

Thornton Catholic College

URN: 110549

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Northampton

16–17 May 2024

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

1

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

1

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

1

Collective worship (p.7)

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

1

The school is fully compliant with the curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference

Yes

The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop

Yes

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

Fully

What the school does well

- As a result of its distinctive charism and identity, the Catholic life and mission of Thornton College is embraced and celebrated with unwavering pride by the whole school community.
- Relationships throughout the school, based on mutual respect and inclusivity, are evident in the pupils' outstanding attitudes to learning.
- Pupils are highly engaged and challenged in religious education; they are exceptionally religiously literate and make outstanding progress as they move through the school.
- Opportunities for prayer and liturgy pervade the school and have an exceptionally positive impact on pupils' attitudes and sense of belonging.
- Leaders have a clear and ambitious vision for Catholic education and, through rigorous evaluation, thoroughly understand the school's strengths and areas for development.

What the school needs to improve

- Integrate Catholic social teaching within religious education and the wider curriculum to encourage pupils to independently make links between learning outcomes, faith and actions which promote social justice.
- Continue to refine the process of moderation in religious education, to ensure consistency and rigour of feedback and assessment.
- Ensure all pupils take a leading role in regularly planning, delivering and evaluating prayer and liturgy.

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

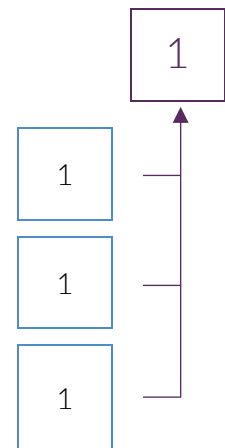
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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



The school's mission in promoting and realising Gospel values in an environment of academic scholarship and personal growth for every pupil is overwhelmingly evident in every aspect of Thornton College. Pupils not only fully articulate their mission, "To educate young people to meet the challenges of life courageously, to use their talents to the full, and to live the values of Christ's Gospel," but live this out on a daily basis through their relationships with one another. Steeped in the charisma and identity of the sisters of Jesus and Mary, pupils understand their personal responsibility to serve those in need. Pupils are able to clearly articulate the many ways they respond to Jesus' teachings such as writing to Tesco to stop importing palm oil in order to save the rainforest, learning to reuse and recycle as well as giving of their time in coaching at the local cricket club and supporting pupils in local schools. Pupils are proud to support many charities, including 'Aid to the Church in Need,' 'CAFOD,' local foodbanks and the local 'Samuel's Charity.' They have recently developed a pen pal link with a sister school in Lebanon and support other Jesus and Mary schools to broaden their knowledge of people's needs around the world. Pupils describe their positive relationships with staff, through the words and teaching of their foundress St Claudine Thevenet, 'To be as mothers to the children.'

The mission of Thornton College permeates every aspect of the school and is known and lived by the whole school community. In the overwhelmingly positive staff survey, comments such as, 'I love working in a school where the ethos exudes and Christ is at the heart,' and 'Christ truly is at the heart of our school, our students, staff and parents embody our school mission statement,' are evidence of the high level of pastoral care for the pupils. In discussions with staff, their witness to the school's Catholic life and mission is abundantly noticeable in the emphasis they place on exceptional staff induction and training which ensures they are outstanding role models

for the pupils. Tolerance and mutual respect are central to the school's charism and pupils are proud to share the many opportunities they have, through clubs and committees to demonstrate the school's commitment to the flourishing of every member of the community. The chaplaincy provision, through opportunities such as the ethos committee, eco club and equalities committee, demonstrate the staff's commitment to providing pupils with a strong voice where everyone feels valued. Displays in classrooms and around the school embody the school's distinctive mission, with liturgical seasons represented with thought and care. The provision for relationships, health and sex education is planned collaboratively to ensure progression through the school and meets all statutory requirements.

