



## 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 100177

St Thomas à Becket  
Mottisfont Road  
Abbey Wood  
SE2 9LY

Inspection date: 7 November 2012

Chair of Governors:  
Headteacher:  
Inspectors:

Mr Tolu Laleye  
Mrs Monica Manley  
Mr Stephen Beck  
Mr Patrick Moloney

### EDUCATION COMMISSION

St Edward's House, St Paul's Wood Hill, Orpington BR5 2SR  
Tel 01689 829331 Fax 01689 829255  
Director of Education: Dr Anne Bamford

# SECTION 48

# Introduction

## Description of the school

St Thomas à Becket Catholic Primary School is voluntary aided. It is situated in the Greenwich Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Greenwich local authority. The principal parishes which the school serves are the expanding parishes of Saint David's and Saint Benet's in Abbey Wood. Small groups of pupils also come from the parishes of St Paul's Thamesmead, St Patrick's Plumstead, St Peter's and Our Lady of the Angels Woolwich. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 78%, some 20% lower than at the time of the last inspection. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in all Key Stages.

The school takes pupils from 3 to 11 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 274. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is well below average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free schools meals is average. Around 70% of the pupils receive extra support in class which is significantly higher than the national average. The majority of these pupils have speech, language and communication difficulties. The demographic of the school population has undergone significant change over recent years with pupils of Black African heritage being the largest group and White British pupils being the next largest group. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language remains much higher than in most schools.

## Key for inspection grades

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

# Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

GRADE  
2

St Thomas à Becket is an oversubscribed, well respected school, within the local Abbey Wood area and beyond, serving a very diverse multi-cultural community. The school is in one of the most deprived areas in the country. It is currently part of a major neighbourhood regeneration programme and is at the early stage of planning a move to two forms of entry. This is much needed expansion to meet the current high demand for places.

The school was classified as a school having a number of outstanding features at the time of its last inspection, with staff and governors being recognised as a strong team and this continues to be so. School leadership is strong within an overall collegiate approach to all aspects of school life. The extremely strong Catholic identity is present in its daily life, as it constantly works to live out its mission statement through encouraging pupils to think about the values which as a Catholic school are important in their daily lives in living as Jesus taught. Central to this is an understanding of the individual's need to take responsibility for the choices they make and to understand and act in the context of forgiveness and welcoming back. The care and support given to pupils and their families is a great strength of the school, as is the investment and commitment the school has made in providing 'Place to Be' support for pupils in need, the visible impact of which has been clearly identifiable. It is commendable how the school has managed a significant change in school demographics over a relatively short period of time reflecting a strong ethos of inclusivity that effectively supports and meets the needs of all pupils. Strong systems of care, guidance and support facilitate the promotion of the educational, spiritual, social, cultural and moral development of pupils as individuals and members of a community. This is within an atmosphere of shared understanding and mutual respect that is at the core of all the school does. As a parent wrote, *"This is a loving and caring school, supportive in all aspects of children's lives and through humble beginnings"*.

The parish priest is a frequent and welcome visitor to the school, providing a strong chaplaincy role to all sections of the school community. The governing body is fully committed to further developing the Catholic ethos of the school and provides appropriate levels of support and challenge.

The inspectors have been able to validate the school's own self-assessment of its effectiveness, as outlined in its self-evaluation statement, on which it places a strong emphasis. Due to the accuracy of this self-evaluation, governors, headteacher and staff have a good understanding of the school's strengths and are fully committed to future development. The school has worked hard on the issues raised in the last inspection which have largely been addressed, with only the areas of assessment and monitoring being on-going, as would be expected. They are willing to embrace innovation, ensuring that the school has the capacity to secure continuing improvement.

