

**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 101821

Thomas More Catholic School
Russell Hill Road
Purley
CR8 2XP

Chair of Governors
Headteacher
Inspectors

Mr P McFall
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Inspection dates 18th and 19th April 2012

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Introduction

Description of the school

Thomas More Catholic School is a voluntary aided school situated in the Croydon Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Croydon L A. The principal parishes which the school serves are Our Lady of Reparation, West Croydon; St Gertrude, South Croydon; St Andrew, Thornton Heath; St Elphege, Wallington; St Chad, South Norwood and St John the Baptist, Purley. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 43%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to religious education is 8.3% in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 with 4% in the sixth form general RE. The school takes pupils from 11 to 18 years, with nearly two third more boys than girls. The number of pupils currently on roll is 835, including 107 in the sixth form. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is slightly below average while the proportion of pupils eligible for free schools meals (17%) is just above. A high number of the pupils (40%) receive extra support in class, while 73% of the pupils are from ethnic minority groups, which is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language (28%) is also well above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

As a Catholic learning community, Thomas More Catholic School is a good school with some outstanding features.

Leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The headteacher has a clear vision of Catholic education and in this she is well supported by a committed governing body and hardworking and dedicated staff. Staff morale, including teaching, support, catering and maintenance staff, is good. Governors effectively act as 'critical friends', supporting, challenging and monitoring the Catholic life of the school as well as standards in religious education. Pastoral care is extremely good and pupils feel they are well supported, cared for and safe in the school. The provision for and the quality of the liturgies is outstanding, as is the school's contribution to community cohesion. The attitude of the pupils towards the school is positive, their behaviour is very good as is their relationship with teachers and each other.

Attainment in religious education is, overall, satisfactory and good at AS and A2 level. The curriculum for the subject is, overall, good, although the curriculum time allocated to it is less than that recommended by the Diocese. Teaching and learning in religious education is good and sometimes outstanding while leadership of the subject is very good with the potential to be outstanding.

The school has addressed or is addressing all of the issues raised in the last inspection (December 2008).

The inspectors believe the school has a good capacity to improve further.

Grade 2

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

In order to improve further the governors and senior leaders should:-

- Improve attainment in religious education, particularly at Key Stage 4 and raise teachers' expectations of pupils across both KS3 & KS4.
- Monitor marking of all written work in religious education more effectively to ensure that teachers consistently make diagnostic comments which inform pupils how they might improve their work.
- Secure, as soon as is practical, a full complement of full time specialist teachers in religious education.
- Ensure that the curriculum time for religious education is fully compliant with diocesan requirements.

The Catholic life of the school

Leadership and management

Grade 1

Leadership and management of Thomas More Catholic School are outstanding.

The school has a very distinctive ethos and identity which is immediately evident to visitors. For example in the entrance area a statue of St Thomas More, the school's vision statement "to care, to learn, to achieve" are prominently displayed and these, together with the religious artefacts, rosaries, pictures and posters in classrooms and around the school, make a clear visible statement about the school's Catholicity. In addition the displays of pupils' activities during BREATHE week, their work for charities and the large motivational photographs with quotes from, for example, Colin Jackson, Terry Pratchett and Mahatma Gandhi, reinforce the school's focus on caring, achieving and fostering the pupils' spirituality.

The personal leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. She has a very clear vision for Catholic education and the contribution Thomas More can make to it. In this she is supported by a committed governing body and dedicated and hardworking staff. She has a strong positive presence in and around the school, leads by example and is seen as an excellent role model by the pupils, who like and respect her.

Governors effectively monitor the Catholic life of the school through attending Masses and other liturgies and services. They are fully involved in the formulation and monitoring of the school development plan, which has a clear focus on developing the Catholicity of the school, through the Self-evaluation Committee, which also monitors standards in religious education.

There is a comprehensive range of policies that supports the Catholic life of the school, and most are underpinned by the mission statement. There is a good induction programme in July for staff new to Thomas More with the emphasis on its distinctiveness as a Catholic school.

