



Archdiocese of Birmingham

Section 48 Inspection

ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Dartmouth Avenue, Coalpool, Walsall WS3 1SP

Inspection date	6 th & 7 th December 2016
Reporting Inspector	Mr T J Hughes
Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005	

Type of School	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 – 11 years
Number on roll	280
Appropriate authority	The Governing Body
Chair of Governors	Mike Quinn
Telephone number	01922 720712
E-mail address	postbox@st-thomas.walsall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	November 2011
DFE School Number	335/3312
Unique Reference Number	104236

Headteacher	Mrs J Richmond
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Previous inspection:	2
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This inspection:	1
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DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Evidence

- The inspection was carried out by one Diocesan Inspector.
- The focus of the inspection was on the quality, leadership, and impact of the school's provision of Catholic life, collective worship, and religious education (RE).
- The inspector observed teaching across 3 RE lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Some of these lesson observations were conducted jointly with the head teacher.
- The inspector completed a work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils to evaluate their understanding of Catholic life, worship, and the impact of teaching on their learning over time.
- Meetings were held with the chair of governors, the link governor for RE, the head teacher, the subject leader, class teachers and the parish priest.
- The inspector attended infant and junior liturgy assemblies, a cluster school carol service and undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of learning and teaching in RE, the presentation of the Catholic life of the school and pupils' behaviour.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documents including the school's self evaluation, data about pupils' achievement and progress, RAISEonline, the development plan, teachers' planning, and learning journals.

Information about the school

- The school is situated in the parish of St. Thomas of Canterbury and serves the community north of Walsall.
- The percentage of ethnic minority pupils is nearly double the national average.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils is currently 58%.
- The number of disadvantaged pupils is about twice the national average.
- The percentage of pupils with special needs is well above the national average.
- Attainment on entry is well below national expectations.
- Previously the head teacher was executive head at another Catholic primary school. Currently, she is the executive head teacher of a local Catholic primary school in Walsall.

Main Findings

- At St. Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School the Catholic life, collective worship and religious education are outstanding.
- The Catholic life of the school is captured perfectly in its mission – 'In Amore Dei Floremus' ('In God's love we flourish').
- Collective worship is reverent and inclusive.
- The leadership of the school is driven by the pursuit of excellence in all areas.
- Although the children enter school with very low starting points, they make exceptional progress.
- The teaching and learning in RE are good with a significant proportion outstanding.
- The broad and thoughtful RE curriculum motivates the pupils, building incrementally on their knowledge, skills and spiritual perceptions.
- Good leadership of religious education has given rise to many improvements in provision in recent years and plans are in place to develop it further.
- The governors and school leaders have a very trusting relationship, as a result monitoring is effective and has brought about outstanding Catholic life.

- There is a genuine desire amongst the school leaders to help the children develop in their faith and love of God.
- To improve further the school should increase the involvement of younger pupils in leading collective worship and engage parents of early years pupils to promote Catholic life at home.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

Catholic life, collective worship and spiritual, moral and vocational development: provision and outcomes

- The school has correctly judged the Catholic life of the school to be outstanding. All members of the school family benefit from the high level of care, which is rooted in the love of God.
- The dignity of each pupil is the priority of the school; as a result, the school provides excellent opportunities for each child to learn, develop, grow and achieve.
- Since the last inspection there has been a notable investment of time and energy to further promote the Catholic life of the school.
- Each member of staff plays a part in creating and maintaining the school's mission. As a result, the experiences for all children are spiritually rich and supportive, helping the pupils, whatever their needs, to thrive and realise success in all aspects of life.
- The outstanding collective worship is central to the personal growth of every member of the school family.
- Mass is celebrated by the parish priest each week in the parish church. This celebration is sacred and carefully planned by the staff and pupils with advice from the parish priest.
- Parents and governors attend the school Masses and further support the prayer life of the children by attending the worship at the weekend. As a result, the pupils embrace the celebration of mass with reverence and commitment. In turn the programme for sacramental celebration has strengthened and mass attendance for the given pupils has improved.
- Engagement with parents of pupils in the first years of school does not focus as much on the development of Catholic life and the school is looking to enhance this area.
- The head teacher and other staff lead a prayer assembly each week where they reflect on aspects of the liturgical year, explore key themes about the holy year of mercy and promote the values and virtues of the Catholic Schools' Pupil Profile.
- Pupils are always highly reverent and engaged during assembly and liturgy. They are exposed to and have a thorough knowledge of a variety of prayer experiences: open prayer; traditional prayers; prayers through song, including the school's own song 'St Thomas of Canterbury School', which has been composed by a member of staff and learnt by pupils.
- Children are familiar with prayer being led by many different individuals. Increasingly, the older pupils are involved in planning and delivering liturgies. The Year 6 RE ambassador helps other pupils throughout the school to plan their own liturgies. As a result, the pupils are confident in presenting and sharing their faith through prayer. Opportunities for the younger pupils to lead the liturgy are less frequent.

