



## **INSPECTION REPORT**

### **St. Thomas More Catholic Primary School**

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DfES Number: 3401

URN: 115710

Head teacher: Mrs Nicola Tippen

Chair of Governors: Mrs June Little

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**Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Diocese of Clifton  
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005**

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Date of inspection: 18-19<sup>th</sup> May 2017

Date of previous inspection: 19<sup>th</sup> April 2012

Reporting Inspector: Mr Joseph Skivington

Additional Inspector: Mrs Michele Marshall

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## Description of the school

St. Thomas More School is a smaller than average Catholic primary school with 186 pupils on roll, 28% of whom are Catholic. The school is located in an area of high deprivation, serving the parish of St. Thomas More and working closely with the parish of St. Gregory. A well above average proportion of pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding and free school meals, and the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is 28% with SEND. The percentage of children from ethnic minority backgrounds is in line with the national average, and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL), is above average. The level of prior attainment on entry to the school is below national expectation. The school has not had consistent long-term leadership for four years, but a new head teacher has been appointed and has recently started in the school.

## Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school (summary statement)

Grade 2

This is a good school because:

- It is an open and welcoming school where pupils and their families, from all faiths and none, are warmly invited and integrated. The school has good leadership and governance, which has sustained and enriched the school's vibrant Catholic life through challenging times. It now needs to take further steps to improve provision and outcomes for RE.
- The pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. They demonstrate care and respect for each other and have a positive attitude to learning.
- The pupils, particularly the chaplaincy team, make a good contribution towards Catholic life, and pupils' response to the prayer life of the school is also good.
- The provision for the prayer life of the whole school community is outstanding.

## The capacity of the school community to improve and develop is good

- The governors are totally committed to developing and improving the Catholic life of the school and have been highly successful, through its Ethos Committee, in not only ensuring the mission of the school has been kept alive, but have grown and developed the outstanding provision for the prayer life of the whole school community.
- The school has now a new head teacher in post, and a new vision and impulse is already evident. The school is aware that the quality of teaching and learning at Key Stage 2 requires improvement, in order that the pupils can make better progress over time.
- Religious education has been successfully sustained by the determined efforts of the RE coordinator and acting head, despite the challenge of serial changes of head teacher and staff turnover.
- The areas for improvement noted in the last inspection have been addressed, and despite constant disruption to careful planning, action has led to improved outcomes, some of which are yet to be fully secured. The use of assessment to inform learning objectives is beginning to

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have an impact on progress. The balance between AT1 and AT2 has been a real focus and a developing strength, but with room to increase the opportunities for pupils, especially the more able, to think more critically and to write more reflectively. The quality of moderated RE assessment work is improving because of the support of the local hub of Catholic schools and the growing file of moderated examples for different levels.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve learning outcomes, particularly at Key Stage 2, by;
  - bringing the level of all teaching up to the best existing practice
  - encouraging pupil ownership of their learning through independent research tasks and in depth group discussion
  - providing learning objectives which sufficiently challenge and engage all pupils, and reflect more clearly the level descriptors.
  
- Improve the effectiveness of the RE curriculum so that it is more accessible and relevant to all pupils, meets their learning needs more accurately, and provides continuity and meaningful progression through the units of work, classes, and key stages.

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## How good are outcomes for pupils, taking account of variations between different groups?

Grade 2

### a) The extent to which pupils understand, contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school

- Catholic life and the pupils' contribution to it are a real strength of the school. Pupils can articulate the distinctive nature of the school, and they know that what they are learning about God and prayer does have a real impact on how they act towards others. Phrases such as the following abound: 'God is the centre of what we do' or 'God is always with us'. One boy explained that although other schools might study RE, 'in this school we express RE in what we do'.
- The chaplaincy team, representing every year group, take the lead in promoting the prayer life of the school, and are developing the skills of planning and organising their own liturgies. They have set up striking prayer stations around the school, and a prayer tree in the hall inviting pupils to add their own. The chaplains are also Leaders in Faith with most having completed their Silver Award. The next step is to involve all pupils in contributing practically to the Catholic life of the school.
- The chaplains have also had training in TAPS – (different types of prayer), and have conducted a playground children's survey about prayer .
- The pupils can articulate the impact that the prayer life of the school has on their view of life and their relationship with others. They understand the links between faith and action, reflected also in British values. Their own composed prayers are relevant and heartfelt. They accept and flourish in an atmosphere of faith and spirituality.
- Older pupils increasingly take on a range of responsibilities. They look after the younger children, and are alert to the needs of others. They have been involved in discussing the mission statement, with their feedback helping the school to make further improvements. They play an important role in raising money for charities both locally and globally.
- Pupils have a genuine respect for those from different backgrounds. This is due to a growing understanding of different faiths, which they have studied and reflected on in RE. There is a real sense of belonging and respect for others, regardless of faith or none, and this is an outstanding aspect of this warm, inclusive school.
- The links with the parish are strong. The pupils set up a Saturday evening parish Mass, preparing readings, choosing hymns, and welcoming parishioners. Parents and parishioners are welcome to attend Masses and assemblies in the school. The parish priest and his opposite number from nearby St. Gregory's are frequent and supportive visitors to the school.

