



St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Greenway, Berkhamsted, Herts, HP4 3LF

Date of inspection: 15th January 2014

A. Classroom Religious Education

What is the overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy?

Overall Grade I

The overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy is very good. The curriculum is based on the delivery of the Curriculum Directory supported by the 'Year of Faith' units. Pupils make very good progress in their subject knowledge of the Catholic faith through the challenge and expectation of their teachers. They have very positive attitudes to learning and appreciate the wide range of teaching methods used by staff. Attainment is very good and is in line with diocesan expectations. Self-evaluation is up to date, accurate and illustrates a very good awareness of development areas for religious education. Excellent leadership of religious education models best practice and provides opportunities for new staff to see outstanding teaching. There are very good systems in place for monitoring all aspects of teaching and learning as well as regular participation in diocesan moderation.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What is the overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing?

Overall Grade I*

The school is outstanding in its effectiveness in developing pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing. The vision of the headteacher, school leadership and governors, supported by local clergy are instrumental in ensuring that worship and prayer are central to the life of the school and are well planned and resourced. The celebration of the Eucharist and Reconciliation are offered at key times of the year with pupils' active participation in the preparation and planning. Religious education is valued and recognised as the core of the curriculum and permeates all areas of school life. There is a very good range of resources which are under constant review and in the process of being updated. Pupils have a very good understanding of the social teaching of the Church and have many opportunities to develop personal responsibility and engage in action to support those in need locally and in the wider world. There is a strong appreciation of being part of the dioc community of schools.

Introduction

The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection. The inspectors spent one day in school, visited eight lessons and one assembly, and carried out seven interviews with school staff, pupils and governors. Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, discussion with local clergy, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

The inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Berkhamsted was carried out under the requirements of the Canon 806 and Education Act 2005, and in accordance with the Framework for Section 48 Inspections approved by the Archbishop of Westminster. The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop. The inspection reviews and evaluates how effective the school is in providing Catholic education. This process begins with the school's own self-evaluation.

Inspection Team

Mrs Pamela Brannigan	Lead Inspector
Ms Pauline Curran	Associate Inspector

Description of School

The school is a one form entry in the LA of Hertfordshire in the town of Berkhamsted. The school serves the parishes of Sacred Heart, Berkhamsted and Corpus Christi, Tring. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 97%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 2% and from other Faiths 1%. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 60%.

There are 235 pupils on roll. There are no pupils with statements of Special Educational Need. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is well below average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is well below average. There is a well below average rate of families claiming free school meals. Five pupils receive the Pupil Premium.

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Headteacher:	Mr Robert Mundy
Chair of Governors:	Mr P. Fitzgerald

Date of previous inspection:	13 th January 2009
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Key for inspection grades:	<i>Grade 1*</i>	<i>Outstanding</i>
	<i>Grade 1</i>	<i>Very Good</i>
	<i>Grade 2</i>	<i>Good</i>
	<i>Grade 3</i>	<i>Requires improvement</i>
	<i>Grade 4</i>	<i>Causing Concern</i>

A. Classroom Religious Education

How religiously literate are pupils in the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith and how well do they know, understand and appreciate the importance of religious faith and practice in everyday life?

What has improved in classroom religious education since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection the school has improved pupils' access to scripture to enable a deeper understanding of God's word. This has gone alongside a thorough review of assessment in the light of the agreed understanding of the levels of attainment and the new Curriculum Directory. A systematic programme of monitoring of all aspects of teaching and learning has led to high aspirations for staff and pupils. Self-assessment for older pupils has resulted in an awareness of the steps needed for further improvement.

How well does the content of classroom religious education meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory?

Grade I*

The content of curriculum religious education meets all the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. It is creative, engaging and meets learning needs. The programmes of study which incorporate the diocesan 'Year of Faith' materials provide a systematic study of the life and teachings of Jesus and the relationship between life and faith. Resources are used creatively to ensure the provision of an interesting and challenging curriculum. There is much evidence to show progression and depth of provision.

Pupil achievement (as well as attainment and progress) in religious education

Grade I

Pupils' achievement, attainment and progress are very good. In all classes observed, pupils were interested, engaged and keen to make good progress. Older pupils have a good understanding of the levels of attainment and respond well to suggestions made by teachers on how to improve their work. The school makes very good provision for all groups of pupils and is currently ensuring that higher order questioning enables pupils to reach their potential. Pupils spoken to said they enjoyed the variety of activities engaged in during religious education lessons and the opportunities given to self-assess and peer review. Their books are very well presented and give evidence of a very good understanding and knowledge of religion and an ability to reflect on meaning. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils reach diocesan expectations.

The quality of teaching

Grade I

The quality of teaching is very good as evidenced by the outcomes for pupils. During the inspection many lessons observed involved a dynamic use of a combination of literacy skills, dance, music, role play, art, design, technology and very successful IT. Pupils were engaged and enthusiastic as teachers used open ended questioning, discussions with talk partners and an interesting selection of tasks and resources to deepen pupils' learning. In most lessons observed, assessment opportunities took place, the pace was lively and teaching strategies varied to meet pupils' needs, as the school strives to be inclusive. Evidence from conversations with individual pupils, members of the school council, workbook scrutiny and monitoring and planning files indicated very good practice. There were some very good examples of high standards of effective marking and feedback to pupils indicating the next steps to take to improve. However, the school is aware that this good practice needs to occur in all classes and is taking steps to put this in place. Support for new teachers from the subject leader and

headteacher is very good. All teachers have high expectations of behaviour, good subject knowledge, well differentiated planning and creative delivery.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade 1*

The leadership and management of religious education is outstanding. The experienced subject leader and headteacher share their vision for excellence with all staff and are well supported by the whole school community including the knowledgeable and effective governing body. The very good systems in place to regularly monitor, track and ensure pupil progress have enabled leaders to support new staff and ensure high standards are maintained through a period of change. The subject leader models good practice and works closely with all staff including teaching assistants, to ensure high expectations are a feature of all lessons. She has an excellent understanding of the strengths and areas for development in religious education. The school improvement plan clearly identifies issues for action and evaluates current provision. The link governor for religious education is active in the life of the school and familiar with current developments in religious education. This enables her to support the school effectively.

