

DENOMINATIONAL INSPECTION REPORT

incorporating Section 48 and Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on
behalf of the Archbishop of Southwark

URN 118769

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Bleakwood Road

Walderslade

Kent, ME15 0NF

Inspection date: 22nd June 2018

Chair of Governors: Ms C. Flood

Headteacher: Ms V. Ebdon

**Inspectors: Ms A. Oddy
Ms A. Pitcher**

EDUCATION COMMISSION

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Director of Education: Dr Simon Hughes

Publication Date 6th September 2018



Key for inspection grades

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

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Thomas More is a two-form entry, voluntary aided primary school maintained by Medway Local Authority. It is situated in the Chatham Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. The principal parish which the school serves is St Simon Stock, Walderslade. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 46%. Other pupils are from other Christian denominations, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or of no faith background. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years and there are currently 424 pupils on roll. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly average. The proportion of pupils for whom pupil premium funding is received is 6%, which is below the national average. Less than 1% of pupils have a statement of Special Educational Need (SEN) with an additional 20% of pupils receiving SEN support. 67% of pupils are from White British backgrounds, 17% are of Black British or Black African background and the remainder represent a number of minority ethnic heritages. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language (EAL) is 6% and is below the national average.

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SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is an outstanding Catholic school because:

- St Thomas More is a welcoming and inclusive school with a rich Catholic life. It provides a happy and well-resourced learning environment to foster and inspire pupils' academic, moral and spiritual development. All feel valued and are encouraged to achieve their full potential. Pastoral care is excellent. The school is highly regarded by parents, who recognise and appreciate the high quality Catholic education it offers. School leaders and governors are dedicated and conscientious in their roles and committed to delivering the best opportunities to all members of the school community.
- The Catholic life of the school is strong and permeates all aspects of school life. The school's Catholic ethos is reflected in the excellent relationships between members of the school community and in the exceptionally courteous, considerate and helpful behaviour of the pupils. The school has strong links with the parish and the parish priest provides valued support and guidance to the school community.
- High quality teaching and learning in Religious Education ensures that all groups of pupils make good progress and achieve well. Pupils enjoy their Religious Education lessons and take a pride in their work. Interesting and creative activities and good use of cross curricular links enhance the curriculum. Religious Education is well led and managed and is at the heart of the curriculum.
- The school provides many varied opportunities for collective worship and prayer. These reflect the liturgical year, themes in Religious Education and school events as well as opportunities for personal prayer. Prayer forms an integral part of the school day and school life.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Ensure that pupils books reflect the challenge and greater depth seen in lessons.
- Continue with the school's identified focus on developing assessment in Religious Education in line with the transition from levels of attainment to age related expectations.
- Continue with the school's identified focus on developing the role of the pupil chaplaincy group.

Overall Effectiveness

How effective the school is in providing Catholic Education.

1

Catholic Life

1

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school.

1

The quality of provision for the Catholic life of the school.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school.

1

Religious Education

1

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.

1

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.

1

Collective Worship

1

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's collective worship.

1

The quality of provision for collective worship.

1

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship.

1



CATHOLIC LIFE

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school is outstanding.

