



INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

THOMAS BECKET VOLUNTARY AIDED CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Becket Way, Kettering Road North, Northampton, NN3 6HT

DfE School No: 928/4703
URN: 122100

Head Teacher: Mrs Y Lucey
Chair of Governors: Mr H Williams

Reporting Inspector: Mrs K Edwards
Associate Inspector: Mr J Welsh

Date of Inspection: 24 October 2013
Date Report Issued: 26 November 2013

Date of previous Inspection: September 2010

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and
in partnership with Northampton Local Authority

Information about the school

Thomas Becket Catholic School is a coeducational 11-18 comprehensive school under the trusteeship of the Diocese of Northampton and is maintained by the Northamptonshire Education Authority. Of the 841 pupils on roll, 312 are Catholic. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is high. The number of statemented pupils in the school is in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic heritages, and pupils who speak English as an additional language, is high. However, the proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium is below average. There are 57 teachers in the school of whom 20 are Catholic. The school is a specialist sports college. In June the school became part of a Hard Federation together with the Catholic primary schools in Northampton. The previous headteacher retired in July 2012 and a headteacher from another school in the Diocese was seconded for a year. Since then a permanent headteacher has been appointed, taking up her post in September. There has been a restructuring of the SLT, and key members of the dedicated chaplaincy team have left. Following an Ofsted inspection in March 2013 the school was placed in special measures.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding **2:** Good **3:** Requires improvement **4:** Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 3

The school has lost much of its Catholic identity, culture and ethos as a result of the challenging circumstances it has faced recently. However, the appointment of a new headteacher, the restructuring of the SLT and the development of a federated governing body mean that the school is now better placed to provide a distinctive Catholic education for all its pupils. The headteacher, SLT and governors share a strong vision for Catholic education and are supported by the majority of staff. The pastoral care of the school, led by tutors and supported by a highly effective home school liaison officer, has improved, and subsequently behaviour is improving. Chaplaincy is at an embryonic stage of development, and it is recognised that there is much to do in this important area. There is much to celebrate in the provision for religious education in the school in terms of attainment, quality of most of the teaching and positive learning attitudes from pupils. There is a strong sense that pupils in the school want to achieve and do well, and that they would welcome more opportunities to celebrate and explore their faith.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 3

Since the last inspection progress in the areas identified for improvement has been varied. There is still no provision for religious education in the sixth form, other than AS and A2, and the curriculum time for the subject at Key Stage 3 [KS3] has been cut from 10% to 6%. Although materials for tutor group worship are now available to all electronically, there is still no monitoring or evaluation of this provision. However, monitoring of pupil progress and attainment through data collection in religious education is more rigorous and there has been some good monitoring and evaluation of teachers' performance followed by coaching to enable staff to meet targets. The quality of the self-evaluation carried out by the school is good. The accurate 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 the school is aware of its areas requiring improvement and the challenges it must face in bringing about change and improvement.

The headteacher is highly committed and passionate about ensuring that the school reclaims its Catholic identity, and has a clear vision for doing so. In this she is supported by

key members of the Senior Leadership Team [SLT], governors and the wider Catholic community. The religious education department receives very good support and direction from their recently appointed SLT link assistant headteacher.

The school is well placed to sustain the programme of improvement that has begun already. The appointment of a new headteacher, and the restructuring of the governing body and SLT will better enable change to take place. In the short term, however, the school may face challenges in resourcing further chaplaincy work and recruiting high quality Catholic religious education teachers.

What the school should do to improve further

- redevelop the school's Catholic identity, culture and ethos
- increase the curriculum time for RE at KS3 to 10% and develop a general RE programme for KS5 pupils
- ensure that the quality of teaching and learning in religious education is at least good across the whole department.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 3

In discussions with pupils from across key stages about the Catholic life of the school they identified that the Catholic identity mostly existed in the religious artefacts that are present in classrooms and corridors and the fact that the school had a chapel. When prompted to talk about relationships in the school, the majority of pupils said they felt safe and cared for by their teachers. Older pupils said that general behaviour in the school had got better and teaching staff had taken a more proactive approach to tackle bullying. Generally pupils are keen to do well and sixth form pupils in particular felt that they would like to develop their service to the school further. They talked positively about charitable work in the school such as raising funds for CAFOD and the local soup kitchen, and the annual 'Operation Christmas Child' appeal. There was a desire to be even more involved in fundraising and charitable work, as pupils see the importance of this in being part of a wider community.

Pupils respond respectfully to the prayer opportunities that are open to them in assemblies and tutor group registration. KS5 and KS4 pupils spoke positively about school masses and liturgies that they had experienced when they were younger, and felt the current lack of these opportunities keenly. They recognised that some teachers are trying to get them more proactively engaged in prayer, and sixth form were able to give examples of this. A Year 7 tutor group was observed composing their own prayers for the day ahead, and this seemed very natural for them.

Pupils were aware that a part-time chaplain had recently been appointed in the school and that Year 7 had form assemblies organised in the chapel in the early part of the term. They were not able to talk about how the current chaplaincy provision had an impact upon them beyond this, although post-16 pupils had positive memories of previous chaplaincy work in the school and explained that there were newly appointed chaplaincy representatives on the school council.

