



SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the
Archbishop of Southwark and inspection of
Denominational Education under Section 48
Of the Education Act 2005
URN 118769

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School
Bleakwood Road
Chatham Kent
ME5 0NF

Inspection date: 24 April 2013

Chair of Governors: Mrs C Nourse
Headteacher: Mrs Siân Williams
Inspectors: Mr Stephen Beck
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EDUCATION COMMISSION

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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

St Thomas More School is voluntary aided. It is situated in the Chatham Deanery. It is maintained by Medway Local Authority. St Simon Stock Walderslade is the principle parish that serves the school. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics has fallen since the last inspection and now stands at 36%. The balance of 64% consists of other Christian denominations, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and some of no faith background. The school and parish celebrate this diversity whilst consistently working hard to address this imbalance which sees a more 50/50 percentage in lower year groups. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is approximately 10% in all Key Stages.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 420 up from 402 at the last inspection. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is generally below average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free schools meals at 17% is above average. Around 23% of the pupils receive extra support in class. Some 35% of the pupils are from ethnic origins other than White British reflecting an upward trend. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is above average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

GRADE

1

St Thomas More School is an excellent Catholic school with many outstanding features such as the leadership and management of the school, the quality of provision for worship and Religious Education. It is notable that this is achieved in an environment that seeks to meet the needs of a widely spiritually diverse community. The strong Catholic ethos has in no way been diluted being enshrined in the school mission statement which influences all aspects of school life and has a positive impact on the quality of education. It is a statement that appropriately addresses its context by committing to, *'provide each pupil with an equal opportunity to experience the love of God and a sense of their own worth'*. The school is highly effective in all that it does and as a result has moved from its previous good with outstanding features grade to an overall grade of outstanding. It is to the school's credit that in achieving this in its Ofsted inspection it has worked equally tirelessly to move the Religious Education curriculum and teaching in the same direction.

St Thomas More is a warm, welcoming school, from the first point of contact, reflecting a strong emphasis on teamwork and collective responsibility for all that happens. Religious Education is given a very high priority that sees it operated as a core subject. The school places a strong emphasis on self-evaluation and the self-evaluation form provided was clear, concise and gave a very accurate account of the school's strengths and areas for development which inspectors have been able to validate. There is a commitment to continuous improvement with an attitude that complacency is not an option and the school is therefore strongly placed to secure continuous improvement.

With a high return of parental questionnaires it is noteworthy that they were 100% positive. As one family wrote, *'St Thomas More has a wonderful family feeling. We have felt very welcomed into the Catholic life of the school despite being Christian believers of a different denomination. Great example is shown by staff and school leadership. Fr Steve is always approachable and engaging with children throughout the school. As a family we feel very blessed to be part of the school's Christian family.'*

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, headteacher and staff should:

- Secure the combined use of the 'Come and See' programme with the 'Way the Truth and Life' programme to provide a clearly documented school Religious Education programme applicable to its context.
- Monitor Religious Education provision to ensure a more consistent allocation of 10% curriculum time to this subject area.
- Continue to develop the school assessment data for Religious Education to enable assessment to have an even greater impact on planning to meet the needs of all pupils.

The Catholic life of the school

Leadership and management

GRADE 1

Leadership and management at all levels are outstanding and have a positive impact on the development and wellbeing of all involved in the school. The headteacher is an inspirational leader with a clear vision of Catholic education, which shapes the school's strong direction. She exudes a passion for Religious Education as a key element in ensuring pupils have an understanding of what, and why, they do things helping them to achieve their goals. There is a strong sense of collegiality across the whole school which undoubtedly contributes to its success. This also impacts on the excellent relationships that are fostered with parents, carers and wider family networks.

St Thomas More is outstanding, in part as a result of clarity of vision, a clear and shared understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development, high levels of mutual trust and a view that success is the only option. The headteacher is the driving force but she receives excellent support from her senior team, staff and a governing body of significant strength. The school's mission statement is a living document that receives a high profile around the school, is at the centre of all documentation and is lived out by staff and pupils. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural aspects of the curriculum were described as vibrant aspects of the school's curriculum by Ofsted and this is clearly evidenced in the Religious Education curriculum, which supports pupils' development in these areas to a high order.

