**IMV Report Writing Frame**

Catholic Diocese of Northampton
Interim Monitoring Visit
26 February 2020
Thornton College (URN EY306 768)

Since the last inspection, Val Holmes has been promoted from Head of RE to Headteacher (September 2018). In her 30 years of service to Thornton College, she has always been a key figure in modelling and articulating the ethos of the school and the charisms of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary. Under her leadership, the school is very much part of their worldwide mission and the sisters themselves remain an important presence in the school. The school has responded very positively to the recommendations from the last inspection demonstrating a capacity for sustained improvement. There has been a substantial increase in curriculum time enabling a stronger provision of RE. Work schemes are appropriately challenging with teachers differentiating for individual needs; this is augmented by initiatives like a Philosophy Day to provide opportunities for developing higher thinking skills. The Retreat Programme and St Claudine’s Day activities supported by Forest School, Duke of Edinburgh Award, rock-climbing and karate clubs provide opportunities for risk-taking and developing resilience. There is proactive approach in fostering staff wellbeing.

The school’s self-evaluation of RE and Catholic life is thorough, accurate and comprehensive. Thornton College is a community of loving relationships where the Christian faith is truly lived. It is outward-looking and valuable links are being formed with other schools including its brother school, St Columba’s. A powerful and inspiring day had recently been organised inviting Sixth Form groups from local maintained This is a community reaching out to those in need both locally and internationally. The leadership team is strong and governors support the school well including the Sisters who are on site. The School Development Plan illustrates a continual striving to improve. I have no hesitation in endorsing the school’s self-assessment of Outstanding in all categories.

The Catholic life of the community is thriving. Prayer is central to the school routine. There is a focus on what will be meaningful and helpful e.g. the Ash Wednesday service and an Examen at the end of the day in the prep school, both of which were observed. There are regularly updated displays around the school and the presence of the Chapel provides opportunities for reflection for pupils and staff. Thornton College is a truly special community where a culture of love and care pervades all interactions. The school is generous-spirited, striving to support those in need both locally and beyond. This is not only evident in fund-raising, which is impressive; there is an emphasis on being of practical benefit to others as illustrated by the many activities on St Claudine’s Day giving to and receiving from care home residents.

The RE department is a strong team of specialists in the senior school and the girls clearly enjoy the classes which are very stimulating e.g. a Year 8 class considering Stephen Hawking’s views of the origins of the universe was observed. RE teaching in the prep school is effective and lays a strong foundation – this has been helped by a thorough induction for the four new teachers last year. The department is very well led and senior leaders and governors are supportive of its work. With 37% of last year’s Year 11 achieving Grade 8-9, 51% of pupils achieved grades 7-9 and all but one exceeding Grade 4, the girls achieved an impressive average value-added score of +1.14 underlining their high degree of commitment to the subject. The RE provision clearly meets the needs of different groups of learners, e.g. EAL pupils or those not from a Christian background, as their achievements are consistent with the rest of the group. Most of the small A level cohort achieved A\*-B grades. Pupils’ work is beautifully presented. It is moderated across the department and their progress is regularly tracked at all stages and interventions made as required.

Areas for further improvement.

The school may like to consider the following:

* The school has become more outward-looking with the links with St Columba’s College and with St Thomas Becket School being good examples. Continue to develop mutually beneficial links with primary and secondary schools; this could include offering ring-fenced bursary places to children from local Catholic primary schools.
* Both the Curriculum Directory and the scheme for Section 48 inspections will be changing. When these are known, respond to the changes as appropriate.
* Current pupils will emerge from full time education into a world where many traditional jobs will be taken over by technological advances. Develop their entrepreneurship skills giving them the confidence to start their own businesses and use their gifts to the full, creating employment for others.

My thanks to everyone – as always it was a joy to be back in Thornton.

John Shinkwin on behalf of the Diocese of Northampton.