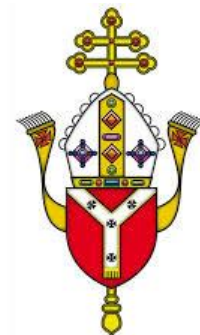


Westminster Diocese Inspection Report



St Thomas More Catholic Primary

Highfield, Letchworth, Herts SG6 3QB

Date of inspection: 26 March 2015

A. Classroom Religious Education

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

Overall Grade 2

The overall effectiveness of classroom religious education in developing pupils' religious literacy is good. The curriculum, reflecting soundly the Curriculum Directory, is adapted well to capture pupils' interest. Very good teaching leads pupils to achieve to their potential and in line with other core subjects. Teachers have strong subject knowledge, high expectations and excellent relationships with their pupils. The leadership of RE, reflecting its priority in the School Development Plan, ensures that the resources, in- service and monitoring needed to maintain its progress are in place. Measures are being taken to enable pupils to have a good idea of the criteria for making progress in their personal next steps in religious education. Pupils are articulate about the meaning and place of their knowledge of their faith in their lives, especially how the teachings of Jesus Christ are relevant to daily life. Governors, especially the link religious education governor, are devoted in their support of the teaching of religious education, showing this support through their regular visits to the school.

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 1

The overall effectiveness of the Catholic life of the school is outstandingly effective in developing the pupils' experience of the richness of a Catholic way of living and believing. There is a genuine commitment to pursuing and achieving its mission statement 'We follow Jesus as we work, play and pray together'. The key to its effectiveness is the school's successful development of a very strong home, school, parish partnership. The outstanding leadership of both the headteacher and senior staff, together with the Governors, have established and continue to maintain this important partnership. Prayer and worship are integrated into the life of the school. Excellent relationships with both the parish and the parents surround the pupils with an ethos of Catholic social values, expressed in outreach to the wider community of Letchworth as well as the Respecting Rights initiatives. Dance, art and music, a strong feature in the school, play their part in developing the breadth of Catholic life. The Governors are whole hearted in their support of initiatives to extend the prayer, worship and Common Good elements in the lives of the pupils.

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 seven lessons and one assembly, and carried out five interviews with school staff, pupils, parents 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, Letchworth 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

Deacon Anthony Clark	Lead Inspector
Mrs Lisa Barton	Associate Inspector
Mrs Catherine McMahon	Associate Inspector

Description of School

This Academy school is a one form entry in the LA of Hertfordshire and the locality of Letchworth. The school serves the parish of St Hugh of Lincoln, Letchworth. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 93%. The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 2%, from other Faiths 2% and from no registered faith 3%. The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 55%.

There are 238 pupils on roll, with one pupil with a statement of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health & Care Plans (EHC). The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is average. The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is above average. There is well below average rate of families claiming free school meals. Twelve pupils receive the Pupil Premium.

Telephone:	01462 620670
e-mail address:	admin@strcjni.herts.sch.uk

DFE Number:	9193400
URN Number:	138354

Headteacher:	Mrs Jane Perry
Chair of Governors:	Mrs Christine Gracie

Date of previous inspection:	March 2009
Previous Inspection grades:	Grade 1

Key for inspection grades:	<i>Grade 1</i>	<i>Outstanding</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?

The last inspection recommended that the school continue to monitor the new assessment procedures. In the intervening years the school has incorporated those procedures well, and is now embedding the latest assessment procedures which arise from revised Curriculum Directory and the schemes of work that have been adopted. In addition, the pupils' use of scripture has been developed in imaginative ways.

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

Grade 1

The content of classroom religious education meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory in an outstanding manner. The teachers and pupils are very conversant with the Directory and are able to situate their teaching and learning in the framework of the four areas of Revelation, Celebration, the Church, and Life in Christ – Morality. Curriculum directory target sheets are used to inform planning. The Bishops' requirement of 10% curriculum time being devoted to religious education is fully met. Dr Carswell's Resource Framework for religious education supplies the basis of the schemes of work. Each year the children study two other Faiths, Judaism in the autumn term and Sikhism in the spring or summer, whichever term is the longest. PSHE themes are linked well into the religious education curriculum. Links to other cultures are highlighted as part of the Rights Respecting agenda that the school is committed to.

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

Grade 2

Pupil achievement is at least good when compared to national benchmarks. Good progress is made by most pupils owing to their positive attitude to their work and a willingness to achieve their full potential. In this regard they are supported by conscientious and committed teachers who have high expectations and work hard to ensure that pupils actively participate in lessons. Behaviour for learning is a clear strength evident in the zeal and thirst for learning shown by pupils of all ages. Religious literacy is very strong and pupils are confident in their use of religious vocabulary. They pose theological questions in their search for truth. To improve further, pupils need to be more fully aware of the next steps for learning. This will promote even further the good rate at which the pupils gain knowledge, skills and understanding.

