



# DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION REPORT

incorporating Section 48 and Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on  
behalf of the Archbishop of Southwark

URN 100196

St Thomas More Catholic Comprehensive School

Footscray Road

Eltham

SE9 2SU

Inspection date: 7-8 March 2019

Chair of Governors Mr Stuart Jordan

Headteacher: Mr Markus Ryan

Inspectors: Mr Tom Cahill

Dr. Janet Croggon

## EDUCATION COMMISSION

St Edward's House, St Paul's Wood Hill, Orpington, Kent BR5 2SR

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Director of Education: Dr Simon Hughes

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## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

## FULL REPORT

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Thomas More is a very popular and heavily oversubscribed Catholic comprehensive school with academy status. It is situated in the Greenwich Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is located in the Royal Borough of Greenwich local authority (LA) but receives its funding direct from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). The principal parishes that the school serves are Christchurch, Eltham; St John Fisher and St Thomas More, Eltham, Our Lady of the Rosary, Blackfen and Our Lady Help of Christians, Blackheath. The proportion of students who are baptised Catholics is 100%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is between 8% & 9% in Key Stage 3 and 10% in Key Stage 4.

The school takes students from 11 to 16 years. The number of students currently on roll is 629. The attainment of students on entering the school is broadly average. The proportion of students eligible for free schools meals (6.3%) is below average. The proportion of students receiving extra support in class is in line with the national average, although the number of students with a Statement of Educational Needs is 2.5%, which is just below the national average. The majority of students are white British and the proportion of students from homes where English is spoken as an additional language is below average.

The school has generously supported a number of Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of Southwark reflecting its strong commitment to the 'common good'. Based on an executive headship model, these schools have struggled in recruiting school leaders or have faced other serious difficulties. The school is currently working in partnership with 2 local Catholic primary schools and the partnership is considering a multi academy trust model as a possible way forward for the future.

The school has addressed the key recommendations of the previous inspection in 2014 and has made significant progress towards the recommended curriculum time allocation for Religious Education.



## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

### St Thomas More is an Outstanding Catholic school because:

- Students make exceptional progress in Religious Education and their outcomes in the subject are in the top 10% of schools nationally.
- Teaching in Religious Education is consistently good and much of it is outstanding. This is a result of carefully planned lessons which are challenging, stimulating and delivered by experienced, dedicated and hard working teachers.
- The behaviour of students and their attitudes to learning are outstanding. This is a response to the very high expectations of the school and the distinctive Catholic ethos that permeates every aspect of school life.
- Leadership and governance are outstanding. As a result, staff morale is high and staff work exceptionally hard to ensure students benefit from being part of a vibrant Catholic community of both faith and learning which it aspires to be.

### WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

- Continue to review the curriculum time allocated to Religious Education so it fully meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference at Key Stage 3. Review how leaders and governors plan and evaluate the Catholic life of the school on a more formal and shared basis.

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## Overall Effectiveness

How effective the school is in providing Catholic Education.

1

### Catholic Life

1

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.

1

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.

1

### Religious Education

1

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

1

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

1

### Collective Worship

1

How well pupils respond to and participate in the schools' Collective Worship.

1

The quality of provision for Collective Worship.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship.

1

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## CATHOLIC LIFE

**The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.**

- Students benefit hugely by being part of this harmonious and very safe learning community where respect for one another is of paramount importance. The gospel values are taught overtly through every aspect of school life and well understood by the students who are clearly taught what is right and what is wrong. They respond positively to the very high standards and expectations consistently set by the school, displaying excellent behaviour both in class and around the school, guided by the staff that are excellent role models. The attendance of the students is very high indeed, they take pride in their uniform and their appearance is always of a very high standard.
- Pastoral care is a real strength of the school and the school's approach to their safeguarding is outstanding. A highly effective learning support unit provides outstanding care and guidance to students who struggle with mainstream classes. The school also has an experienced and highly effective counsellor who works closely with teachers to ensure those students who need additional support have their needs met. Staff are also able to make use of this provision reflecting the school's commitment to their well being.
- Many opportunities are provided to students to take on extra responsibility and develop their leadership skills in every year group. These include Chaplaincy reps, junior prefects and being peer mentors. All students are also expected to participate in at least 1 club or extra curricular activity. They know well the school's motto of St Thomas More 'The King's good servant, but God's first' and they aspire to live the same way in their daily lives.
- Students have a wide range of retreat opportunities including visits to Aylesford Priory in Key Stage 3. The school also provides a residential experience for all Key Stage 4 students at Kintbury, which is generously part-subsidised by the school to ensure all students can benefit from this experience. Students also have the opportunity to visit Krakow in Poland, which includes a very moving visit to Auschwitz. Other students make visits to the battlefields of World War 1 including The Somme.
- The school's mission statement is summed up in the words of Christ as "Love one another as I have loved you" The students live this message by always seeking to help those less fortunate than themselves. Each year they generously raise significant sums of money for both local, national and international charities including The Jimmy Mizen Charity in memory of a past pupil, Manna which is a local project supporting the homeless, Crisis at Christmas, CAFOD and the British Heart Foundation. They also support a school project called Extra Mile in Sierra Leone by providing both funds and resources.
- Students have an active voice through their school council whose core members met with inspectors. The students are excellent ambassadors for their school being



