

St Thomas Catholic Voluntary Academy

URN: 146145

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Nottingham

19 November 2025 – 20 November 2025

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

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

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education RE

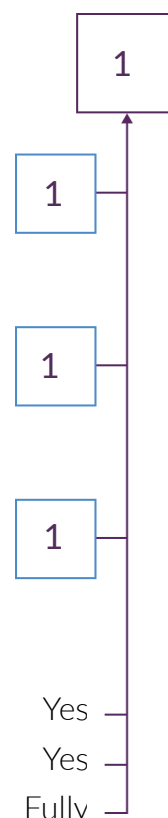
Collective worship (p.7)

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

The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference

The school is fully compliant with any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop

The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection



What the school does well

Catholic life and mission, religious education and collective worship are intrinsically and imaginatively linked, and thus have outstanding impact on each other.

There is outstanding leadership of this Catholic school, which inspires and motivates all within the community to live out the mission, 'We serve God when we work and play together'.

There is a strong sense of belonging and welcome, shared by pupils, families, staff and governors.

Excellent teaching in religious education leads to the full engagement and enjoyment of pupils, continually deepening their knowledge and understanding.

An extensive variety of prayer and liturgy that is accessible and engaging leads to full participation by pupils and their willingness to be involved in ministry.

What the school needs to improve

Refine the approach to task design and recording in religious education to enable pupils to fully display their learning with creativity and independence.

Ensure that outstanding practice in religious education is shared across the school to secure consistently high-quality teaching across all classes.

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

Pupil outcomes

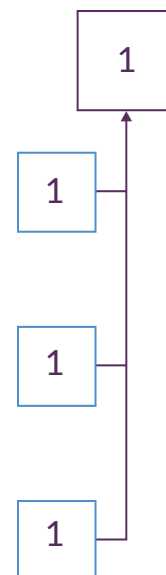
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school



Pupils are very proud of their school. They have a clear understanding of the meaning of the school's mission statement, its gospel values, and its commitment to following the example of its patron, the 'father of kindness'. Their sense of worth, and respect for each other, is shown in their exemplary behaviour, manners and courtesy. Pupils state that 'we are all really kind' and 'we feel special and included', and also remark that 'not one person is alone', demonstrating that they are 'friendly, positive, safe and secure', as one pupil summed it up. The demands of Catholic social teaching are thoroughly embedded in pupils' understanding, and they refer to its principles consistently, in discussing the needs of their peers and others beyond the school. They willingly respond by taking on leadership roles to foster these principles, such as in the Catholic Life Committee, Mini-Vinnies, Eco Committee, Cafod Club and prayer groups. Pupil groups are well-formed and active; very independent, having ownership; and love taking action that helps others. Examples can be seen in charity involvement, such as for the Canaan Trust, Cafod Lent Walk, visits to a local nursing home, and the shoe box appeal. Pupils acknowledge the theology behind their actions: 'Helping others brings us closer to Jesus'. They highly value and take an active role in the school's chaplaincy provision.

Staff commitment to the mission statement, and their participation as role models, leads to a clear visibility of the Catholic ethos and the warm welcome for all. There is a strong sense of belonging among staff, which translates to the pupils. 'It's a blessing to be part of the St Thomas community' and 'We are like a family here' are typical comments. The nurture, care, and pastoral support ensures all are included and supported, extending to pupils, families and staff alike. The Catholic identity of the school is stunningly presented throughout the school in the many beautiful and intriguing displays, and the care given to the environment, both inside and outside. The chaplaincy provision provides extensive creative and high-quality opportunities for spiritual and moral development.

