



Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

INSPECTION REPORT

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

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DfES Number: 936/5209

Headteacher: Mr Kevin Gawley

Chair of Governors: Mr Ben Marlow

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Bishop of Arundel & Brighton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: 3 December 2013
Date of previous inspection: 10 June 2008

Lead Inspector: Mr Stephen Beck
Associate Inspector: Mrs Ros Gillies

Description of School

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School is voluntary aided. It is situated in the Guildford Deanery of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. It is maintained by Surrey Local Authority. The principal parishes which the school serves are St Joseph's, Guildford and St Pius, Merrow. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 68%. This is an increasing percentage as a result of growing numbers of Catholic applicants in the early years' part of the school. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to religious education is 10% in both key stages.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll has increased to 425 from 376 at the previous inspection. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free schools meals is below average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties is below average with 46 pupils receiving extra support in class. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds including families with Eastern European and Afro Caribbean heritages. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is above average with 29 different languages represented.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

The provision of Catholic education at St. Thomas of Canterbury Catholic primary school is outstanding. It is a secure, supportive community underpinned by a strong Catholic ethos effectively serving a diverse community. It is a warm, happy and welcoming school with a shared vision of what it means to be a Christian community and it is dedicated to the spiritual, moral, academic and pastoral needs of all its pupils. The mission statement is embedded and lived out in all aspects of school life.

The school has addressed well the area identified in the last inspection for development. This has seen an impact on the school's effectiveness through the assessment procedures now established. The fact that all stakeholders demonstrate commitment to 'delivering the mission statement', is impressive.

Strong self-evaluation processes that give the school clear evidence of its areas of strength and those in need of development put St. Thomas of Canterbury in a strong position to maintain and successfully build on its current levels.

The school has rightly been commended for the excellent development of pupils' personal skills, including spiritual, moral and social development. This is underpinned by the outstanding care, guidance and support given by all members of staff. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they articulate the care they show for each other and their environment in the context of the commandment to 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.

With a good parental response to the online questionnaire it was impressive that virtually all responses were strongly positive. The school benefits from a collegiate ethos among the school's leadership, staff, governors and parents which has seen a strong culture of mutual support and respect develop. This has allowed for a truly reflective 'critical friend' approach to school development being established. This has secured clarity over the next steps to move the school forward and in turn supports the shared aim to give pupils the very best of learning experiences. The capacity and desire to continually improve is not in doubt. This is well supported by the energy and enthusiasm of the headteacher, who provides strong leadership that offers a wide range of developmental opportunities for all staff. He is strongly supported by his deputy, senior management team, staff and governors.

Governors are well informed and regular visitors to the school. They play an active role in supporting developments and monitoring performance. The work of the religious education link governor is very much appreciated by both the subject leader with whom she meets regularly and all of the school's senior leadership team. As a Foundation Governor and parishioner she is well placed to relay to the governing body developments in religious education. This is a truly self-reflecting community and this, together with a strong commitment to future development and effective systems of evaluation, indicates that this school has an excellent capacity for further improvement.

Grade 1

Improvement since the last inspection

The school was given the task to 'Continue to develop initiatives already identified by the school that focus on pupils' higher attainment'. It is to its credit that it has continued to develop the Catholic religious experience provided to its pupils in the widest sense. This has included addressing the issue through the introduction of termly tracking of pupil achievement. The school has developed use of 'O track' which allows the tracking of progress of classes, individuals and groups. Analysis of pupil data at the end of key stages shows that achievement and progress is very good as measured by end of key stage comparative data. This reflects sustained progress since the last inspection.

Grade 1

What the school should do to improve further

Governors and management should:

- Provide greater opportunities for pupils to undertake more individualised work to incorporate investigative topics and research
- Update guidelines for assessment and moderation in relation to the new 'Come and See' programme of work
- Revisit and raise awareness of the school's sex education policy in consultation with governors, staff and parents.

