



DIOCESE OF
SHREWSBURY

DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION REPORT:

**THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL
AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

School: Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College
Address: Urban Road
Altrincham
Cheshire
WA15 8HT

Tel No: 0161 911 8090

URN: 106376

Headteacher: Mr J Cornally

Chair of Governors: Mrs H Hope

Date of Inspection: 1 & 2 May 2019

Inspectors: Mr J Wilbraham
Mrs M Garvey

Our Mission

We are a Catholic family of aspiration, dedicated to all our students
excelling spiritually and academically in our school and beyond.
We change lives through our culture of high standards and expectations
of everyone who learns and works in our school
and a belief that achievement is for all.

Date of last Section 5 Inspection – June 2013. Outcome - outstanding
Date of previous Section 5 Inspection – June 2008. Outcomes – outstanding

Date of last Section 48 inspection – November 2013. Outcome - outstanding
Date of previous Section 48 inspection – July 2008. Outcome - outstanding

- There were no issues to be resolved from the **previous full inspection of 2008**

In order to develop further the school's outstanding achievements, it was recommended after the **monitoring inspection of 2013** that:

- the monitoring and intervention strategies ensure that boys' performance at GCSE, excellent as it is, is fully commensurate with that of the girls.
- the school should plan for the introduction of a lay chaplain to develop further the outstanding work of the RE department, Leadership Team and clergy in the spiritual and liturgical life of the school community.

PROGRESS MADE WITH AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PREVIOUS INSPECTION

- The school appointed a full time Chaplain in 2014 who remained in post until 2016. When the Chaplain moved to another school the governors and the Headteacher reviewed the impact of Chaplaincy provision. They agreed that given the skills and talents already in evidence within the department they would appoint two current staff to share and coordinate the Chaplaincy work. Looking at the range of activities that have been organised and the quality of whole school celebrations of the Eucharist and collective worship this decision seems to have been the right one. The provision is under constant review along with the commitment to provide improved spaces for collective and private worship.
- One of the main priorities for this academic year continues to focus on strategies and interventions to close further the gender attainment gap at KS4. The gap has varied since 2013 but narrowed to Girls 71%, Boys 65%, achieving grade 5+ in 2018. However boys' attainment and progress in RE, for the three-year trend, is significantly above national progress figures, as is the overall progress measure for RE. At the most recent review, estimated grades for 2019 are girls 85% and boys 89% achieving GCSE grades 4 to 9.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS: how effective is the school in providing Catholic Education.

1

The above judgement on overall effectiveness is based on all the available evidence following the evaluation of:

CATHOLIC LIFE

1

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

1

Summary of key findings:

This is an outstanding Catholic school

- Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College is an outstanding Catholic mixed comprehensive school in which all leaders, staff, governors and pupils contribute to the reality of a successful, mutually supportive community based on Gospel values. The school's successes are all the more laudable by virtue of its comprehensive nature in an area which retains selective grammar schools.
- The Mission Statement and underpinning aims drive the school and are demonstrably the significant factors in enabling pupils to achieve academic success and personal and spiritual development.
- The school benefits from the highly effective leadership of the Headteacher supported by a team of successful leaders at all levels. They are supported by an experienced and informed governing body which provides high levels of challenge and support.
- Pupils are proud to be part of the school community and willingly contribute to, and benefit from, the Catholic Life of the school. They have a wide variety of opportunities to put their faith into action within and beyond the school community, such as visits from, and activities involving Laughter Africa and Cornerstone and participating in pilgrimage to Lourdes.
- Standards of pupil behaviour in classrooms and around the school are exemplary as is the respect and courtesy shown to each other throughout.
- All pupils make good progress in RE in all key stages with some achieving outstanding progress. The percentage of students achieving a grades 9-4 at GCSE in 2018 was 76%, which is significantly above the national average of 70%. 32% of pupils achieved grades 9-7.
- The school provides a rich and varied range of opportunities for collective worship, prayer and reflection, following the Church's liturgical year, its feasts and seasons and other relevant themes.
- Links with some of the parishes the school draws from build on pupils' experiences and have a positive impact on their spiritual development. The numbers completing Confirmation programmes in parishes is an example of the positive attitudes of pupils.
- Effective and supportive partnerships over a number of years have been developed by the school, with the Headteacher and other leaders assisting other diocesan schools.

