



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD



Inspection Report

Name of School: St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Unique Reference Number: 137081

Inspection Date: 25 November 2013

**Reporting Inspectors: Dr Michael Sutherland-Harper and
Mrs Patricia O'Byrne**

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

**Type of School: Primary
School Category: Academy Converter
Age range of pupils: 4-11
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 211
Appropriate Authority: The governing body
Date of previous inspection:**

**School Address: South Road
Saffron Walden
CB11 3DW**

**Tel. No. 01799 523248
Fax No. 01799 525800
Chair of Governors: Mr Ken Lowe
Headteacher: Mrs Mary Jo Hall**

Introduction:

The Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education (Schools) Act 2005 by two inspectors appointed by the Diocesan Bishop at the request of the Governing Body of the School.

The Inspectors acknowledge and are appreciative of the full support, co-operation and courtesy they enjoyed from the Governors, Headteacher, Staff and Pupils of the School both before and during the Inspection. The Inspectors wish to express their gratitude to all concerned.

The focus of the Section 48 Inspection was:

- Classroom Religious Education
- The Catholic nature of the School through:
 1. Worship
 2. Links with the Catholic and wider community
- Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development

The Section 48 Report

**St Thomas More Catholic Primary School
South Road
Saffron Walden
CB11 3DW**

Head Teacher: Mrs Mary Jo Hall

Date of Inspection: 25 November 2013

Description of the School:

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is an academy situated in Saffron Walden in the county of Essex and in the diocese of Brentwood. The school is a smaller than average-sized primary school. The school serves the Catholic parish of Our Lady of Compassion in Saffron Walden.

Record of Evidence Base:

Two Diocesan Inspectors were in the school for the equivalent of two inspection days.

- The study of pre-inspection documentation including the Self-Evaluation Form/ Denominational Provision (SEF/DP).
- The observation of 7 lessons.
- Participation in an assembly.
- Scrutiny of pupils' written work.
- Meetings with the Headteacher who is currently also part of the three-person team co-ordinating Religious Education (R.E.), the Chair and Vice-Chair of Governors, parents and a group of pupils comprised of the House Captains and the Chaplaincy Group.
- Observations of R.E. displays in the classrooms and around the school.

What the School does well:

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School places great store by, and lives up to, its pupil-friendly mission statement: 'Loving to learn and learning to love in Jesus'. Led by its deeply-committed, experienced headteacher, it is an outstanding Catholic school, providing its pupils with an outstanding Catholic education.

Outcomes in R.E. are good. Pupils leave the school with results which are above average and sometimes well above. They have positive attitudes to learning and enjoy R.E. lessons, where they have regular opportunities to discuss their thinking with each other. They grow in confidence as they move up the school, also having many ways in which they can serve as ambassadors for the school community. A growing number of pupils have reached the highest levels (level 3 at Key Stage 1 and level 5 at Key Stage 2) in recent years but the match of work to ability has been sometimes too general to allow the more able to make rapid progress in reaching level 5 by the time they reach the end of Key Stage 2. The school is currently reviewing its assessment procedures to ensure that those reaching the highest levels continue to increase in number.

Pupils' learning and progress in R.E. is good. Pupils make good, and sometimes better, progress in R.E. as they continue their studies. Strong support systems enable those who have needs of any kind to make good progress. The school is working successfully to refine its systems for tracking the on-going progress of all groups. However, in a few lessons, pupils have slightly less time when they can take the lead with their learning or let their enthusiasm for the topics under consideration take them forward without adult help.

Opportunities for pupils to contribute to, and benefit from, the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. Pupils spoken to, and observed during the inspection are very proud of

their school and benefit from many occasions when they can develop spiritually, morally, socially and personally. These include participation in prayer groups, work as prefects, Year 5 buddies for Reception children, close links with the parish and fund-raising for charities. In order to further develop this area, the school has chosen its current focus on 'statements to live by' and individual 'prayer journals' as a part of pupils' life-long religious development.

Pupils have an outstanding variety of ways in which they are able to respond to, and participate in, collective worship. During the inspection, they demonstrated their deep affection in an assembly for one of the local priests who was retiring from his role. Pupils willingly take part in prayer in class and in collective gatherings. They have experience of prayer writing, including for the prayer tree in the school grounds. Links with the local parish are strong. The parish priest, who knows the school and its community very well, makes regular visits both as a priest and governor and shares the school's determination to expand parish-school links. Pupils are ready to take an even higher profile than they already have in organizing collective worship, including the music, around the school.

Leaders', governors' and managers' efforts to develop the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. The headteacher and governors have an accurate picture of the school and are determined to make it as good as possible in every way. They are working steadily to implement the new 'Come and See' scheme of work for R.E., on which governors have received training, and the 'statements for life'. Governors make regular visits to the school. Year 6 pupils are also involved with the school vision as members of the Chaplaincy Team. Staff professional development is regularly undertaken by the senior leadership team.

Leaders, governors and managers are making good efforts to implement improvements to outcomes for pupils. Leaders and governors have identified those areas requiring some further work, including further development of staff skills through increased opportunities to observe and share best practice in classroom skills. Assessment systems for recording and tracking progress and attainment in R.E. are being reviewed. Plans are under way to increase the number of school and class Masses and to complete the school's prayer garden.

Learning and teaching in R.E. are good. Pupils are well behaved in lessons and know that they are there to learn. The majority of lessons seen during the inspection were good and some were outstanding. Lessons are always well planned but there is some inconsistency in the way work is matched to ability. The school recognizes that assessment and marking procedures require greater consistency across the school and is also looking at ways to ensure that there are more opportunities for pupils to take a leading role in their learning and for the more able pupils to work independently at a faster rate.

The curriculum is good and is in the course of development as the school completes the introduction of 'Come and See'. It is supplemented by a wide range of activities which engage pupils further with their learning and relate R.E. to the world around them. The school meets both the national and diocesan requirements for the allocation of curriculum

time for taught R.E. Teachers make good use of information and communication technology to deliver the different modules.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. Pupils are respectful of each other and adults, have a strong sense of right and wrong, and regular chances to interact with different cultures and religions.

What needs to be improved?

- **Ensure that systems for marking, assessment and lesson planning are consistent and high throughout the school**
- **Increase opportunities for identifying and sharing best practice in classroom skills in order to fully develop all staff**
- **Refine systems to enable more able pupils to reach the highest level in R.E. and to work independently at that level.**

The Inspectors endorse the areas identified by the school for improvement in the Section 48 Self-Evaluation Form.