The Parish Priest is extremely supportive of the life of the school. He provides, with the Religious Education link governor who works closely with the religious education subject leader, an informative link with the governing body for both this curriculum area and the overall life of the school. In addition he supports teachers in the teaching of the sacraments, as well as providing a strong chaplaincy role for the school community as a whole.

Quality of provision for personal and collective worship

GRADE 1

The school more than fulfils its statutory obligations in regard to worship. It places great importance on prayer being at the centre of all that happens during the day and sees prayer as integral to the life of this happy community. It is recognised that pupils have had different experiences of worship, so a focus is given to developing their personal relationship with God through prayer and reflection in recognition of the individuality of each person's faith journey.

There is excellent provision for personal and collective worship that includes a whole school assembly each Monday, a Key Stage 1 assembly each Thursday and Key Stage 2 each Wednesday, with these being closely linked to the liturgical calendar. On other days pupils have an opportunity to participate in a more intimate class prayer and reflection.

Traditional prayers are said at the beginning of the day, lunchtimes and at the end of each day. The liturgical year is closely followed and marked by appropriate celebrations, during Advent, at Christmas and in Lent when all Key Stage 2 pupils have the opportunity to take part in Reconciliation services. Participation in Nativities and other services throughout the year give pupils the opportunity to express their spirituality, through dance, word and song. Each month a class participates in a liturgy which is attended by the Parish Priest. Parents are warmly invited to all liturgies. A designated quiet area allows pupils the opportunity to pray for specific things, either individually or as a small group. Class focal areas and displays reflect the current 'Come and See' topic or the liturgical year. Currently the children of Year 3 are prepared with the parish for the sacraments of Reconciliation and

Holy Eucharist. Whole school Masses are celebrated for Holy Days of Obligation and other school celebrations e.g. First Holy Communion and the beginning and end of each term. Music is used as an important tool to enhance pupils' spiritual development. The pupils listen to appropriate music as an aid to their time of prayer and reflection and display reverence and thoughtfulness during liturgies.

The children have a great sense of fairness and take their responsibilities seriously. They know the difference between right and wrong and can express themselves confidently and respectfully. There is a good relationship between learners and staff. Pupils are tolerant and respectful, feel safe at school and feel confident to talk to an adult if they are worried. Pupils of other faiths are respectful and keen participants in the understanding of the Catholic faith, providing a rich resource for the school. This attitude is reciprocal throughout the school community.

The school accesses the Place2B counselling service which provides an opportunity for pupils to develop their social skills, by talking through problems and learning how to interact with others.

There are very strong links with the parish community within which the school is held in very high regard. Pupils are given many opportunities to access the church for liturgies and as a resource.

In an assembly led by the headteacher, pupils entered the hall in very good order creating a reverent atmosphere. The concept of 'saying sorry' being able to 'lift a weight' from a person was very well presented through a weight carrying activity demonstrated by four pupils. The whole school was engaged throughout. The full participation of staff in the assembly alongside the pupils was noteworthy and added significant value to the assembly. The assembly concluded with the reading of prayers submitted by pupils and excellent, enthusiastic singing with signing.

A Year 4 liturgy examined the concept of Jesus describing us as sheep. It was very well planned utilising a range of learning strategies. Pupils read extremely well, with clarity, intonation and excellent diction. The celebration was greatly enhanced by input from the Parish Priest and the involvement of a large number of parents, who worked with the pupils on a task to identify their talents. All pupils were fully engaged and demonstrated a willingness and keenness to share their work. Very good singing and the use of prayers made this a reverent and reflective occasion.

Class focal points are of a very good standard and benefit from a consistency across the school whilst retaining a variety of content. They are well used as lesson starters and at times of prayer. High quality displays are made good use of throughout the school, which is noticeable from the point of entry into the school with a reception area that immediately marks the school out as Catholic.

Community cohesion

The leaders of the school are aware and respect the differences that exist between members of the whole school and wider community and demonstrate this respect in the way everyone is treated. St Thomas More is an inclusive school with Inclusion being central in the development of the school through its mission statement. An appreciation of the diverse range of cultures that exist within the school enables pupils to learn from, and with each other, with all pupils and staff being included in all aspects of liturgy.