Leaders and governors ensure that Christ is at the heart of the school, confirmed by the views of both staff and parents. 'Our faith is the focal point of our school' and 'This school is filled with love' are two typical comments that evidence this. The development of the Catholic life and mission is particularly effective in the way in which it permeates not only those aspects that encourage putting faith into action, but also has significant influence on religious education and prayer and liturgy. The inter-linking of all three aspects is an impressive and highly effective achievement, ensuring that all three areas draw from, and have impact on, each other. The personal development programme, which includes personal, health, sex and relationships education, Catholic social teaching and the study of the characteristics of saints, is very well developed. The Catholic curriculum is extending beyond religious education, impacting on other subjects such as science and geography. Parish links are regular and purposeful, with the school leading hymns at Mass every term, and involved in other activities, supported by the parish priest and parishioners. There is clear respect for the rights and dignity of employees: they value the support they are receiving. The strong ambition for the school existing between the St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi Academy Trust, governors and leaders drives the high standards that are seen. Self-evaluation is regular and leads to action: The 'You said, we did' messages posted on displays evidences the involvement and impact of pupils and others in the community.

Religious education

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

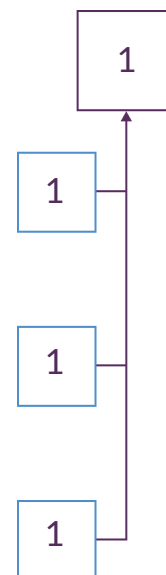
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

Provision

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

Leadership

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



Pupils confidently demonstrate excellent knowledge of the content of the religious education curriculum. This leads to them making consistently good progress. Pupils have excellent recall of scripture, and an ability to reflect on its relevance to their own lives and how that informs their actions and choices. This extends to previous years' curriculum areas of focus, with pupils recalling the sequence of learning, the meaning of subject specific vocabulary and the key messages from what they have been taught. They speak fluently and confidently about what they have learnt, and delight in sharing their knowledge. Pupils ask incisive questions and have innate curiosity. They like to do well, and are not afraid to 'have a go' at all tasks. 'Challenges push us to the limit with our work, to think deeper and show what we know', as one child expressed. Pupils know their contributions are valued; they show notable independence and creativity when given the opportunity to do so. They concentrate exceptionally well, and collaborate with each other willingly. Pupils produce work of a good standard in their books, although sometimes task designs and time available restrict the extent to which they can demonstrate their knowledge. They are fully engaged, and have a pride and satisfaction in showing what they have learned, particularly in longer, more open tasks. Behaviour in learning is exemplary. They know how well they are doing, and how to improve.

Teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge and a strong commitment to the value of religious education. Predominantly, they have high expectations of all pupils. Their lessons are well planned, following the school's agreed lesson structure. This ensures a consistency of approach that gives confidence to teachers and pupils. Teachers use questions skilfully to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding; they include appropriate opportunities for reflection and discussion. The 'feedback system' that starts each lesson is working very effectively, as is regular retrieval of previous learning, included throughout the lesson, and the focus on pupils' understanding of vocabulary. From the feedback they receive, pupils gain praise and added motivation that they then take into making improvements in their 'green pen' work. Teachers clearly understand how religious education impacts pupils' spiritual and moral development, reflected in pupils' behaviour and willingness to reflect. Catholic social teaching permeates lessons, deepening pupils' understanding of its principles. Resources are varied and generally of good quality, although task design and closed formats sometimes restrict pupils' ability to demonstrate their creativity and independence. The unobtrusive role of teaching assistants is significant in helping pupils with particular needs to access the curriculum.

Leaders and governors ensure that the curriculum is well planned, fully meeting the demands of the Religious Education Directory. Since its introduction, it has had a significant impact on pupils and staff. Religious education is given due priority in terms of resourcing, timetabling and staffing. Staff members have benefitted from the quality of professional development delivered through leaders, the St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi Academy Trust, and the diocese. The subject leader has an inspiring vision of teaching and learning and a high level of expertise; the partnership between her and other leaders is having noticeable impact, recognised beyond the school. Curriculum design is thoughtful and systematically introduced with excellent support for staff. It meets the pupils' needs very well. There are a wide variety of enrichment opportunities, with the use of visitors to school a particular feature, especially in relation to the study of other world faiths. Monitoring and evaluation of religious education is thorough, involving leaders, governors and school improvement officers, and leads effectively to improvements.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