- Pupils are fully involved in the rich Catholic life of the school. They are aware of the mission statement and know it is at the heart of their school. It is etched on the glass in the entrance hall so that it is immediately evident and is displayed around the school.
- Pupils are proud to belong to their school and know they have responsibilities to the school, to each other and the wider community. They are offered many opportunities to take roles of responsibility and respond to these very positively. These roles include the School Council, Eco Club, Kindness Team and Play Leaders. They take part willingly and enjoy contributing to making their school a happy and harmonious community. A pupil said, "Our different groups make the children part of the school and what's happening," and another said, "We like being able to make a difference to school life."
- Pupils are very involved in the school's spiritual life, including preparing class liturgies and participating in the school's prayer life. The Beacons are a pupil chaplaincy team who discuss a range of spiritual and social issues with their peers and consider suggestions and contributions. Examples include a collection for a local food bank and raising funds for victims of the Grenfell Tower fire. Pupils in the chaplaincy group recognise their responsibilities to the spiritual life of the school. One member stated, "We are a team of people who try to make the school holier."
- Pupils appreciate the importance of considering the needs of others. They are active in fund raising for those in need and in being part of their local community outside the school. Examples include fund raising for a range of charities and singing carols to the residents of a local care home.
- Pupil behaviour observed during this inspection was exemplary. Pupils are polite and courteous to each other and to adults around the school. They know they have a duty to care for each other and of the importance of forgiveness. Strategies such as the Friendship Bench and the work of the Kindness Team help pupils to care for their peers. A pupil said that when new children join the school, "We introduce ourselves and welcome them to our school."
- Pupils appreciate the many opportunities the school offers and are happy to play their part. They enjoy taking part in school, community and diocesan activities.
- They recognise and value the school's Catholic tradition and identity. The school has strong links with the parish, the deanery and the diocese, fostering pupils' sense of belonging to a wider Catholic family.
- Pupils consider their school to be a special place and a nurturing environment. Circle time and mindfulness help them to explore and discuss social, moral and cultural issues.
- Pupils know it is important to include everyone in their school community, regardless of culture or faith background. Diversity week was mentioned by pupils as an enjoyable time, "It's when we celebrate that we are all different but all equally valued."
- Exceptionally strong parish links strengthen the parish/home/school partnership. Foundation governors are also parishioners and catechists. The parish priest is a governor and a frequent visitor to the school. Pupils all know him and speak of him with warmth and affection as a valued member of their school. A parent wrote, "I feel the school and the church work very well together to give the children a spiritual educational experience."



- Parents are very appreciative of the school's ethos and Catholic life. Parental comments made to inspectors and in response to the inspection questionnaire include: "The Catholic ethos is maintained to a very high standard;" "The school is just perfect;" and "As a member of the Church of England, the school's ethos is not so Catholic that we feel excluded. It is distinctly Christian in our view."

The quality of provision for the Catholic life of the school is outstanding.

- The school mission statement is central to the life of the school and informs all policies and practice. It is regularly reviewed and is prominently displayed throughout the school, as well as the Golden Rules which are based on it.
- Staff form a cohesive team committed to supporting each other alongside providing guidance and support for the pupils in their care. There is a strong sense of community at all levels, with excellent relationships existing between all members of the school community. This was evident at the joyful celebration of Mass for the feast day of St Thomas More which took place on the day of this inspection.
- Displays in classrooms and around the school reflect the school's Catholic identity. These feature events in the liturgical year, themes in Religious Education and events in the Catholic life of the school such as First Holy Communion. Prayer focus areas in every classroom are attractive, well-kept and feature pupils' own prayers.
- The school's behaviour policy embodies principles of respect and forgiveness. Pupils know they have a duty to forgive others and also that they will be forgiven and allowed to start afresh when they make the wrong choices.
- The school provides extensive opportunities for the moral and spiritual development of its pupils. Pupils are encouraged to explore and debate moral and social issues and to ask "Big Questions" to develop their understanding. Religious Education and the rich programme of events in the school's Catholic life, together with the school's strong sense of community, fosters spiritual development.
- Pastoral care for pupils is excellent. A variety of groups and therapies ensure that vulnerable pupils are supported and cared for. The school also works with a number of outside agencies to provide support as appropriate.
- The parish priest provides invaluable support for all areas of the school's Catholic life and for the school community. A pupil chaplaincy team, the Beacons, has recently been established and has already had considerable impact on the Catholic life of the school. The school has identified extending the role of the chaplaincy team as an area for development and this is in line with the recommendations of this inspection.
- A range of prayer and worship opportunities are central to the school's Catholic life and to the school as a worshipping community. These include all pupils, regardless of their faith background. A parent from another Christian denomination wrote, "With my daughter being Christian, I feel she is still very much included."