GRADE 1

Awareness of the needs of others in the local and wider community is promoted through fundraising. Support for various charities include Cabrini Society, Poppy Appeal, Good Shepherd, Caring Hands in the Community, Medway food bank, Children in Need, Macmillan nurses and Demelza House. The school supports the work of the Knights of St Columba each year by entering their annual Christmas card competition. In which pupils have won prizes and enjoyed taking part. Pupils participate in a broad range of inter school competitions, sporting and otherwise. All adults are good role models for the children and the children in turn are encouraged to be good role models for each other, e.g. Council members, Year 6 lunchtime monitors and Young Play Leaders. The school is supportive of local parish events for example, a recent poster competition 'Life in the Spirit'. This support is mutually reciprocal.

The school actively promotes community cohesion through the Religious Education programme and teaching of other world faiths. Through education in other world faiths pupils gain an insight into the beliefs of others and recognise the importance of those beliefs. This helps them to value each other as individuals and to recognise strengths in everyone. Pupils are increasingly aware of their own identity and are taught to treasure the gifts and talents of others. They are introduced to the idea of social harmony and the diversity of backgrounds within the school, the local area, the United Kingdom and the wider world. The school was very supportive of a family who suffered bereavement last year. The parent wrote, *'Last year, I was, as expected, all over the place but staff showed me nothing but kindness. They have also kept a close eye on the children ensuring that all is well with them. I feel they have given great moral and spiritual care to my family. The children will go out into this world having been given the right start from all staff at the school. They are in good hands and I feel I am too'.*

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Religious Education

GRADE 1

Achievement and standards in Religious Education

Pupils enter school with below average attainment particularly in communication and language skills. Religious knowledge in many cases is virtually non-existent. The school sets high targets, expecting the same high standards in Religious Education as in other subjects and due to consistently focussed teaching in Foundation Stage, pupils make rapid progress in Religious Education and achieve well. They are encouraged from the start to become independent learners and 'catch' an enthusiasm and thirst for learning. Very good progress continues through Key Stages 1 and 2 where a majority of pupils build successfully on this solid foundation, making very good progress that sees a significant number achieve above age related expectations by the end of Key Stage 2.

Pupils make such good progress because the school has taken comprehensive steps to ensure all their needs are met. Consequently those with learning difficulties and those who are more able make appropriate progress.

Pupils demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of religious concepts during plenaries and through completing written and oral tasks. They are beginning to understand the moral implications of what they study as they see that different groups of people have different priorities. Across the Key Stages pupils can readily empathise with others and can explain how people might feel in specific circumstances. Pupils' clearly see their Religious Education books as being special. They are well presented and show that they can record work in a number of different ways. Pupils can recount Bible stories and can apply what they have learnt in Religious Education lessons or assemblies to real-life situations, thus developing a conscience and knowing how their choices can affect others.

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

GRADE 1

Teaching is very good and frequently inspirational, successfully building on previous knowledge. It is marked by good planning and high expectations alongside challenging activities which engage pupils' interest. Learning intentions are shared at the start of each lesson so that pupils are clear about what they have to learn. They are revisited at points in the lesson in order to keep pupils focussed and enable them to stay on task. Classroom management is of a very high order and supports teachers use of a variety of approaches and activities that make lessons relevant and interesting. Pupils are supported and encouraged to take responsibility for aspects of their own learning as appropriate.

Pupil behaviour and attitudes are exemplary. Positive behaviour strategies, based on Gospel values, are known and understood by all pupils. Extra support is provided to SEN/EAL pupils with work being differentiated so that all children can succeed through teachers setting work at an appropriate but challenging level of difficulty. Highly effective support and guidance is in place where needed.

Formal assessment is carried out using a range of methods and is impacting very positively on learning. Development of assessment strategies is ongoing with pupils being encouraged to undertake self-assessment. Very good teacher marking is consistently applied across the school and is often interactive encouraging pupils to reflect on their work and make further progress.

Teaching at St Thomas More has numerous strengths. It is consistently challenging, has good pace, is supported by good planning and teachers providing real examples from their own lives to support learning and elements of humour where appropriate. This reflects teachers self-confidence and strong subject knowledge. Good use is made of cross

curricular opportunities. Very good and appropriate use is made of interactive white boards.