The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

The school benefits greatly from experienced leadership and management. The effectiveness of this within St Thomas of Canterbury is marked by ambition and determination to succeed, the intrinsic value of the individual and a common view that standing still is not an option. The collegiate nature of the leadership and management is inclusive being further enhanced by parents having a real feeling that they are listened to and are able to make a valuable contribution to the life of the school. The headteacher has a clear vision of the Catholic nature of the school and is able to share this with all stakeholders. He is well supported in this area by the senior leadership team, and by staff at all levels. The school's mission statement drives all aspects of school life and is regularly shared with pupils. In-service training within the area of religious education is greatly valued. It is notable that two serving members of the teaching staff underwent the RCIA programme and were received into the Catholic Church. This reflects a school ethos that recognises values and supports the faith journey of each individual within its community.

The Governing Body with the school staff are very effective and knowledgeable about their roles and responsibilities. They demonstrate a clear awareness of the school's strengths and areas for development and these were identified in the well-constructed self-evaluation presented to inspectors which they have been able to validate. The school is to be commended for the clarity of its improvement plan which reflects the school's priorities for its development as a Catholic community.

It was noted in the school's recent Ofsted, that leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement. They promote high quality care and education, effectively promote pupils' spiritual and moral development and these are equally applicable to all aspects of religious education.

Grade 1

The Prayer Life of the School

The provision for personal and collective worship is a great strength and a central part of the school's ethos. This is reflected in the many opportunities the pupils have to pray in the day. Pupils are encouraged to recognise the importance of their faith through liturgy and collective worship, showing respect and reverence. The school more than fulfils its statutory obligations with regard to worship. There is evidence of a wide range of liturgies and prayer forms, from the traditional prayers of the church, prayers written by the pupils themselves and opportunities for reflective prayer. All children take part in collective worship each day, as a whole school, phase or as a class. Opportunities are provided for meditation and reflection, which lead to excellent responses from the children. All members of staff attend worship and the responsibility of planning and leading worship is evenly distributed across the teaching staff. Liturgies are made more prayerful and memorable through the excellent use of music, singing, dance, drama and the children's reading of God's word. The pupils value their classroom focal points and realise, as confirmed in discussions with them, that these are ways through which the distinctive Catholic nature of the school is marked.

Parents form part of a monthly prayer group at the school. A broad range of liturgies are celebrated with assemblies being related to themes running through the liturgical year, the sacraments, the Old and New Testament, moral issues and the 'Come and See' religious education programme. A celebration assembly focuses on contributions to school life through work or behaviour towards others. It is impressive to see how secure and involved pupils are in the school's prayer life, which shows that the school lives out its commitment to pick up individuals along their faith journey, thereby enabling them to grow spiritually and morally.

The parish priest is very proactive in his support of the school's religious education programme. He regularly celebrates Mass for the school and he joins the Year 6 leavers, with staff, on an annual retreat day in the Parish. In discussion he confirmed his confidence in the school, citing the home, school, parish partnership as a strong three way process. His liturgical support is valued as is the time he gives to the school. He also provides a much appreciated chaplaincy role to the whole school community which is greatly facilitated by his frequent contact with the school.

An assembly led by the headteacher introducing Advent set challenges for pupils to bring to a future assembly, with themes from the assembly being followed up by teachers in lessons observed. The pupils participated particularly well in signing some of their singing.

The prayer life of the school is emphasised by the provision of a well-used prayer room, the focus of which, is a beautiful stained glass window originated by past pupils and a parishioner. Displays around the school are of a good standard as are classroom focal points.

Grade 1

How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?

St Thomas of Canterbury is a harmonious and inclusive school. The school articulates very laudable aims for the area of community cohesion which it lives up to. This starts with all members of the school community including the pupils, being involved in the formulation of the school's mission statement which has a high profile in the school. A child friendly poster has been formulated by the pupils and is displayed in all classes. This defines the school as a place where the parents have a positive attitude towards the school as a Catholic community. They give support and feel involved. The parish priest visits the school regularly, works with staff and pupils and takes an active part in liturgies and celebrations and there is good communication between school and parish and they support each other's publicity. There are effective links with other Catholic schools in the area.

The school maintains close links with a range of organisations including South West Surrey Women's Refuge, Guildford SENCO Support Group, Boxgrove Surestart Children's Centre and St Joseph's, Cranleigh (access to specialist Speech & Language therapy support).

The school prepares pupils well to adapt to the demands of a changing world. They show respect for other cultures and religious beliefs which equips them well for their future life.