- There is a strategic approach to the monitoring of collective worship, which includes pupil evaluations, an audit of prayers, the RE leader's observations and a shared assessment between the head teacher and governors.
- The actions taken as a result of the monitoring of Catholic life have had a significant impact: the collective worship timetable links exactly with the liturgical year, the Catholic Schools' Pupil Profile has been embedded within the life of the school and the prayer areas in classrooms have been enhanced helping pupils understand the importance of prayer.
- The pupils' responses to the Catholic life experience provided are outstanding. The pupils display very good levels of growing spiritual maturity. They are willing to discuss their faith and consider the impact it has on their lives. They understand the presence of God around them. They have a growing awareness of the needs of their locality and the wider world.
- Pupils engage with enthusiasm in the promotion of charity for national and international causes. For example the children visit a homeless shelter and this experience has motivated them to donate funds and food for the local homeless. During lent the school undertakes a programme of fund-raising in support of CAFOD.
- The Gospel virtues and the school's mission statement underpin the pupils' excellent behaviour in school. The inclusive approach, which is driven by deeply held belief in the sanctity of each child, has resulted in some pupils with particular challenges improving their personal behaviour, their integration into the school and their respect for others.
- Parents are both confident and complimentary about the Catholic life of the school. Every parent, who responded in a questionnaire about Catholic provision, stated that their children are exceptionally well supported in their faith and that the school lives out its Catholic mission through its daily practices.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership of Catholic life and collective worship

- The success of the school in providing a rich, inclusive and appropriate Catholic education is largely due to the outstanding leadership of the head teacher, senior leaders, teachers and governors.
- The head teacher has a clear vision for the school, which is motivated by her faith and belief in the dignity of each person as being made in the image of God. Together with the staff team she has resolutely set about creating a school, which offers each child security, challenge and a connection with the gospel values. As a result, all pupils, whatever their life experiences, are able to grow in faith and personal strength and achieve in their tasks.
- The head teacher has the highest expectations of the staff team and the pupils, and has built a productive relationship with the parish and other local Catholic schools. The growth and enrichment of the Catholic life is uppermost in all that she plans and manages; as a result, the school has moved forward.
- In serving as executive head of another local Catholic primary school, the head teacher with the senior staff of St. Thomas of Canterbury are bringing breadth and reflection to their leadership.
- The governors are resolute in their purpose, which they state is to enrich the faith in the pupils so that they may lead better lives.
- The governors, including the parish priest, are rigorous in their evaluation of the school's spirituality and promotion of gospel values. They assess provision through

learning walks, the scrutiny of pupils' work, attendance at assemblies and through the reports, audits and discussions at meetings with the head teacher and senior teachers.

- The governors challenge and support the senior teachers by bringing their skills and perspectives to the development of RE. For example, where they saw the KS1 outcomes dipping they challenged the leadership to strengthen the quality of teaching. As a result, a new Key Stage1 structure was initiated and there have been year on year improvements in outcomes.
- The governors trust and respect the work of the head teacher and her staff team. They are proud of the children's achievements and recognise the great strides made in the past five years.
- The governors support the school in the constructive relationship that it has with its sister school and other local Catholic primary and secondary schools. They recognise that collaborative working enhances provision through training, moderation and shared spiritual events.
- They are engaged in a debate as to how the school will work with other local Catholic schools in the future. There is the need to consolidate their plans to be clear about the direction of the potential collaboration of schools and what this will mean for school leadership and the succession of staff.
- The leadership of the school has established systems whereby pupils take a role in development of the Catholic life and the direction of the school. Faith ambassadors and a liturgy committee are active in preparing and leading the worship in the school and in training other pupils to participate in spiritual development.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Leadership, outcomes from and provision for religious education