What the school needs to do to improve further

- Continue to review and develop provision for chaplaincy, including spaces for collective worship, as and when resources allow.
- Develop further the strategies for inclusivity as recently set up within the 'We are Family' initiative to ensure that the school's mission keeps pace with wider society and cultural changes.

Information about the Inspection

The Inspection of Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College was carried out under the requirements of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Shrewsbury Diocesan Framework and Schedule for Denominational Inspections approved by the Bishop of Shrewsbury. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the school is in providing Catholic education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation and the inspection schedule follows the criteria set by the National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers (NBRIA 2017).

The inspector reviewed in detail the following aspects:

- The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school
- The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school
- How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education
- How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship
- The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school
- How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education, Collective Worship and the Catholic Life of the school

The inspection was carried out by two inspectors over two days:

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 14 classes seeing all of the RE department teach.
- Meetings with the Headteacher, chair and three other governors, including the link RE and Catholic Life governor who is also a parish priest; the chaplaincy team, leaders from the pastoral, inclusion and safeguarding teams, the Head and Assistant Head of RE, Head of Sixth Form, a newly qualified teacher, pupil representatives, another group of SEND pupils who requested an interview, and a variety of other discussions with various members of the school community.
- Attendance at 2 year assemblies and 4 form tutor periods.
- A sample of RE books was scrutinised from all RE teachers together with assessment and tracking data.
- Responses to pupil, staff and parent (300+ families) questionnaires were collected and analyzed. All comments made were available to the leaders and managers.

- A wide range of documentation was made available prior to and during the inspection for scrutiny including Diocesan Self Evaluation Form (DSEF), departmental and whole school development plans, staff handbook, departmental handbook, Collective Worship and prayer resources, and monitoring and evaluation data.
- Learning walks were undertaken throughout the school covering all teaching areas to inspect the presentation of the Catholic Life of the school and pupils' behaviour and attitudes

Information about this school

- Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College is an average sized but rapidly expanding non-selective comprehensive mixed Voluntary Aided Catholic 11-18 school in Altrincham. It is in the Diocese of Shrewsbury and located in the Borough of Trafford.
- Due to increasing demand for places, the school now has an annual admission number of 300, and there are currently 1394 pupils on roll, with 141 in Sixth Form. The school has 221 pupils from 14 minority ethnic groups. 232 are eligible for pupil premium funding and 183 are on the SEND register. 34 students have Educational Health Care Plans.
- The school has an exceptionally high proportion of Catholic pupils at 94%.
- The school serves mainly the following parishes - St Hugh and St John, West Timperley; St. Vincent de Paul, Altrincham; All Saints, Ashton-on-Mersey; St Margaret Ward, Sale; St Joseph's, Sale; Holy Angels, Hale Barns; Our Lady of Lourdes, Partington; Our Lady of the Rosary, Urmston; Holy Family, Sale Moor; St Alphonsus, Old Trafford; English Martyrs', Davyhulme; St Monica's, Flixton; St Theresa's, Firwood/Chorlton; and St Hugh's, Stretford and St Ann's, Stretford.
- Staffing includes a full time equivalent of 128.15 teachers including the Headteacher and 13 teaching support staff. 50% of teachers are Catholic.
- 10 teachers teach in the RE department, one of them part time, and one full time experienced non-specialist.
- The evidence from pupil, staff and parents/carers questionnaires, meetings and feedback from various bodies confirms that this is an outstanding learning community.

