

**ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK
COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS & COLLEGES**



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
Old Ruttington Lane
Canterbury CT1 1NY

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| Chair of Governors | Mrs Marion Nash |
| Headteacher | Miss L D'Agostini |
| Inspectors | Mrs Angela O'Connor Mr Roger Tapley |

Inspection dates 12 October 2011

**ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK
COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS & COLLEGES**
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Introduction

Description of the school

The school is voluntary aided. It is situated in the Canterbury Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Kent LA. The principal parish which the school serves is St Thomas of Canterbury. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 78%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to religious education is 10% in Key Stage 1, and 10% in Key Stage 2.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 196. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly below average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is slightly above average. Around 15% of the pupils receive extra support in class. The majority of pupils are of White British, Indian or African backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is above average.

Key for inspection grades

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|---------|-------------|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 2 | Good | Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

St Thomas's is a good school, with some very good features. The school is warm and welcoming where the care and welfare of all the families are paramount. It is a very inclusive and diverse community where each pupil is celebrated and cared for as an individual. The pupils are happy, well behaved and very well mannered. The parents are very supportive of the school which was apparent from the positive response from the parent questionnaires. As one parent wrote "St Thomas's is a lovely school, with a wonderful, nurturing, community feel. I can't praise the school ethos more highly." A strength of the school is the very knowledgeable and dedicated governing body. The school has been through a period of transition and the governors have been very supportive and committed. They know the school well, its good points and the areas for development. The Headteacher has worked extremely hard since her appointment to ensure the school moves forward and continues to raise standards for all pupils. The church/school partnership is clearly present in the school. The issues from the last inspection have mostly been resolved and the school is well placed to make further progress.

Grade 2

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors and senior leadership should give further consideration to raising standards by:

Continuing to develop the curriculum so that there are opportunities for pupils to learn about other faiths

Ensuring that planning includes activities to challenge the most able and to develop independent learning

Ensuring the best practice seen in teaching is shared effectively across the school so that all teaching is consistently good or better.

The Catholic life of the school

Leadership and management

Grade 2

The Headteacher has been in post since January 2011 and has effectively managed a challenging transition period extremely well. She provides positive and focussed leadership and has created a stable and happy school which is appreciated by all. The Headteacher, together with the governors, articulates a clear vision of Catholic education which is shared with the whole community. The mission statement, which is also used as the school prayer, was developed by staff, pupils, governors and parents. It is displayed prominently around the school and is well known by all the pupils. Relationships throughout the school community are excellent and staff and governors are mutually supportive. All the adults work together and put the welfare of the pupils at the forefront of all they do. The Headteacher works tirelessly with the local parish to further enhance school parish links. The priests are welcome and valued visitors to the school, attending weekly timetabled events such as Golden Assembly. As one parent said "The school fosters very strong links with St Thomas parish and priests, and this extends to families and parents." The parents are very supportive of the school and have welcomed the many increased opportunities to take part in school activities, including the weekly Golden Assembly and end of topic assemblies.

Quality of provision for personal and collective worship

Grade 2

The quality of provision for personal and collective worship is good, and the school more than fulfils its statutory obligations. Prayer and worship are central to the life of the school. Opportunities for personal and private prayer were many. For example, there were prayer boxes in every classroom. The start of each lesson seen was marked by music, reflection and prayer. Some good examples of collective worship were seen during the day. In the hymn practice the pupils were eager to be involved. The singing was lively, and joyful. The assembly itself was of a brisk pace with a good balance of known hymns and new hymns, which were learnt very quickly. Prayer corners of varying quality were seen in every class. A lovely and eye catching display highlighting the work of CAFOD was in the main entrance. Artefacts and displays proclaim the Catholic nature of the school. The children respond with sincerity to worship and prayers and spiritual and moral development is good. Assemblies are planned on a rota and all staff are timetabled to lead an assembly. A recent innovation has been giving each class the opportunity to lead an assembly. This has been very well received as it allows each class to share their work with the rest of the school. In the Year 4 Assembly seen the pupils had planned it with the class teacher. All the pupils were involved. They spoke clearly, and showcased their understanding of the topic, and their art and drama skills. There were a good number of parents who were very pleased to see their children's work. On occasions the assistant priest attends the weekly Golden Assembly, joining in celebrating the achievements of the pupils and school.

