



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD



Inspection Report

Name of School: St Thomas More's Catholic Primary School

LEA: Essex County Council

Inspection Date: 22nd October 2015

Reporting Inspector: Pamela Brannigan

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

Type of School: Primary
School Category: Catholic Academy
Age range of pupils: 4 - 11
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 211
Appropriate Authority: The Governing Body
Date of previous inspection: June 2008

School Address:
St Thomas More's Catholic Primary School
Priory St
Colchester
Essex
CO1 2QB

Tel. No. 01206 865722
Headteacher: Mrs B. Harris
Chair of Governors: Mr S. Fenning

Information about the school

St Thomas More's Catholic School is one-form entry situated in central Colchester, Essex in the diocese of Brentwood. The school serves the parishes of St James the Less, St John Payne Greenstead and St Monica's Wivenhoe. There are 211 pupils on roll, 97% of whom are Catholic, mainly coming from the parish of St James the Less. The school is oversubscribed and cannot always offer places to children from Catholic families. Pupils have a wide cultural heritage and many have a first language other than English. Two pupils have statements of Special Educational needs. The school has a stable staff, 62% of whom are Catholic. The headteacher also oversees another diocesan Catholic school with which it works closely.

Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Satisfactory 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Thomas More's is an outstanding Catholic school. The head teacher together with the governors, other members of the senior leadership team and the subject leader who is also the deputy headteacher are very effective in promoting the Catholic dimension of the school. Staff are excellent role models for the pupils. Prayer is an integral part of the school's daily life and is central to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. Pupils behave very well, work hard and thrive within a strong Christian community where they feel loved, well supported and safe. The school works closely with all stakeholders including parents, the diocese and the local deanery group. Teaching is at least good and often outstanding. During the course of their time in the school, pupils make very good progress.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 1

The school has an excellent capacity for sustained improvement. It has addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection in 2008. Since that time a number of new initiatives have taken place including a change in religious education scheme, from 'Here I Am' to 'Come and See' which is now embedded.

The headteacher, governors and senior leadership are committed to improving St Thomas More's still further. The Catholic dimension of the school is strengthened through very good parish links and many opportunities for pupils to plan and lead worship. The head teacher, ably supported by all members of staff, ensures the Catholic mission of the school is explicit and understood by the entire school community.

The inspector agrees with the school's summative grading in its self-evaluation form and the areas discussed for future development. The headteacher together with senior leaders and governors is well placed to ensure outstanding effectiveness is maintained.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to implement the areas for development identified in the school's self-evaluation.
- Ensure the school mission statement is known and understood by all pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 1

Pupils' achievement is of a very high standard. All groups are well supported and attain expected standards. Pupils enjoy their work, concentrate well and are keen to succeed. Older pupils are able to work independently and understand how to improve. Pupils are interested in religious education and strive to achieve the learning objective. By the end of Key Stage 2 they achieve and sometimes exceed diocesan expectations.

The quality of pupils' learning and progress in religious education is outstanding. Their behaviour for learning is of a very high standard both in class and around the school. They are actively engaged in their religious education lessons and co-operate and work well in pairs as well as individually.

The extent to which pupils benefit from the Catholic life of the school is also outstanding. They are eager to participate in all aspects of school life. They are friendly and thoughtful, ready to help others; they, in turn, feel valued, safe and well supported. Pupils enjoy the family atmosphere; they have a common sense of belonging, everyone is important, everyone belongs. They are proud of their roles as buddies and membership of the school council. Pupils enjoy the responsibility given to them as prefects and are enthusiastic about the very many extra-curricular activities offered by the school. Pupils can talk about the main events in the Church's year and know how the life and teachings of Jesus affects their responsibilities to each other. However, not all pupils know the school mission statement.

The prayer life of the school permeates everything it does and is central to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. They know the traditional prayers of the Church appropriate for their age group and are able to write their own prayers, many of which were seen during the inspection. During collective worship and reflections observed, pupils were attentive and responsive. All classrooms have an area which provides a focus point for prayer and reflection. Pupils are encouraged to compose their own prayers in class and at home. Music is a strength of the school and pupils' beautiful singing enhances celebrations and is also appreciated in the parish church. There is a large choir which sings at public events including Joint Schools Brentwood Christmas Concert and at the O2.

