



DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP INSPECTION REPORT

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

URN 118778

St Thomas' Catholic Primary School
South Park
Sevenoaks
TN13 1EH

Inspection date: 23 September 2014

Chair of Governors:

Mrs Germaine Campbell

Headteacher:

Mrs Elizabeth Baldock

Inspectors:

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EDUCATION COMMISSION

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Introduction

Description of the school

St Thomas Catholic Primary School has Academy status.

It is in the Tunbridge Wells Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark.

It is in the Kent Local Authority area.

The principal parishes which the school serves are St Thomas of Canterbury, Sevenoaks and St John the Baptist, Westerham.

The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 99%.

The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to Religious Education is 10% in all Key Stages.

The school takes pupils from 4 to 11 years.

The number of pupils currently on roll is 210.

The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly average.

Around 10% of the pupils receive extra support in class.

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average.

The majority of pupils are White British, but increasingly there is an above average proportion from other ethnic heritages.

The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is broadly average.

Date of previous inspection:

9 June 2009

Overall Grade:

1

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1

Outstanding

Grade 3

Requires improvement

Grade 2

Good

Grade 4

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school in providing Catholic Education

GRADE
1

St Thomas' is an Outstanding example of a successful school, which is committed to high academic achievement and the all-round development of the pupils. The school has many strengths.

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding and are key ingredients in the success of the school.

The highly effective Headteacher, who is well regarded by all, is an inspirational leader. She has created a strong and cohesive staff team and successfully developed leadership capacity within that team. She has a clear vision of Catholic education and is totally committed to the success and well-being of the school.

The committed and enthusiastic staff, both teaching and support staff, have great pride in their school, and work hard to ensure that all the pupils enjoy school, make progress and achieve well.

Excellent teaching and learning, high expectations of the pupils and a calm and friendly environment further enhance the pupils' experiences in school.

The spiritual life of the school is very strong and is apparent in all they do. As one parent commented "This is a Christ-centred school."

The relationship between home, school and parish is very strong.

The pupils are polite, friendly and respectful and clearly proud of their school. They are extremely well-behaved and are very considerate of each other. They feel safe, happy and well cared for in school. The older pupils are very caring and supportive of the younger children.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive and involved in the life of the school. There were many appreciative comments and one parent spoke for many as they said "St Thomas is an amazing example of how a Catholic school should be. All the staff show incredible care, dedication and love towards all the children and really value them."

All the issues from the previous inspection have been addressed and any areas for development have been identified. The strong leadership and supportive staff team ensure that the school has an excellent capacity to continue to improve.

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

As identified by the school

Governors, Headteacher and staff should:

- Ensure that more opportunities are created for the pupils to plan and lead Whole School and Key Stage Collective Worship.

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

The pupils live out the Gospel values and the Mission Statement of the school "Learning in the Light of Christ." This is manifest in the Candle Assembly, which is held at the beginning of each year, and ensures the Mission Statement is at the heart of the school.

It is evident in the quality of relationships, the sense of community, the involvement of the parents and the school and parish links. They link with both global and national charities where they are committed to helping others less fortunate than themselves. This encapsulates the aim of the Mission Statement of promoting a spirit of charity, social and global awareness. The charities supported by the school include CAFOD and Mission Together. Locally there are links with a special school and a senior citizens home as well as organising events in school such as tea parties for Macmillan fund raising.

The pupils participate well in the Catholic life of the school and the parish. Mass is celebrated in the parish church at the beginning and end of each term as well as Holy days of Obligation, with pupils taking an active role. During each term a different class attends a timetabled weekly Mass in the church as part of the parish community

Prayers are an intrinsic part of the life of the school. They know the traditional prayers of the Church and prayers are said at the beginning and end of the day and before and after lunch. Each class has a prayer corner and there is evidence of pupils' own prayers around the school. For example on a display on the Mission Statement in a central area one pupil's prayer read, "In our school the light of Christ helps us to become a better person".

Parents are also part of the Catholic life of the school. A parents' prayer group is held in the school each week. Newcomers to the school are welcomed and families are supported through their prayers.

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

Pupils come into school with broadly average ability. They settle well into school and make good progress by the end of the Foundation Stage. They make good progress across all Key Stages and groups. Standards by the end of Key Stage 2 are above average.

Pupils enjoy their Religious Education lessons. They are focussed, attentive and cooperate well with each other. They are able to think and discuss for an extended period of time. For example, in a Year 6 class they were focussing on the story of the Prodigal Son and the relationships of the father with the sons. Open ended questions, which enabled the pupils to reflect more deeply, resulted in some intelligent and reflective answers. They make good connections with their previous learning and respond appropriately and realistically to questions. In a Year 2 class when the pupils were discussing if it is easy to be a child of God, one of the pupils said "It is very difficult because we all make mistakes."

They have good analytical skills.

Work in books is of a good standard and well presented.

There are opportunities for the pupils to present their work in a variety of ways using various means such as storyboard, computing, writing poems and art.

How well pupils respond to and participate in Collective Worship

Pupils respond to Collective Worship with interest and respect. There is a calm and peaceful atmosphere throughout the school and that is reflected in the pupils' behaviour and their consideration and care for each other.