### b) How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education

- The quality of pupils' learning and achievement at Key Stage 2 requires improvement in order to be good.

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- Pupils come from a variety of faith backgrounds and practice. Most enter the school with levels of knowledge and understanding below expectation. They make good and rapid progress in the Early Years where the children have an excellent introduction to RE through story, prayer and reflection. By the end of Key Stage 1 they have made good progress given their low starting points and have developed basic religious literacy.
  - By the end of Key Stage 2 however, many pupils have not made sufficient progress relative to their starting points. Attainment at this stage is lower than expected, even given previous disruption through staff turnover, an unusually high percentage of SEND and pupil premium children, and high pupil mobility.
  - Many pupils lack the skills to express understanding at any real depth, especially the lower to middle ability pupils. They have an inconsistent quantity of written work in their books, and because the pieces are short with little challenge or opportunity to make any real intellectual effort, it is difficult to come to a reliable judgement on progress over time. The low level of tasks they are given, and the low expectation in the learning objectives, especially for the more able, effectively curtail further progress or improvement.
  - The inconsistent standards of literacy and presentation of work in some pupils' books is a cause for concern. The more able pupils generally set out their work neatly and produce some good responses to the Prove It formative comments from the teachers.
  - Other groups such as those with SEND and disadvantaged pupils, make similar progress to others in each key stage because of planned interventions and the pro-active support of learning assistants. However, not all tasks are scaffolded sufficiently to meet their learning needs.
  - Pupils' ability to learn independently, and with others is not yet embedded because they are not encouraged sufficiently to actively seek to improve their knowledge. However, their ability to think spiritually, morally and (less) theologically is developing well, and most can make the connection between what they believe and how they think and act.
  - Their ability to understand and critically reflect on our faith story, and that of others needs to be further developed. They do enjoy RE lessons, but become disengaged when there is repetitive teaching and too much time spent on tasks which are not challenging or do not engage their interest.

### **c) How well pupils lead, respond to and participate in the Prayer Life of the School**

- Pupils respond well to and participate fully in the prayer life of the school. All pupils irrespective of faith background are invited, encouraged and feel included. They show reverence, attentiveness, and willingness to play their part. They are ready and eager to be more involved in the initiation, organising, and presentation of their liturgies and assemblies, not just being willing participants in adult- led collective worship.
- Pupils already have the examples and role modelling of the chaplaincy team, with their high profile around the school. They lead assemblies, have set the school prayer to music, sing enthusiastically, and are becoming real animators in the school. They also, with the Ethos governors, monitor the displays around the school and the prayer tables in the classrooms.

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- The pupils value the many excellent prayer opportunities during the school day. They have a good, progressive knowledge of the traditional prayers and have some understanding of ritual and prayer different from their own through their study of Islam and Judaism. They compose their own heartfelt prayers and reflections, displayed on the prayer tables, in their folders, and on the school prayer tree.
  - The sacramental and liturgical life of the school is reflected in the assemblies, the class and whole school Masses, and the celebrations throughout the Church's liturgical year of the life of Jesus, and the saints.

