

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Greenway, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire HP4 3LF

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 14 June 2019



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is good

- Despite the change in leadership and staff turnover, school leaders are proactive in their determination to put religious education at the heart of the school.
- The Religious Education Curriculum Directory forms the basis of the religious education programme.
- Attainment is at least as good as in other core subjects.
- Teaching is generally good across the school and teachers show good subject knowledge. Pupils get a very good start to their learning in Early Years Foundation Stage. Behaviour across the school is good. Support staff are well deployed to facilitate learning for pupils with additional needs.
- The newly appointed religious education leader is committed to improving the teaching and learning of religious education across the school. Teaching is monitored regularly and systems are being established by the leadership team to support teachers. Governors visit the school often and know the school well.

Classroom religious education is not yet outstanding because

- Not all teachers have high enough expectations of presentation and pupil response.
- There is not sufficient challenge for all learners.
- Marking and feedback is not consistent enough to ensure all pupils know how to improve their learning.
- Recent improvements in practice are not yet fully embedded.

B. The Catholic life of the school is good

- The school meets the 10% requirements as directed by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
- The school strives to ensure that 'Learning to love, live and celebrate as we grow in the knowledge and love of Christ' is at the centre of the school's everyday work.
- Prayer and worship are a daily part of pupils' experience at this school. Pupils are becoming more independent in the planning and delivery of pupil led worship.
- The newly formed 'Pupil Chaplaincy' team is enthusiastic about taking a leading role within the school and parish community. The school encourages pupils to give of their time to others using the liturgical year as their basis for planning activities.
- The school's commitment to the Common Good and social justice is good. There is a sense of community in the school that the pupils are keen to share.
- The executive headteacher and leadership team are fully committed to the Catholic life of the school. Governors share in the strategic leadership of the school with enthusiasm.

The Catholic life of the school is not yet outstanding because

- Pupils do not yet have a deep understanding of their call to service and the theology underpinning their actions.
- There are limited opportunities for pupils to engage within the parish community.
- There are missed opportunities for the newly appointed religious education leader to engage with other Catholic schools.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

The areas for development from the previous inspection continue to be addressed and the school continues to look at ways to improve marking and feedback to pupils and develop higher order thinking skills.

The content of classroom religious education is good

The content of the religious education curriculum for this Catholic school fully meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory (RECD). The current scheme for religious education (RE) is supplemented by a second scheme based on Catholic Social Teaching and both are used throughout the school. Pupils are taught about other faiths in an age appropriate way and children can explain what they have learned. During the inspection there was evidence of the use of Bibles to support lessons. Pupils are given opportunities to develop an understanding of the liturgical year through a wide variety of activities such as the celebration of Advent, theme days for Shrove Tuesday, attendance at Mass in the local parish and May devotions. The structure, planning and content of the RE curriculum and individual lessons are mostly good but in some lessons there was the lack of opportunities for pupils to express their own ideas and talents. Teaching assistants are well deployed and support pupils well in lessons, especially those pupils with additional needs.

Pupil achievement in religious education is good

Pupil achievement overall is good. Children get a very good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the carefully planned learning environment is a warm, friendly and nurturing place for children to begin their faith journey. The school data shows that attainment is at least as good as in other core subjects and comparison of workbooks supported this evidence. The school marking and feedback policy and procedures are not yet consistent across the school and need greater rigour to ensure that feedback to pupils allows them to know how to improve their work. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is mostly good and they are engaged and interested in their learning. Pupils clearly enjoy their religious education classes and have positive attitudes to learning.

The quality of teaching is good

The quality of teaching observed was mostly good and where teachers were confident and had good subject knowledge, teaching was often better. In a Year 5 lesson about knowing the beliefs we share with Jesus a pupil said 'The Church teaches us to respect others no matter what faith we have to welcome differences.' Pupils across the school were generally eager to learn and wanted to improve their work. In lessons where work was matched to pupils' abilities and pupils were clear about what they had to do to improve, there was evidence of good progress being made. Generally pupils were keen to share their work and discuss what they knew about RE. In a Year 2 lesson about the school and Christian community a pupil told the inspector that her RE book is, 'different from her other books as they teach her things for when she is an adult' but her RE book teaches her 'about God and Jesus and He is here now.' Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage classes was good and the young children receive a very good start to their school life in a secure and nurturing environment. There were good opportunities to learn both indoors and out and all staff in these areas were effective in helping the young children to quickly learn. In the Nursery pupils were learning about Pentecost and had opportunities to engage in activities that helped them think about the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Across the school, teachers generally have high expectations of their pupils and want them to do well.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education is good

