



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 100196

St Thomas More Comprehensive Catholic School
Footscray Road
Eltham
SE9 2SU

Inspection date: 3 - 4 February 2014

Chair of Governors:	Mr Gerald Peters
Executive Headteacher:	Mr Markus Ryan
Headteacher:	Ms C Hamilton
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SECTION 48

Introduction

Description of the school

St Thomas More is a voluntary aided comprehensive school. It is situated in the in the Greenwich Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Greenwich LA. The principal parishes which the school serves are Christ Church, Eltham; St John Fisher and St Thomas More, Well Hall and Our Lady of the Rosary, Blackfen. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 100%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 6.7% in Key Stage 3 and 10% in Key Stage 4.

The school takes pupils from 11 to 16 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 619. The attainment of students on entering the school is above national average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free schools meals (6.4%) is below average. The proportion of pupils receiving extra support in class is around average, although the number of pupils with a Statement of Educational Needs is high (4%), the national average being 2.8%. The majority of pupils are white British and the proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is below average.

The school was asked by Southwark Diocese to work in partnership with St Edmunds, Dover from 2013. The Headteacher of St Thomas More subsequently became Executive Headteacher of the two schools, with his Deputy, taking on the role of Headteacher for St Edmund's. This has resulted in the Governing Body subsequently re-structuring the leadership team of St Thomas More to ensure capacity and sustain excellence. The Chaplain at St Thomas More had recently left at the time of inspection, while two part-time Chaplains had taken up post in January 2014.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education

GRADE
2

St Thomas More continues to be a very good school with many outstanding features. Committed Catholic leadership is outstanding in ensuring the distinctiveness of the school in its philosophy and practice. The Executive Headteacher and other leaders therefore epitomise Gospel values, while their vision of Catholicity and Christian ministry reveals a strong sense of mission which is shared with all stakeholders. Governors make a good contribution to the work and Catholic dimension of the school. The distinctive nature of the school is easy to identify and can be seen in the Chapel, Catholic icons and religious artefacts around the building, together with the rich and colourful displays highlighting thank you letters from those who have received help through charity events. It is a community that is driven by its faith; hence relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Pastoral care is outstanding and pupils feel valued and very safe in the school. They feel that bullying is negligible, and that they receive maximum support from staff. Despite the recent departure of the Chaplain, the spiritual team and acting Chaplains are excellent and make valuable contributions to the Catholic life of the school. They organise Form Masses, prayers, Benediction and other liturgies linked to the liturgical calendar, while there is a retreat programme for all years. They are ably supported by a Counsellor who deals with the well-being of pupils. Links with parents, parishes and Diocese are constantly reviewed and ways to enhance them regularly developed. The spirituality days and daily Form prayers ensure that pupils are able to develop into thoughtful and reflective individuals. Collective worship is outstanding, as highlighted by the House celebration assembly led by the Executive Headteacher and Deputy. The Religious Education results at KS4 are outstanding. Teaching in the subject is good and pupils are overall making good progress within lessons and over time. Generally the Religious Education curriculum is good, despite not meeting the Bishops' Conference requirements for the allocation of time. Resources and accommodation are good and the department is further developing schemes of work in KS3, particularly in year 8 and 9. Leadership in Religious Education is currently good, with the potential to be outstanding. The Head of Department with the Executive Headteacher has had to redeploy staff lately due to the departure of one teacher and this has led to some non-specialists teaching Religious Education. All staff value Religious Education as central to the life of the school and are fully involved in developing it as a key subject. The school has the capacity to be outstanding with more effective monitoring and evaluation.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Review the KS3 Religious Education curriculum content and increase the time allocation so that it meets the Bishops' Conference requirement of 10%.
- Enable all pupils to achieve outstanding results by ensuring that staff mark diagnostically, and that students consistently respond to the feedback and advice from teachers about how to improve their work.
- Provide appropriate Religious Education INSET to facilitate the development of all the department e.g. by visiting other schools.
- Seek to appoint another Religious Education subject specialist to enhance the department.
- Achieve outstanding through more effective monitoring and evaluation by all leaders and governors of the school.

