

INSPECTION REPORT St Thomas More RC College

Inspection date 27th September 2013

Reporting Inspector Sister Judith Russi
Mr Stephen Jones

Inspection carried out in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School	Catholic College
URN	106271
Age range of pupils	11-16 years
Number on roll	773
Appropriate authority	The Governing Body
Chair of Governors	Peter McDonald
Head teacher	Miss Janet M. Burns
Date of previous inspection	January 2008

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades 1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3 = Requires Improvement
Overall effectiveness of the school	1	
The quality of Catholic Leadership	1	
The quality of the Word of God community	1	
The quality of the Welcome community	1	
The quality of Welfare	1	
The quality of Worship	1	
The quality of Witness	1	
The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements		

CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

St Thomas More RC College welcomes students from many parishes across Manchester. The main feeder parishes are St John Fisher, Haughton Green, St Mary's Denton, St Anne's Audenshaw, Holy Family Denton, and St Paul's Guide Bridge. 48% of staff are Catholic and 86.5% of pupils are baptised Catholics. The college is a smaller than the average-sized secondary school. Since the last full inspection, the senior leadership team has been strengthened by the appointment of three assistant head teachers.

The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium is similar to the national average (176). Students are predominantly of White British heritage. 63 students are from minority ethnic backgrounds including 11 students who are new to learning English. 32 students have Statements which is significantly above the national average. The college is a provider of local authority support for students affected by autism and enables students needing a wider range of courses to attend alternative provision for part of their education at Tameside College. The college meets the current government floor standards.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL IS OUTSTANDING

St Thomas More RC College is an outstanding school with many excellent features offering the students a rich faith experience which permeates all aspects of school life. The cohesive team of governors and staff have dedicated themselves to the building up of a Catholic learning community which sees as its primary mission the inclusion of all students giving priority to those with special needs and challenges. In this deliberate decision to welcome those who need the very best care and support they have become a source of inspiration for the whole community. The impact of the school's commitment to excellence throughout has raised standards to an exceptionally high level. The students receive a Catholic education which demonstrates Gospel values across the whole school.

The unique inclusion policy challenges students every day to understand their place in the world as future stewards who can influence, change and contribute to the common good for all people. The school has many national and international awards including the Leading Edge Award, Designated High Performing Specialist College and one of only five schools nationally to be awarded the Investing in the Community Engagement Award.

KEY STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL INCLUDE:

- The leadership and vision of the school at all levels is excellent.
- The Catholic life, relationships, behaviour and care for those in the greatest need is inspirational.
- The quality of Catholic education is outstanding.

THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

St Thomas More is a joyful learning community. The governors, Head teacher and leadership team lead the school with a clear vision and sense of purpose recognising the dignity and value of every member of the community. The school's priority for the growing numbers of pupils and their families in the greatest need, its inclusivity, passion for learning and emphasis on personal development, ensures that all pupils receive an integrated Gospel based formation and education in a learning community which, *recognises the worth and dignity of all people..... committed to developing fully the talents of all its members, in Communication of the Gospel values of peace, love, truth and justice; in Communion with Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

The governors and leadership team are not afraid to take risks and think differently in order to best serve the many complex needs of the pupils. Their commitment to ongoing review and evaluation of their leadership ensures that they remain a highly effective team.

Pupil leadership has been developed in a wide variety of ways both in focus areas as well as whole school. The School Council meet regularly and more recently through the training and establishment of the very active Pupil Chaplaincy Team the impact of the students on the decision making process of the school is significant. Pupils were found to be confident and enthusiastic about taking on responsibility. The leadership of the school has a secure overview of the strengths and areas for development due to the robust and highly effective strategy for self- evaluation, development and succession planning. The wide ranging and numerous tributes and awards which the college has received are all testimony to the outstanding leadership.

THE QUALITY OF WORD IS OUTSTANDING

Using the RECDT as a basis the school has developed the RE scheme of work to ensure maximum access for all pupils using a high level of creativity, increased religious literacy skills and critical thinking skills. Teaching and learning was found to be at least good and in the majority of lessons outstanding. Learning across both Key Stages moved forward quickly, was creatively differentiated and pupils clearly achieved the objectives. Standards in RE have improved since the last inspection. At KS3 there has been an improvement in level 5+ from 88% to 96%; level 6+ from 54% to 61%; level 7 from 4% to 11% 94% of Pupil Premium pupils achieved Level 5+. 90% of SEN pupils achieved Level 5+. 100% of G and T pupils achieved Level 6+.in 2013. At KS4 the performance of GCSE pupils has improved with those achieving grade C or above increasing from 65% to 75% in 2013, exceeding national averages. 23% of pupils achieved grades A*-A in 2012, increasing to 25% in 2013. The number of pupils attaining A* or A grades was higher than in any other core subject.