This is a diverse and very inclusive school community. Pupils come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and all are valued and welcomed into the school and parish community. The children now have first hand opportunities to experience the customs of other cultures. For example a summer fair held in July where the theme was celebrating the cultural diversity of the school. The programme included Scottish dancing, an African drum display, Indian dancing and Philippine dancing and stalls selling different ethnic foods. Everyone agreed it was a great success and was instrumental in bringing the community together. As one parent said "it was lovely to see everyone working and playing together, sharing their different heritages. The children had a wonderful time". Links with the local community are good, including links with the deanery and local Catholic secondary schools, for example sports days. There are also strong links with two French Catholic schools which include opportunities for the older pupils to visit each other, and to pray together. There is a high proportion of children with English as an additional language. The excellent provision for these pupils was celebrated and commented on by a recent visit from the Department of Education. The good practice seen was highlighted to be shared with other schools. The school supports a variety of Charities such as CAFOD and the Cabrini Children's Society. The school council planned, organised and ran a toy sale and the proceeds went to CAFOD. There are global links with Fr Sylvester, and money is raised to support his work. Local charities are also supported with active involvement from the pupils. For example, the pupils go carol singing in retirement homes at Christmas. They also take part with other schools in local and religious community activities such as a re-enactment of the life of Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. To enhance the pupils understanding of this rich background, more resources and artefacts for other faiths are needed to assist with the development and delivery of the curriculum.

Religious education

Pupils start school with slightly below average attainment. They settle into school well and are eager and happy to learn. Progress is made across the year groups and levels by the end of Key Stage 2 are slightly above national averages. Standards are rising and school leadership is very clear as to what is needed to continue to raise standards. This was seen in the comprehensive School Improvement Plan. Children's work is generally well presented and there was a good quantity of work. However there is little evidence of differentiated tasks in the pupils' work, which would stretch the more able and assist in raising standards. Pupils' behaviour in all lessons seen was good. The pupils work well and they especially enjoy their lessons when they are varied and interesting and they are actively involved. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well supported.

Teaching is never less than satisfactory in the lessons observed. Some good lessons were observed and good elements were present in all lessons. All lessons seen had clear learning intentions which were displayed and shared with the children. This was also apparent in the pupil's workbooks. In the good and best lessons seen they were well planned, had good pace, independent tasks and pupils given the opportunity to apply their learning. For example in a Reception class the pupils worked independently decorating their "I am special" cards. They sustained their concentration and successfully completed their task. In a Key Stage 1 class the teacher constantly challenged the pupil's answers and effectively improved their level of response. Where teaching assistants were deployed to support the class teacher, the good relationships effectively supported and enhanced the pupil's learning. Pupils with special needs and with English as an additional language were well supported. The recent monitoring by the Headteacher has proved successful especially with regard to marking. The teacher comments and response from the pupils has shown them what to do next and how to improve their work. Assessment is developing well. However the senior leadership team has rightly identified that assessment for learning needs to be more consistently applied across the school, particularly with regard to high achievers. An area to develop is the use of more challenging questions to enable the pupils to think for themselves. The interactive whiteboard was used as a teaching aide and there is evidence that pupils use ICT in Religious Education lessons to support their learning.

The religious education curriculum**Grade 3**

The curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops Conference and sufficient time is allocated to the teaching of Religious Education. The school has recently introduced "The Way, The Truth and the Life" religious education programme in order to better meet its needs. This was well received by the staff and they were well supported by the coordinator in introducing the scheme. Parents were consulted to find their views and then to have knowledge of the new curriculum. Cross curricular links such as drama and the use of storyboard were used in the lessons seen to support the curriculum. In a key stage 2 lesson the pupils were animated and enthusiastic when they had to work in groups to produce a report for television on one of Jesus miracles. The curriculum now needs to be expanded so that the children have more opportunities to learn about other faiths and more resources are needed to support in this area. Policies are in place for the teaching of Education in Personal Relationships and these together with the religious education curriculum, contribute to the spiritual and moral welfare of the pupils.

At present the leadership and management of religious education is led by the Headteacher. She has taken responsibility for the area and with the support of the priests and governors she is driving this forward. With her commitment and knowledge of the subject she ensures that religious education has a high profile in the school improvement plan and in communications with parents. She has instigated several activities to bring the parents and school together. One innovation which has proved very successful is holding an end of topic assembly in the classroom and inviting the parents to attend. The parents are also given the opportunity to provide feedback by writing comments in the assembly book. She is supportive to staff and leads staff training and Inset. She makes sure that the school plays an active role in inter-deanery events. As coordinator she regularly monitors the pupils' work and the teaching and learning, which is beginning to have a positive effect on the delivery of the subject. She is well aware of the areas for development and this can be seen in her clear action plan.