How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school is outstanding.

- School leaders and governors are committed to the Catholic life of the school and the Church's mission in education. Senior leaders promote the Catholic identity of the school at all times and are excellent role models, leading by example.
- Governors are fully involved in the school's Catholic life. They attend school celebrations and events and are active in evaluating the school's Catholic life and suggesting improvements. They attend the parental meetings and the teaching and learning of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) as part of their monitoring responsibilities to ensure it is in line with the teachings of the Church and appropriate to the needs of pupils. They know their school well and consider its Catholic life to be a high priority. They work towards implementing new initiatives and realise the importance of assessing the impact of these.
- The school has a strong partnership with parents and welcomes them into the school community. A wide variety of events, both academic and spiritual, are offered to maximise parental involvement. These range from the "Welcome Breakfast" and "Bring your parents to ...", to invitations to attend school Masses, year group liturgies and morning prayers. Parental questionnaires distributed as part of this inspection showed a high rate of return and were overwhelmingly positive regarding the school's Catholic life. One wrote, "Providing an open, supportive and caring environment for all children and parents is to me the epitome of what Catholic life should be. I cannot express the depth of my gratitude for the love and care shown to me and my children."
- Pastoral care is a strength of the school. RSE and Personal, Social and Health and Economic Education (PSHE) programmes are carefully planned to foster pupils' social, moral and spiritual development in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church. Nurturing groups, "Special Time" (counselling and play therapy), and Play Leaders help vulnerable pupils and those in need of support. Staff wellbeing is also addressed, examples being an awareness of the need for work/life balance, the availability of counselling and support and the possibility of release time to support family members. The parish priest regularly spends time in school when he is available to offer pastoral support to staff and pupils. A member of staff wrote that the school, "reflected a true Catholic ethos" in the support she had experienced from leadership and all the staff. A parent who had experienced difficult times expressed the view that the Headteacher and the school, "have helped change my children's life for the better forever."
- Staff are committed to the school's Catholic life and are active participants. They attend a Deanery Mass at the beginning of the school year and readily volunteer to lead prayers at school celebrations and at times such as October, May, Advent and Lent.
- School self-evaluation is accurate, reflective and strongly evidence based. It is clear that monitoring and evaluation of the school's Catholic life informs development planning and is part of the school's drive towards continued improvement. Governors have been fully involved in the school's self-evaluation, contributing to it and discussing it to ensure it is representative of the school.



RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is outstanding.

- Pupils enjoy their Religious Education lessons and achieve well. All groups of pupils make good progress, with the great majority achieving or exceeding age-related expectations by the end of Key Stage 2. Significant numbers of pupils are working at greater depth. Attainment in Religious Education is in line with that in other core subjects.
- A wide variety of cross curricular links, visits and interesting activities enrich and enhance the Religious Education curriculum, maximising pupil engagement and enthusiasm. Of note is the programme of activities for each class during Religious Education week. These included a Year 3 visit to Aylesford Priory, a Year 5 class comparing a Parish Mass with a school Mass and Year 6 inviting a speaker to lead a workshop on Sikhism.
- Pupils speak highly of their Religious Education lessons and appreciate the importance of Religious Education to their lives. They particularly enjoy activities involving art and role play and enjoy discussing and exploring Religious Education themes. School monitoring indicates that pupils enjoy their learning in Religious Education this is in line with the findings of this inspection. Pupils said they enjoyed Religious Education and that it helped them, "understand the bigger picture of what is happening in the world." Another said, "Religious Education helps us to be better people. If you've hurt someone else, you know you've made the wrong choice and need to say sorry."
- Work in pupils' books is of a high standard, reflecting the pride pupils take in their work. Pupils were keen to show inspectors their books and show them pieces of work they were particularly proud of. They spoke confidently of their work and demonstrated high standards of religious literacy and subject knowledge.
- Pupils are able to apply a wide range of skills to their learning and are encouraged to develop other skills through their Religious Education work. They can reflect on their learning and apply it to their everyday lives. They appreciate the importance of Religious Education and the teachings of Jesus in influencing their behaviour and their care of others. A pupil said, "Religious Education gives us an idea of how Jesus lived so we can follow in his footsteps and live like him."
- Pupils were keen to speak to inspectors about their learning in Religious Education. In a lesson about miracles and the effect a miracle might have, pupils commented, "It would increase your faith and make you want to spread the Word of God." At the end of the lesson, pupils articulated clearly how the lesson had made them think deeply. "I was sceptical about this, but now I've seen it, modern day miracles do happen."
- In the lessons observed, it was clear that questioning challenged more able pupils to work at greater depth, but this is not always reflected in pupils' books. The school may wish to consider including further examples of this in written work and Class Religious Education books.

