



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD

Denominational (S48) Inspection Report

Name of School: St Thomas More Catholic Primary School
Local Authority: Essex
Inspection Date: 12th December 2018
Reporting Inspector: Mr Stephen Beck

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005 and 2011.

Type of School:	Primary	School Address:	South Road
School Category:	Academy		Saffron Walden
Age range of pupils:	4 – 11		CB11 3DW
Gender of pupils:	Mixed	Tel. No.	01799 523248
Number on roll:	206	Headteacher:	Ms Mary Jo Hall
Appropriate Authority:	The Governing Body	Chair of Governors:	Mr David Brunwin
Date of previous inspection:	November 2013		

Information about the school

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is an Academy situated in Saffron Walden in the county of Essex in the Diocese of Brentwood. The school is a smaller than average-sized primary school. The school serves the Catholic parish of Our Lady of Compassion in Saffron Walden. There are currently 206 pupils, aged 4 – 11, on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. 67% of pupils are Catholic with the remainder coming from other Christian denominations, Other Faiths or none. The school has benefitted from a low turnover of staff. 51% of the teachers are Catholic. The proportion of pupils with special needs is below the national average, at 14%.

Key grades for inspection

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

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 1

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School has been graded as outstanding in its last two Section 48 Inspections. It is commendable how it has sustained a continual drive and relentless determination to maintain its high standards that sees it maintain recognition as an outstanding Catholic school. This has been achieved as a result of the Headteacher's inspirational leadership, hard work and collegiate working with Staff, Parents and Governors. This has generated a shared vision for Catholic education, the forging of strong home school partnerships and supported a culture of aspiration for all. Pupils are confident that they can achieve whatever goals they set themselves and are supported in this regard in a positive learning environment of high expectations, to which pupils rise. There is a mutual respect for the individual and a recognition of each one's God given talents. The school is well served by an exceptional leadership team for Religious Education made up of, the Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher, Assistant Headteacher and Religious Education Coordinator who each bring their own dimension to the team making a strong skills set.

Within this environment, pupil achievement and progress, the provision for Catholic education and the capacity for sustained improvement are all outstanding. Prayer and worship are integral to all that the school does and opportunities for spiritual and moral development are interwoven through Religious Education and the wider curriculum. Pupils have an excellent understanding of what it means to be part of a Catholic community. The Headteacher and senior leaders are explicit role models and provide a range of opportunities that lead to good outcomes for all groups. Pastoral care is very strong and shared by all members of the school community. Relationships are excellent and pupils feel safe and well cared for. Pupils and parents greatly appreciate the very many opportunities offered to develop a wide range of interests through the provision of extra-curricular activities. Parents also welcome the high standard of education, the Catholicity of the school and the way their children's prayer life is supported and developed. As a parent wrote, *'St Thomas More's is a unique and special place which supports our Catholic faith and gives the children a sense of pride in being Catholic as well as an awareness of our responsibility to live out our faith on a daily basis'*.

What the school should do to improve further:

Whilst there are no significant areas for improvement, the school should, in line with its own self-evaluation:

- Continue the excellent work started to update assessment procedures to ensure they are embedded across the school.
- Further develop the role of School Chaplains linked to pupil led worship and the use of the prayer and reflection area in the eco garden in order to further extend prayer and worship opportunities.
- Consolidate the use of prayer journals.

The Leadership and Management of the Catholic Life of the School are outstanding. The Headteacher and the Religious Education team have a clear vision and give a clear lead in promoting and developing the Catholic identity of the school. This is understood and supported by a highly committed and enthusiastic staff and a well-informed Governing Body who together make a significant contribution to the 'Catholic Life of the School'. The Mission Statement is at the heart of the school and all it does. Pastoral care in its widest sense is exceptional and as a result the pupils feel very happy, safe and secure. The very strong emphasis on Catholic traditions and beliefs are evident in every aspect of school life. Staff provide positive role models, nurturing pupils in a knowledge and love of the Catholic faith. As a result, the spiritual and moral development of the pupils is outstanding. They are very respectful, considerate and extremely caring of each other. The 'Catholic Life of the School' is very well monitored. Leadership ensures very good provision for chaplaincy by encouraging and enabling the Parish Priest to visit and celebrate Mass and whole school and class liturgies on a regular basis. Strong links exist between home, school, the parish and the wider community. Parents speak very highly about the school in terms of its Catholic Life. They are welcomed into the school community and are encouraged to participate in a wide variety of acts of worship. They feel involved and their views are valued. Pupils know about and respect other faiths. The school actively supports parish sacramental programmes.