The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education was found to be excellent. Lessons demonstrating SMSC were observed in PE, Science, Citizenship and Art. Teachers demonstrated a highly developed understanding of the building blocks of spiritual and moral education and were able to make challenging interventions through higher order questioning and thinking. Students were able to make the links and connections across other areas of the curriculum in a natural and mature manner.

Learning about and from other faiths is developed through the study of major world religions in both Key Stages. KS4 students develop their learning by exploring the religious viewpoints in Roman Catholic Christianity and the similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam. Visits to places of worship take place in Years 7, 8 and 9 (Jewish Museum, Mosque and Hindu Temple). The Religious Education budget is set according to the needs of the curriculum and the Catholic life of the school. All classes receive a minimum of 10% RE curriculum time.

THE QUALITY OF WELCOME IS OUTSTANDING

St Thomas More is a living, celebrating Catholic community in which staff; pupils, parents and parishes seek to build an effective educational partnership. The college is warmly supported by parents. It is a place where pupils feel secure and cared for and in which they receive and experience Catholic education at its best. The pastoral care of this college is inspirational where the Mission Statement is at the heart of this vibrant Catholic community. Pastoral structures are in place, that make this college an extremely caring and friendly environment and this is consistently enjoyed in all curriculum areas. The pupils are happy and feel safe and openly talk about all students being welcomed into their college.

A strong NQT and staff induction programme enables staff to integrate into college life, and this kind of welcome is extended to all pupils, where transition from primary school is outstanding. The support for pupils with specific disabilities, especially autism is excellent. Inclusion is a real strength in St Thomas More and provides clear evidence that everyone is made in the image and likeness of God, a gift to the community to be recognised and celebrated. All staff are prepared to go the extra mile and teaching assistants in particular, are a real strength in the college; as highlighted in the 2012 Ofsted report.

A dedicated support area is made available for those pupils who need the extra space and when necessary, specialised support and guidance. The open door policy for parents ensures that any concerns are quickly addressed. Transfer pupils who struggled to thrive in previous schools are welcomed and spoke warmly of their gratitude at being given a fresh start. The college clearly places Christ at the centre of all things and his message is visible in word and deed. Significantly, the pupils recognise that 'forgiveness' is at the heart of the college, where Gospel values are of paramount importance.

THE QUALITY OF WELFARE IS OUTSTANDING

The welfare and care of all at St Thomas More is an area of excellence witnessed through the many smiling faces. Staff and pupils are clearly happy and at home. Behaviour is outstanding: the number of racist incidents is very low (zero in 2012-13); there are no recorded homophobic incidents. All pupils subscribe to the anti bullying charter which is proving effective with only 1 recorded incident 2012-13. St Thomas More's commitment to inclusion extends to those with behavioural and emotional difficulties and this is reflected by the low rates of exclusion. The inclusive nature of St Thomas More is inspirational and is recognised locally as an example of best practice (Enhanced Inclusion Award). Evidence of the lengths to which the school will go to keep students on board was demonstrated by the pupils themselves who had been transferred from other schools who spoke of their gratitude to the school for '*Not giving up on me*', and '*Thanks for supporting me*'.

Particularly impressive was the attitude of mainstream pupils who showed a high level of empathy for those with special needs. Pupils with special needs including those on the autistic spectrum, benefit significantly from the inclusive nature of the College and attitudes of their peers. The achievements at GCSE level are testimony to the extraordinary progress of these pupils. SRE and PSHE are delivered within the beliefs and values of Catholic teaching and are reviewed annually. Pupils displayed a high level of knowledge, understanding and confidence in addressing moral issues based on the Church's teaching. Safeguarding procedures are outstanding, well known and monitored closely.

Parents are involved in the process of evaluating St Thomas More College and commend the support and care that permeates the whole community. They recognise the Christ-centred ethos and the dignity of each unique person.