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is outstanding.

- Standards of teaching and learning are very high. Lessons observed as part of this inspection demonstrated careful planning and interesting and creative activities to engage and motivate learners. Teachers showed excellent subject knowledge and built on previous learning. Lesson objectives were clear, and pupils made good progress. Four lessons were observed,



across three key stages. In all lessons pace was good, and pupils were engaged and enthusiastic. Pupils were confident in contributing their own ideas, knowing that these would be welcomed and considered. Pupils listened respectfully to the opinions and ideas of others. Behaviour management was excellent, and strategies consistently applied across the school. Relationships between pupils and pupils and staff were clearly strong and supportive.

- The curriculum was made accessible to all pupils. Pupils with SEN were supported skilfully and appropriately, enabling maximum contribution to their own learning. Probing questioning and differentiated activities provided challenge and allowed pupils to deepen their understanding. They responded to this thoughtfully and positively.
- Marking is regular and developmental, with pupils given time to respond to teachers' comments. It allows them to understand how to improve their work further and build on their learning.
- The teaching of Religious Education is well resourced and receives an appropriate budget share. The school also maintains good links with local secondary schools, who often lend it extra resources to enhance curriculum teaching.
- Achievement in Religious Education is affirmed and celebrated. Exceptionally good work is shared with parents, displayed in classrooms or displayed in "exhibition crates" in the main corridor, highlighting the importance accorded to this area of the curriculum.
- Moderation of assessment tasks takes place in school and also at deanery and diocesan level, ensuring consistency and validating judgements.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is outstanding.

- Leaders and governors are committed to ensuring that Religious Education is at the heart of the school curriculum and that high standards of provision and attainment are maintained and further developed.
- The school uses the "Come and See" programme of Religious Education, interwoven with elements of "The Way, the Truth and the Life." Curriculum time allocation is in line with the requirements of the Bishops' Conference in both Key Stages. Relationships and Sex Education are in line with the teaching of the Catholic Church and is provided in consultation with parents and governors. The school is currently introducing the programme "A Journey in Love" and will extend this throughout the school.
- A comprehensive system of monitoring in Religious Education includes lesson observations, learning walks, book scrutiny and planning scrutiny. It is used to inform school self-evaluation and development planning and to ensure consistency.
- Systems of assessment and pupil tracking are well established. The school's assessment of Religious Education is being developed to facilitate the transition from levels of attainment to age-related expectations. This is a current area for continued development identified by the school and this is in line with the findings of this inspection.
- School development planning is responsive to school needs and also to strategic development. It has clear timescales and lines of responsibility. Progress is regularly monitored by school leaders and governors.