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

The inclusion of all is a central goal and a shared vision at the school; hence pupils are proud of their backgrounds. Within the school, systems are well established which illustrate that every individual is respected and valued; hence all gifts are recognised and celebrated. The House System in particular encourages team work, healthy competitiveness, charity and fund raising for all, including those who have died. The story of the Mizen family and raising money for a pupil who needed funding for research to cure a serious eye problem, highlighted how pupils take full advantage of the opportunities which the school provides for personal support and development. Lent and Advent are times when pupils excel in supporting those less fortunate than themselves, not only through collections of money but also using innovative initiatives, and by giving time. Four senior pupils and several prefects oversee the student charity work of the school and were able to recount, how they respond to the needs of the local community and beyond, for example the Macmillan coffee morning campaign, delivering Christmas hampers for the elderly or toys to the nearby hospital. Sports day was singled out by pupils as one of the best for fostering a sense of community spirit. The Chaplains facilitates fund raising activities.

Pupils treat each other with total respect and relationships between pupils and staff were exemplary throughout the inspection. Pupils said the school was 'like a family', thus bullying was rare and dealt with swiftly by an appropriate member of staff, or by peer mentors who worked with others to secure a community spirit and environment. The school is outstanding at promoting a convivial atmosphere for all in the community. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of right and wrong which is evident within and outside the school. The liturgies are equally all-inclusive, with all pupils having opportunities to participate at various levels. The Religious Education lessons, which are part of the core curriculum, include studies of the major world religions. Pupils have opportunities to engage with the opinions from their own faith and those of other world religions. The lessons also promote respect, toleration and acceptance. The school continues to develop in the pupils an understanding of national and international economic and social issues, for example through working with another school in India. Cultural diversity and an understanding of society's shared and agreed values is nurtured through Year 7 International Day and Year 8 race awareness, together with visits such as to a Greek orthodox Church.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Attainment and Achievement in Religious Education are very good. Standards pupils attain at KS4 are high and above national average with 91.7% achieving an A-C grade and 50.4% A* and A's. At KS4 pupils are keen and committed to succeed and grasp every opportunity to extend or improve their learning. At KS3 most pupils perform well in relation to their targets, and show good knowledge and understanding of religion AT1 with an ability to reflect. 2012-2013 was the first year the Religious Education department measured levels of progress from entry at Year 7 to GCSE results. This is helpful to the department as evidence of pupils' achievement from KS2. Standards in the classroom at the time of inspection were good and had the potential to be outstanding with specialists teaching Religious Education, and more time to share daily practice. The departure of a

key member of staff at Christmas had led to a major timetable change. At KS3 pupils generally seek to produce their best work and are usually interested in their learning. Behaviour in Religious Education lessons is very good; group and pair work encourages meaningful discussion, while pupils respectfully listen to one another's opinion in whole class activities. SALPS, students as learning partners, always support others in their learning.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

Pupils' response to collective worship is outstanding. Prayer and worship are central to the life of the school and a major part of every celebration, hence pupils act with respect and reverence on all occasions, as witnessed at the excellent benediction service led by students, staff and the local parish priest. Pupils' liturgical formation is well planned to ensure the widest possible experiences of the richness of the Catholic tradition of prayer and worship. As a result acts of worship engage all pupils' interest and inspire them to think deeply and appreciate the intrinsic value of faith in their lives. Pupils articulated how they enjoyed all the activities related to prayer and how it enriched their ability to make difficult moral decisions. Equally they were exceedingly respectful of other faiths. At the Executive Headteacher's assembly, pupils participated in the celebration of House points and were able to grasp the opportunity for singing the school hymn, quiet reflection, and join in community prayers appropriately. Pupils' engagement in both the planning and preparation of prayer and worship is an integral part of the school's commitment to them; hence they are at ease when praying within the school community. They have an excellent understanding of the Eucharist and other sacramental celebrations offered at key times throughout the liturgical year. During form periods at the start of the day, lessons, and class masses, pupils are familiar with the ritual of prayer and confidently lead the majority of acts of worship, which is taken as the norm. The chapel is regularly used by students during break and lunch time for prayer and worship and they actively encourage others to deepen their faith through the Chaplaincy group and School Council.