What should the school do to improve further in classroom religious education?

- Continue to extend good quality developmental marking across the school to ensure all teachers are equipped to give pupils effective advice on the next steps in their learning.
- Continue to develop high order thinking skills as they relate to religious education

B. The Catholic life of the school

How well do pupils experience the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing through all areas of school life?

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection the school has initiated and introduced a Deanery Day to further develop links with other Catholic schools including the secondary school to which most pupils transfer at the end of Key Stage 2. There has been much input into teachers' theological knowledge and understanding to improve religious education and enhance the Catholic life of the school. The theology underpinning Catholic social teaching has been emphasised to enable pupils to reflect on the significance of the Common Good. An outside prayer garden has been developed to enable pupils to experience quiet prayer and meditation. All staff have been well supported as they implement the new Diocesan Framework and the requirements of the Curriculum Directory.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum – time, staffing, accommodation, resources, budget Grade I*

Religious education receives at least 10% curriculum time and has a larger budget than other core subjects. Resources are excellent and are constantly reviewed and replaced when necessary. The learning environment is outstanding with attractive classroom displays and prayer tables which reflect the Church's year and are used as a focus during classroom liturgies. School leadership, including well informed governors, offers very good support in developing and reviewing the quality of religious education. All staff receive regular in-service support and training related to the Catholic life of the school. Governors play a major role and are actively involved in self-evaluation and the school improvement plan. Priests from the two local parishes liaise with the school for a planned programme of masses and liturgies and are frequent visitors.

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community. Grade I*

The school's provision for prayer and worship is outstanding and a key part of every school celebration. Prayer and worship are central to the daily life of the school through class prayer times and assemblies. In addition, pupils are given frequent opportunities for spiritual development through meditation and reflection; examples of both were seen during the inspection. Pupils are often engaged in the planning and preparation of worship through writing their own prayers and reflecting on the relevance of scripture to their own lives, particularly for the regular class masses. The parish youth worker who visits every week led a 'Songs of Praise' assembly during the inspection which involved pupils in reflecting on Sunday's Gospel and the importance of the sacrament of baptism. Pupils led the 'signing' and participated with reverence and enthusiasm. Singing is excellent. Parents and families are invited to masses and assemblies and appreciate the opportunity this gives them to become involved in the prayer life of their children and the school.

The commitment and contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice. Grade I*

The school is a welcoming community which recognises the gifts and uniqueness of each individual. Pupils are encouraged to share their gifts with others through acts of service to the school through well established systems including house charities which are chosen by pupils, special friends, peer mediators and responsibilities through the school council. Conversations with pupils indicate that they have a very good understanding of the theology underpinning their support for a wide range of

charities. Older pupils also have a good grasp of moral issues in society fostered by links with a school in a less privileged area and a long standing, historic connection with Tujereng in Gambia and now through the charity, Ariba. They are familiar with the ethics of the market place through involvement in Fairtrade activities and the use of fairly traded products throughout the school. The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities to support the interests and gifts of pupils. Participation in local and national events including sports partnership and a gala concert also offer involvement in the wider world. The school ensures that pupils understand the call to justice and a sense of service are essential parts of their Catholic identity.

Enabling the authentic partnership between parents, school and parish as an integral part of the Diocese, particularly through its relationship with the Diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf;

Grade I*

Partnership between parents, school and parish is very effective and seen by governors and leadership as an essential part of the being a diocesan school. Parish links are excellent with priests from both churches on the governing body and actively engaged in the life of the school. Class masses and informal visits help pupils and parents to see the Church as a vital part of school life as does the involvement of the link governor. The school works closely with parents and families and keeps them well informed through newsletters, questionnaires, curriculum meetings and consultations. The school welcomes parental participation and actively seeks to communicate a shared understanding of the mission of the school. There is a very high level of attendance at assemblies and liturgies. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the provision offered by the school. Many thoughtful and appreciative comments were made on the diocesan questionnaires including, 'Religious education is fundamental to the teaching approach and is included in all school activities. Being at St Thomas More has greatly helped my son's faith and I thank God for this blessing.' Links with the diocese are very good. Senior leaders and governors attend diocesan conferences, in-service and courses offered by Westminster Education Service. The headteacher has initiated a Deanery Day to share expertise with other diocesan schools.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school.

Grade I*

Leadership is outstanding. The headteacher, governors and senior staff are fully committed to the Church's mission in education. They demonstrate this by providing a curriculum with spiritual and moral education at its heart. Catholic life is central to the work of the school and leaders ensure that all aspects reflect the richness of a Christian way of life. The headteacher ensures that all staff are enabled to contribute to the Catholic life of the school and there are excellent systems in place to induct and support new teachers. Pupils are given every opportunity to know the life and teachings of Jesus and the traditions of the Catholic Church. Governors make a highly significant contribution to the work and Catholic dimension of the school. They have a high level of expertise and fully understand their role as governors of a diocesan Catholic school.

What should the school do to develop further the Catholic life of the school?

Continue to provide pupils with opportunities to reflect on the meaning of their Catholic faith for their lives today.