Chaplaincy is regarded as a shared responsibility by all staff. Pupils spoken to were confident about where to go if they need help or advice. In addition a counsellor is available for vulnerable pupils and their families. Pupils have a good understanding of their responsibilities to those beyond the school community and are involved in charity work throughout the year. All age groups fund raise enthusiastically for CAFOD and other charities and understand the theology underpinning this commitment. Pupils brought in contributions for the local food bank as part of their harvest celebration which took place during the inspection and included a reflection on the need to share God's gifts. Older pupils are very much aware of the needs within their own community and the wider world.

Leaders and managers

Grade 1

The leadership of the school's Catholic life is outstanding. The head teacher has a clear vision for the school which is shared and owned by all members of the school community. All the staff clearly promote the Catholic life of the school and are excellent role models for pupils. The Catholic mission of the school is unambiguous and evidenced in its daily life and within the wider community. There is a range of religious education related displays in classes and around the school which are linked to topic themes, the liturgical year, particular events or specific prayers.

The subject leader is experienced, enthusiastic and highly motivated to ensure religious education is regarded as a core subject. She is an excellent teacher who is able to

demonstrate lessons or work alongside new colleagues. In-service education is used effectively to support and develop staff skills and subject knowledge. Leaders work hard to support colleagues through a programme of lesson observations and monitoring planning and workbooks. They are currently exploring the possibility of adapting 'Target Tracker' to aid assessment.

Governors are very aware of their responsibilities and understand the strengths and areas for development within the school. They attend all parents' evenings and meet staff formally for evaluation and planning meetings. The parish priest from St James the Less acts as link governor for religious education and is extremely knowledgeable about the school. He visits frequently and has a good understanding of day-to-day activities. There are regular monitoring visits and reports prepared for the governing body.

The school is highly regarded by its parent body. Recent questionnaires indicated overwhelming support and appreciation for every aspect of school life. Parents value the wide range of extra-curricular activities given to their children including the provision of a breakfast club which helps the whole family. Parents and carers are kept well informed about the religious education curriculum and the liturgical life of the school. They are invited to all celebrations including Mass in the parish church which pupils in Key Stage 2 attend on a rota basis.

Provision

Grade 1

Good planning, lively pace, open and challenging questioning and effective use of talking partners result in teaching being at least good, often outstanding. Pupils are given a very good start in Early Years which is built on as pupils progress through the school. Good examples of differentiation were seen during the inspection which resulted in all pupils making good progress. In Year 6 pupils were involved in interviewing a permanent deacon to establish the different roles of priests and deacons. They formulated their own questions which lead to increased understanding of the sacrament of ordination. Opportunities are generally taken to challenge pupils and they make very good progress. Resources including class sets of bibles are used well to ensure pupils are familiar with scripture. Workbooks are well presented and reflect the pupils' pride in their work. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed and provide good support for groups and individual pupils.

The school has been working on the assessment of pupils' attainment levels in religious education and staff are confident when levelling pupils' work. There are regular moderation sessions across the school and there are plans to include other deanery schools in the process. Thorough and informative marking ensures that pupils know what they need to do to improve their work. The school devotes at least 10% of teaching time to religious education and the curriculum is enhanced through effective links with the local parish. Drama is also incorporated into the curriculum with role play observed in some classes. The religious education curriculum is further enriched through the school's charity work and its musical flair.

Collective worship is very well planned and there is a variety of formal and informal opportunities for daily prayer. Masses are celebrated in school and parish, special assemblies are held and plans are in place to develop a prayer garden in the school grounds. Parents are invited to many celebrations including Masses, Ash Wednesday services, Easter and Christmas plays, Harvest and assemblies; the school also provides a wide variety of clubs and enrichment activities which provide opportunities for the development of skills and interests. Achievement in school and outside of school is celebrated. Pupils are fully involved in planning and leading liturgies and assemblies.

The inspector would like to thank all members of the school community for the warm welcome and the hospitality extended during her visit.