



INSPECTION REPORT

St Thomas More's Catholic Primary School

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Acting Headteacher: Mr Andy Darby

Chair of Governors: Mrs June Little

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Clifton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: December 7th/8th 2010

Date of previous inspection:

Reporting Inspector: Mrs A Fowler

Description of School

St Thomas Mores' is a smaller than average primary school which serves in the main the parish of St Thomas More's and a housing estate on the outskirts of Cheltenham. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals has increased recently. A high proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school was placed in Special Measures by Ofsted earlier this year and is at present being led by an acting head seconded from another school. The Governing Body has undergone considerable change since the Ofsted inspection. Despite being placed in Special Measures the school is well thought of in the local community and attracts considerable parental support.

Key for inspection grades

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

How good are outcomes for pupils, taking account of variations between different groups?

Grade 3

Pupils are exceptionally proud of their school and regard it as a safe and welcoming place. They are keen to participate and take responsibility. They have a good understanding of right and wrong and show through their actions that they understand what it means to try to live out the values of the Gospel. Year 2 pupils for example, help reception children to put on their coats and find their way. The pupils understand the need to put forgiveness into practice and are aware of the needs of others outside the school community. They are respectful of difference and all pupils feel welcomed. Through their involvement in charity work they demonstrate their commitment to justice. All of the pupils encountered during the inspection were able to express their own views with confidence and believed that the school valued them as individuals. One pupil, for example, explaining that the school gave him the opportunity to develop talents that he wouldn't otherwise be able to do. However, pupils expressed the view that they were not given enough responsibility, citing the school council as an example. Although they valued being part of the council they felt that the school should allow them to take the lead and do more. The Pupils were able to articulate some aspects of distinctiveness, they knew that the school was a praying community and tried to put the values of Jesus into practice. The pupils interviewed also understood the role of their patron saint. They were less certain of the school's mission statement. They were aware of the meaning of religious artefacts and showed respect for their environment. They are far less certain about the connection of the school to the wider church and the role of the parish.

Pupils' response to the prayer life of the school was reverent and reflective. In both assemblies which took place during the inspection pupils sang joyously, behaved with respect and joined in prayers with confidence. They clearly knew and responded to the basic prayers of the church, all pupils including reception children joining in with the morning offering for example. All year three children are presented with a prayer book to take home and keep. The use of music and drama was clearly demonstrated in the assemblies and pupils welcomed this opportunity to be involved and engaged. It was noticeable however that pupils helped teachers lead prayer rather than take ownership themselves. This meant they were less certain of why things happened and less secure about meaning. All pupils were respectful of difference and understood that others do not hold the same beliefs as they do. Individual class reflections take place during the course of the day. All staff try hard to encourage reflective experiences and to connect the words of Jesus with the choices we make in daily life. This continued and communal emphasis results in pupils displaying a very mature approach to moral decisions.

Pupils respond positively to their experiences in religious education, particularly when there are opportunities for them to engage in drama or other creative tasks. They are interested and enthusiastic about their learning. However, the level of challenge and the selection of tasks does not always allow pupils to demonstrate what they are capable of, or respond in a way which encourages theological literacy. Pupils do have a good grasp of the main teachings of Jesus and are able to recount many gospel stories; they also understand the main outlines of the Church's Year. Their understanding in other areas however is limited, particularly in areas relating to sacramental life and the life of the church.

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Grade 3

Although overall provision is satisfactory spiritual and moral development is good. Staff and governors model the kind of attitudes towards prayer that they would like to see in the pupils. Moral issues and the way to behave are discussed in class. Prayer is central to the life of the school but the range of opportunities is limited and leadership by pupils is not at present encouraged. Pupils are offered opportunities to experience the Eucharist but other sacraments are not celebrated. The liturgical year is well marked with special services in Advent for example although more could be done to access the full range of the traditions of the church.. Focal areas for prayer are present in all classrooms, however in some cases these need to be further developed. In order to develop prayer life further both staff and pupils need to be provided with resources and ideas so that pupils will be able to take on leadership roles. The school is at present extremely well supported by the local priest who plays an active role within the school; the school is re-examining its links with the parish and considering how further encouragement might be given to both parents and parishioners to play a greater role in supporting chaplaincy within the school. The Chaplaincy team is in its early stages and at present the impact of this cannot be seen but it should make a valuable contribution in the future. Some consideration might also be given to developing a retreat programme for pupils.

The Bishops' Conference requirements for the time allocated to RE are fulfilled. The syllabus is in the process of being re-evaluated. Teachers are actively trying to engage

pupils in the lessons through a greater range of activities for example, the use of drama, and role play. They plan their lessons with a view to promoting engagement of all pupils and pupils report that they enjoy their work. In the lessons observed opportunities were provided for pupils to work in pairs and in groups and pupils responded well to this and were always on task, even the youngest pupils.. Their behaviour was always excellent. In all lessons observed objectives were clearly stated which help pupils to focus and referred back to in plenary sessions. Lessons were well paced and teachers' use of questioning techniques to promote thinking was good. The use of IT within religious education is embedded into the lessons and often helped to provide a focus. In the lessons observed teachers and support staff work well together to support pupils. What isn't yet fully embedded is the use of religious literacy. Occasionally the opportunity to develop a theological understanding was missed. The range of tasks offered can be limited and some tasks were not sufficiently focused on religious objectives. Orally pupil's response is more developed than their written work. For key stage two pupils in particular there is a gap between expectations in literacy and in RE. Literacy work is far more sophisticated. Pupils who had special educational needs were well supported and tasks were differentiated though the challenge for gifted and talented pupils was not always in place. A relationship programme incorporating sex education is in place and is at present being reviewed.