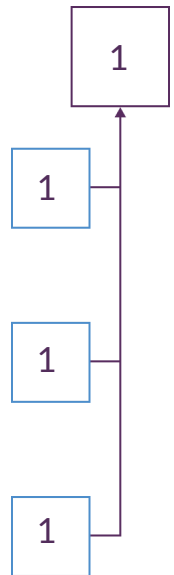
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

Leadership

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



Pupils show full engagement with the experiences of prayer and liturgy provided by the school. Their attitudes towards the sacred nature of each gathering are highly appropriate, demonstrating respect for each occasion of prayer, knowledge of what is being shared, and the ability to reflect deeply in silence. In addition, they listen with sustained attention, responding readily to questions or prompts, and delight in joining in joyful singing and actions. Pupils show a passion for prayer and liturgy: they value it greatly. They see how the messages shared in scripture relate to everyday life and how they should live. Their skills are well developed in helping to plan and prepare celebrations of the word, at an age-appropriate level, and they have an enthusiasm and confidence in ministry roles that enhance each occasion. These include proclaiming the word, liturgical dance and using technology aids. Within classroom worship, they are focussed on the message or theme that is being considered. For example, in *Lectio Divina* they show a well-developed capacity to reflect and think; and in *Visio Divina* they observe with curiosity, asking questions and sharing 'wonder' moments. They can articulate how their experiences of prayer are connected to actions, even from a young age. The chaplaincy team actively supports spontaneous opportunities for prayer.

Prayer and liturgy are central to the life of the school. Prayer occurs throughout the day, from the foundation of the universally known school prayer, at the start to the end of the day, woven into religious education lessons, and with opportunities for personal prayer. A weekly plan ensures that there is a wide variety of prayer in the Catholic tradition, and this has creativity and imagination at the forefront. Scripture is carefully chosen to match the seasons of the Church's year, with skilful and natural links made to Catholic social teaching principles and the 'word of the week'. Staff members are highly skilled in facilitating prayer, and in helping pupils to take a leading role in the planning and preparation of celebrations. Their modelling and commitment is sincere and exemplary. This ensures that pupils build their knowledge of scripture and how to engage each other in deeply reflective celebrations. The talents of staff and pupils are given full rein, as evidenced in the imaginative inclusion of artefacts, video, art and music from traditional and contemporary sources. The school makes creative use of spaces for prayer, in its adaptations of the hall, classrooms, corridors and outside areas. There is a flourishing partnership with the parish, seen in regular and purposeful links and activities. The inclusion of parents is also given priority, with noticeable impact, as seen in this typical comment: 'The celebrations of the word and school Masses are incredible. They fill us, as parents, with pride for the community our children are a part of'.

Leaders and governors plan the school calendar carefully to ensure that the seasonality of the Church's year is reflected. There are regular opportunities for celebration of the Eucharist, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation is also offered in Advent and Lent. Eucharistic Adoration, termly retreats, *Visio* and *Lectio Divina* are all significant features, along with marking feast days and annual events such as praying the rosary in October, harvest celebration, remembrance services and the May procession, for example. A well-developed skills strategy for pupil participation has been devised, progressively relevant to the ages of pupils. Professional development has been extremely effective so that all staff feel confident in their roles. The impact of leadership is evidence of excellent planning, with knowledge, skill and dedication. There is regular involvement and support from the parish priest. There is a high priority given to evaluating acts of worship, with all the community involved. This leads to thoughtful improvements.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Thomas Catholic Voluntary Academy
School unique reference number (URN)	146145
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8303508
Full postal address of the school	Church View, Allendale, Ilkeston, DE7 4LF
School phone number	01159 320550
Executive Headteacher	
Headteacher or Head of School	Mr Michael Sellors
Chair of Governors	Mrs Susan Doczyminska
School Website	www.stthomasilkeston.srscmat.co.uk/
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi-Academy Trust, St Ralph Sherwin CMAT
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	
Age-range of pupils	4 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	2 October 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

The Inspection Team

Alan Dewhurst	Lead
Tracy Lane	Team

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