In a Reception class the teacher demonstrated considerable skill in presenting the topic of Jesus rising from the dead and the reaction of his friends, particularly Thomas, in an age related context enabling the pupils to relate the subject matter to the friendships they experience in their lives. Likewise in a Year 1 class dealing with 'What happened on Ascension Day', learning was reinforced through the effective use of the interactive whiteboard and pupils' experiences of losing a pet, thereby relating the work appropriately to the age group. Year 2 were given the opportunity to undertake a practical task to send a message in a bottle that related to the importance of Jesus' messages still being important and relevant today. A challenging task to which the pupils rose. The class was marked by a 'buzz' of enthusiastic learning throughout. The Year 3 group made excellent use of role play and freeze framing to discuss their understanding of the resurrection of Jesus. In a Year 5 lesson the subject of the gifts of the Holy Spirit was exceptionally well presented with pupils being able to relate the gifts to their own lives. Year 6 pupils demonstrated a good knowledge of the Bible and ability to quickly source given texts. Consistently throughout the lesson pupils build religious vocabulary, whilst developing an in depth understanding by pupils, of feelings and emotions in the context of doubting Thomas and their own lives. Good use was made of opportunities to engage in debate through paired and group work.

The Religious Education curriculum

GRADE 1

St Thomas More School having adopted the Religious Education scheme supported by the Diocese, 'Come and See' has skilfully reflected on the needs of its pupils and appropriately supplemented this scheme with elements of, 'The Way the Truth and the Life' scheme. This reflects the determination of the school to assess and meet the needs of all pupils by tapping into and giving relevance to the subject in their everyday lives. The curriculum is further enhanced by the use of a variety of resources including DVDs, PowerPoint and relevant internet resources. The school also issues the weekly 'Wednesday Word', which families clearly value as a tool to help them support their children at home. The broad Religious Education curriculum offered meets the 10% curriculum allocation requirement. It will benefit however, taking account of the introduction of the revised scheme of work, by being documented in a revised Religious Education policy to secure the time provision.

Religious Education planning and assessment ensures that progression is made within and between all Key Stages and this is subject to regular review. Staffing, learning resources and accommodation are of high quality and are well deployed to support pupils' learning and attainment, in addition to contributing to pupils' spiritual and moral development by encouraging self-esteem and confidence and by preparing pupils to be good citizens in the future.

Parents are very content with the Religious Education their children receive and the school's programme for Education for Personal Relationships including sex education. As one parent wrote, '*St Thomas More encompasses Religious Education in a very child appropriate way. My child brings home a lot of Religious Education work that she has learnt and is able to tell me about It*'. Another parent commented, '*We are always kept up to date with what our child is learning in Religious Education and are encouraged to support this at home. We are pleased with the school and with the Catholic education it offers*'.

Leadership and management of Religious Education

GRADE 1

The leadership and management of Religious Education is in the highly capable hands of the Deputy Headteacher who is the Religious Education subject leader. He is well supported by the headteacher and the senior team who together have a very clear vision of Catholic education and what it means. This consistent and collaborative approach to the subject has secured very good progression.

Inspection evidence gathered confirms a judgement of outstanding for leadership and management of Religious Education at St Thomas More. The subject leader has excellent subject knowledge and is well placed to advise and support his motivated staff and knowledgeable governors. His subject leader's folder is very well organised and presented, as was all evidence presented during the inspection, reflecting the high status given to Religious Education.

The subject leader regularly attends co-ordinator meetings and shares relevant information with staff. He also monitors lessons and undertakes book scrutinies. Planning and assessment sheets are scrutinised each term. Feedback is given to staff as part of their development and any issues are included in future improvements for the school. The subject leader is always available to help and support staff and is well respected by teachers and pupils alike.

All teachers are involved in assemblies, liturgies and pastoral care and promote the same shared values and vision.

The school has a good range of quality resources and funding is allocated each year to update and improve these. They support the teaching and learning of RE throughout the school. Some of these resources are invaluable in helping pupils understand the special features of other religions e.g. The Seder plate used in the celebration of the Jewish Passover.

Having adopted the revised 'Here I Am' scheme 'Come and See' with elements of 'The Way the Truth and the Life' scheme the school is in the process of revising its assessment procedures. It has already incorporated within the school's 'Target Tracker' assessment programme, tracking for Religious Education and will refine and strengthen its Religious Education database over the coming academic year.