of their responsibilities with respect to religious education including those set out above. They ensure that religious education is broadly comparable to other core subjects in terms of professional development, resourcing, staffing and accommodation. Religious education was securely led and managed under the previous acting head of department and continues now under the joint leadership including the current substantive Head of Department (now part-time) and the previously Acting Head of Department. Regular learning walks ensure that teaching and learning are monitored so that appropriate support may be provided. Assessments of students' work is moderated and reported in line with school policy and rigorously reviewed by school leaders and governors. External moderation of assessments is provided by another diocesan school, St Joseph's Catholic School, Slough. Fortnightly line management meetings provide a clear and effective means of oversight and support of the department by school leaders and the link governor ensures that the governing body are well informed.

Collective Worship

Grade 2

Pupils take part in the regular prayer life of the school, though not necessarily with enthusiasm, because it is a pervasive feature of school life. In Years 7-9 in particular all pupils irrespective of faith or belief engage well in collective worship tutor time with all pupils writing prayers and personal reflections and also selecting and leading class prayer, for which all stand. Pupils are less engaged in other years apart from the sixth form where individuals assist the school chaplain in devising and leading collective worship in a lower year and in Trust primary schools. Pupils in Year 8 confirmed to inspectors that they appreciate and enjoy their weekly year gathering which included prayer and worship with a confident and insightful presentation in harmony with the weekly theme based on the gospel for Corpus Christi. Local clergy who celebrate Mass and special liturgies for the school and the Trust are complimentary about pupil behaviour.

Working with the school chaplain, ethos team members in Years 7-9 and 12 from all faiths and beliefs play a significant role in promoting prayer and worship. In addition to supporting tutor groups with resources and displays, they are a presence in the school chapel every lunchtime and regularly lead voluntary prayer and worship including lectio divina and the rosary. They also select appropriate music and lead prayer at special liturgies. A recent student survey revealed 72% either agree or strongly agree that staff and students participate in prayer and worship with respect while overall 54% are enthusiastic about collective worship but this rises to 71.2% of Year 7 students. Prayer and worship are at the heart of the life of the school community. The headteacher leads the whole school in prayer three times each day when it assembles for lessons, sometimes deputing another senior member of staff or a pupil. The school chaplain helps animate prayer and worship throughout the school in a variety of thoughtful ways. In addition to producing weekly gospel reflection resources that support and tutor collective worship, her role includes guiding teachers in leading prayer and worship, developing mutual links with local clergy that facilitate liturgical and sacramental celebrations and empowering pupil engagement in the spiritual life of the school through the growth of an ethos team. The year is marked by school celebrations that invite pupils and their parents to participate in and gain a deeper understanding of the Church's liturgical cycle of seasons and feasts. These include Trust-wide events along with local Catholic primary schools in the cathedral, to which parents and parishioners are invited, in Advent and Lent. Pupils and parents spoke highly of such liturgies. The 5 year group Ash Wednesday liturgies were led by a local parish priest with the theme 'change to be a better person' (with the option of receiving a blessing rather than ashes). They reflect the school's commitment to inclusive celebrations and were reported in complimentary terms to inspectors. Mass is celebrated regularly by local clergy. It is celebrated in each Year 7-9 tutor group in the school chapel which is co-located with the chaplaincy office and situated adjacent to the religious education classrooms.

Leaders and governors are committed to the centrality of prayer and worship that both recognises the school's Catholic character and also respects the faith and belief of the school community. The liturgical year and school celebrations are key to the school calendar which includes the weekly gospel themes, which are linked each half-term to one of the school's specific values. Each week the gospel theme is explored by the headteacher, developed by senior leaders in year group worship and pursued and reflected upon in tutor time by tutors. These tutors are working with their pupils in an increasing range of styles of presentation, including video, displays and music, to engage all pupils. Celebrations are thoughtfully planned and led by the headteacher, school leaders and chaplain so that they include a range of modes of prayer and worship that increasingly engage the school community. Local clergy are working with school leaders and chaplain to determine how best to celebrate Mass in school, year and tutor groups to the benefit of all who attend. Whole school celebrations of Mass will be a regular feature from 2019/20 academic year. Staff induction and training includes support and advice in leading prayer and worship which is also modelled by the headteacher when he leads prayer and worship for the whole school, for year groups and at staff briefings. Leaders and governors regularly monitor and review all forms of prayer and worship in order to ensure that it contributes positively to the renewed Catholic ethos of the school. The recent survey of pupil opinion demonstrates the progress that has been made and indicates areas for future development.

The inspectors would like to thank the headteacher, staff, students and governors for the warm welcome and their ready cooperation during the inspection.