

Catholic Diocese of Northampton



INSPECTION REPORT OF DENOMINATIONAL CHARACTER AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

(Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005)

ST THOMAS MORE VOLUNTARY AIDED CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Northampton Road, Kettering, NN15 7JZ

DfE School No: 928/3502

URN: 122050

Headteacher: Miss Anne O'Neill
Chair of Governors: Mr William Falshaw

Reporting Inspector: Mrs Marion Betts
Associate Inspector: Mrs R. Jones

Date of Inspection: 4th December 2012

Date report issued: 17th December 2012

Date of previous inspection: 2nd July 2009

The School is in the Trusteeship of the Diocese and
in partnership with Northamptonshire Local Authority

Information about the school

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is a one form entry school for pupils aged from 4 to 11 years. There are 210 pupils on roll, 88% of whom are baptised Catholics. The school is situated on the western side of Kettering serving the parish of St Edward. The majority of pupils are White British but a significant number come from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is much lower than the national average. The new headteacher took up her post at the beginning of this term. The acting deputy headteacher has been appointed to the substantive post, effective from the first of January 2013.

Key grades for inspection

1. Outstanding 2. Good 3. Satisfactory 4. Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

Grade 2

St Thomas More School is a good Catholic school with a very good capacity to improve. The extremely strong Catholic identity permeates the school's daily life. The committed leadership of the headteacher is instrumental in inspiring a strong spiritual purpose throughout the school. This very effectively promotes the pupils' personal development and faith awareness which reflects in their good behaviour and positive attitudes. Relationships within the school are good and reflect Christian love and concern for others. Pupils are very proud of their school describing it as having "a safe and joyful atmosphere". Prayer and worship are of pivotal importance in the school's life. Religious education (RE) has a high profile. Pupils make good progress throughout their school life in knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith. For example, in discussion about recent learning, one pupil explained "Advent is when we prepare our hearts for Jesus".

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

Grade 2

In the majority of areas highlighted during the last inspection, the school has improved very well. Pupil attainment in RE is now tracked and pupil progress recorded. The school prospectus now includes all legal requirements. A single mission statement has been devised and is well known by all in the school community and used regularly as a prayer. There is still a need for consistency in the quality and quantity of written RE work throughout the school.

The inspectors concur with the judgements made by the school. The headteacher, through her initial monitoring, has a good overall view of the school's strengths and development needs. The school's self-evaluation is comprehensive and accurate. Appropriate improvement actions are fed into the whole school development plan.

Since the last inspection a new substantive headteacher is in post and a new deputy has been appointed. The school's adoption of a new rigorous RE scheme of work "Come and See" is promoting more challenging learning and enhancing teachers' subject knowledge. This, combined with the headteacher having taken the role of RE subject leader, ensures RE has a high profile throughout the school. There is already a strong focus on Catholic life provision and development. All staff are committed to promoting the Catholic dimension of the school and to high quality religious education and are willing to improve their skills through training opportunities. The governors are aware of their role to further foster the Catholic life and RE.

The school has a very good capacity to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Monitor closely the quality and quantity of work in pupils' RE books to ensure full coverage of the new "Come and See" RE programme and to raise the standards of work produced.
- Develop planning and marking to challenge pupils to work towards achieving their next level of attainment and by giving pupils opportunities to make the suggested improvements.

Outcomes for pupils

Grade 2

Pupils benefit very well from the school's Catholic ethos. They can articulate clearly how their learning impacts upon their lives. One pupil said "we try to be like Jesus". Pupils display respect and care towards each other and to adults and feel very safe at school. They appreciate the trust adults show them and willingly undertake responsibilities evidenced by the care and support they give the younger children in the playground. The pupils demonstrate a developing awareness of those in need through their charity fund-raising and link helping others to following in Jesus' footsteps. They praise the friendly, caring attitude of the teachers who listen to them, help to solve any problems and encourage their learning. Pupils' achievements are recognised, praised and valued. Their views and ideas are sought through the School Council and through a termly questionnaire.

All pupils respond well to worship and the prayer life of the school. They participate respectfully and with ease. Pupils have opportunities to create their own prayers as part of their RE learning. Quiet opportunities are given them for their own personal thoughts that they record in their reflection books. Pupils enjoy worship especially the lively songs which they sing extremely well, and when they have opportunities to listen to or present class assemblies. Worship contributes well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Pupils have a good understanding of the liturgical year and its celebrations. Pupils contribute to Mass by reading, leading intercessions and singing. Once a week older pupils organise a prayer session for younger children. Attendance is voluntary and the response is high.