Pastoral care is a real strength of the school and pupils feel safe and cared for at Thomas More. They are very positive about the school. They value the strong sense of community and most are happy to be here. Relationships between pupils are good and behaviour is exemplary in religious education lessons and very good around the school. The school makes a very significant contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school (see Appendix 1). In their comments when answering the questionnaire many parents wrote about the effective pastoral care system and how the school supports their child's personal development.

Quality of provision for personal and collective worship

Grade 1

The quality of provision for private and collective worship is, overall, outstanding. Prayer is central to the life of this school. This is evident from observation in lessons, conversations with pupils & staff and attendance at acts of worship. The pupils spoke with great enthusiasm and sincerity about the recent BREATHE week in March and how much it deeply affected their spiritual development.

The Eucharist features prominently in the life of the school. There is a very good programme of Masses, organised by the liturgical co-ordinator and includes celebrations on the school's Feast Day, a welcome and a leavers' Mass and numerous year and class Masses. There is a voluntary Mass every Thursday morning before school begins, the attendance at which varies according to the needs of the school community or the time in the liturgical year. Pupil participation in Mass is very good where they act as servers, readers, in the choir or composing or reading bidding prayers. Non-sacramental services are organised on Ash Wednesday and during Advent and Lent. The school is very fortunate in having the local priest coming into the school to celebrate sacramental liturgies, being available for confessions and also making weekly visits to religious education lessons or being in the playground to meet pupils socially, thereby highlighting the importance of a priestly presence in the school. He makes a powerful contribution to the spiritual life of the school community.

There is a weekly rota of assemblies for all pupils. The two assemblies seen during the inspection were outstanding as acts of worship. Pupils were extremely well behaved and respectful of the occasion. A peaceful and quiet atmosphere was created when a musical piece by Vivaldi was played as the pupils entered the hall. The theme was very clear, very appropriate and accessible to all. There was an excellent opportunity for the pupils to spend time reflecting and meditating and all pupils responded to the invite to say The Lord's Prayer at the end of the assembly. The quality of prayer during form tutor time is usually good. The liturgy co-ordinator has produced a very good prayer booklet to support form tutors with tutor-time prayers. Collective worship makes an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development. There are good opportunities for staff to pray together and the chapel is available to staff and pupils, although it is not always open.

Community Cohesion

Grade 1

Thomas More Catholic School is outstanding at both promoting and achieving community cohesion. Inclusion of all is central to the ethos of this school. Within the school there is concern and respect for others. The school seeks to include all pupils in its corporate life and worship, evidenced by several comments from pupils who belong to other faith groups. Pupil friendship bonds cross cultural, faith, social and economic boundaries. This was emphasised particularly during pupil interviews when there was a unanimous recognition that "there is a genuine concern for the welfare of all

pupils". The pupils also made reference to teachers "willing to go the extra mile" in promoting extra-curricular activities and support for learning which contributes significantly to the cohesive nature of the school community. There are several strategies to ensure that this situation is sustained. For example, the debating society and the Comenius project run by the English and MFL departments respectively, and the international evening held each Summer. In addition, sixth form students assist with reading projects with younger pupils while the religious education curriculum promotes tolerance for and understanding of other faiths and cultures.

In the context of community cohesion beyond its gates, the school is involved in a range of activities in support of groups in the local, national and international community. Local involvement encompasses sixth form students organising Christmas parties for local senior citizens, the school facilities being used by local organisations and the Student Ambassadors to shopkeepers in Purley. Nationally and internationally the school has organised fund-raising activities for Great Ormond Street Hospital, CAFOD and OXFAM, already raising this year £1800 for charity.

Religious education

Achievement and standards in religious education

Grade 3

Attainment and achievement in religious education are, overall, satisfactory. At Key Stage 3 the percentage of pupils reaching level 5 or above is slightly below those of some other core subjects. After very good GCSE results in 2010 there was a disappointing dip last year. While the proportion of pupils gaining A*/A grades was comparable with some core subjects the percentage being awarded A*-C (43%) was well below the school average. Girls performed much better than boys. The AS and A2 results in 2011 were good, with an 83% and 100% pass rate respectively. There were staffing issues and related difficulties which contributed to these disappointing GCSE results and the school and the department have taken active steps to address these. For example, the schemes of work have been changed, there is now in place a more robust system of tracking pupils' progress, resources have been improved and revision classes introduced. The process of taking on another religious education teacher is well developed.