confident, very polite and well mannered. They are also highly articulate in highlighting the many positive things happening at the school. They are able to identify things such as changes to sports kit that had been requested by the school council and agreed by school leaders. They also realised that not all changes proposed by the school council could be agreed by school leaders for the benefit of all students in the school.

- Parents, through questionnaires and meetings with inspectors, are overwhelmingly positive about the high quality Catholic education provided by the school. They expressed their gratitude to the staff for working hard so that their children can thrive. As one parent wrote “My child is very happy in the inclusive environment created by the school. My child has developed a real sense of responsibility both for himself and others, which exceeds his age. All staff at the school work exceptionally hard to support our children” The sentiment expressed by this parent was that similarly expressed by parents who met with the inspectors.
- Leaders ensure parents are kept fully informed about Catholic Life of the school by a very comprehensive and informative weekly newsletter together with a very accessible school website.
- Such is the impact of the school and its ethos on students that at least 10 teachers at the school are former pupils, as are a number of support staff.

**The quality of provision of the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.**

- The school provides a distinctively Catholic education, which is high quality and clearly based on gospel values. Prayer and worship are at the heart of school life.
- The school has a chaplain who is also a long serving and experienced member of the teaching staff. She is very well supported by members of the Chaplaincy team as well as members of the Religious Education department of which she is a member.
- The school is also very well supported by the local parish priest who is a governor of the school. He ensures Christchurch Priory is available for use by the school for regular whole school and Year group masses as well as for Services of Reconciliation and Benediction. He is a regular visitor to the school celebrating Mass and leading other forms of Collective Worship for the school community.
- There is a well-planned diary of liturgical celebrations together with weekly assemblies for both the whole school as well as separate assemblies for each key stage.

**How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding.**

- The long serving and highly experienced Head teacher provides outstanding Catholic leadership both to the school and the wider Catholic community and is held in high regards by all.
- The school benefits from an effective governing body that know the school very well including its many strengths and few weaknesses. The Chair of Governors has a long



association with the school and together with the rest of the governing body holds senior leaders to account with the right balance of support and challenge.

- Through regular visits to the school, governors monitor the quality of Collective Worship. However planning and evaluation is less formal. The Catholic Life of the school can be further enhanced by a more formal approach such as having a governors committee being tasked with having oversight of this core aspect of school life. Leaders and governors should consider how this committee could work in close partnership with the Chaplaincy team and the students who are Chaplaincy representatives in each Year group so it is a shared responsibility.
- Leaders ensure that all new staff are inducted into the Catholic Life of the school and non Catholic staff feel well supported through training and resources provided to them particularly by the Chaplain.
- The Sex and Relationships policy has been recently reviewed and follows the guidance issued by the Education Commission and Archdiocese. A copy is published on the school website.

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## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

### How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is outstanding.

- Students clearly enjoy their Religious Education lessons as shown by their very positive attitudes and behaviour in lessons and their feedback when speaking to inspectors. They really appreciate the time taken by their teachers to plan interesting and challenging lessons using a variety of teaching styles. This outstanding practice results in very high levels of engagement by the students in their classes. They particularly enjoy group work and class discussions as well as value the guidance and support provided by teachers in preparing them for public examinations.
- Outcomes for students in Religious Education have been consistently high for many years and are regularly in the 10% of results nationally although girls outperform boys overall at the school. This reflects the national picture in Religious Education and indeed many subjects nationally at GCSE level. Students, whatever their prior attainment when joining the school make exceptional progress as a result of their very impressive attitudes to learning together with outstanding teaching provided by their teachers.
- Students very much enjoy learning about other faiths and have the opportunity to visit places of worship of other faiths such as the Greek Orthodox Church in nearby Welling. There are plans to further increase such visits to include non Christian places of worship in the local community.

### The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is outstanding.

- Teaching of Religious Education is outstanding overall. Lessons are consistently good and much of the teaching is outstanding. Lessons are carefully planned and there is a strong collegiate approach by teachers to sharing as well as improving teaching materials.
- Assessment is very well developed and in line with school policy. Regular half termly assessments take place and very detailed feedback is provided to all students including advice on how they can improve. Results of assessments are carefully tracked both by the Religious Education department as well as senior leaders to identify any underachievement and to ensure students receive additional support and guidance where required.
- Teachers are offered regular in-service training to update their subject knowledge and skills. The department is very fortunate to be fully staffed with subject specialists as a result of the proactive approach taken by senior leaders to both recruit and retain staff.