Leadership and management are judged to be good. The school has been on a difficult journey with a falling roll, high staff turnover and declining budget. The appointment of an executive headteacher, who divides her time between two schools, and a new religious education leader, who despite being new to Catholic education is having an impact, means that now school leaders have the capacity and commitment for continued school improvement. Leaders communicate a clear vision and commitment to high standards through monitoring and self-evaluation. RE is clearly identified in the school's termly improvement plan as an area for on-going improvement. The RE leader is very committed to her role, but now needs the opportunity to liaise with other local Catholic schools to observe best practice, which will assist her in monitoring and tracking classroom RE at St Thomas More. The school link governor for RE is a regular visitor to the school; she knows the school well and is able to both support and challenge school leaders.

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

- Raise teacher expectations in order to enable pupils to demonstrate consistently their full potential.
- Ensure teachers plan lessons that provide challenge for all learners.
- Ensure that next step marking is consistent, purposeful and moves learning forward.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

Pupils have begun to plan and lead worship across the school and a 'Chaplaincy Team' has been established to enable pupils to take a more active role in prayer and worship.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is good

The school fully meets the 10% requirements as laid down by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. The school appointed an experienced Catholic teacher to the role of religious education subject leader in the last academic year. She is new to Catholic education and it is recognised that she would benefit from observing best practice in other Catholic schools. The new RE leader's enthusiasm and dedication to the post are clearly evident and recognised by the school community. She has a high profile and regularly leads staff training and meetings on religious education. Staff who are not Catholic willingly support and promote the Catholic ethos of the school and are further supported by school leaders. Religious education is well resourced and has a budget in line with other core subjects. The leadership team and governors are fully committed to the development of RE and ensure that opportunities for training and staff development are available to all staff.

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

is good

The traditions of the Church, through worship and prayer, are central to the school and its daily experiences. These include the church liturgical calendar and the seasons of Advent, Lent, Easter; more recently the Adoremus Eucharistic Congress has been the stimulus for other opportunities for worship. These key events in the liturgical calendar are marked by the school community either in the church or the school. Prayer and worship are a daily part of school life. The school have a newly appointed 'Chaplaincy Team' who have begun to lead collective worship for younger pupils who have additional needs. They also play an integral role in the weekly themes based on the Gospel values and 'Learning Powers' by providing posters for all classrooms and other school spaces with liturgical quotes that link to the theme. The team have recently begun adding a scripture link to the weekly theme, which is shared in the school newsletter. There is weekly pupil led worship in each class as well as whole school and key stage opportunities. A variety of displays around the school remind pupils of the importance of and commitment to the Catholic faith and tradition. There was evidence of the teaching of other faiths as part of the curriculum and all staff no matter what faith take part in leading morning prayer, reinforcing the religious nature of the school. Pupils of other faiths also have the opportunity to lead and share prayers from their own faith. All classes have appropriate prayer focus areas and there are plans by the chaplaincy team for the existing prayer garden to be relocated to ensure it is more accessible and engaging for all pupils. Year 5 pupils experience an annual retreat at St Cassian's retreat centre and this is an opportunity for pupils to consider the place of God in their lives.

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

is good

Christian values are at the heart of St Thomas More School. The school's commitment to the Common Good and social justice is good. There is a sense of community in the school that the pupils are keen to share. Pupils' understanding of the Church's call to action for justice and peace is demonstrated by their response charities such as; Macmillan Cancer, BBC Children in Need, The Catholic Children's Society and the Hospice of St Francis. The 'Chaplaincy Team' supported the

parish with the 'Lenten Frugal Lunch' as part of their new role. Pupils support the local foodbank, which is distributed through the local parish. Discussion with pupils shows that they are just beginning in their understanding of the call to serve but are not yet able to articulate the theology that underpins their actions. Pupils are offered opportunities to take on roles of responsibility such as head boy and girl and school council membership and respond to these very positively.