## **How effective are leaders and governors in developing the Catholic Life of the school?**

**Grade 2**

### **a) How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils**

- Leaders and governors have effectively promoted, nurtured and sustained the Catholic ethos of the school as their primary concern and care, and are able to articulate its mission and share this with the staff and parents.
- Since the last inspection, the chair of governors and the Ethos Committee have been outstanding in their involvement with the school during the last four turbulent years. They were determined to let nothing slip in the quality of Catholic life, and not only did they achieve this but also raised it to a new level with outstanding provision. As governors they effectively became the guardians of the Faith.
- The governing body is a challenging, knowledgeable and practical influence in the life of the school. They meet all the statutory, canonical, and diocesan requirements fully. With the arrival of the new substantive head teacher who is articulating a new vision for the school, they are now able to step back and play a more supportive role in the leadership of Catholic life.
- There are robust and reliable processes of self-evaluation, the result of frequent detailed monitoring by the Ethos Committee, which reports to the full governing body. The school also asks parents, staff and pupils, through discussions and questionnaires, their views and suggestions for improvement. Consequently, governors have a realistic view of what has to be done to improve and grow.
- The chaplaincy team benefits significantly from adult guidance and support in their early steps to becoming real animators in the life of the school. This is much appreciated and followed through with growing impact and success. Assemblies and liturgies are regularly reviewed for quality and impact.
- Provision for staff induction and in service training in order to develop staff understanding and commitment to the Church's mission is good. Staff spirituality is well supported. Links with the parish are strong and the parish priest is a supportive and welcome presence in the school. There is at least one Inset day annually devoted

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specifically to Catholic life and spirituality. The priest from St. Gregory's parish gives fruitful support through popular twilight sessions (on topics such as Sacrament, Pentecost and the Essence of the Church), to the teachers who are joined by staff from St. Joseph's school, Nympsfield. This helps to deepen the teachers' own understanding of the topics they are exploring with the children.

- Leaders are open to advice from outside agencies, including the diocese, and share a renewed determination to move the school forward in close and fruitful collaboration with the Gloucestershire Catholic Schools Partnership. The school is entering a period of welcome stability and can plan for a more secure future.

**b) How well leaders and governors monitor and evaluate the curriculum for Religious Education and relationship education, and plan and implement improvement to outcomes for pupils**

- The RE curriculum has been delivered over the last four years by different acting head teachers and RE coordinators, but latterly with determination and commitment in the face of serial staff shortages and intermittent senior leadership. The governors have monitored provision and outcomes throughout and lent their full support.
- The recommendations from the previous inspection report have been addressed. Subject leaders have focussed successfully on processes, but need now to revisit the impact on learning. Provision and outcomes at Key Stage 2 require improvement, and existing data and monitoring information need to be used more effectively in order to plan future improvements.
- Learning walks around the school, lesson observations, and book scrutinies have successfully identified the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning, and these have fed into provision for staff induction and in service training. There is evidence of impact on teachers becoming more confident in assessment and in setting learning objectives, but there is still work to be done in eliminating inconsistencies across the school.
- Where necessary governors challenge and hold staff to account. This is evident in a scrutiny of the minutes of governor's meetings, where there are examples of specific questions, and answers expected, regarding the quality and impact of the RE provision.
- A subject development plan has been drawn up and used as an annotated working document, which is added to or otherwise amended during the course of each term. The pace of progress is constantly scrutinised and new assessment sheets are being drawn up.
- The feedback from pupils and parents through conferencing and questionnaires is positive. Some parents would like more information about the topics their children are studying so that they can help them at home.

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

- The quality of teaching in RE requires improvement. There are examples of good and better teaching, but more teaching, especially at Key Stage 2, which does not promote purposeful learning, engagement, enjoyment and the best progress that the pupils are capable of making.
- Teachers are very willing to improve their subject knowledge, expertise and planning skills through Inset, CPD and courses specific to RE teaching. This will help them also to model higher order skills in RE for their pupils.
- Learning assistants are closely involved in planning lessons with the teacher, so that interventions have a positive effect on progress. On occasion, the less able pupils have the same whole class tasks without the much-needed differentiation.
- Teachers need to encourage more independent learning through challenging tasks, which better meet the pupil's individual abilities, and to encourage pupils to write more reflectively and at length. They could achieve this by showing pupils examples of levelled work to guide and inspire them.
- Where teaching is less effective, opportunities are sometimes missed to challenge the pupils to write more creatively and reflectively on what they are learning, rather than simply re-telling stories or writing out explanations.
- Effective systems for the tracking and monitoring of pupil progress over time are evolving and being embedded. The assessment and marking policies are in place, but the school's own scrutiny of pupils' written work reveals inconsistencies in both, and some discrepancy between the over-generous levels given by an individual teacher, and the quality of the actual work in their books. Teachers will benefit from the support of shared moderation with the other schools in the partnership as well as diocesan training.
- The marking of pupils' work is often helpful in showing them how to improve, but is not consistent in all classes. The impact on progress over time would be enhanced enormously by more challenging teacher comments, which elicit a more extended, thoughtful response from the pupils and require real intellectual effort.
- Assessment is not yet informing the learning objectives in all lessons. Greater attention needs to be placed on the learning challenges inherent in the lesson objective. Assessment data is not yet sufficiently reliable to make accurate and dependable measures of progress, in part because there is not enough solid work in books upon which to make a reliable judgement on a pupil's level of attainment and achievement.

