



St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School

URN: 140805

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Birmingham

24 June 2026 – 25 June 2026

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

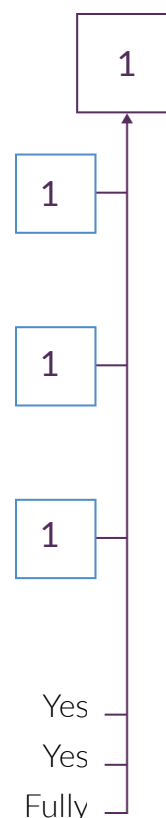
Collective worship (p.7)

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

- Pupils are exceptionally happy, confident, and filled with joy at St Thomas Aquinas as they constantly strive to put the school's mission to 'let their hearts, minds and spirits soar' into action.
- Christ is at the heart of the school, where the tangible sense of an inclusive community is embodied in love and care for pupils and families.
- Pupils really enjoy their religious education lessons resulting in excellent knowledge, a real sense of pride in their work, and an ability to reflect deeply on their learning.
- The religious education subject leader is exceptional, with a clear vision and expertise that enable her to develop staff skill and therefore impact on pupil outcomes.
- Leaders have developed highly effective skills strategies that enables pupils to plan, minister, and evaluate prayer and liturgy in an increasingly creative and imaginative way as they progress through the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure the majority of pupils take a leading role in responding to the demands of Catholic social teaching and can clearly articulate the theology underpinning their actions.
- Develop imaginative and engaging prayer spaces across the school.

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

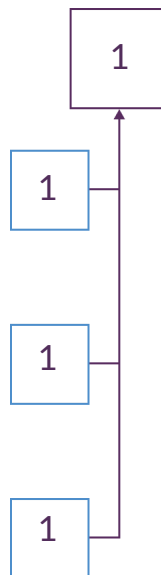
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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 wholeheartedly embrace the school's Catholic mission, confidently articulating how it shapes their knowledge and compassion in their daily lives. Pupils typically explain that 'minds soar because they are full of knowledge, our hearts soar because we are full of love, and our spirits soar because we are full of compassion'. Pupils' moral development is highly evident through their commitment to the school's virtues and the well-established buddy system, where older pupils model care and responsibility towards younger pupils. Pupils demonstrate an excellent understanding of stewardship of creation. Through the work of the Mini Vinnies, including recycling initiatives and community litter-picking, they actively promote care for our common home, contributing to the school's achievement of the LiveSimply Award. However, they do not yet take routine leadership roles in this work or explain confidently the Catholic social teaching principles underpinning their actions. Relationships throughout the school are characterised by exceptional respect, kindness, and courtesy. Exemplary behaviour, seen in pupils' smiles and politeness, is consistently recognised by all. Pupils willingly embrace leadership responsibilities through the chaplaincy team, making a valuable contribution to the spiritual life of the school community.

The school's mission is deeply embedded and clearly lived by staff, who regularly reflect on the school's virtues and intentionally promote them through every aspect of school life. Staff demonstrate an exceptional commitment to the school's mission through their generous service beyond the classroom, including supporting sporting and musical events, participating in parish Masses, and providing authentic witness to the Catholic faith. A strong sense of community permeates the school. Parents feel genuinely welcomed and valued regardless of

faith background, and events such as the 'international food day' strengthen relationships across the school community. Inclusivity is a significant strength. The school demonstrates profound respect for the dignity of every individual, providing thoughtful opportunities for pupils of all faiths to pray and practise their beliefs. Pastoral care is exemplary. Highly effective support, particularly for pupils experiencing mental health and emotional challenges, is carefully coordinated through the mental health and wellbeing team. The learning environment clearly reflects the school's Catholic identity through high-quality displays celebrating Catholic social teaching, pilgrimage, the liturgical year, saints, vocation, and pupils' God-given gifts and talents. Chaplaincy provision is highly effective. A strong partnership with the parish clergy provides pupils with rich opportunities for spiritual and moral development.

