



# Thornleigh Salesian College

URN: 105264

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Salford

07–08 November 2024

## Summary of key findings

### Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

2

#### 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

2

#### Collective worship (p.7)

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

2

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

Yes

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

Yes

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

Fully

## Compliance statement

- 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 laid down by the Bishop of Salford.
- The school has responded fully to the areas for improvement from the previous Catholic school inspection.

## What the school does well

- The moral framework provided by Don Bosco's teachings and the Salesian charism makes a lasting impact on the lives of the students at the College.
- There is a nurturing and collaborative model of leadership development in both Catholic life and religious education which fully reflects the Salesian charism. This develops staff in ways that benefit not only the school but also the wider church in due course.
- The magnificent chapel embodies everything that is good about physical provision and is the centrepiece for frequently exceptional worship occasions.
- Thornleigh Salesian College is exceptionally welcoming and inclusive. Staff and students feel a tangible sense of community and belonging leading to high quality relationships.
- The work of the headteacher, and his closest colleagues, is characterised by humility and is focused on dignity and love. This motivates the right people.

## What the school needs to improve

- Catholic social teaching is not yet fully evident in subject curriculums. Leaders and middle leaders need to make explicit where the principles of Catholic social teaching exist in subject specialisms.
- Lower ability students are not yet performing as well as other students. Closing gaps with other ability groups is a development need.
- The daily prayer and liturgy experience of students is limited in its impact and less strong when compared to much better experiences seen in larger gatherings. Leaders should consider how these two opportunities are reconciled so that students get a consistent experience.

## 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

1

#### Provision

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

1

#### Leadership

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

2

1

Students' recognition of the Thornleigh Salesian charism, and the way they embrace and nurture it, is a long-standing strength. The concept of *RUAH (Respect, Understanding, Affection and Humour)* is learned as part of their formation and stays with them during and beyond their passage through school. Students' forthright expressions of feeling loved and cared for goes to the heart of Don Bosco's teachings. They are alert to recent adjustments in the leadership of the school and comment very positively on the way that senior staff treat them with dignity and make them feel wanted. Guided by the Salesian charism and rooted in Jesus' teachings, the moral framework is very much understood and supports positive relationships with peers and adults. Students demonstrate exceptional commitment to engaging in events and collaborative efforts connected to Catholic social teaching. However, some struggle to express these principles and how these impact their lives beyond the context of the RE curriculum. In both lessons and recreational time, students' conduct is very good showing respect for each other and their teachers. Student interactions are charitable and thoughtful. The scope of student involvement in chaplaincy is exceptional and a distinguishing feature of the school. This includes growing in faith together teams, Cafod young leaders, faith in action students and several other voluntary groups.

The mission of the school is encapsulated in the motto "*Growing together, rooted in faith*". This is referenced around the school and used in all interactions including meetings and prayer. The embedded dedication to mission impacts strongly on every member of the community influencing the real sense of community; this is growing stronger as a result of strategic actions taken by leaders. Demographic changes in the student body have created additional opportunities for the school to illustrate its inclusivity. This is evident in the design of personal development programmes and in the way that students of other faiths are supported in their

own formation. Pastoral care is at the heart of the school mission. The dedicated support for the BONTA (*goodness*) group illustrates the profound commitment to assisting vulnerable young people. The school environment, with its chapels and designated prayer spaces, vividly reflects the school's Catholic mission. Chaplaincy provision is exceptionally strong, featuring a full-time Salesian priest and a dedicated chaplaincy team that includes other clergy and senior staff members. The design of R(S)HE is skilful and supported by trustworthy *Life to the Full* resources. Staff are well-trained, leaders are creative and resourceful, and statutory and diocesan requirements are fully addressed.