The pupils at St Thomas More are very proud of their school. They take full advantage of the opportunities and experiences offered to them to represent their school at religious, sporting, or musical events. A group of children from Year 6 form the School Chaplaincy Team and they make up the welcome party at Mass and select music for assembly. They lead worship and act as role models for other children. Each class has a Chaplaincy group who take on responsibilities within their classroom. Pupils welcome the responsibilities the school offers them, such as Chaplaincy Team, House Captain, Prefects, School Council or Eco Committee and all rise to the challenges of these responsibilities. Pupils' behaviour around the school, the relationships between pupils and pupils also staff and pupils, show immense respect.

The Catholic ethos of the school is evident from the point of first contact. Visitors are warmly greeted on arrival in an entrance where the central display highlights a religious theme throughout the year. The Catholic identity of the school is highlighted throughout. There is a stained glass window showing the 'Body and Blood of Christ' in the entrance. The school is inclusive and there are no distinctions made between children of different backgrounds, cultures and faiths. Everyone's identity is celebrated. A parent wrote to the inspector saying, *'The children are taught using Religious Education and Christian values that everyone is different. But everyone has their strengths. This is tremendous and so important in an age of social media and constant judgement'*. PSHE is linked to Diocesan materials such as Journey in Love. The Mission Statement is on display throughout the school and its emblem forms part of the school name plaque. It is used in prayer and its meaning is discussed at the start of each term. It is evaluated and monitored by the pupils at the start of term on PSHE days.

The Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher take an active part in the life of their own parish, acting as role models to staff. Their Parish Priest who is a Governor has responsibility for the 'Catholic Life of the School'. There is also a Governor responsible for Religious Education and a parish link Governor. All, as well as the Chair of Governors, visit the school often and take an active role in the life of the school. The school's leadership is deeply committed to the Church's mission in education and the school's Mission Statement is lived out in the daily practice of the school. The pupils' version, 'Learning to Love and Loving to Learn through Jesus' is very evident both physically and practically around the school.

Staff receive regular support and regular professional development from the Headteacher and Curriculum Team to improve provision. New members of staff and non-Catholic members receive support from the Curriculum Team. Systems for monitoring, analysing and evaluating the 'Catholic Life of the School' are robust and Religious Education is clearly documented in the School Development Plan. The teaching of other faiths and cultures supports and reflects an inclusive, broad and balanced curriculum. The school operates an 'open door' policy and the presence of many parents helping in the school reflects the Catholic ethos of the school.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Grade 1

Religious Education at St Thomas More School is outstanding. Having entered the school with generally average attainment, results show that many pupils leave the school with attainment well-above average. Parents commented on the excellent knowledge base in Religious Education the school gives their children. They commented on how well their children were prepared for secondary school as recognised from the very positive comments they receive from staff at their children's secondary schools. Pupils in Foundation Stage enjoy formal Religious Education lessons and they also take part in independent activities which support and reinforce the curriculum. They may act out a baptism or a marriage or they may sort hymns according to the number – largest to smallest. They are provided with an excellent start to their educational careers and this is successfully built on as they move through the school.