- Governors have a clear understanding of provision and standards in Religious Education. They take part in monitoring activities and visit the school frequently. They receive regular reports from the Headteacher, subject leader and governor visits. They are confident to exercise their twin roles of support for and challenge to leaders.
- Religious Education is led by the subject leader who is new to the post and supported by the Headteacher. She has a clear focus on high standards and continued improvement in Religious Education. She provides support for colleagues and ensures that best practice is shared to raise standards and contribute to a consistent approach.
- Professional development is provided for all staff and is responsive to identified needs. New members of staff receive induction, training and support to ensure that they are fully enabled to deliver the Religious Education curriculum and become active participants in the school's Catholic Life.
- The teaching of other faiths is well established throughout the school.
- Areas for development identified by the last inspection have been addressed.

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COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's collective worship and prayer life is outstanding.

- St Thomas More provides a wide range of collective worship and prayer opportunities. Pupils value these and respond very positively, knowing they are important to them personally and to school life.
- The act of collective worship observed was a whole school outdoor Mass to celebrate the feast day of the school's patron saint. It was a joyful day of celebration and clearly an important day in the school calendar. Pupils, staff, governors and parents formed a united worshipping community. Pupils sang and joined in the actions with enthusiasm, particularly in their school community song.
- Pupils are very much involved in planning and leading worship. They choose artefacts, music and readings with care. Pupils across the school are at ease composing and contributing prayers. Prayer intentions are put in prayer boxes, read out during school collective worship and displayed in classrooms. The Beacons chaplaincy group meets regularly. They participate in school worship, read Bible stories to younger pupils and encourage pupils to pray and reflect in the prayer areas. They also see their role as exemplifying their faith beyond the school community by organising charitable initiatives. They are guided and supported by the subject leader. The school has identified developing the role of the chaplaincy team as a focus for development and this is in line with the recommendations of this inspection.
- Pupils have a sense of respect for other faiths and know the importance of including all members of their school community.
- Pupils recognise the importance of prayer in their lives. They are familiar with the traditional prayers of the Church and with composing their own prayers. The Quiet Area provides a place for personal prayer.

The quality of provision for collective worship and prayer life is outstanding.

- Prayer and collective worship are central to the life of the school and form the heart of every school celebration.
- Praying together is part of the daily experience for pupils and staff. Pupils and staff start and end the day with prayer. Staff and governors' meetings always include prayer and the many displays and prayer spaces in the school enrich reflection and prayer. Photographs of the school's First Holy Communion pupils are displayed in the Quiet Area so that others can pray for them at this important time in their lives.
- The Church's liturgical year, its feasts and seasons are celebrated in school so that pupils gain a deep understanding and enjoyment when marking these occasions. Advent, Lent, Christmas and Easter have an important place in the school calendar and are reflected in the school's programme of collective worship. The Rosary is said daily during October and parents and carers are invited to join pupils in this. In May, the Hail Mary forms part of daily class prayer. Reconciliation services take place in Advent and Lent, with pupils invited to



participate regardless of their faith background. Catholic pupils are able to receive the sacrament and all pupils have the opportunity to speak with the priest.

- The school provides a wide range of collective worship and prayer opportunities which are carefully planned, well-resourced and valued by the school community. As a result, pupils' spiritual growth is nurtured, and all members of the school community are united as a worshipping community celebrating the feasts and seasons of the Church.

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship and prayer Life is outstanding.

- Leaders and governors are committed to high quality provision for collective worship and prayer. They demonstrate knowledge and expertise. A well-planned programme reflects the Church Year, themes in Religious Education and school events and celebrations.
- School leaders model high quality examples and support other staff in delivering prayer and worship opportunities, building a cohesive team. Training for this work is provided for new staff and to increase the confidence and expertise of all staff.
- School newsletters and the website keep parents informed and warmly invite them to participate.
- The subject leader and headteacher monitor and evaluate collective worship, sharing best practice in discussions at staff meetings.
- Governors attend school worship as part of their monitoring role as well as participating as members of the school community.
- School newsletters, the website and parish newsletters keep parents and parishioners informed and warmly invite them to participate in the school's collective worship. Parents and parishioners respond very positively.

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