For many years, there has been great leadership expertise and theological awareness among governors who are relentless in their ambitious vision for Catholic Salesian education. Recent adjustments to governance and leadership have presented new opportunities. Mutually, priorities have been quickly identified, including, for example, in the way strategy and policies are reviewed and adjusted. Governors are now in a stronger position resulting from effective communication of needs. The school has a full and productive engagement with the Diocese of Salford. Links with parishes are strong and illustrated by the use of the school as a centre for sacramental preparation. The establishment of a parent group demonstrates the proactive drive to develop strong family links. Practical aspects of Catholic social teaching are embedded but not visible in the written curriculum. This makes it harder for students to explain the motivations behind their action work. The new headteacher's intelligent appreciation of the pastoral needs of staff has promoted adaptations ensuring that well-being is a priority. Processes for self-evaluation are thorough and standards of self-critique high. Improvements to the way that training is delivered are beginning to make an impact but since these are only recent, this is not yet fully realised. Induction processes are secure.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

**Pupil outcomes**

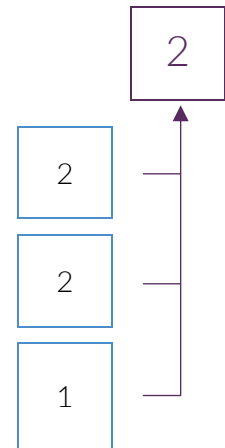
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

**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



Opportunities presented by the new *Religious Education Directory* (RED) have been seized, leading to a well-integrated and creative curriculum. Students make good progress and, with the additional expert and deliberate support from Salesian tutors, their religious literacy is strong. In lessons, many show the ability to articulate their faith and reflect on it quite deeply. In these instances, their views and experiences have spiritual depth as a result of their ability to reflect. Largely because they enjoy the subject, students' learning is 'on-task', and they work independently showing a positive attitude with exceptions a rarity. They speak readily of their enjoyment and appreciation of the subject. Student work compares well with that in other core subjects and strategies for feedback are improving. Attainment is again above diocesan levels and exceeds other core subjects but is below national comparators for some ability groups. This should be seen in the context of entering all students, regardless of ability. A focus on the achievement of able students has borne great fruit. With less able students, the school's emphasis on inclusion does not always translate into maximising their achievement.

A strong religious education team is being led well, with a supportive and collaborative approach to the development of teaching, learning and assessment, rooted in the school's Catholic ethos. Subject knowledge is good, and the commitment and expectations of staff are of a high level - something recognised and appreciated by students. Planning is developed in a way that can be bespoke to groups and individuals. Typical of this are learning packs given to students and adjusted to suit individual needs and abilities. This promotes learning and confidence, as well as inclusion. Strategies to ensure all abilities profit equally from lessons are not always consistent, but there is strong commitment to move this forward. A good standard of questioning is the norm across the subject and there are areas of outstanding practice. Student effort and achievement is effectively praised and celebrated, leading to high levels of motivation. Feedback

inevitably focuses on content and could perhaps be enhanced by a deeper awareness of skills development. This is, however, highly developed in sixth form assessment where the well-planned curriculum and effective teaching fosters a professional and engaging atmosphere. Spiritual and moral development is at the core of teaching and almost all lessons make strong links with real life and foster religious reflection. High quality resources are meticulously planned and developed and utilise the creative opportunities underpinning the new RED.

The development of the new RED has been prioritised, and hard work and careful planning has ensured a rapid and creative adoption. Leaders ensure that religious education has full parity with other core subjects. This includes the focus on revision, meaning that students take the subject seriously and engage with it. Professional development in religious education is comprehensive, tailored to need and makes use of the rich theological knowledge available among the Salesian clergy. There is an excellent nurturing and collaborative model of leadership development, producing subject leaders of the future in a way that could benefit the wider diocese. The subject leader has progressed to be a highly competent, organised and committed professional, with a clear vision, ensuring consistently good teaching. Excellent curriculum planning leads to organised and sequential progression in learning. It is recognised that planning in religious education is genuinely focussed on allowing all to progress regardless of their ability, and strategies are very much in place to achieve this, although it is not always seen in every lesson with every teacher on every occasion. Enrichment is outstanding, making use of external and in house resources. Subject and senior leaders' self-evaluation is increasingly thorough and now provides governors with the clarity to enhance strategic decision making.

