



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC FIRST SCHOOL

Studley Road, Redditch, B98 7RY

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Inspection dates | 8 th – 9 th July 2014 |
| Reporting Inspector | Debbie Huxtable |

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Type of School | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 4 – 9 years |
| Number on roll | 204 |
| Appropriate authority | The Governing Body |
| Chair of Governors | Mr Gerard Paisley |
| Telephone number | 01527 525821 |
| E-mail address | office@st-thomasmore.worcs.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | October 2009 |
| DFE School Number | 885/5202 |
| Unique Reference Number | 116910 |

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| Headteacher | Mrs Teresita Moriani |
|--------------------|----------------------|

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Previous inspection: | 2 |
| This inspection: | 2 |

DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Evidence

The inspection was carried out by 1 Diocesan Inspector. The focus of the inspection was on the effectiveness and use of the school's self evaluation of religious education (RE) and Catholic life. To validate the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation of teaching and learning, the inspector observed 3 full RE lessons with the headteacher and RE co-ordinator. In addition the inspector completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time. She held meetings with the headteacher, chair and vice chair of governors, staff, the parish priest and chaplain. She observed a mass, collective worship, whole school assembly and undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of learning and teaching in RE, the presentation of the Catholic life of the school, and pupils' behaviour. She looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self-evaluation such as RAISEonline, the development plan, teachers' planning, and assessments. Alongside the validation of the school self-evaluation, the inspector gathered evidence about Catholic life, which will be shared with other diocesan schools.

Information about the school

St Thomas More is a smaller than average one and a half form entry Catholic first school serving the parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Redditch. The school currently has 204 pupils on roll 59% of whom are baptised Catholics. The majority of pupils 65.5% are from white British background but there are significant groups from Indian and other white backgrounds, most of whom originate from Poland. The school serves an area of high social deprivation with the proportion eligible for free school meals above the national average, as are the numbers of ethnic minority pupils and pupils with English as an additional language. Attainment on entry to the reception class is below the national average.

Main Finding

In its self-evaluation the school judges the quality of its Catholic life and religious education as good. Evidence gathered during the inspection is broadly in line with this judgement as the school has accurately identified the key areas for strengthening and further development of religious education and the Catholic life of the school. The school has been through some transition in recent years when there was an acting head in post. However a new head was appointed in September 2013 and her drive for school improvement is beginning to show an impact on standards across all areas. This new head, along with a new chaplain and the established RE co-ordinator share a clear vision for the Catholic life of the school and this is strengthened by other members of staff, a strong and committed governing body and the school community. Children and parents are proud of the Catholicity of the school and the newly reviewed mission statement gives direction and places "Our Catholic faith at the heart of all we teach, believe and celebrate"

School self evaluation

The school has a strong Catholic ethos and is committed to building on this to strengthen and further develop its distinctive vision and belief that Christ and gospel values are central to the school and permeate all aspects of its life. Evidence gathered at the inspection shows that the school now has in place effective systems of monitoring and evaluating the Catholic life of the school and that these are starting to impact on outcomes for pupils and families. Governors recognise their pivotal role in the development of the school vision and are very active in school life many attending Masses, assemblies and other activities. This gives them the opportunity to seek the views and opinions of pupils and parents and in turn

feeds into their discussions on the Catholic life of the school. They are well supported by the school chaplain who, together with the parish priest who is also a governor of the school, provides a strong spiritual direction. A proactive school council and pupil interviews indicate that pupils feel listened to and able to contribute to the direction of the school and how they live out the values in their daily lives. These informal systems have given governors an accurate base line but the headteacher and subject leader recognised that a more thorough audit would strengthen their current practices and provide more detailed and accurate information to governors and other stakeholders. They therefore introduced a more robust and systematic audit with governors and staff which has led to a detailed, whole school review of the mission statement. The school also now has in place a clear and precise action plan including key objectives, actions and impact measures. Governors and leadership are committed to further embedding these processes to reflect the growing needs of the school and have included an objective in the headteacher appraisal process to ensure this. The school development plan accurately identifies targets for RE and collective worship and governors have identified RE as a key area for development. The school's use of an external consultant to evaluate provision has enabled the school to correctly identify key drivers for improvement of both the RE curriculum and the Catholic Life of the school.