Assessment for learning is taking place throughout the school. Although pupil involvement is still in the early stages they understand the use of success criteria and the need to assess their own work. They are learning to self and peer assess and this is having a positive effect on their work. Although the school collected data last year on pupil progress it is not yet being used effectively and to support teachers planning. Marking is variable but the school understands the need to try to make marking diagnostic. Success criteria and comments in books tend to be generic at present and need to develop a clearer RE focus

How effective are leaders and managers in developing the Catholic Life of the school?

Grade 3

The acting head is not a catholic but fully supports the ethos of the school and works closely with governors and diocese to ensure the ethos is developed. The leadership team as a whole demonstrate and try to model the values that they believe are important. Parents expressed the view that the school is a welcoming place that supports their own values. One parent saying that she felt the school helped her children understand the real meaning of Christmas. Relationships between the school and priest are good. The school welcomes his involvement and he in turn commits a great deal of time to supporting pupils and staff. The school creates an environment in which all pupils are known, feel secure and safe and part of a family. Monitoring and evaluation procedures for the Catholic life of the school are not in place at present. Despite the recent decision by Ofsted to place the school in special measures there is an optimistic atmosphere in the school and the staff under the positive leadership of the acting head are committed to school improvement. staff are less certain about some explicit aspects of Catholic education and the school has not fulfilled the Bishops' Conference requirement that at least one inset day a year be devoted to the Catholic Life.

Staff feel supported by the coordinator in developing schemes of work for RE and feel they have someone to turn to for advice. The coordinator is monitoring lessons and conducting book trawls though the impact of this is not fully realised. The school needs to revisit the way planning for RE takes place to ensure there is progression.

The Governing Body are almost all entirely new. They have a positive plan for working in the school and taking the school forward. Although the impact of their approach cannot be fully seen as yet, they have already taken action and are present in the school on a regular basis which means they are known to both pupils and staff, who appreciate their commitment. They respond well to parents and now have a good grasp of the strengths, weakness and challenges that the school faces.

The leadership and management of community cohesion is good. Pupils are encouraged to support a variety of charities both at local and international level, including the Children in Need and Cafod. The school has recently held a multi cultural awareness day and runs a Chinese club for pupils. There is a sense of inclusiveness within the school community with support for those who face difficulties. Work by the school on supporting work with families on an extension to the SEAL programme is to be commended. Links with local schools are in place and there are well developed plans to develop a garden/allotment for the pupils and the local community. Work on other faiths takes place within RE.

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 3

St Thomas More's is a satisfactory and improving school with elements of good practice. The school was placed in Special Measures last July by Ofsted and since then has undergone major changes in the Governing Body. The acting Head teacher is committed to developing and supporting the ethos of the school and is maintaining strong links with the diocese.

Pupils and parents value the school and feel welcomed within the community. Parents actively choose the school both for its Catholic identity and especially for its family feel. Gospel values are crucial to the identity of the school and the pupils' moral development is excellent. Every member of the new Governing Body under the leadership of the new chair have committed themselves to spending at least half a day a week in the school and this is already impacting on their knowledge of the school and has had a positive effect on their ability to understand the role of critical friend. Their new code of conduct clearly outlines their mission. The school has strong links with the diocese and the local priest is strongly supportive of the school.

Throughout the inspection pupils behaved impeccably and demonstrated their commitment to supporting each other and working to the best of their ability. Pupils like coming to school and feel valued. They respond well to the needs of others in the wider community. They are able to articulate what it means to follow Jesus in terms of how we behave and are beginning to take responsibility for their own learning. They are respectful during prayer and worship and would welcome the opportunity to take greater responsibility for leadership in this area.

When staff plan RE lessons they look for ways to engage pupils who respond well to opportunities. Pupils are able to work both independently and as part of a team. Pupils need to be offered opportunities to make greater progress and to increase their

religious literacy and staff need to be encouraged to further develop their understanding of the subject.

The monitoring and evaluation of the Catholic Life of the school is not fully developed and this must become a priority for the future.

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

Grade 2

The Capacity of the school to improve is good for the following reasons:

- The commitment of the pupils, who seek to do their very best, are already becoming skilled at evaluating their work and are extremely supportive of the school and its ethos
- The commitment, knowledge and approach of the new Governing Body; they have already raised their profile within the school and are aware of the need to both challenge and support.
- The commitment of the staff and acting head. The acting head is passionate about the need to fulfil the potential of every pupil and communicates this vision to staff.

What the school should do to improve further

- Review the RE Curriculum to ensure it is sufficiently challenging and progressive. At the same time ensure staff have sufficient opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in delivering the new curriculum.
- As part of the process of strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of the Catholic Life of the school plan for an inset day devoted to the Catholic life of the school.
- Review the schools Mission statement to ensure it is accessible and understood by pupils.
- Develop strategies to enable pupils to take more responsibility in planning and leading the prayer life of the school.