The standards of attainment in religious education at KS4 and KS5 are good. Examination results at KS4 show an improving trend and 2013 results exceeded the Fischer Family Trust [FFT] target for A*-C. At KS5 there have been significant improvements against Advanced Level Prediction Service [ALPs] targets with AS moving from a rating of 7 in the previous year to 5 and A2 moving from a rating of 8 in the previous year to 2. Generally pupils in

Years 10 and 11 throughout the ability range are making good progress towards their expected targets for the end of the course. At KS3 progress against targets in Year 9 is very good, however in Year 8 there is considerable underachievement spread across classes and ability ranges. Current Year 7 progress shows a mixed picture across the classes, with the majority of those underachieving being level 4 starters. When well taught pupils demonstrate positive learning behaviours in religious education. They sustain their engagement, work collaboratively, are articulate and confident in class discussion and listen attentively to the teacher and each other. They are able to reflect on their learning and assess their own progress against targets set by their teachers. They take a pride in their work and progress and enjoy their lessons. Where teaching is less than good, pupils are less engaged and sometimes disrupt the learning of others.

Leaders and managers

Grade 3

The newly appointed headteacher is conscious that the examination of what it means to be a leader in a Catholic school is a priority for development and training. The role of the form tutor in leading the spiritual development and pastoral care of pupils was focused upon during the September training day. An attempt to involve more staff voluntarily in examining the development of chaplaincy in the school was less successful. The governing body is well aware of the need to develop and promote the Catholic life of the school, and the challenges that lie ahead whilst the school is in special measures. The recent restructuring of the SLT and the vision, commitment and tenacity of the new headteacher are seen as fertile ground for improvement. The newly appointed chaplaincy group formed from members of the governing body has drawn up clear terms of reference and is currently engaged in reviewing and sharing practice across the schools in the areas of chaplaincy, liturgy, spirituality and prayer, Christian formation and mission and evangelisation. This group will make recommendations to support further the strategic development and overall effectiveness of the Catholic schools in the Federation.

The appointment of the previous Director of Learning of Religious Education on to the SLT and the appointment of an outstanding practitioner as subject leader mean that the monitoring and evaluation of the provision for religious education is improving rapidly.

Summer examination results were reviewed by the headteacher along with the performance of individual teachers and actions for improvement were identified. There is increased scrutiny of assessment data and pupil progress across year groups, and planned interventions are taking place such as increased differentiation as part of lesson planning and provision to challenge the more able. Where teaching staff are seen to require support, targets have been identified and coaching has taken place to help staff meet these. Formal reviews of pupil progress are scheduled to take place between individual teachers and the SLT link next half-term. The department have evaluated their progress against the wider school improvement plan, and have identified the actions necessary for further improvement in the provision of religious education in the school.

Provision

Grade 3

Pupils are provided with regular opportunities for prayer at registration, the end of the day and in assemblies, however this is mostly led by staff. Year 7 pupils have benefitted from the programme of chapel assemblies and a group of fifteen recently attended mass at a local parish. The school chapel is now open, but is currently underused by pupils. Other than the mass to celebrate the induction of the new headteacher, mass has not been celebrated in school for a year, and there is little currently taking place in terms of wider liturgical celebration. No retreat programme is in place, although there is a commitment to providing a mission week in the last week of the summer term to enable pupils to explore their faith journey. An action plan for chaplaincy development has been drawn up recently, but progress in developing a liturgical programme has been minimal so far.

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is inconsistent across the whole department. There is outstanding and good practice, particularly at KS4 and KS5. There are well developed schemes of work and well devised assessment points, and lesson planning is generally of a very high quality. A particular strength of the teaching is the provision of graded success criteria and differentiated materials to enable pupils of differing abilities to succeed. In lessons pupils are offered additional challenge at the top end. In the outstanding and good lessons teachers have a very good understanding of prior learning, targets and individual needs, and check progress rigorously. Skilful interventions either to scaffold thinking, or develop it further through effective questioning, ensure that pupils achieve well and make good progress. Resources are imaginatively used to engage and often inspire pupils. There is an expectation in most classes that pupils will take responsibility for their own progress and learning. However, in some KS3 classes teachers find it difficult to manage behaviour, and the disengagement of a few has an impact on the learning of the majority.

The religious education curriculum is good in that it provides a cohesive study of God, the life and teachings of Jesus and the Church, central Catholic beliefs and the relationship between faith and life. Throughout the key stages pupils have opportunities to study other world faiths and are taught to respect these. The Year 9 curriculum has recently been revised to offer a better foundation and preparation for the rigours of GCSE. The Bishops' Conference and diocesan requirements both in terms of time allocated and content are fully met for Year 10 and 11. The curriculum time for Years 7, 8 and 9 is, however, under the 10% required in Catholic schools; this is an area for urgent development. At KS5 pupils cover the philosophy of religion and Luke's gospel through the Edexcel AS and A2 course, but there is no other curriculum provision currently for the rest of the sixth form to meet the requirement for 5% curriculum time at KS5.

The inspectors enjoyed visiting Thomas Becket School and very much appreciated openness and hospitality extended by all members of the school community.