Pupils enjoy their Religious Education lessons and have a positive attitude for learning. They are able to join in discussion and express their views. They show confidence and can demonstrate their beliefs. Discussions in Key Stage 1 are appropriately more teacher led. Staff use a variety of strategies to engage pupils in their learning. Excellent use is made of Powerpoint presentations and interactive whiteboard activities allowing teachers to be very creative in the lessons they offer the pupils. There is evidence that teachers are using deeper questioning to challenge the more able. There is good coverage of the Religious Education programme in pupil books with work being of a high standard. There is clear evidence of differentiation to allow all of the pupils to access and get the most out of the curriculum. Pupils produce high quality work for displays around the school which the pupils value, with opportunities being used by teachers to link Religious Education to other curriculum areas.

Planning for Religious Education is detailed and differentiated. Teachers use the 'Come and See' planning sheets. Assessments ensure full coverage taking account of different abilities with staff utilising assessment data increasingly effectively.

All lessons observed during the course of the inspection were either outstanding or good with outstanding elements. Teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge. Lessons are well paced, build successfully on previous learning, utilise strong open ended questioning with appropriate time allowed for pupil responses and high level vocabulary development. Teachers make excellent use of Scripture with pupils demonstrating good biblical knowledge and an ability to find and use Bible references. They know their Bible stories well and behaviour for learning across the school is outstanding. It is noteworthy how teachers share experiences and participate in lessons and worship that assists pupils greatly in giving what they are doing a context whereby it is clearly relevant to their everyday lives.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Grade 1

The quality of Collective Worship is outstanding. The school is justly proud of its Holy Spirit Fireball sculpture which was blessed last year. It is a high profile, external focus for outdoor worship and Religious Education lessons. Photographic evidence reflected the growing use of this area and the pleasure pupils get from using it. It makes a strong statement about the Catholic ethos of the school and the value placed on Collective Worship.

The pupils join in with prayer both individually and during Collective Worship in a respectful manner. They respond positively to planned and spontaneous prayer. They regularly write their own prayers, including the prayer of the week to be shared with the whole school and parents. They take part in a range of creative forms of Collective Worship, utilising a variety of ways of understanding and engaging in the spiritual message. The programme is planned by the Religious Education team to offer a broad and balanced experience. Talk partners are used to ensure there is maximum participation. There is often a visual stimulus to help with understanding and reflection. Very good use is made of IT resources to support a variety of forms of worship.

The House Captains and the Chaplaincy Group lead assemblies also. They plan and deliver the worship, guided by the house teachers. The pupils respond respectfully to the Collective Worship planned and delivered by their peers. Class assemblies are of a high standard, with art, drama and music being used to enhance prayer. They are often cross-curricular. There is always a lot of support from parents at class assemblies. At Mass, the pupils lead the prayers and readings, carry the offertory and act as altar servers. At school celebrations, the pupils join in hymn singing beautifully and with enthusiasm.

Parents and members of local parishes are welcome to school Masses. Each year the whole school walks in procession to St Mary's Church to celebrate with the pupils who have made their First Holy Communion. Pupils from a young age regularly give their input to liturgies in the form of reflections, prayers and role play and are introduced to different types of and ways to pray using the school prayer book.

The pupils are at ease and respectful when visiting places of worship such as our local Catholic parish churches, the Baptist Church and St Mary's Church of England Church. Recently, Year 6 visited the Cambridge Synagogue as part of their learning of Judaism.

The Parish Priest is a regular visitor to the school and frequently is involved in Collective Worship. The Baptist Minister who has links with the school visits when appropriate and pupils have taken part in celebrations at the local Church of England church.

A year four class worship attended was beautifully led by pupils who planned and delivered the celebration. The class were very attentive to their peers and their every word. They joined in a signed response to prayers and signing is an undoubted strength of the school. Pupils expressed very positive views about signing as a communication tool. The worship was clearly pupil initiated reflecting evidence in planning records showing all pupils from Reception upwards are leading worship in an age appropriate way and this is an exemplar that could usefully be more widely shared.

A Nativity production seen reflected the school's strength in developing pupils' self-confidence and the breadth of opportunities and curriculum offered to pupils encompassing areas such as art, music, and drama which are all valued and celebrated in the school. As a parent responded on their questionnaire, *'We couldn't be happier with St Thomas More School which has provided a great foundation for our sons'*.