Leaders and Governors clearly articulate the Church's mission in education and take great pride in supporting the strategic vision for the school through embracing the charism of the Sisters of Jesus and Mary. They are exceptionally supportive of the school's ethos and their involvement, through meetings and regular visits, ensure staff and pupils are listened to and their ideas and opinions valued. They are inspirational examples in their respect for the well being of staff, who express their gratitude for the welcome and hospitality they receive. Staff acknowledge the strength of the sisters' pastoral care for them and the families in the school. The school's outstanding leadership in religious education ensures this subject is at the core of the curriculum and is evident across the whole taught curriculum. In developing the curriculum further, it is recommended that the school integrates Catholic social teaching themes to encourage pupils to make links within every subject and, as a result, use their learning outcomes as a basis for their actions in promoting social justice.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

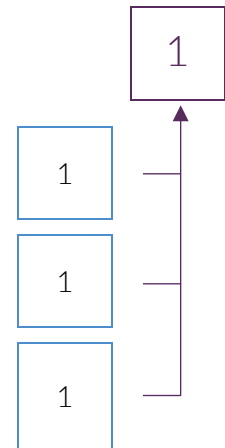
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 make outstanding progress in religious education and their behaviour for learning is exemplary. They speak passionately about the impact that religious education has had on them from Prep to Senior, providing them with a strong moral compass. Pupils are exceptionally religiously literate and easily transfer what they have learnt in class into real life situations using quotes from scripture. In one pupil discussion, they linked Jesus' teaching to the fact that 'small acts of kindness, such as lending a pen, being available to talk to someone in need or simply smiling at people, are very powerful. Pupils are challenged in lessons and are confident to join in discussions. In one lesson, in response to a question, a pupil answered, 'This is just a guess but...' which is indicative of their willingness to take risks, knowing they are supported and encouraged to think deeply. In a Year 12 lesson observed, students felt safe to ask incisive questions and deepened their learning by making cross curricular links. In the most engaging lessons observed, pupils take ownership of their learning and are encouraged to reflect on scripture. In an example of an outstanding lesson in the Prep, the learning objective to show the 'spreading of the good news through the power of the Holy Spirit' involved pupils in a treasure hunt to find 'tickets to heaven' with scripture references which supported them in their understanding of Pentecost.

The religious education curriculum is thoroughly planned and sequenced so that pupils can make links to prior learning and build on existing knowledge. Older pupils in the Prep could recall and compare their learning about Pentecost in Reception through colouring headbands with flames to represent the Holy Spirit to their current learning using scripture sources from the Bible to explain the presence of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Teachers have very high expectations of the pupils and enable them to feel successful in their learning. They adapt lessons to meet the needs of all learners and use questions skilfully to challenge and support.

Learning objectives are clear and pupils in the Senior answer these after each lesson to demonstrate their understanding. 'Super challenge' questions develop their critical thinking skills. In the Prep, pupils are proud of their progress and can articulate the reasons why they feel successful. Monitoring of feedback to pupils in the Senior and assessment in the Prep needs to become increasingly rigorous through moderation with other schools in order to benchmark and validate the school's outcomes in religious education. Teachers' subject knowledge, including those who are not specialists, is excellent and all staff feel supported in seeking clarification from colleagues. The department works as a cohesive unit and has ensured continuing success by outstanding succession planning.

Leaders and teachers are relentless in their expectations for pupils in all year groups and this results in the development of pupils who are articulate and motivated to learn. The school works collaboratively with the Diocese to ensure they are up to date with the latest curriculum developments of the *Religious Education Directory*. The exceptionally strong leadership of the head of religious education enables staff to deliver lessons that are rigorous and challenging. Leaders are unwavering in their support to all teachers of religious education, with teachers commenting that the religious education leader, 'has done a fantastic job in making Catholic values open and accessible for all, particularly those of no religion.' High expectations of religious education are a result of a sincere and authentic commitment to Catholic education at Thornton College. Robust strategic leadership, supported very ably by Governors, ensures the highest standards and expectations from all stakeholders.