Leaders and governors ensure that policies are faithful to the school's inclusive nature. Leaders fully embrace the archbishop's vision for Catholic education through active engagement with diocesan initiatives, collaborative partnerships, and professional formation opportunities. The natural synergy between parish and school enriches pupils' faith formation, with staff and pupils making a significant contribution to serving parish life, including welcoming parishioners at Sunday Mass. Leaders have established highly effective partnerships with parents, providing numerous opportunities for families to participate actively in the school's Catholic life and mission. Initiatives such as vocations week enable pupils to understand and respond to God's call to serve others. Leaders place a high priority on staff wellbeing through a culture of openness, support, and professional trust, ensuring staff feel valued while maintaining a clear focus on the school's mission. The Catholic curriculum is coherently planned and enriched, enabling pupils to make meaningful connections between faith and everyday life. Governors provide highly effective strategic leadership through rigorous evaluation of impact and appropriate support and challenge. Self-evaluation is, therefore, robust and inclusive. Leaders and governors actively seek and respond to the views of pupils, parents and staff, using this evidence to inform strategic planning and continuous improvement. Staff formation is a significant strength in ensuring all staff understand and actively contribute to the school's Catholic life and mission.

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

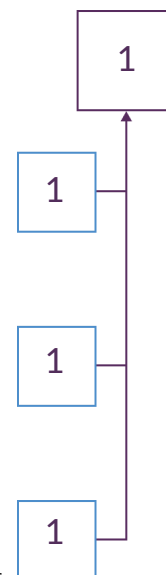
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 demonstrate excellent religious literacy, acquiring the knowledge, understanding and disciplinary skills expected by the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory*. Pupils make consistently strong progress over time because learning is carefully sequenced to build on pupils' life experience. In Reception, for example, pupils spontaneously apply their understanding of forgiveness from the Our Father by sharing examples of those they had forgiven. Pupils confidently recall previous learning and use increasingly sophisticated religious vocabulary with accuracy. For example, Year 6 pupils independently explained the meaning of 'omniscient' and applied this understanding accurately. Pupils have an evident love of religious education, shown in their high level of engagement during lessons. They speak enthusiastically about it, describing it as 'the most important lesson'. Pupils take exceptional pride in their work. Beautifully presented books reflect the high value pupils place on religious education. Pupils think deeply and independently, confidently making theological connections across scripture, doctrine, and lived experience. Pupils understand how well they are achieving because, through the school's assessment systems and regular feedback, they can confidently articulate their next steps in learning and demonstrate increasing ownership of their progress.

Teachers possess excellent subject and pedagogical knowledge, demonstrated through meticulous planning, consistently high expectations and skilful questioning that deepens pupils' theological understanding and extends their use of religious vocabulary. Teaching builds systematically on prior learning, enabling pupils to make meaningful connections

across scripture and doctrine, and teachers create opportunities for pupils to engage deeply with the Bible. For example, in Year 6, pupils reflect that the Psalms are part of us because they help express emotions such as joy, sadness and gratitude, demonstrating thoughtful personal engagement with God's word. Assessment is used effectively to celebrate achievement and move learning forward. Creative approaches to teaching enrich learning and deepen pupils' theological understanding; teachers make highly effective use of a rich range of resources, including scripture, religious art, artefacts, music and reflective activities, to engage pupils and support spiritual and intellectual development. Teachers require pupils to communicate their understanding through a wide variety of approaches, ensuring the curriculum is fully accessible. Younger pupils' verbal contributions are carefully captured, ensuring their learning is valued and evidenced. Oracy is a significant strength of the school. Pupils confidently articulate their ideas, justify their thinking and respectfully build upon the contributions of others during religious education lessons.

Leaders and governors place religious education at the heart of the curriculum, ensuring it has full parity with other core subjects through strategic leadership, careful curriculum planning, and appropriate resourcing. Leaders provide high-quality, effective training that has a positive impact on classroom practice. Staff subject knowledge continues to strengthen, with diocesan training successfully adapted by the religious education leader and special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) for the school's specific context, including to enhance provision for pupils with additional needs. The religious education leader provides inspirational leadership. Through rigorous monitoring, forensic analysis of assessment information, and highly effective staff support, standards continue to improve. Leaders have successfully implemented targeted actions that have reduced differences in attainment, including closing gaps between boys and girls. A wide range of enrichment opportunities, including a vocations week and visits to places of worship, significantly enhances pupils' understanding of religion and broadens their appreciation of the Church's dialogue with other faiths and religions. Monitoring and self-evaluation are rigorous and highly effective. Leaders use lesson observations, book scrutiny, pupil voice, and assessment information to evaluate the impact of their subject improvement work accurately and drive continuous improvement. Governors have an accurate understanding of standards through regular monitoring visits, and actively contribute to self-evaluation and strategic planning through their skilful and insightful questioning.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