## 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

2

**Leadership**

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

2

2

In larger gatherings, often strongly influenced by the Salesian community, students' experience of prayer and liturgy is rich and they respond positively to opportunities provided. Here, there is proof that ministries, including in reading and song, are undertaken with confidence and skill. Students are respectful at times of prayer – something affirmed by leaders' belief that Thornleigh is a 'praying community of all faiths and backgrounds'. Participation is much less evident in the daily student experience in form time. Assembly themes are carefully planned and reflect the Church's liturgical year as well as the Salesian charism of the school. Students have the opportunity to receive the sacrament of reconciliation in Advent and Lent. Weekly 'sacred time', each Friday, provides opportunities for silent reflection, some use of scripture and sometimes considers links to Catholic social teaching. Staff would benefit from further training in the delivery of this. There are opportunities across all year groups for students to plan and prepare liturgies. Form tutors are responsible for planning Mass with their form group and students are recruited as contributors. Mission week is a highlight of the academic year and is integral to the school's Salesian ethos. Staff and students spoke enthusiastically about this event where students are involved in a wide range of activities and events.

The main chapel, recently refurbished, stands as the central worship space - a magnificent, inspiring and frequently used resource for staff, students, their families, and the Salesian community. Careful thought is given to the delivery of prayer and liturgy; when events, such as assemblies, are posited in the setting of the chapel, celebrations are especially rich. The regular daily experience for students is built around the school prayer with deeper and thematic reflection opportunities in Friday's 'sacred time'. As it stands, this structure does not always allow students to undertake ministries or consider the meaning of scripture. Although there is an annual calendar for the prayer life of the school showing adherence to the liturgical pattern and

rhythm of the Church, there is a lack of detail about themes, including for Catholic social teaching. As stated, larger gatherings are creative and original but there is an inferior experience in form groups where scripture can be peripheral – even in ‘sacred time’. Intensified staff training was recently introduced although enhanced skills among a broader group of staff are not yet apparent. There remains some reliance on the indisputable expertise of clergy and senior staff. Staff appreciate that the school is fortunate in its physical provision.

Leaders recognise that the policy for prayer and liturgy needs renewal. The current policy points to many opportunities for students but lacks clarity around roles and responsibilities. The celebration of the Feast of St. John Bosco, through the school’s annual Mission Week, is a joyful and meaningful event and exemplifies a prioritisation of Holy Days. This is a strength of the school. Staff are encouraged to set a ‘mission’ personal target linked to Catholic life and mission. Several leaders, including members of the Salesian community, have an excellent understanding of prayer and liturgy following the pattern of the Church’s liturgical year, and possess the skills to deliver experiences which are meaningful and relevant. Staff are appreciative and feel well-supported in the guidance they receive linked to theme, structure and expected outcomes. There has been a conscious investment by governors in religious education and the overall resourcing of Catholic life is substantial. Religious education classrooms are contiguous, close to the Chaplaincy, with the whole presenting as bright, welcoming and open. There is a half termly evaluation of prayer and liturgy via pupil and staff voice, although enhanced tracking and monitoring by leaders would support development of this provision.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	Thornleigh Salesian College
School unique reference number (URN)	105264
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	3504612
Full postal address of the school	Thornleigh Salesian College, Sharples Park, Astley Bridge, Bolton, BL1 6PQ
School phone number	001204301351
Headteacher	Mike Fitzsimons
Chair of governors	Anne-Marie Parkinson
School Website	<a href="http://www.thornleigh.bolton.sch.uk">http://www.thornleigh.bolton.sch.uk</a>
Trusteeship	Salesians of Don Bosco
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	23 <sup>rd</sup> November 2016
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

## The inspection team

Philip Mooney	Lead
Dr Daveth Frost	Team
Deacon Paul Mannings	Team
Claire Wallace	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