The pupils actively contribute to the local and wider community by preparing and hosting an annual Harvest Festival for elderly members of the local community in addition to participating in a number of community activities (e.g. Guildford Schools' music festival). They generously and actively support various charities including Mission Together, Cabrini and Cafod. They have an understanding of the international aspect to community through involvement in a partnership with Busenya Catholic Primary School in Uganda which provides an invaluable opportunity to empathise and learn about another culture. Pupils help to support a number of projects which are designed to help Busenya to become self-sustaining. The parish has also contributed to these efforts.

The religious education curriculum contributes fully to promoting community cohesion by developing an appreciation and understanding of other faiths. Festivals for other religions are often the focal point for class assemblies and prayer services.

It is commendable that the school has retained the services of a part time Family Support Officer to enable direct support to be provided to families in need, for either a short or extended period of time. Inspectors received an emailed communication from a family of a child with a disability commending the school and its community for the support they have received, both personally and in connection with funding for medical treatment.

Grade 1

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

Attainment on entry to the school is generally in line with age related expectations. As a result it is noteworthy that effective teaching and established monitoring ensures that pupils make good progress overall. The majority of pupils meet age appropriate levels of attainment by the end of Key Stage 2. Progress in the early years is successfully built on through each key stage. This provides a consistency that is impacting on levels of attainment across the school.

The school's mission statement sets the tone for all aspects of school life including the achievement and standards of pupils. It states clearly, "We encourage everyone in our school family to do the best they can". As a result of this clarity of purpose across the school, assessment data demonstrates that pupils attain well in knowledge, understanding and skills and that attainment continues to improve. Pupils demonstrate their ability to apply their learning to their own lives and social issues. They show a developing awareness of the moral and spiritual dimensions of what they study. Attainment in religious education compares favourably with attainment in the other core subjects. Assessment for Learning is established and is effectively supporting the raising of standards. Developmental marking has been a target for school improvement during the last academic year and teaching staff are clear as to the expectations. They are aware of the positive impact this can have on raising pupil attainment. Religious education assessment guidelines are utilised to ensure consistency of practice across the school. Work is planned, progress is monitored and work is moderated using level descriptors.

This helps to ensure the work provided matches the ability of the pupils and their next steps are planned for. Internal tracking procedures demonstrate that from their various starting points pupils of all backgrounds, gender and ability make good progress and achieve well with a number working above age related expectations. Pupils make a strong start in the Foundation Stage as a result of an emphasis being placed on personal, social, emotional and spiritual development. They demonstrate a confidence in evaluating their own work and that of others and this contributes much to both their levels of achievement and self-confidence. Through self and peer assessment they are developing an awareness of themselves and learning to support their peers. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed and provide well planned-for support that significantly enhances learning. The discreet nature of their support is commendable.

Workbooks reflect very good subject coverage. They are well presented and are clearly valued by pupils. They contain strong evidence of pupil self-assessment, peer assessment and good quality developmental marking.

Achievement and standards are moving towards outstanding. In order to achieve this greater opportunities need to be provided to enable pupils' workbooks to reflect more evidence of individualised programmes of work that reflect pupils high level of oral competency.

Grade 2

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

The teaching seen during the inspection was predominantly outstanding with none less than good. Lessons are well planned, focussed and delivered with enthusiasm. Excellent subject knowledge is evident, generating great confidence in delivery, resulting in enhanced learning. Learning objectives are clearly identified and revisited throughout lessons. Teachers build well on previous knowledge and give ongoing oral feedback that supports learning. Lesson plans indicate support for the range of ability levels in classes. Teachers make particularly good use of role play, music, drama, discussions and ICT, which sees increasing use of cross curricular links becoming a strength of lessons. With due importance being given to key words, pupils are gaining a good range of religious education vocabulary and this is a strength of the religious teaching.

Teachers should consider extending opportunities to develop pupils' independent learning and research skills in order to further extend their levels of attainment. Common strengths include high expectations for what pupils can achieve, on-going self-evaluation and improvement, demanding questioning and very effective classroom management. Teachers have excellent relationships with pupils and this has a positive impact on their learning. Very close attention to the social and emotional aspects of learning has a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and personal development. PSHE schemes of work ensure that emotional and personal developments are considered alongside spiritual development and PSHE objectives are cross referenced with the religious education planning. As a result of the school's work in this area it has achieved Enhanced Healthy School status.