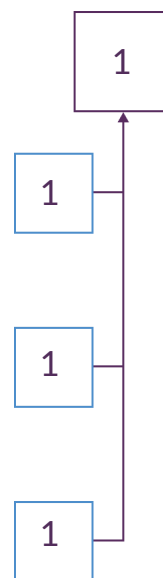
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

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 participate wholeheartedly in the school's rich prayer life and demonstrate deep reverence, enthusiasm, and increasing spiritual maturity during class prayer, celebrations of the word, and liturgy. They recognise prayer as central to their relationship with God and confidently explain its impact on their daily lives. Pupils respond thoughtfully to prayer and liturgy, applying scripture and Gospel values to their own lives and the school's mission. For example, Year 2 pupils reflect that they can 'build the Church' through acts of stewardship, compassion, and service. Pupils engage with scripture confidently, reflecting deeply on its meaning and relevance to their lives. Pupils demonstrate increasing independence in planning, ministering, and evaluating prayer and liturgy, which develops progressively throughout the school, starting with younger pupils, who make thoughtful choices when selecting scripture, symbols, and artefacts, and explain their significance with confidence. Pupils confidently describe the age-appropriate evaluation strategies used throughout the school. Pupils understand that prayer responds to the needs of the world; they readily identify themes for prayer inspired by the curriculum, including praying for refugees, peace, and those who have died. Pupils articulate the profound impact prayer has upon their lives, describing it as a source of courage, hope, and peace; they explain that prayer helps them through difficult times and strengthens their relationship with God.

Prayer is at the heart of daily school life and is carefully planned to reflect the rhythm of the Church's liturgical year. Opportunities for joyful celebration and quiet reflection enable pupils to deepen their relationship with Christ. A well-established daily pattern of prayer enables pupils to engage and participate confidently in traditional and contemporary forms of prayer.

Scripture is carefully selected by staff and pupils, who proclaim it with fidelity to the Church's liturgical season. For example, Key Stage 2 pupils selected scripture from 1 Thessalonians to support prayer based on the theme of encouragement. Staff model exemplary practice in planning and ministering celebrations of the word. Creative and imaginative approaches enable pupils to engage deeply with scripture and symbolism. High-quality use of religious art, music, symbols, and artefacts significantly enhance the quality of prayer and liturgy, creating prayerful environments that foster awe, wonder, and reflection. Sacred spaces within classrooms and around the school provide opportunities for private and communal prayer, though they are not always used imaginatively to enhance prayer provision. Families are active partners in the school's prayer life. Invitations to Mass, celebrations of the word, 'stay and pray' sessions, and the use of prayer bags successfully strengthen and enhance the partnership between home, school, and parish.

Leaders have established prayer and liturgy as a central expression of the school's Catholic identity. The prayer and liturgy policy fully reflects the requirements of the *Prayer and Liturgy Directory*, and is strengthened by a comprehensive progression framework that clearly outlines the development of pupils' skills of ministry. Leaders provide exceptional guidance for staff through carefully structured planning resources and progression documents, ensuring pupils progressively develop the knowledge, confidence, and independence required to plan, minister, and evaluate prayer and liturgy. High-quality formation and coaching have secured strong practice consistently across the school. Consequently, staff demonstrate confidence and expertise in facilitating meaningful prayer experiences that are faithful to the *Prayer and Liturgy Directory*. Governors provide effective strategic oversight through regular monitoring and evaluation of prayer and liturgy. They have a secure understanding of its impact on pupils' spiritual development and use this evidence to support ongoing and highly effective school improvement.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	140805
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8613408
Full postal address of the school	North Street, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 7DG
School phone number	01782 234919
Headteacher or Head of School	Shenade Moorhouse
Chair of Governors	Geraldine White
School Website	www.st-thomasaquinas.stoke.sch.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	St Gabriel the Archangel Catholic Multi-Academy Trust
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non Selective
Age-range of pupils	3 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	04 July 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

The Inspection Team

Gael Hicks Lead

Claire Faulkner

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