THE QUALITY OF WORSHIP IS OUTSTANDING

The life of St Thomas More is permeated by prayer. The Chaplaincy Team is having a significant impact across the prayer life of the whole College. Daily prayers, weekly reflections, retreats, days of recollection and whole school Masses celebrate the rich liturgical life of this Catholic community. The pupils are offered a variety of prayer experiences in and through which they can develop and deepen their understanding of the nature and purpose of prayer.

St Thomas More College is proud of its heritage and the way it translates its vision and mission into all aspects of school life. The use of form time is an on-going support for the spiritual development of pupils. Creative and reflective material produced by the Chaplaincy Team helps to foster spiritual

growth. This is further enhanced by liturgies that reflect the liturgical calendar of the Church. Pupils are encouraged to participate in the religious life of the college from the moment they enter Year 7. Support is also given to pupils of other faiths and traditions, so that they feel a strong sense of community and friendship. Collective worship also recognises the faiths and beliefs of all within the school. Substantial funding is made available for retreats and residential experiences. The pupils readily speak of 'their' mission statement, which incorporates the '4 C's': Community, Commitment, Communication, and Communion. These key words frequently provide the starting point for prayer and worship.

THE QUALITY OF WITNESS IS OUTSTANDING

The witness of St Thomas More, as patron of the college is widely recognised by students and staff and is repeatedly celebrated. This understanding of the college patron is supported by a mission statement that is firmly rooted in Gospel values that are central to this vibrant Catholic community. Whilst the Mission Statement is well known and lived, Governors, staff and pupils are embarking on a review to ensure that the centrality of the gospel message remains contemporary and challenging for all. Central to this mission is inclusive practice respecting the value and dignity of all. Strong leadership ensures that levels of exclusion are low and vulnerable pupils are supported by an outstanding SEN department. This is recognised by parents as one of the major strengths in the school, where everyone is cared for, and loved.

Pupil voice indicates the appreciation of other faith groups and their communities. Every effort is made to foster positive links and partnerships with the local community. Charity work is encouraged throughout the academic year, supporting local, diocesan and national initiatives. A strong Sports Leadership programme continues to strengthen the Catholic life of the College.

The College is particularly proud of the Chaplaincy Team, who are confident in leading prayers, liturgies, form time reflections and work across the College. Relationships in the College are marked by genuine respect between staff and pupils, who work together in a very positive environment. Through the rich life of faith, prayer and relationships within the immediate and broader community, the College makes an outstanding contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils. The pupils show an enjoyment and interest in learning about themselves, others and the world around them. The teaching of citizenship is particularly strong in the college and was found to be greatly valued by staff and students as making a significant contribution to the Catholic life of the school and preparing young people for adult life.

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT:

- Continue the present review of the College Mission Statement to ensure the radical challenge of the gospel message remains accessible and contemporary.
- Continue the development of the Chaplaincy team to further the already high level of pupil engagement in the Leadership of the Catholic life of the school.
- Act as a catalyst and beacon of excellent practice for other Diocesan Catholic schools seeking to develop a radical inclusion practice.

October 8th 2013

Dear Students

Thank you so much for the wonderful welcome you gave us when we came to visit you. Your school is an outstanding school and in many instances excellent. This is because you and your teachers are working so hard to always do your very best and care for one another so well.

You have done so much to make your school a beautiful place to be. We loved all the displays, art and looking at what you are learning and achieving. Your work is of an outstanding standard and we could clearly see that you take your learning very seriously and are proud of your achievements. We were delighted to find that your RE is one of the highest achieving subjects with the greatest number of students achieving A*-A grades at GCSE. Well done!

Your creative ideas are very good and we could see that you can make connections between what you are learning in RE with other areas of the curriculum. Thank you for letting us share so much of what you are doing.

Your teachers are keen to help you develop the Catholic life of your school even further and to do this they have started the pupil Chaplaincy team. This is very important and we hope it will do great things in helping you to lead the Catholic life of your school and play an even greater part in the decision making of the school.

God bless you all and have a really happy term.

Yours sincerely

Sr Judith Russi

(Section 48 Inspector)

Summary Report to Parents

On 27th September 2013 the school was inspected in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005. The full report has been made available to the school and can also be accessed via both the school website and the Education section on the website of the Diocese of Salford.

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