



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 118777

**St Thomas' Catholic Primary School
99 Military Road
Canterbury
Kent CT1 1NE**

Inspection date: 2nd March 2017

Chair of Governors:
Headteacher:
Inspectors:

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SECTION 48

Publication date 19th of April 2017

Introduction

Description of the school

The school is a voluntary-aided primary school situated in the Canterbury Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Kent Local Authority. The principal parish which the school serves is St Thomas of Canterbury, Canterbury, with a smaller number of pupils attending St Dunstan's, Hersden. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 71%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in all Key Stages.

This one form entry school currently 209 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at 14.5%. The number of pupils who have Special Educational Needs (SEN) Statements and/or Educational Health Care (EHC) Plans is below the local and national average. However, the number of pupils for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL) is significantly higher than both the Kent and national averages at 56%.

Key for inspection grades

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

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Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education **GRADE 1**

St Thomas' Catholic Primary School is an outstanding school, providing its pupils with excellent opportunities to develop their spirituality and religious literacy. The Headteacher and other leaders successfully promote a clear vision for the Catholic life of the school and its place in the local community. They ensure that the school's mission statement is reflected in all aspects of school life. The contribution of Religious Education to the Catholic life of the school is excellent. The subject, which has outstanding leadership, ensures that pupils make excellent progress throughout the school and are enthusiastic learners. Governors work closely and very effectively with senior leaders to support the subject, ensuring that it makes a significant contribution to the success of the whole school. They share, with the Headteacher, a vision of outstanding Catholic education at St Thomas'.

The school provides a warm and welcoming environment and provides its pupils and staff with a wide range of opportunities to develop their faith. These are well supported by local clergy, who visit the school regularly, in its mission.

Pupils respond very well to the expectations and standards which the school has developed regarding behaviour in and around the school site and, thus, there is a calm atmosphere throughout the school day. Pupils spoke highly of the sense of belonging to a family, recognising the importance of care for one another.

The inspectors received many responses from parents to the pre-inspection questionnaire. The overwhelming majority of responses were positive with the majority agreeing or agreeing strongly with the various statements about what the school offers and how it helps pupils to progress. One parent wrote: "St Thomas' respects Catholic traditions but is also very welcoming and inclusive of other faiths... it is a lovely, diverse school with a strong sense of family and an open, friendly community." In meetings with both pupils and parents this sentiment was echoed repeatedly.

The school has successfully addressed the three areas for development identified in the last Section 48 Inspection (October 2011). The Religious Education curriculum now contains substantive and effective study of other faiths. More-able pupils are challenged across the entire subject range through creative and imaginative subject matter and tasks. A collaborative approach to planning and sharing best practice has ensured that all staff provide a standard of education which is exceptional. The inspectors believe that the school has excellent capacity to maintain and build on its outstanding provision.

The inspectors spent one day in school, observed lessons, faith groups and an assembly, as well as carrying out several discussions with school staff, pupils, parents, governors and parish priest(s). Other evidence was gathered from contact(s) with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons, examination of school and department documents, and learning walks across the school.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Further enhance the school planning process by harmonising the school's self-evaluation process with school development planning, thus ensuring that priorities identified have impact.
- Share their outstanding practice with other Catholic schools, in particular the use of spirituality to raise standards across the whole curriculum.

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Outcomes for pupils

GRADE
1

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

Pupils greatly benefit from attending St Thomas'. They respond very well to the encouragement by staff to take ownership of key aspects of the religious life of the school and as a result feel valued and have a strong sense of belonging. They make excellent progress as a result of the consistently good teaching they receive and the high expectations placed on them by their teachers. Pupils are confident about their faith and through active participation in lessons, liturgies and various acts of worship are capable of expressing their views in an assured manner. The Headteacher, senior leaders and teachers are outstanding role models for the pupils.

During a meeting with the School Council, pupils made clear to inspectors how proud they were of their school. They felt very safe and well cared for by their teachers and other adults and were encouraged to look out for each other. The inspectors saw much evidence of this throughout the inspection both in the classroom and on the playground. Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities and are effective in their support for others as Play Leaders, House Captains and E-safety Crew Members. Pupils were confident that if there was a problem, it would be dealt with straight away, both sensitively and fairly.

As a result of the strong community spirit in the school, where diversity is celebrated, pupils' behaviour is outstanding, not just in the classroom but in all aspects of school life.