The Headteacher led the whole school assembly on Fruits of the Spirit. It was calm and peaceful right from the start. The pupils entered quietly to music. They listened attentively, sung joyfully and responded well to the guided meditation. Each class chose a fruit of the Spirit and had to give a reason for choosing. Their answers showed understanding and maturity and they were able to relate to everyday life. Year 6 choose peace and their reason was, "Because sometimes in games we argue and if we have peace it means you won't argue."

Pupils were eager and enthusiastic to contribute to the assembly, take part and answer questions. As they are so keen to have a role in Collective Worship now is a good opportunity for the pupils to be more active in the planning role.

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How well leaders, governors and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils

Governors, the Headteacher and the Senior Leadership team are all committed to the Catholic life of the school.

The Governors are fully involved in the life of the school and know well the strengths and the areas to continue to develop. Governors have a high profile in the school, both formally and informally. They hold the school to account and work in collaboration with the headteacher.

The Headteacher lives out the Mission Statement in her inspirational and spiritual leadership of the school. She is appreciated by all members of the school, home and parish community. She has a clear vision of Catholic education and she has fostered a real community spirit. As one parent said, "She is an inspiring, strong, gentle and spiritual Head who leads by example."

She is well supported by the Senior Leadership Team.

The school parish relationship is good. The Parish Priest is a frequent and welcome visitor to the school.

The First Communion programme is run in the parish and there is a close liaison with the school.

The many colourful and relevant displays around the school reflect the Catholic nature of the school. The mission Statement is displayed in the front entrance and around the school. There is also a lovely display showing the pupils' understanding of the Mission Statement. As one pupil wrote, "in our school the light of Christ helps us to pray for others who are not as fortunate as us and are going through bad times."

There are Prayer Corners in every classroom. Good practice was seen when pupils work is displayed and this should be extended to all classes, as well as involving the pupils in the creation of the focal area.

A retreat for the staff was held at Aylesford Priory. This was led by the Co-ordinator and focussed on Prayer, the Mass and Catholic life.

How well leaders, governors and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education and plan and implement for improvement to outcomes for pupils

The Religious Education Coordinator is committed to her role and well supported by the Headteacher. She meets with Governors on a regular basis providing them with information on monitoring and assessment and the religious education curriculum. She leads staff meetings to support planning and assessment. She attends Diocesan training and Deanery meetings. Her monitoring role includes lesson observations and work

scrutiny. There is now a comprehensive system for pupil progress and the Coordinator has developed an assessment portfolio to reflect the levels achieved.

In the school's quest for continuing improvement they wish to further challenge the most able pupils and to increase the percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 by the end of Year 6

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The quality of teaching and how purposeful learning is in Religious Education

Teaching across the school is effective in enthusing pupils and ensuring they learn well. Pupils were encouraged to reflect and meditate on the theme of the lesson. Teachers' subject knowledge was good and they used high level and probing questions which challenge the pupils to think. Learning intentions are clear. Computing was well used to support both teaching and learning and shared with the pupils. Lessons were built on prior learning and knowledge.

Teaching assistants were well deployed to give the best possible support. They provide good support and have an excellent rapport with pupils. They were clear about their role, supported well and intervened when necessary.

Of particular note, the response of the pupils showed an understanding and depth of maturity.

In all the lessons observed activities were well matched to support the learning needs of the pupils. Plans are in place for this to be extended to provide further challenging tasks for the more able.

High expectations of the pupils, and the quality of the language used and expected from the pupils ensures that their learning progresses at a good rate.

The learning environment is attractive and stimulating and there is much evidence of high quality pupils' work. Pupils take pride in their workbooks which are well presented and show a sufficient quantity of work. Books were marked regularly and some examples of interactive marking were seen. Pupils spoke highly of the verbal feedback they regularly receive from their teacher.

The extent to which the Religious Education curriculum promotes pupils' learning

The curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference with 10% of the timetable allocated to the teaching of Religious Education.

The school uses the "Come and See" programme which is now in its second year of use in the school.

There are good cross-curricular links in place and excellent use is made of computing, drama and art. There are strong links with the PSHE curriculum which provide good opportunities for personal, spiritual and moral development. There are a variety of activities to support and enhance the curriculum.

The pupils and their families own experience enable them to make connections and relate to their own lives

The teaching of other faiths is a planned part of the 'Come and See' curriculum.

There are sufficient books and resources available.

The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

Collective Worship is central to the life of the school and reflects the Catholic nature of the school. There is a real sense of togetherness inspired by the headteacher.

There are a variety of well-planned celebrations and liturgies where the pupils take part for example in playing the recorder to enhance the music.

Masses and assemblies, which are either whole school or separate Key Stage assemblies, are planned by the leadership team at the beginning of each year.

At the start of each academic year is the 'Candle Assembly.' This draws the whole school community together and each class takes the 'Light of Christ' back to their classroom in the form of their own class candle.

Each class leads a whole assembly at least once a term based on their Religious Education topic with the pupils taking an active role through drama, song and prayer.

A staff prayer and reflection at the beginning of each day highlights the importance of collective worship for all members of the staff community.

Whole school assemblies and Masses are led by the staff and opportunities are now being sought for the pupils to be involved in the planning and leading stages.

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