Full report – inspection judgments

CATHOLIC LIFE

The Catholic Life of the school is outstanding

Catholic Life Grade	1
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The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school	1
The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school	1
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school	1

- The Mission Statement is brief and clear and effectively drives the life and achievements of the school.
- The commitment to, and success of, the mission of the school is driven by high quality leadership from the Headteacher and leaders at all levels, who embrace the vision for the school and work together to achieve it. School Development and Self –evaluation documentation indicate the integration of the school’s mission into all aspects of the school’s work.
- Almost all pupils appreciate, value and actively participate in the Catholic Life and mission of the school. They respond positively and are often keen to lead those activities that promote the Catholic Life of the school both within school and in the wider community. This is evident in students’ attitudes, ‘student voice’ responses, community and charitable activities, prayer and worship, relationships and the whole approach to learning and achievement.
- Pupils are not only proud to be part of their school family but demonstrate this by their consistent acceptance of the required standards of behaviour and work and this is indicated by their outstanding records of attendance. Almost all pupils believe that they attend a very good school and appreciate the care and support offered by the staff at all levels.
- Student leadership is strong and pupils are supported by an effective praise and reward system.
- Pupils see the school as a family which is concerned with the development of the whole person. This view was also shared by the staff.
- Almost all pupils show a deep respect for others and are often articulate in seeing this as an integral part of the Christian faith.
- Pupil behaviour in and around the school is exemplary. This makes the atmosphere conducive to learning and personal development
- The school’s chaplaincy and other pastoral provision is highly valued by the pupils as are the regular and varied opportunities it provides for reflection, worship and celebration on an individual, small group, year group and whole school basis.
- The school offers opportunities for voluntary and whole school Mass along with a variety of varied opportunities for prayer and reflection.

- Almost all pupils take full advantage of the opportunities for personal support and development and appear happy, confident and secure in their physical, emotional and spiritual development. Pastoral and spiritual provision is multilayered, inclusive, effective and appreciated. The House System bears names of inspirational saints bringing the school's mission to the fore. The 'Be Your Best' programme ensures full integration of all provision for pupil welfare and development, integrating pastoral and spiritual provision. The 'We are Family' project seeks to ensure that all pupils of all backgrounds are welcomed supported and empowered. This is a particularly relevant initiative in the light of the school's expansion and changing ethnic and cultural makeup.
- Teaching staff, on appointment, are provided with induction into the Catholic Ethos of the school and its demands and implications. They are also provided with practical introductions to praying with pupils and are given appropriate themes and materials to develop this. The Headteacher, senior leaders, priest governor and staff in general have regular opportunities to pray and reflect and are provided with appropriate continuing professional development (CPD).
- The school leadership is deeply and clearly committed to the Church's mission in education and this has resulted in all staff focusing on the school's mission.
- Parents and carers have a clear understanding of the school's mission and values which runs through all school documentation. Regular review enables a continuing momentum.
- Governors are deeply committed and make a significant contribution to the Catholic Life of the school. They are actively involved in its evaluation impact on college life.
- In Advent the school supports local homeless charities such as *Cornerstone* and *Wellspring*, donating items such as food, toiletries and clothes. At Lent the focus is on fundraising for overseas projects such as Laughter Africa who work with street children in Sierra Leone. A 'Faith in Action' group is pupil-led and prays together and aims to raise awareness of Christian Responsibility

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Religious Education is outstanding

Religious Education Area Grade	1
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education	1
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education	1
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education	1

- The RE department consists of 10 teachers, including 2 Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and 1 experienced non-specialist teacher, all of whom display strong subject knowledge and employ a wide range of effective classroom pedagogies. There is clear evidence of the national teaching standards being met. The school's self-evaluation that RE teaching is never less than good is accurate, as endorsed by a total of 14 lesson observations across all key stages (including both A Level and Sixth Form Core RE) during the inspection. The school's self-evaluation that RE teaching is never less than good is accurate, as endorsed by a total of 14 lesson observations across all key stages (including both A Level and Sixth Form Core RE) during the inspection.