### How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is outstanding.

- The Religious Education department at St Thomas More is a very well established and highly successful department over many years as a result of outstanding



leadership of the previous subject leader and now the more recently appointed subject leader.

- The subject leader is line managed by a Vice Principal and they meet regularly to monitor student progress and the work of the department. He is very well supported by senior leaders who rightly see Religious Education as a core subject. Regular lesson observations carried out jointly by the subject leader and senior leaders show that teaching is outstanding overall and inspectors agree with this judgement.
- In line with recommendations made in the previous inspection, leaders and managers have increased further the time allocated to Religious Education. As a result, students in Key Stage 4 (Years 9-11) have 3 lessons a week, which is in line with the 10% requirement of the Bishops' Conference. Leaders have also increased the time for Religious Education at Key Stage 3 (Years 7 and 8) to three lessons a week but one lesson is on a rotation with other subjects or cannot be attended by all students where they are studying another modern foreign language. Inspectors therefore recommend that leaders and governors should continue to keep the curriculum under review taking into account the requirements of the Bishops' Conference.
- The curriculum offered by the school in (Years 7 and 8) is based on 'The Way, The Truth and The Life. At Key Stage 4, the school has recently transferred to the GCSE course offered by Edexcel as it better meets the needs of the students. In addition to studying Catholic Christianity, students also study the Jewish faith as part of the study of other world religions as well as Philosophy and Ethics. The curriculum therefore meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory for Religious Education.
- Leaders ensure that the Religious Education department is well resourced both in terms of staffing and teaching materials. When the department wished to move to another exam board, the headteacher ensured that the new textbooks required were provided. Teaching spaces for Religious Education are bright and well maintained and wall displays are of a high standard. The department also has a resource base adjacent to the teaching spaces.
- There is a link governor who works closely with the Religious Education Department. As he is also the local parish priest, he works closely with the department and the Chaplain.



## COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

**How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding.**

- The response and participation of students to the many opportunities for Collective Worship and prayer is outstanding. Their respectful and mature behaviour during collective worship shows how much they value Collective Worship whether led by the staff or by their peers.
- Prayer is at the heart of school life. Pupils pray at the beginning of the school day either as part of their form or at an assembly. Prayers also take place in all lessons before lunch as well as at the end of the day. Students often write their own prayers but this good practice could be encouraged more widely across the school.
- In an excellent lower school assembly seen during the inspection, students from Year 9 delivered a powerful message to their peers on the theme of the rule of law. They skilfully outlined how British law is made and linked them to laws from the Old Testament using readings as well as animation and imagery during the assembly. All members of the form group who delivered the assembly were involved and it was clear from talking to students later in the day they had absorbed the clear moral messages presented by their peers. At the end of the assembly, the vice principal reinforced the importance of always telling the truth and speaking up for those who are not able to speak for themselves.
- At the start of the assembly, those assembled sang cheerfully the school hymn dedicated to St Thomas More and specially written for the school many years ago. The hymn has been passed down from one school cohort to another with the words being as relevant now as when they were written some 50 years ago. The music department and school choir adds significantly to the quality and impact of Collective Worship.
- A large number of students are Chaplaincy representatives although their role has been, in the past, mainly concentrated on works of charity and fundraising. The chaplain has plans to develop their role to further enhance their involvement in Collective Worship and prayer life of the school.

**The quality of provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding.**

- The school is fortunate to have a small chapel which was funded and constructed by a group of parents a number of years ago. The chapel hosts a number of activities, which enhances the spiritual life of the school including a meditation group, a bible group as well as a Taizé group. Students and staff also have the opportunity to pray the Rosary in October.
- Students have opportunities to attend Mass celebrated both in school or at Christchurch, which also hosts the start of the new academic year service. Students are also offered opportunities to attend Benediction as well as services of Reconciliation.



**How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is outstanding.**

- Leaders ensure that students benefit from high quality Collective Worship and prayer life through careful planning and providing appropriate resources and time. This ensures the key dates of the liturgical calendar are celebrated in school whenever possible. The headteacher and other senior leaders give their full support to the Chaplain who takes a leading role in organising Masses and liaising with the local priests.
- Leaders and governors monitor the quality of Collective Worship through leaders being present during Collective Worship. As previously mentioned, planning and evaluation could be further enhanced by creating a governor's committee as previously mentioned so it becomes more of a shared role.

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