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

1

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

1

Leadership

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

1

1

Thornton College excels in providing daily opportunities for prayer and worship. The wide and varied experiences of prayer and liturgy for the pupils engages them in powerful moments of prayer, meditation, reflection and song. The conclusion of all prayers in the school end with the school's motto 'Praised forever be Jesus and Mary' (Laus Semper Jesu et Mariae) and this reminds pupils of their witness and belonging to a Christ centred school. Pupils, most noticeably in the Senior, are provided with a range of opportunities for liturgical formation through leading assemblies, reflections and prayer through various clubs and committees. During public examinations, the students, of their own volition, make a prayer circle before entering the exam hall and this exemplifies the value of prayer in their lives. In discussions with pupils about how prayer and liturgy influence them, the examples they are able to give are numerous. One pupil described the sign of peace at Mass as 'feeling the strength of the community,' while a student reflected on an assembly led by the ethos committee about homelessness and the 'Big Issue.' The impact of the assembly prompted them to really take notice and go to buy a copy. Pupils in the Prep discussed how prayer helps them to be kind to others, especially in their own families and how, through prayer and liturgy, they respond to Jesus' teachings, for example, by being very keen to pick up litter around the school.

Reflecting on the quality of prayer and liturgy, one staff member commented, 'I have never worked in a community which so actively works to foster love and respect, to seek opportunities to serve others and where prayer is at the heart'. The school provides numerous opportunities for pupils, parents and staff to be involved. In the Prep, experiences such as Bridgebuilders workshop, stations of the cross, May procession and the 'travelling Nativity' engage pupils in experiences of the Catholic tradition. The Senior are given opportunities to lead prayer and liturgy and are excellent role models to the younger pupils. Opportunities for all pupils to plan

and lead prayer and liturgy needs to become increasingly regular, especially in the Prep where prayer and liturgy is predominantly teacher led. Increasing focus on awe and wonder, periods of contemplation and simple 'moments with God' instead of worship that might reflect a religious education lesson will support pupils in their planning. Parents are invited to parent prayer sessions in the school chapel as well as various other forms of liturgy. Weekly Mass for the boarders brings the community together and galvanises their faith.

Leaders, including governors, clearly prioritise the evaluation of the quality of prayer and liturgy and are reflective in their self-evaluation. Self-evaluation of prayer and liturgy needs to be extended now to the pupils on a more regular basis so that they become increasingly rigorous in planning and leading the daily pattern of prayer. Staff, including leaders, model good practice and relevant training in leading worship is provided for all teachers. The school's links with the local parishes are very strong. In discussion with the parish priest, he described Thornton College as, 'a happy school where faith is part of the blood of the school, and I feel energised whenever I visit.' He is a regular visitor and this partnership clearly makes an impact on the faith formation of both staff and pupils. Leaders are exceptionally proud of their school and show a clear commitment to creating a vibrant, worshipping community that provides meaningful prayer and liturgy of a high quality. The outstanding quality of leadership in prayer and liturgy can be summarised in the comment of a parent who said, 'the school embodies the values of the gospel and the whole family benefits from this. My daughters are forgiving, empathetic and compassionate.'

Information about the school

Full name of school	Thornton Catholic College
School unique reference number (URN)	110549
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8256010
Full postal address of the school	Thornton Catholic College, College Lane, Thornton, Milton Keynes, MK17 0HJ
School phone number	01280812610
Headteacher	Louise Shaw
Chair of Governors/Trustees	Sr Helen Haigh RJM
School Website	www.thorntoncollege.com
Trusteeship	Religious of Jesus and Mary
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	All Through
Type of school	Catholic Independent School
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	3-19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Date of last denominational inspection	28 February – 1 March 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

The inspection team

Monica McCarthy	Lead
Sheila Birtles	Team
Carol Ransom	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