- The department is well led and managed. There are rigorous monitoring procedures for lesson observations and work scrutiny and an effective coaching programme in place to support teachers and enhance their expertise. Two teachers within the department are currently enrolled on the 'Good to Outstanding' programme as part of their ongoing voluntary CPD.
- The RE curriculum provision is appropriate and meets the requirements of the Bishops Conference. The subject leader has mapped the curriculum across all key stages to ensure it meets the Curriculum Directory. The two year KS3 and three year KS4 has improved standards at GCSE. The department has adopted the recommended GCSE 'Catholic Christianity and Judaism' specification. Pupils recognise the value of compulsory Core RE and the opportunities this provides to engage with ethical and philosophical issues, outside speakers and Catholic Social Enterprise. The curriculum across all key stages provides opportunities for the spiritual and moral development of the pupils.
- In all lessons, pupils are well behaved, and engaged. Their behaviour in lessons demonstrates a respect for and enjoyment of the subject. This is further evidenced by the respectful presentation of their exercise books. Pupil questionnaires are overwhelmingly positive and interviews with pupils across all key stages, provide further evidence of their enjoyment of RE. They speak enthusiastically about their lessons. They share the high expectations their RE teachers have of them, the support they receive from them, and the willingness of their teachers to provide extra support after school revision classes.
- All lessons are well planned to maximise lesson time. The school policy of 'Make every minute count' is embedded. The pace of the lessons, effective questioning and quality of student responses, both verbal and written provided clear evidence that the lessons observed were 'typical'. Interviews with pupils confirmed this.
- Standards of attainment and progress, measured by GCSE outcomes, are significantly above the national average and above the diocesan average. In 2018, 76% of pupils achieved grades 9-4 in RE. At A level, 67% gained grade A*-B, significantly above the expectation measure for this cohort. Internal data indicates that almost all pupils at KS3 are making expected progress.
- The Head of Department, supported by the linked Assistant Head, and Headteacher have a clear vision for the department. There is an effective system in place assessing, tracking and monitoring pupil progress. Having identified the progress of boys as a priority there is a programme of targeted intervention to raise outcomes. Internal assessment data indicates that this is having a positive effect.
- Pupils are aware of their targets and they use the data tracking sheet in their books well. Teacher feedback in student exercise books is focused, it celebrates their success and identifies what they need to do to improve. The use of dedicated improvement and reflection time (DIRT) provides timely opportunities for them to do this. The impact of this can be clearly seen in the improved quality of written responses in their exercise books. The assessment and marking policy is clear, informative and highly consistent.
- The department has adopted a collaborative approach to lesson planning, to ensure consistency across all lessons. This in turn has helped members of the department to manage their workload. The quality of resources is exceptional. During pupil interviews A level pupils expressed their appreciation for the efforts their RE teachers put into creating lesson resources.
- All specialist RE classrooms provide a stimulating environment in which to learn through high quality displays which both support the RE curriculum and provide a stimulus for personal reflection.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Collective Worship is outstanding

Collective Worship Area Grade	1
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How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship	1
The quality of provision for Collective Worship	1
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship	1

- The prayer life of the school is seen as a vital component of its mission and success in enabling pupils to achieve and develop personally. It is structured, practical, perceived to be relevant and accepted as the norm by pupils and staff
- Pupils take the initiative in leading or making contributions in Collective Worship depending upon their age and experience. Their contributions are varied in style and presentation and students are always respectful to whoever is leading prayer or worship.
- Through the local clergy the school provides a weekly voluntary mass and whole school mass for major feast days or other events. Every form will over the course of year prepare for an assembly with guidance as appropriate from the chaplaincy team or other staff.
- The experience of living and working in a faithful praying community has a deep and visible effect on the pupils and staff. They have a respect for those of other faiths and this is reflected in the manner in which pupils prepare and participate in prayer or liturgy.
- Praying together is part of the daily experience for pupils and staff. Regular prayer and reflection is 'second nature' to staff and pupils and impacts upon attitudes and a keen sense of social responsibility.
- The chaplaincy team prepares and disseminates high quality resources to help staff with leading pupils in prayer, although staff and pupils are welcome to use their own resources too. Many staff contribute actively to prayers and assemblies and the pastoral teams, under the umbrellas of the 'Be Your Best' and 'We are Family' initiatives ensure integration of chaplaincy activity with all aspects of pupil needs.
- Collective Worship has a clear purpose, message and direction. The themes chosen for worship reflect a clear understanding of the liturgical seasons and the Church's mission, along with appropriate responses to disasters and other global issues.
- Prayer and worship are effectively and regularly monitored and evaluated with findings being recorded and reported on. This ensures that pupils are given their entitlement to appropriate and high value experiences and opportunities.