The school judges the pupils' response to and participation in collective worship as good. This is broadly in line with the evidence gathered during the inspection. Children were well behaved and respectful during collective worship particularly during Mass where they respond with reverence and enthusiasm to the liturgy. All lessons observed by the inspector began with prayers and this was an integral part of the lesson. Some classes wrote their own prayers and shared them with the rest of the class as part of a prayer service at the end of the lesson. The experienced RE co-ordinator has provided staff with effective guidance and support so that there is clear progress with the children's knowledge of formal prayers. The RE Co-ordinator has also monitored the provision and use of prayer tables in classrooms and this has enabled her to ensure consistency and a minimum expectation for all classes.

The school self-evaluation judges RE overall to be good and the evidence gathered during inspection shows the strong leadership by the headteacher and RE co-ordinator has accurately identified key areas for improvement. Paired lesson observations during the inspection show the headteacher and RE Co-ordinator make accurate judgments and have clear expectations of staff which is reinforced by good timetabling and deployment of support staff. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored through a termly plan and includes a thorough scrutiny of teachers' planning, lesson observations, work trawls and pupil interviews. The findings of this monitoring is fed back to staff both individually and in phase groups with actions for improvement identified. Support is targeted through staff meetings to all teachers or to individuals who require improvement. Long term strategic plans are also in place to provide more day to day support where it is needed most. The headteacher and RE co-ordinator make accurate judgements and have now set clear expectations of staff which are reinforced by good timetabling and deployment of support staff.

Processes for assessment of attainment are in place and all staff complete end of unit assessments which feed into future planning as well as providing evidence for judgements on pupils' learning. The school has developed a pupil self-assessment system and pupil interviews show that pupils are able to reflect on their own learning and accurately use new vocabulary in different contexts. Portfolios of levelled work are used by the staff and subject leader to ensure a consistency of judgements across the year groups. Moderation is effectively used in some year groups to ensure consistency of judgements but needs to be more consistently applied and also extended to incorporate more work with other

schools. Leaders have accurately identified the need to further develop the use of data to analysis progress over time as well as progress of vulnerable groups and the need to provide governors with more detailed data analysis of standards in RE.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

Baseline assessments completed by the teachers in the Reception class at the beginning of the year, show that children enter school below expectations and a repeat of the baseline assessment at the end of the year, shows clear improvement across all areas. Progress currently slows in Key Stage 1 but is accelerated in Key Stage 2 so that by the end of Year 4 when children leave the school, they are at least in line with expectations and many above expectations. This was identified in the school self-evaluation and plans have already been made by the leadership to address the issue of consistency across all classes.

Children have an outstanding knowledge of Bible stories and they are able to interpret and apply these stories to life today. Lists of key vocabulary for each unit can be found in all books and this has a very positive impact on children who are skilfully and confidently using the appropriate vocabulary for the teaching unit. Where teaching is good, staff work hard to make lessons interesting and to provide a variety of activities to stimulate learning. However in a small number of classes, teachers need to provide more opportunities for children to express their feelings, views and thoughts through prolonged pieces of writing rather than being limited by too many worksheets.

The curriculum is based on the diocesan curriculum strategy '*Learning and Growing as the People of God*' and staff work hard to enthuse and motivate pupils with a variety of activities such as drama, role play and diary writing. Opportunities to develop the spirituality and a moral framework of pupils are embedded in the planning as are aspects of the multi-cultural and vocational curriculum.

Pupils take on responsibilities and are keen to extend their Catholicity outside the boundaries of the school through organising fund raising events for a variety of charities within the community. The school recognises the diversity within their own families and how Catholics from different cultural backgrounds celebrate their Catholic faith. This enriches and supports the Catholic life of the school and children are respectful and show consideration of other religions and beliefs. They are proud of their school and are confident and enthusiastic when talking about the distinct nature of the Catholic ethos of their school.