Parents are given guidance on activities to support their child's learning in religious education and each topic planned has a home / school link activity. Information and communication technology supports planning, teaching, learning and assessment well.

A Key Stage 1 lesson on the topic of Advent benefitted from being well planned and resourced. It was marked by excellent pace and positive and supportive classroom management. Pupils experienced a high level of challenge to which they rose. Excellent use was made of the interactive whiteboard with a clip from the film 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' being shown to support pupil understanding of 'expectation' and 'preparation' in the context of Advent. True awe and wonder was created through a 'golden box' with pupils speculating on its contents. When opened, each pupil received a 'shining stone'.

The issue of feelings was well explored in a Key Stage 2 lesson utilising a 'bingo' game where pupils had to collect names of their peers who had undertaken specified tasks such as visiting family or reading the Bible. Good use was made of previous learning through the use of a pupil's powerpoint posing questions and answers such as, 'How will I use my voice wisely?' and 'Ideas for a purpose' which reflected on the concept of 'Spiritual Expectations'. In another Key Stage 2 lesson more able pupils were challenged to consider the messages of Isaiah by putting themselves in his place in today's world and reflect on how they might deliver his messages. Excellent questioning was employed to generate thoughtful and reflective responses. An early years' lesson saw pupils sit in a circle with some wearing candle hats and choosing greenery to hold, which provided a tangible understanding of the Advent wreath. This lesson was undertaken in a pleasant, calm, happy atmosphere that was very conducive to learning.

Grade 1

Quality of the Curriculum

The school fully meets the requirements of the Bishop's Conference. At least 10% weekly curriculum time is used for religious education and the school ensures religious education is recognised as a core subject and is timetabled and resourced to reflect its importance. The school uses the Diocesan recognised 'Come and See' scheme which is being embedded following its introduction last year.

Parents are involved in 'Come and See' topics through their involvement in homework activities which consolidate, reinforce and extend what is learnt in school. Termly newsletters outline the religious education topics for the term and encourage parental support. Parents are invited to join the children in a range of religious celebrations. The quality of the curriculum is further enhanced through parenting courses, support groups for parents and pre-school children, provided through Boxgrove 'Surestart'.

All pupils have equal access to the religious education curriculum, which makes adequate provision for the more able, pupils with SEN and EAL pupils.

The religious education policy and scheme clearly and fully represent Catholic faith, teaching and tradition. Content is aptly chosen and presented in an age appropriate way for its relevance to pupils' lives and experience and to what is going on in the wider world.

Pupils respond confidently and openly, offering their own ideas, values and beliefs and are encouraged to deepen their understanding of topics and moral issues through reflection, discussion, circle time, social skills groups and 'Rainbows'. Religious education is well resourced to deliver a creative and rigorous curriculum.

Pupils expressed considerable positivity towards the new religious education scheme. They are extremely enthusiastic about their school life and commented on the numerous opportunities provided to them including visits to the school by their local member of parliament and visits to the Houses of Parliament. They feel they are listened to and that the school council is effectively managed by them. They are able to set the agenda for meetings and have a committee structure well established.

Grade 1

Leadership and management of Religious Education

The leadership and management of religious education are in the highly capable hands of the religious education subject leader. She 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 of Canterbury. The subject leader has excellent subject knowledge and is well placed to advise and support a motivated staff and knowledgeable governors. Her subject leader's folder is very well organised and presented, as was all evidence proffered before and during the inspection, reflecting the high status given to religious education. She has developed a religious education staff handbook that is an extremely helpful tool for staff.

The subject leader regularly attends co-ordinator meetings and shares relevant information with staff. She 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 religious education throughout the school. Some of these resources are invaluable in helping pupils understand the special features of other religions. Having adopted the revised 'Come and See' religious education programme, the school is appropriately in the process of revising its assessment procedures. It has already incorporated within the school's assessment programme, tracking for religious education and will refine and strengthen its religious education database over the coming academic year.

Grade 1