### b) The extent to which the Curriculum promotes pupils' learning

- The RE curriculum meets all Bishops Conferences requirements. It is broad and balanced so that students can explore and develop their own values and beliefs. They explore

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themes such as fairness, compassion and injustice, which they then link to the objects of their charity fundraising, and outreach to others in society who are more needy.

- The curriculum, however, requires improvement because it does not always provide continuity and progression between key stages in order to ensure that pupils whatever the starting points are able to make consistent progress. The syllabus needs more attention in relation to interpreting the schemes of work to meet the pupils' needs. Particular attention should be paid to planning learning objectives that engage and challenge all pupils in their learning.
- The study of other world faiths is given great importance in this inclusive school because it promotes tolerance, understanding, and respect for others, especially cultural and religious differences. There is a strong link with a school in Uganda.
- Provision for sex and relationship education is in place and approved by the governors adhering to diocesan guidelines.
- The curriculum design promotes spiritual, moral and vocational development and is taught through the lens of the Faith. Children work towards a different SMSC objective for the whole school on a termly basis. The assembly observed was based on the virtue of Hope.
- The sacramental preparation programme for First Holy Communion is run in the parish in close collaboration with the school.

### **c) The quality of the Prayer life provided by the School**

- The prayer life of the school is outstanding. It is fully inclusive and joyful. Prayer punctuates the school day and is part of every celebration. There is a focus on encouraging more pupils to organise and lead collective worship, modelled well by the chaplaincy team.
- There are many opportunities provided by the school, such as the Lent Prayer Stations, the Little Way week in October, the Reconciliation Box, the Prayer Tree, Advent Retreat at All Saints Academy, Cheltenham, and planning the Pentecost liturgy, which includes flying Holy Spirit kites. All these and many more opportunities contribute to a rich provision and the highest profile for prayer life.
- Pupils experience the regular Masses and the celebration of the feasts in the Church's calendar, as well as the special seasons of Advent, Lent, Easter and Pentecost. There are also opportunities to learn the traditional Catholic devotions such as the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross. The prayer methods and styles used by the school are age appropriate and displayed around the school.
- There are colourful and thought provoking displays around the school which remind the whole community of the liturgical cycle, the topics the pupils are currently studying, and are supportive of the school's vibrant Catholic life. They are attractive, and reinforce the mission and values of the school.
- School Masses are very well attended by parents and governors. The provision for the engagement of parents, the local parishes, and other faiths is excellent. The inclusive nature of the provision is a real strength.
- The school's Prayer Life is closely monitored and evaluated, and leads to action for improvement. Prayer is frequently shared with joint services with the other partnership

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schools. Pupils in Year 6 go on retreat, as do the chaplaincy team. The school organised a very successful pilgrimage for the Year of Mercy, and attended the closing of the Door of Mercy at Prinknash Abbey.

## **Summary of Parental Questionnaires**

All 37 returned parental questionnaires were every positive about the school and the quality of their children's education. Some typical responses included:

***'St. Thomas More helps children to develop spiritually, morally, and has a good standard of teaching. My children enjoy being in this school'.***

***'Very personal, great teaching, great governors. Always a warm atmosphere during the school day'.***

***'As a Catholic parent I wanted a school that would support the values and teachings that I hold important. What is distinctive about the school is the friendly, community spirit where all children are valued and their unique talents nurtured, and Catholic values are part of all lessons, not just RE'.***

***'The school teaches all children as individuals and recognises their strengths. I get text messages to tell me when my child has been kind and helpful. It is important to me that these qualities are acknowledged not just academic progress'.***

***'We wanted a faith school for our children. Each child is known for who they are, and cherished for being them. There is a clear Catholic ethos and everyone is respected regardless of faith'.***

***'My eldest child is so proud he is part of the chaplaincy team. When he made his First Communion it was lovely that so many staff took time out of their family time to support the children. The school has a lovely community feel and it was great to see the links between home, church and school'.***