Leadership of the school is good and the headteacher, who is very open and honest about her limited experience in leading a Catholic school, is using this in a positive way in order to question and review all aspects of the RE curriculum. She recognises the gifts and talents of her staff, governors, and clergy and the impact of this can be seen in the development of the Catholic life of the school since she started in September 2013. The headteacher and RE co-ordinator work well as a team and have a clear vision of what they want to achieve with respect to the Catholic life of the school. This vision is shared by the very supportive clergy, the school governors and the staff. They are good role models and are committed to the principles of a Christ centred school where all children are equal and unique.

The recent emphasis on prayer and collective worship is clearly having a positive impact in the classrooms and there are more opportunities for staff and children to pray together. The regular celebration of Mass is central to the life of the school and is greatly enjoyed by

¹ As the quality of the school self evaluation has been affirmed, the judgements in this section of the report conform to those of the school.

all the children, even the youngest. The school chaplain makes a significant contribution to the school and is a constant source of knowledge and support to staff, children and school families. Prayer posters are displayed in all classrooms to prompt the children and to help them to learn prayers by heart. In some classes children are beginning to be involved in the planning of prayers and Mass and the RE co-ordinator has plans to develop this further next year. The school has excellent links with the clergy and benefit from a close relationship with a chaplain who regularly visits and supports both children and staff as well as a deacon and the parish priest who is the link governor for RE. Prayer tables are in all classrooms as well as artefacts of various kinds to support the teaching and experiences of prayer. Staff may now wish to build on this in order to make the prayer table more relevant to the age group of individual classes and the unit they are teaching at the time. Children have some experience of different types and forms of collective worship but the use of music to enhance the experience is not yet used widely across the school and some collective worship would benefit from a more child focused theme appropriate to the age of the children.

St Thomas More First School is an improving school where children and families are rightly proud of its strong Catholic life and the standards in RE that the children achieve.

Recommendations

- Develop formal processes for monitoring and evaluating collective worship with a view to ensuring that the variety of experiences, including the use of music, enables pupils to plan, lead and engage with age-appropriate liturgies.
- Develop the assessment of RE through a robust analysis of data including that of vulnerable groups and report this regularly to governors, so that they can have a clearer knowledge and understanding of the standards and progress in RE.



Diocesan Education Service,
Don Bosco House,
Coventry Road,
Coleshill,
B46 3EA

July 2014

Dear Parents and Carers

Section 48 (Diocesan) Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic First School, 8th – 9th July 2014

I am writing this letter to share with you the findings of the diocesan inspection of your children's school. Diocesan inspection now explores in detail the school's own view of itself as expressed in its self-evaluation. For this reason, much of the report is more technical than used to be the case. You are still entitled to have a copy of the full report should you want one and it will be available on the school website or by request from the school office.

St Thomas More First School is a good Catholic school that has accurately set itself targets to improve even further. It is committed to strengthening and further developing its distinctive vision and belief that Christ and gospel values are central to its ethos and permeate all aspects of its life. Collective worship is an integral part of the daily life of the school and contributes to the spiritual and moral development of the children. Prayer and collective worship is clearly having a positive impact in the classrooms and there are many opportunities for staff and children to pray together. The regular celebration of Mass is central to the life of the school and is greatly enjoyed by all the children, even the youngest. The leadership of the headteacher and RE co-ordinator is good and they are well supported by governors, staff and priests.

Children make good progress in religious education and, by the time they leave the school, achievement is good. Their knowledge of Bible stories is outstanding. Good achievement is in large measure the outcome of good teaching. Children make a significant contribution to the Catholic life of the school and benefit from it. They are happy in school, have an understanding of their uniqueness and show respect for each other's differences, whether cultural or religious.

I have recommended that the school further develops opportunities for collective worship that are varied, age appropriate and engaging. As well as this I think governors should be more involved with the assessment of RE and how different pupils achieve.

It was an honour and a privilege to inspect St Thomas More First School. The children, families and staff all made me feel very welcome and it was a real pleasure to spend some time in the school. I wish you all happiness and success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Debbie Huxtable
Diocesan Inspector