Pupils have a range of opportunities to take on responsibility and to help those less fortunate than themselves. The school is supporting a number of local and national charities and has successfully established a 'Mini Vinnies' group encouraging pupils to be aware of the needs of others but also to put their ideas into action. In particular, activities with elderly parishioners have placed the school firmly as part of the parish. As part of the school's development plan, pupils will be encouraged to further engage with local community centres and nursing homes.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Religious Education is at the heart of the school curriculum. It is taught both discretely and in a cross-curricular way. Pupils acquire knowledge quickly and in depth, linking their learning in Religious Education to other subjects. During the inspection, the Local Authority advisor took the time to contact the inspection team in order to highlight how the school's spirituality and ethos is a driving force in school improvement.

Pupils spoke highly about their enjoyment and interest in Religious Education lessons. They particularly appreciate the range of teaching strategies used by teachers to engage and enthuse them. As a result, pupils concentrate well and behaviour for learning is outstanding.

The level of religious literacy displayed by most pupils is extremely high, with pupils not only knowing key terms and words but also able to express ideas and concepts with confidence and clarity – oral literacy is exceptionally strong at this school.

Teachers have high expectations of their pupils. Pupils' attainment and progress in Religious Education are very good as a result of teaching which is confident and assured. Pupil progress is enhanced as they are challenged by lessons which are creative and delivered by teachers who are prepared to take risks. Teachers know their pupils well and have an accurate understanding of their abilities and needs. There are no perceivable differences between different groups of pupils with high levels of attainment in Religious Education

mirroring, and sometimes exceeding, pupils' attainment in English. There is evidence, both in books and through discussions, of pupils being encouraged to work independently and collaboratively. Pupils are developing the skills which enable them to reflect spiritually, think ethically and theologically and to become more aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

The school environment reflects the Catholic nature of the school and its use as a place of worship. There is a planned programme, of liturgies and Masses based on the Church's year which is age appropriate and contribute to the pupils' learning as well as their spiritual development. In addition, the prayer areas of each classroom as well as the multi-faith displays throughout the school are inspirational and impressive.

Pupil's response to and participation in the school's Collective Worship is outstanding in all respects. Acts of worship engage pupils and inspire them to respond thoughtfully, respectfully and reverently. Most pupils are knowledgeable about and proficient in the use of scripture, music, silence and artefacts to pray and worship. The development of high quality Collective Worship is having a positive impact on pupils' spiritual and moral development.

In a whole school assembly observed by the inspectors, Year 2 pupils took the lead throughout with confidence and maturity. Of particular note, was that the participation and response of the school community bore witness to the importance of worship and praise being at the heart of the school life. The assembly not only reinforced an element of scripture, but was an opportunity to celebrate diversity and shared values. Pupils shared prayers and thoughts in their various home languages in a way that was both powerful and moving.

Parents, governors and parishioners are encouraged to join in Acts of Worship and the local Parish Priest, who is a regular visitor to the school, was able to confirm the high rate of attendance at these services, which take place both in the school and in the Church. The school has recently introduced a Rosary Group, led by the Headteacher, with pupils from across Key Stage 2 actively engaged in prayer and reflection.

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

Leadership at this school is outstanding at all levels. It is inspirational and promotes excellent practice across all areas of Catholic school life. The Headteacher provides outstanding leadership and is well supported by her senior leadership team who are enthusiastic and energetic. They have a very clear understanding of the Church's liturgical year and use this to good effect in leading the school in its knowledge and understanding of Catholic rites and symbols.

It is clear that the leadership team and governors have a clear vision of the journey which the school is embarked on in its aim of excellence in all areas. As a result, Religious Education and the Catholic life of the school are central to all key decisions and planning. Parents who spoke to the inspectors, spoke highly of the staff at the school and in particular the leadership of the Headteacher, who, they identified as having a strong moral purpose, ensuring that every pupil is supported to the fullest.

The school's self-review process and development planning is thorough and identifies many areas for improvement. The inspectors identified that these processes would be even more effective if they were harmonised, allowing the self-review to be the dominant driving force for school development. It is evident that the relationship between the governors and senior leaders at the school is very strong and together they have driven significant school improvement.

Governors are regular visitors to the school and are involved in monitoring visits three times a year. These visits are formally recorded and reported on at Governor meetings. Of particular note, is the leadership of the experienced Chair of Governors who is a regular attendee at the school, sharing her passion for its development as a thriving Catholic community.

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 school has established a rigorous and effective system of monitoring and evaluation. The Headteacher and Religious Education leader provide clear and outstanding leadership to the teachers and have a clear vision of what action needs to be taken to further develop the subject. They ensure that the quality of teaching is monitored through lesson observations and provide detailed schemes of work to ensure the effective delivery of the subject. Assessments take place on a regular basis and the data is analysed with action taken to ensure all pupils make at least expected progress in Religious Education.