The quality of teaching

Grade 2

The teaching is never less than good and the children achieve well over time. In the best lessons, children were inspired to ask questions to deepen their understanding, for example by hot seating characters from the Easter story. Pupils are engaged during lessons and show a good level of religious literacy. They are keen to learn more about their faith. They are given good oral feedback and in some cases next steps are also given in their books to improve even further. Teachers use a

range of religious education themes to cover the RE Curriculum Directory. They keep detailed records of the pupils' attainment. Teaching Assistants make an excellent contribution to lessons, sometimes working with groups and sometimes taking part in the teaching, for example by 'rolling the stone' while Reception children learned the Resurrection story.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of religious education

Grade 2

The leadership and management of religious education is soundly effective in developing the religious literacy of the pupils in the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith. The pupils know, understand and appreciate the importance of religious faith and practice in everyday life. This was specially evident in the articulate manner pupils demonstrated when talking about what the Catholic faith of the school and their religious education lessons meant to them. The religious education coordinator together with the headteacher provide good leadership in promoting religious education, ensuring by their regular monitoring of both religious education classes and pupils' books that the subject receives the resources and in-service it needs. Pupils have begun the journey in knowing how to take the next steps in religious education but they need further help to know the criteria for making progress. The school successfully inducts non Catholic teachers into the programmes of study taught in the school. The link RE governor is very regular in her support and contact with the teaching of religious education and other governors assist in the induction and in-service of newly appointed teachers. The school's website ensures that RE themes are shared with parents.

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

- Continue to consolidate the schemes of work into a unified religious education curriculum
- Develop procedures to ensure that pupils are given sufficient idea of the criteria for progress in 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?

The last inspection found that the Catholic life of the school was outstanding and there were no issues for improvement in relation to it. In the five years since then a number of areas have improved yet further. The very good St Thomas More website succinctly portrays a school which has its Catholicity at the centre of all that it plans and does. The school's vision arises from its deep understanding of the key catechetical partnership of home, school and parish working together for the richness of the Catholic way of living and believing for each child.

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

Grade I

Religious education is firmly placed at the core of the curriculum and the school is outstanding in devoting the resources needed to ensure this. At least 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education. The displays across the school and in the classrooms richly proclaim the liturgical themes and the entrance area leaves no doubt that one is entering a Catholic school. The resources devoted to the development of the environment which speaks of the presence of Christ, permeate the school, whether they be the new set of Bibles recently purchased or the sensory prayer garden. Staff have a Catholic Life/RE target as part of their performance appraisal. The school is generous in its provision of continuing professional development for all staff. 'Catholic Life matters' are at the head of Governing Body agendas.

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community

Grade I

Worship and prayer are integral to the life of the school. Pupils have every encouragement to deepen their faith, a faith which is firmly understood and evident in all aspects of school life. There are many opportunities for pupils to articulate their knowledge and express themselves in a variety of ways as evidenced in the wonderful and thought provoking dance presentation during the whole school assembly. Pupils participate fully in daily prayer. The school excels in providing ample opportunities for children to write own prayers and this is fully linked to the homework set across the school. They are respectful of one another and acknowledge the right of others to have their own viewpoint. The close links with the local parish and the support of the parish priest mean that pupils experience the sacramental life of the Church in a meaningful and participatory style. The school continues to value the spirituality bequeathed to it by the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, the sisters who founded the school and whose charism is still guiding the school.

The commitment and contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice

Grade I

The school is an outstanding example of commitment to the Common Good. By living out the mission statement 'We follow Jesus as we work, play and pray together', the whole community shows how it makes a contribution to Christ's call for action. As members of a Rights Respecting school, the children focus on global issues and link them across the curriculum throughout the school year. This promotion of citizenship is a great strength of school. This, together with work about and for national groups like CAFOD and KISS, helps the children to focus beyond their own community and into the wider world. The children demonstrate care and consideration for each other, and their gifts are celebrated through concerts, assemblies and outside events. All children are given the chance to shine. The children initiate many fundraising events themselves such as the Wacky Onesie day to support others. This follows from the emphasis the school places on enabling pupils to translate their learning about values from Scripture into programmes of action. An example is the Junior Leadership Team formed from Year 6 pupils who act as buddies to the Reception children and develop other projects.

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

The school has forged an outstanding and authentic partnership with its parents and with its parish. The parents are vocal in their affirmation of the openness of the school to engaging with them in the education of their children and the solid sense of celebrating this in the local parish. Very good communication has been established with the parents so that they are both informed and drawn into the prayer life and celebration in the school. The school has excellent relations with the parish priest who is a regular visitor to the school. He is a governor and contributes to the secure maintenance of the Catholic identity of the school. The school participates appropriately and well in the wider life of the diocese, whether attending teacher and governor courses offered by the diocese, or working in conjunction with its diocesan adviser. The partnership, which begins with the knowledge that we are all children of God, extends to other schools in Letchworth and its cultural life. The school has established good links with the Clore Shalom school in Shenley as well as the local First Garden City Church.

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

Grade I

Leadership and management is outstandingly effective in promoting the Catholic life of the school. There is a shared sense of all members of the community contributing as appropriate to its Catholicity. The Governing Body takes great care to fulfil its responsibility to protect the Catholic ethos, supporting diocesan and school priorities, and taking a close interest in the half termly report of the headteacher which begins with a focus on the school's Catholic life. There is openness to change, development and improvement which ensures there is a freshness about how the mission statement is achieved; 'We follow Jesus as we work, play and pray together'. On the day of the inspection, a Level 6 Maths day at the school was characterised by welcome and respect as pupils from a number of surrounding schools attended. There is regular in-service on Catholic themes for all staff as well as induction for all new staff on the Catholic nature of education.

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

- In preparing for the 50th anniversary of its founding, the school should discern in what way the charism of the foundation sisters, the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, can be portrayed in a permanent memorial display.
- Continue to work closely with CAFOD and Unicef on the journey of gaining accreditation as a Rights Respecting school at higher levels.