- The school provides outstanding religious education.
- RE is very well led by the co-ordinator. She routinely monitors and reflects upon the school's provision, adjusting and enhancing planning, teaching, learning and assessment to achieve high standards. The leadership of RE is gaining momentum as the leader aspires to outstanding provision across all areas.
- The strength of the school's consistent provision of RE has been brought about by the support that the RE leader provides for her colleagues. She ensures that all staff are clear and confident about the syllabus and how to deliver the RE curriculum. She administers useful guidance and appropriate liturgical resources to the teachers to bolster and enhance the experiences for the pupils.
- Given the low starting points of pupils entering the school, the levels of needs and the challenges faced due to social and emotional issues, the pupils achieve very well indeed.
- In each phase of the school all groups of pupils make very good progress. Year on year pupils grow in knowledge of the Faith and improve their skills. Their reflections on the spiritual content of RE become increasingly mature. By the time pupils reach Year 6 the majority meet or exceed the expected outcomes in RE assessments.
- The pupils enjoy RE, they take great pleasure in the stories, prayers, religious imagery, and the themes of the liturgical seasons and the many celebrations of faith.

- The teaching of RE is nothing less than good with much of it outstanding.
- The best teaching is brought about through teachers' thoughtful questioning, the well established routines for learning and the inspired content of the lessons.
- The children's work and development of skills are supported by a real dialogue in the teachers' marking, which is delivered consistently across all year groups and provides opportunities for the pupils to reflect on the spiritual content of a lesson as well as being prompted to enhance their thinking about faith.
- Teachers' expectations are high and as a result pupils' presentation in their writing and illustrations are impressive.
- Two particular facets of the good teaching are the prayerfulness, which infuses all RE lessons and the time teachers allow pupils to take to really think and engage in discussion about faith.
- Teachers ensure that all pupils can access learning and make progress in lessons by providing tasks, which are differentiated to their needs, and by using appropriate and vivid resources to engage the pupils.
- Team work in the classrooms is strong with teachers and teaching assistants working well together to support the pupils' development.
- Regular lesson observations and learning walks, conducted by senior staff, monitor the quality of teaching and serve as a catalyst for the promotion of outstanding provision.
- RE as a subject is prominent in the planned curriculum. It is given equal, if not greater, status to the other core subjects of English and mathematics. The standards achieved in RE mirror the good results secured in English.
- In recent years there has been a concerted effort to design and deliver an RE curriculum which is broad and inspiring. The curriculum is now rich with prayer, exploration of the lives of saints and activities, which encourage detailed knowledge of the bible. Spirituality may be found in the school's wider curriculum. For example work undertaken in science, geography, personal social health education and art teaches pupils to value all of creation and their own bodies as part of God's gifts to the world.
- Pupils learn about aspects of other world faiths and the many cultures that form British society. As a result, they are curious about the world and respectful of all members of the local and wider community.
- Relationships and sex education is successfully delivered through the 'All that I am' programme, which is supported by a link governor from a local Catholic secondary school, keeping the curriculum delivery up to date with current guidance.
- Assessment is purposeful and serves to illustrate the pupils' outcomes and what next steps are to be taken. Through a combination of end of unit tests, teacher-pupil discussions and the monitoring of pupils' RE work, all staff have an accurate understanding of the pupils' achievement. Specific cohorts of pupils, who have not reached the expected standards, have been identified through assessment processes and targeted planning for these pupils has brought about improvements.
- The displays and artefacts around the school reflect the breadth of the RE curriculum. The rich and vivid religious displays remind the pupils of the liturgical seasons and key elements of faith. However, the exposure of faith is significantly less evident in the outdoor areas of the school site.

- Activities provided in RE support the pupils' understanding of vocation. They are clear that God has given each of them particular talents and opportunities, which they must use to improve the lives of others to enable them to flourish.

Recommendations

In order to improve the school should:

- Develop a programme of engagement with parents of early years pupils to promote the Catholic life at home.
- Increase the involvement of the younger pupils in leading collective worship.
- Develop the outdoor area to reflect the Catholic life of the school.