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How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils

The leadership of the Catholic life of the school is outstanding in many respects. The Executive Headteacher and governors are totally committed to the Church's mission in education, and ensure that spiritual development is a priority. The Executive Headteacher, who has a positive presence around the school and acts as a very good role model, has a very clear vision of Catholic education, its purpose, and its distinctive ministry. He is supported by a committed and enthusiastic governing body who attend many of the liturgies, but to be even better they need to conduct a range of activities to monitor the Catholic life of the school and establish rigorous systems to plan for future improvements. The vision for promoting the Catholic life of the school is actively developed throughout the school year while staff INSET and an annual spirituality day reinforces the school as a community of faith. Maintaining and enhancing the spiritual life of the school is a priority in the school development plan, but a focus on the outcomes and impact for pupils would enhance planning and actions. All new staff (teaching and support staff) participate in an induction programme to outline how they can contribute to the promotion of the Catholic ethos. Staff and pupils have a high regard for the Catholic life of the school and Collective worship. The Executive Headteacher, Head and SLT feel well supported in what they regard, and is, a truly Catholic organisation. In addition pupils from the School Council and prefects stated that the staff sacrificed many hours of their own time to help them succeed. Parental questionnaires included the following comments: "the school has helped" my child "progress in all areas;" "St Thomas More offers the perfect balance of education and Catholic enrichment. I would not have sent my child anywhere else."

How well leaders, governors and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education and plan and implement for improvement to outcomes for pupils

The Head of Religious Education has been in post for four years, and provides consistently good leadership of the department. Recently the departure of the long serving Chaplain who was also a teacher has resulted in a re-structuring of staff. The Executive Headteacher has redeployed staff hence a few classes are currently being taught by a Geography teacher who kindly volunteered to 'fill in' as they had knowledge of teaching Religious Education. The department therefore, together with the Head of Religious Education, has two full-time staff and two part-time non specialists. Given the unusual circumstances, effective management led to an excellent solution, which ensured that the best use of resources was made at the time, and that prompt and decisive action was taken to remedy the problem. The smooth running of the school was the key priority in this situation and was very successful in the short term. In the long term the department would benefit from another full time Religious Education specialist and from more rigorous line management.

The Executive Headteacher and Head were fully aware of the immediate necessity to solve the current situation long term and were confident that there was capacity to make the Religious Education department outstanding. Inspectors agreed fully with their opinion. The Executive Headteacher readily makes extra financial provision and resources for the teaching of Religious Education. Support for the subject by all leaders, including governors, is considerable. The link governor for Religious Education is a local priest of

the Diocese and he meets once a term with the department. At KS4 it is evident that there is very good progress in the evaluation, planning and delivery of the subject by all leaders. Indeed a lot of focus is put into this area of the school. At KS3 there needs to be more consistent monitoring and evaluation of assessment processes, while more challenging scrutinies of marking would further assist pupil progression, tackle any underperformance, and inform students about how to improve the standard of their work. Revised schemes of work in Religious Education are being developed from Years 7-9 on a termly basis and the department is about to map Religious Education across the whole school curriculum. Data is used effectively by all leaders and there is a notable tracking system. Very good links exist, both at departmental and whole school level with parents, parishes, the Diocese, and external agencies. There is a high standard of care and guidance to support pupils' safety and well-being, thus pastoral care is an outstanding feature of the school. The pastoral teams consistently track the welfare of pupils and liaise with outside agencies to maintain and improve individual academic progress. The Acting Chaplains and Counsellor work tirelessly to implement appropriate interventions for pupils, one clear example being in times of bereavement when families are referred for support. The impact of this is seen in pupils' total commitment to the school's mission of serving and helping others.

In order to become outstanding there needs to be more rigorous and effective monitoring and evaluation by all leaders and governors in the school.

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The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education