There is a high level of collaboration across the teaching staff and this has been effective in driving up standards. While the majority of staff at the school are Catholics the support given, by the senior leaders and especially the subject leader, to those of other faiths has ensured that the Religious Education at the school is delivered at a high level, and with confidence.

The inspectors identified the measures which the school had taken to address the areas for development in the last inspection. The need to provide challenge for the more able pupils and encourage independent learning, has been resolved by the focus on encouraging creativity in the teaching of Religious Education. Which excites the pupils and, thus, the attainment and progress for pupils in Religious Education is excellent.

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Provision

GRADE
1

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

The quality of Religious Education teaching at the school is at least good with much evidence of outstanding practice. Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and are planning and delivering lessons which are varied and engaging. As a result of collaborative planning teachers are able to share good practice and develop exciting resources which motivates pupils.

In the lessons observed during the inspection pupils were inspired by challenging tasks and there was clear evidence of enjoyment for learning. Teachers know their pupils well and provided differentiated tasks which both supported and challenged the full range of ability. At the heart of all lessons is the opportunity to reflect and pray and the response of pupils was excellent.

Marking and assessment of pupils' work is very purposeful. Teachers communicate very well with pupils and the response to their comments showed that they wanted to know how to improve their work. The range of work in the exercise books was excellent and pupils are encouraged to present their work with great care and attention. It is clear that pupils have great pride in their work, much of which is put on display in the classrooms and along the corridors. The Headteacher is very clear that pupils' work and achievements are always the focus of displays in order to celebrate their efforts and talents.

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

The school has taken great care to develop the Religious Education curriculum, at each Key Stage, in order to provide rich experiences, knowledge and understanding. As a result, pupils are engaged and confident in articulating their thoughts on a full range of religious and moral issues. This was witnessed throughout the inspection. The subject leader maintains in-depth assessment data for all pupils and ensures that through regular moderation all pupils are making the required progress according to their abilities.

Both the Headteacher and subject leader attend Diocesan training and conferences. Of particular note, is the support given by the Headteacher, in her role as a 'Kent Leader of Education', to other primary schools. It is satisfying to note the respect that the Local Authority has for the standards achieved at this school both in curriculum delivery standards and leadership.

The school addresses the understanding of Other Faiths in an exemplary manner, ensuring that the pupils' experience and understanding is fully embedded. Faith Weeks are now established in the school calendar and the quality of display work around the school was excellent. Pupils are able to articulate their knowledge and understanding of Other Faiths and were able to explain to the inspectors why they study Other Faiths and how it makes them better people.

The school has made significant use of modern technology in order to deliver the curriculum and also to instil a sense of curiosity and wonder in its pupils. In Religious Education lessons ICT was used to great effect. For Lent pupils have designed and placed Stations of the Cross around the school, which use scan codes to access prayers and information. Charity boxes enable pupils to research about the various charities they were supporting. The Deputy Headteacher is leading the school's engagement in the 'Microsoft Mix' project, organised by the Education Commission, which is ensuring that pupils are taking advantage of up-to-date technological advances while studying Religious Education and other subjects.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

Pupil engagement in Collective Worship is outstanding in every respect. It is central to the life of the school and enhances each school activity. As previously recorded in this report the quality of the assemblies at the school is extremely high as a result of the pupil involvement as well as a strong focus on prayer and reflection. Masses are held regularly both in the school and in the local parish church and it is pleasing that the number of parents attending is good and increasing.

The school ensures that their liturgical calendar is based on the Church seasons and celebrations. Pupils are confident in prayer and are able to explain aspects of their faith with confidence. As well as formal acts of worship and liturgies, prayer and reflection takes place throughout the day in lessons. This is facilitated by members of staff who take great care to ensure that these opportunities are sensitive and thoughtful. During the assembly, inspectors witnessed prayers and reflection from pupils across the full age range which was of the very highest quality.

The school has also established other opportunities for pupils to explore their faith through the Rosary Group and the newly established 'Mini Vinnies' group which engages pupils in the work of the St Vincent DePaul Society. Pupils' engagement in this activity is to be praised for as it puts their faith into action.

Of particular note, and of great credit to the school leadership and staff, is the inclusive nature of the community which ensures that while the faith life of the school strongly maintains its rich Catholic traditions, St Thomas' celebrates the faiths of all its pupils and those of none in a caring and sensitive manner, thereby nurturing all pupils on their various faith journeys.

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