## What steps need to be taken to improve further?

Governors, headteacher and staff should:

- Continue the development of the tracking of individual pupil's progress and good assessment procedures which are already in place. This should be targeted at ensuring all pupils are given challenging goals, achieve appropriately, and are provided with a wider range of activities through increasing opportunities for independent learning, thereby raising attainment further.
- The school should consider reviewing its sex education policy in consultation with parents, staff and governors with a view to securing a whole school cross curricular policy with reference to the 'Diocesan policy for Education in Human Love
- Further develop the school's current work in the teaching of other faiths to heighten awareness of the importance of this aspect of the Religious Education curriculum in the context of society today.
- 

Publication date ... 21 DECEMBER 2012

# The Catholic life of the school

## Leadership and management

GRADE 1

The headteacher has admirably secured a school environment that is supportive of all involved. There is a shared vision that sees all valued within the school community, in addition to ensuring the school's aim to develop an understanding of the concept of helping one's neighbour in the widest sense is lived out in the daily life of the school. She is justly held in high regard by staff, parents and governors. She provides strong spiritual leadership and has a clear vision, which is enthusiastically communicated to all members of the school community, based on Gospel values. All within the school community work in unity to provide a bright and stimulating environment which includes displays that emphasise the school's Catholic ethos. The Mission Statement is displayed throughout the school, reflected in all documentation and shared with parents.

The headteacher is ably supported by her deputy, senior staff and governors who, together, lead the school highly effectively. The governing body is increasingly representative of the school community, is knowledgeable about its school and is actively involved. Governors attend school celebrations, visit frequently to carry out their responsibilities, and have formed a Learning Team that regularly talks to subject leaders, reviews pupils' books and liaises with the school council. The Chair aptly summed up the school's approach to on-going development when he said, *"The only certainty in life is change"*.

There are good links with local Catholic schools enabling the sharing of good practice in a supportive context. These links include the local Catholic secondary school which has provided strong curriculum links in the area of physical education. Very positive relationships have been forged between home, school and parish. Parents are actively involved in the life of the school, helping in classes, on school trips and through the recently formed Friends of St Thomas à Becket Parents Association.

## Quality of provision for personal and collective worship

GRADE 2

Personal and collective worship are seen as essential elements of religious experience and are integral to the life of this happy and very welcoming community. Pupils are given daily opportunities to participate in collective worship and prayer. They are encouraged to recognise the importance of their faith through liturgy and collective worship and taught an appreciation of showing respect and reverence. The school's assembly programme is a highly valued part of the life of the school and includes whole school, key stage and class assemblies. Prayer is central to the school day with regular opportunities given to reflect and write their own prayers. Pupils make use of the class prayer book by taking it home and writing a prayer in the book which is then shared with the class. Pupils participate in prayer enthusiastically at various points in the school day. School Mass is celebrated on Holy Days of Obligation and other special occasions and for specific celebrations in the liturgical year. Every class attends Mass in the parish church at least once a half term.

Classroom focal points, which are contributed to by the pupils, are used by teachers in Religious Education lessons for quiet reflection or meditation. They are of a consistently high standard and very effectively support the prayer life of the school. Display work round the school, largely centred on the current Religious Education theme, is likewise of a very good standard and maximises display areas within what is, a restrictive 1960's building. A display on entry to the school hall relating to 'Remembrance' effectively supports pupils' understanding of this concept. Pupils have a clear understanding of right and wrong and are active in maintaining a climate of mutual respect. They understand the notion of accepting responsibility for their own actions and demonstrate a great love of their faith.

In assemblies attended pupils were very attentive and participated fully. The celebrations were greatly enhanced by a very high standard of singing, drama and liturgical dance. The reception class liturgy 'Celebrating God's World' was very reflective, engaged all the pupils and provided them with an opportunity to 'shine' in the presence of the parish priest and a high number of parents. This celebration could usefully be shared with the wider pupil population. Some parents indicated in their questionnaire returns, which were wholeheartedly supportive of the school, that they would welcome more opportunities to attend school based liturgies. Greater value could also be gained through attendance by all key stage staff at these celebrations. The Religious Education coordinator, as part of her monitoring role, keeps an oversight on the quality of worship. She supports staff and encourages the use of music, prayer and reflection to enhance liturgical celebrations.