The quality and quantity of pupils' written work is, overall, satisfactory although there are variations between teaching groups, particularly in Key Stage 3. The department has introduced challenge target grades to supplement the minimum target grade in order to challenge pupils to achieve higher standards. Overall achievement and progress is satisfactory with some of the more able pupils making good progress. Pupils enjoy the subject and have a very positive attitude towards it. Religious education makes a significant contribution to their spiritual and moral development.

Teaching and learning is, overall, good and sometimes outstanding.

Where teaching is good or better the teachers use a variety of styles and pupils are engaged in a variety of learning activities. For example in a year 9 lesson on 'knowing Jesus' there was individual, paired and group work. The pace of the lessons is good and the questioning technique used by teachers challenges pupils to use the higher order thinking skills, as seen in a sixth form lesson on St Mark's gospel, where there were also excellent opportunities for the pupils to engage in independent learning. Prayer is an integral part of religious education lessons and the older pupils, for example sixth formers in a general RE lesson, are confident and comfortable in talking about their own spirituality. In these lessons pupils were making good progress. Most pupils are aware of their target grades.

In lessons that were less than good the pace was often too slow resulting in some pupils being off task. In all lessons the behaviour of the pupils is very good as are relationships with and between pupils where they are respectful of each other and are willing to listen to others' opinions. There is some evidence of peer assessment taking place, as in a year 7 lesson on The Eucharist where pupils assessed each other's work, although this practice is not yet fully embedded. Written work is generally marked regularly with good use of praise, encouraging comments by the teacher and, in some cases, teachers making comments which show the pupils how they might improve their work. However this diagnostic marking is not consistent across the department and is, with assessment for learning, underdeveloped.

The religious education curriculum**Grade 2**

The inspectors agree with the school's own judgement that the quality of the religious education curriculum is overall, good and meets the needs of the pupils and the requirements of the Curriculum Directory. At Key Stage 3 the schemes of work have been reviewed and revised and currently years 7 and 9 broadly follow the National Project ICONS with some in-house adaptations while the year 8 programme is the second year of The Way, the Truth and the Life syllabus. The Key Stage 4 programme has also been revised and pupils now study St Mark's gospel and the Catholic perspective on social and moral issues. Sixth form students follow either an AS course (St Mark's gospel and philosophy of religion) or an NOCN accredited course for general RE. The curriculum time allocated to the subject (8.3%) falls short of the requirements of the Bishops' Conference but the school plans to increase the time to the required 10% in September 2012. Visits to places of religious interest or significance are limited and the school should try to expand these in order to add to the pupils' experience.

Leadership and management of religious education are very good with the potential to be outstanding. The curriculum leader has a very clear understanding of the centrality and importance of the subject in the school and is strongly focused on the school's Catholic mission, on raising standards and promoting the faith and spiritual development of pupils. She provides very good leadership and is an effective role model for the relatively large number of staff who teach the subject. Support for staff in the department is excellent, in particular the support given to the many non-specialists through the detailed schemes of work, lesson plans and the provision of a rich variety of resources including PowerPoint presentations for each key stage. There is a rich body of evidence of a well-developed programme for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and addressing the issues these observations raise. In addition a robust system of tracking pupils' progress using 'traffic lights' is firmly in place. The quality of the department's self-evaluation is very thorough and accurate. Examination results are analysed by teaching groups. They should also be analysed by gender and ethnicity to identify if any particular group is underachieving. Following the disappointing GCSE results in 2011 the curriculum leader has undertaken a thorough in-depth study of the causes of the blip in the results. She has identified solutions and has marked out pathways to achieve these. Resources, including text books and bibles available to deliver the subject are adequate while the ICT facilities including interactive white boards are very good. However these, as yet, are not being used to their full potential either as teaching tools or as learning aids. The religious education classrooms are spacious with good displays of pupils' work and keywords, icons for prayer focus or motivational posters. The budget for the subject is comparable with other core subjects.