The partnership with parents, school and parish, and collaboration as an integral part of the diocese through its relationship with the diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

is good

The school is committed to partnership with the Diocese of Westminster with attendance at the Good Shepherd Mass and Advent Carol Service as well as participating in in-service training and work moderation exercises. Staff and governors have taken part in diocesan training. The executive headteacher leads two Catholic schools ensuring that staff share expertise and training opportunities. The diocesan RE adviser is supporting the school and provides valuable support. The executive headteacher ensures the school is linked closely to local Catholic schools and values the support the partnership offers. Parents are regularly invited to school Masses and celebrations. The parent questionnaire sent out for the inspection had a good response with parents mostly giving positive views. One parent said, 'we are highly impressed as strong Catholic parents by the quality of RE in the school.' Another parent said, 'Both my children have grown more of an interest in our religion thanks to St Thomas More.' A significant number of parents were unhappy with the relationship between the school and parish and with communication with parents from the school. However, it was noted that there is a weekly newsletter including a section on the Catholic life of the School and a weekly email to parents with reminders and upcoming events to keep them informed and up to date with what is happening in school. The school website would benefit from more up to date information about RE in the curriculum and the Catholic life of the school. It is seen as an area for development to build bridges with the local parish and parents to address the concerns to ensure improved relationships.

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

is good

Leadership and management are judged to be good. The executive headteacher and the governing body are fully committed to the Catholic life of the school. The executive headteacher takes responsibility for leading the Catholic life of the school with the RE leader leading the curriculum RE. They ensure that Christ is at the centre of their work. The governing body is fully committed to its responsibility and mission in the church. They are active partners with the leadership team and regular visitors to ensure they are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities within the school. There are plans in place to ensure daily leadership is present at the school from the next academic year and this will support school leaders in their capacity for school improvement.

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

- Continue to strengthen the links with the parish and communication with parents.
- Ensure that there are opportunities for the religious education leader to meet with other schools that model outstanding practice.
- Provide opportunities for pupils to link their acts of service to the theology that underpins these acts.

Information about this school

- The school is a one-form entry Catholic primary school in the locality of Berkhamsted.
- The school serves the parishes of Sacred Heart, Berkhamsted and Corpus Christi, Tring.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 81%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 6 % and from other faiths is 6 %. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 47%.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is one.
- There are 14% of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 0 has statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well below average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is well below average.
- There is a well below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 13 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (7%).

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| Department for Education Number | 919 3402 |
| Unique Reference Number | 117479 |
| Local Authority | Hertfordshire |

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary Aided |
| Age range of pupils | 3 -11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on roll | 197 |
| The appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Peter Fitzgerald |
| Headteacher | Mrs Kathy Little |
| Telephone number | 01442 385060 |
| Website | www.stmore.herts.sch.uk |
| Email address | admin@stmore.herts.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 15 January 2014 |
| Grades from previous inspection: | |
| Classroom religious education | Very Good |
| The Catholic life of the school | Outstanding |

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out (i) under the requirements of the Canon 806 and (ii) in accordance with the Framework for Diocesan Inspections 2015 approved by the Archbishop of Westminster and (iii) under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

- The inspectors would like to thank the governors, executive headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection.
- During the inspection 8 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended 1 assembly and two of acts of worship.
- Meetings were held with school staff, pupils and governors.
- Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

Mrs Ann Staunton

Lead Inspector

Mrs Yvonne Rutherford

Associate Inspector

Miss Aisling Meehan

Associate Inspector

Information about inspection

The purpose of Diocesan inspection is to report to and advise the Archbishop on the quality of classroom religious education and the Catholic life of the school. The inspection report is also used to inform parents and carers, and the wider Catholic community. Inspection provides an opportunity to support, challenge, evaluate and promote the work of Catholic schools. It also assists schools in the work of self-evaluation and improvement, and enables the Diocese to celebrate with schools their sense of identity and their strengths as Catholic schools.

Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

This report is published by the Diocese of Westminster and is available at:

<http://rcdow.org.uk/education/schools>

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