### **Community cohesion**

St Thomas à Becket School is an inclusive school which welcomes all. There is a common sense of belonging. School leaders respect difference, value diversity and ensure equal opportunities for all. Relationships among pupils are positive. They are able to express their identity with pride. Provision for spiritual development offers opportunities for staff and pupils to celebrate and respect the religious diversity within the school. The school is a close-knit community where all work together to encourage and support the development of every pupil, with staff members being very good role models. This enables pupils to gain an understanding of how cooperation and valuing diversity serves to create a purposeful, harmonious community. Pupils are equipped with skills which enable them to lead, listen, take responsibility and respond through routes such as the school council. Older pupils are responsive and thoughtful in supporting younger pupils.

Charity is an important aspect of St Thomas à Becket. Support is given for example; to families in need, the Greenwich and Bromley Hospice, the British Legion, CAFOD and 'Love in a Box'. In each case the fundraising is built round pupils learning, which includes discussion, to enable pupils to understand and have an empathy with those they are helping.

Pupil voice is heard through the established School Council which was effusive about the contribution it felt it made to the life of the school. Pupils are given opportunities to take on a range of responsibilities including older pupils being 'buddies' to younger pupils.

Whilst the teaching of other faiths is undertaken, the school could look to making this area more explicit, by extending this to include visits to places of worship, to further develop pupils' awareness of others and particularly of other faiths. This would give opportunities to further extend their knowledge and understanding of global issues and the needs of the wider world.

The school has established links with a Canadian Primary school through the writing of letters and the use of Skype. The school has received one of the Canadian teachers on a visit, thereby strengthening these links further.

The participation and positive interactions between groups of pupils, parents and staff make an important and beneficial contribution to cohesion. The Catholic ethos of St Thomas à Becket is far reaching as people are drawn into this cohesive community.

# Religious Education

## Achievement and standards in Religious Education

GRADE 2

Pupil attainment on entering the school is generally below national expectations. Pupils make good progress at every level and by the end of Key Stage 2 attainment is at least average and sometimes above. Attainment in Religious Education compares very favourably with literacy and is often better. This applies to pupils from other faith backgrounds and equally to boys and girls. Pupils are developing a good religious vocabulary at all levels. Many can articulate their thoughts and ideas about what they have learnt and willingly share these in lessons. Attainment in Religious Education across both key stages and across all year groups is good in relation to learning outcomes. This is reflected in the standard of children's work in Religious Education lessons, and in their books.

As they progress through the school the children's work reflects their ability to apply their learning to their own lives and social issues. They ask thought provoking questions using good religious vocabulary. They also demonstrate increasing insights into the beliefs and attitudes of others. Pupils are aware of the high expectations of their behaviour, agree class rules, have a good sense of right and wrong and treat everyone with respect. As a result the behaviour is exemplary. This is based on an established strong value system.

The presentation of work in pupils' books across the school is of a high standard reflecting the high value pupils place on their books. The content reflects very good coverage demonstrating clear continuity and progression.

Pupils clearly enjoy their Religious Education lessons and progress is successfully built on year by year.

## Teaching and learning in Religious Education

GRADE 2

Teaching ranges from good to outstanding. Teaching is well supported by teachers' subject knowledge and understanding of the 'Way the Truth and the Life' scheme being used. Teaching is good, marked by a brisk pace, clear revisiting of learning objectives, clarity of success criteria, which are understood by pupils and tasks matched to learners needs. Teachers have a good rapport with pupils providing a secure classroom environment through sensitive interaction and skilful use of discussion with pupils. Supporting adults provide good role models for the pupils they support.

Teachers make an effort to ensure that Religious Education lessons are distinctive and include time for individual reflection or prayer. They create enthusiasm among pupils for Religious Education through the use of supporting materials such as music, candles and ICT.

In the Foundation Stage lessons observed behaviour was exemplary and pupils displayed a positive attitude towards their learning. In the best teaching skilful open ended questioning is employed very effectively.

In order to further raise the overall quality of teaching the school needs to include greater levels of challenge through clear, assessment led differentiation and greater use of research and independent learning opportunities. Teaching would be enhanced by more pupil initiated learning and planning with greater personalisation, to ensure it meets the needs of all pupils.