The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education is good with some outstanding practice. Best practice in a Year 11 lesson demonstrated good subject knowledge, appropriate planning, imaginative resources, pace, a variety of teaching and learning strategies, pupil engagement, progress and excellent classroom management. Best practice in assessment was highlighted in a Year 7 lesson which demonstrated regular marking, diagnostic feedback, and an exceptional use of assessment for learning. Pupils are encouraged to self- and peer-assess and their grasp of levels in their work is good. Skilful questioning by teachers enables pupils not only to think deeply, but also to reshape specific tasks to improve their learning. In addition teachers systematically and effectively check pupils' understanding throughout lessons, anticipating where they may need to intervene, and doing so with notable impact on the quality of learning. Excellent religious literacy was evident in all lessons. Pupils are increasingly confident in the assessment process and are clear about their targets, and expectations. Attainment has markedly improved in Key Stage 4, hence it is well above national average and is improving in Key Stage 3. Progress, both during lessons and over time is good with an excellent use of baseline and tracking data. Moreover good work is done using intervention strategies to raise achievement. There are several dedicated Religious Education rooms each with electronic white boards, hence ICT was purposefully and creatively used in all Religious Education lessons observed, which maximised learning. Very good religious displays showcase exemplars of pupil's work. Pupil behaviour in lessons is very good, and it was commendable the way one member of staff used humour to defuse what could have been a potentially difficult situation in Year 10. All staff therefore create a perfect climate for learning in their classroom through high expectations, care and respect for the pupils.

The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning

The Religious Education Curriculum is broad and balanced. It is appropriate, accessible, supports pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development and usefully informs their faith journey. At KS3 it is based on 'The Way, The Truth and The Life' Religious Education programme, supplemented by a wide range of resources and ICT. The quality of resources underpinning the Key Stage 3 Curriculum ensures good knowledge and skills acquisition, provides levelled work and built in assessment and is responsive to current Religious Education requirements. Staff know what is expected and schemes of work are comprehensive and accessible to non-specialist teachers. The current programme is in the process of being reviewed by the department and schemes of work are being further developed, particularly for Year 8 and 9. Part of this review should also include the time allocation to the subject. Religious Education is one of the lead departments at KS4 and pupils continue to follow the Edexcel course to GCSE and study Catholic Christianity in Year 10 and Edexcel unit 3 'Religion and Life' based on a study of Catholic Christianity, both of which are most suitable and appropriate. The Religious Education curriculum time at Key Stage 4 meets the recommendation of the Bishops' Conference (10%) but at Key Stage 3 is below that recommendation. The programme of visits to places of religious interest or significance is excellent while the retreats for all year groups enhance the overall curriculum, and contribute to pupil enjoyment of the subject. The curriculum makes a very good contribution to the spiritual and moral development of pupils, while they are taught to respect other faiths and cultures. Various extra-curricular and enrichment activities through PSHE days support the core Religious Education curriculum and enable pupils to develop independent and social skills.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

Collective worship is outstanding, and makes an excellent contribution to the spiritual and cultural development of pupils. The acting Chaplains and student leadership together with staff actively promote prayer, collective worship and liturgy. Indeed Collective worship is central to the life of the school and a key part of all celebration as witnessed during the inspection. Pupils are actively involved in Year and Form Masses as servers, musicians, lectors or bidding prayer readers. They are becoming skilled in the use of scripture, hymns and other forms of prayer. The quality of assemblies is excellent. Prayer opportunities for staff and pupils are planned in a way that attracts attendance and interest. The Church's seasons are the focal points in the school's life, while assembly themes reflect a clear understanding of the Church's mission. Every opportunity is used to reinforce the Catholic ethos through the displays and artefacts in the building and chapel. Relevant and popular retreats are in place for all year groups, hence there are visits to Aylesford, Whitstable, and Kintbury. All Religious Education lessons start with a prayer. The Sacrament of Reconciliation, led by local priests, is available during Advent and Lent whilst other non-sacramental services include Benediction and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament on occasions and the Rosary and Stations of the Cross during the liturgical year. The local priest provides good leadership in the liturgical life of the school and is highly valued by governors, senior leaders, and staff. There are voluntary prayer meetings every morning in the chapel and these are well attended at specific periods during the year. Where appropriate, participation in the prayer and Eucharistic life of the parish community is assisted and encouraged. Quiet periods of reflection and prayer are encouraged throughout the school day to enable pupils to 'breathe' and foster their Christian faith. Moreover opportunities are given to raise an awareness of the challenge of the spiritual life within everyday experience. The school is a place where talk about God is encouraged through worship and readily engaged in all the time. It is evident that initiating young people into the whole meaning of education is but one strand of the school, since initiating pupils into the life of the church has equal importance – 'vibrant in faith and learning' is a reality at the school, so that the Gospel values and culture work seamlessly for the good of all pupils, staff and the community.

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