Pupils enjoy an outstanding beginning to their educational life in Foundation Stage where Religious Education is of high quality provided at an appropriately age related level. In a lesson seen the teacher built on previous learning and used very effective questioning suited to the age group. It encourages them to respond to the learning objective, "I am aware that God made the people in the world to be part of His family just like me". In another lesson the teacher challenged pupils at an above age expected level, with a demanding task related to the concept of faith. The class reflected on the difficult times Jesus experienced in his life and the feelings of 'Doubting Thomas'. In a differentiated activity one group were set the very challenging task of presenting the case as to why one should trust in God. Very good use was made of drama in a lesson on the Ten Commandments that enabled pupils to reflect on the ideas they were acting out. This lesson saw a particularly good balance between teacher led and pupil generated learning. Teaching across the school is of a high standard and in some cases is inspirational. Some teachers willingly supported discussions with examples from their own lives helping pupils to likewise relate topics to their own lives. Teachers build successfully on previous knowledge and establish excellent relationships with pupils. Learning benefits from implicit cross curricular links which could usefully be developed in the context of a more explicit approach. Teaching and learning benefits from the teachers' strong subject knowledge and a whole school approach to planning. This is in the main appropriately matched to the needs of pupils. Opportunities need now to be provided to facilitate a wider range of opportunities for independent learning and the development of research skills. Classroom management is of a high order with lessons generally being well paced. Teachers use affirmation regularly, thereby developing self confidence in the pupils. The effective use of support staff both in and out of the classroom is a strength of the school.

### **The Religious Education curriculum**

**GRADE 2**

The importance St Thomas à Becket School gives to Religious Education is highly commendable. The school has adopted, 'The Way the Truth and the Life' Religious Education scheme, which is now well embedded. Religious Education is at the core of the whole school curriculum with, the scheme being followed by all classes at an appropriately age related level.

The Religious Education curriculum makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development and makes a positive impact on the raising of pupils' self-esteem. This could be further enhanced through increased opportunities for pupil initiated learning. Religious Education includes the teaching of other faiths and the Religious Education programme more than meets Bishops' Conference requirements for 10% of curriculum time to be allocated to the subject. Religious Education is embedded in the timetable as a core subject. This could be an appropriate time to review the other faiths' aspects of this curriculum area with a view to heightening awareness and extending pupil opportunities to reflect on the beliefs of others in the context of their own.

Parents are given information each term about the Religious Education programme and this serves to involve parents by suggesting ideas on how they can help at home. Pupil voice is well served by an effective school council. The school website could usefully be used to celebrate aspects of the Religious Education curriculum and the liturgical life of the school. The curriculum is enhanced by the school's PHSE programme and its use of SEAL materials. Education for Personal Relationships is well established and successful although parents were unsure about the sex education aspects of this policy, which could usefully be revisited.



## Leadership and management of Religious Education

GRADE 1

Inspection evidence gathered supports the judgement that the leadership and management of Religious Education is outstanding. The subject leader has excellent knowledge of her subject and is well placed to advise and support her motivated staff and knowledgeable Governors. She has a clear vision of her role in the school and provides proactive, strong leadership and direction for her subject. Her key strategic position on the school's Leadership Team as Deputy Headteacher helps to ensure that Religious Education is held first and foremost in the life of the school. There are effective systems in place to enable her to monitor her subject. She has successfully created an effective staff team whom she inspires and motivates, while ensuring appropriate support and challenges are evident. There is a clear and well laid out action plan for the future development of this subject. The school is well served by the priests of its parishes. The priests are regular visitors to the school and all make a different but highly valued contribution to the life of the school. They support the Religious Education curriculum in addition to providing a chaplaincy role to the whole school community.

The Religious Education coordinator leads her subject with considerable professionalism, knowledge and expertise. She shows a real commitment to see her subject grow and flourish as a core subject in the school.

Publication date ... 21 DECEMBER 2012