Pupils know the chaplain, who is the parish's assistant priest, well and are aware that he is willing to answer any questions when he visits their class. They know the school leaders support and promote chaplaincy. Pupils feel safe in school and are aware how to access any help if they have a problem. All staff understand their pastoral role and contribute effectively to the well-being of pupils.

Pupils know RE is an important subject and through it develop a sound knowledge of their Catholic faith throughout their time in the school. They achieve age appropriate RE levels of attainment and progress is in line with expectations. Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons especially when given practical tasks. For example during the inspection RE learning was consolidated using computer research, drama and role play, devising an Advent quiz, and by art and craft activities. Pupils behave very well and have a positive attitude to learning. They enjoy sharing ideas with each other and work well together. There is inconsistency of presentation of work throughout the school. Some class books evidence a very full coverage of the curriculum with detailed work showing growing depth of thought, but this is not reflected in all the RE books throughout the school.

Leaders and managers

Grade 2

The headteacher effectively communicates a clear and shared vision for the Catholic ethos and a positive concern for the well-being of all in the school community. The school mission statement "Try to be like Jesus in all that we think, do and say" was chosen by the children

and underpins the work of the school, contributing very well to the children's spiritual and moral development. Attractive displays around school confirm the Catholic identity. The school works in partnership with parents who responded extremely positively to the inspection questionnaire. Many parents mentioned the friendly and family atmosphere of the school. Parents feel welcome and are invited to many assemblies. The headteacher and governors have conducted a range of monitoring activities related to the school's religious life and this provides a firm basis for areas of future development. The school has strong links with the parish through the involvement of the assistant priest, through pupils' contributions to Sunday Mass and through their work displayed in the church. The school provides extra activities linked to Catholic life such as the pilgrimage to Walsingham and the residential retreat.

The headteacher, as religious education subject leader, ensures this subject is regarded as important. All teachers have undertaken training linked to the new RE scheme, 'Come and See'. The subject leader has provided extra support and guidance for staff especially those from a non-Catholic background. A clear direction for improvement has been set. The budget provided is generous and in line with that given to other core subjects. Religious education is well resourced.

Governors fulfil their statutory and canonical responsibilities. They are supportive of the school and kept well informed by the headteacher. They hold the school in high regard and have a strong commitment to further influence the Catholicity of the school. They are becoming increasingly skilled in identifying a focus for their monitoring and have clear systems for feeding back their evaluations. They seek the views of parents and pupils. They are well aware of all their responsibilities and have formed a committee to oversee the well-being of staff and pupils.

The school is a welcoming inclusive community where all members are respected and valued. Pupils respond well to supporting those less fortunate than themselves and connect their generosity with their Catholic faith. Pupils raise funds for local, national and international charities. Pupils are involved with the wider community. Parents and parishioners are invited to join celebrations and events. The school participates in the town's activities such as carol singing and visiting local residential homes. The school building is used by many local groups. The school links well with other Catholic schools such as when older pupils join with others from the area for a pre-confirmation gathering. Provision for spiritual development effectively provides opportunities for pupils to link the learning with their own experiences. The RE curriculum includes study of other faiths. The rich diversity of cultures within the school is positively valued and celebrated well such as by the displays exhibiting different Christian Christmas traditions from other countries.

Provision

Grade 2

The quality of worship and prayer is good and central to school life. Pupils experience a wide range of opportunities such as being involved in Mass, prayer, and liturgy in a variety of different groups and settings. Each term pupils contribute to leading Sunday Mass in the parish and their singing enriches the worship. Worship is well planned using visual presentations, bible and other stories, drama, and song to promote pupils' interest and develop their thinking. The worship observed led the children to reflect more deeply on the Church traditions of Advent preparation. A calm reflective atmosphere was created. Pupils learn a variety of traditional prayers. The prayer tables in each classroom provide a clear focus. Chaplaincy contributes well to the life of the community and pupils can access spiritual and pastoral help if needed.

The quality of religious education lessons is good overall with some outstanding aspects observed. Lessons are particularly well planned with clear learning intentions made explicit

to pupils. Where teaching is best teachers have secure subject knowledge, good classroom management skills, and effectively use visual presentations, challenging questioning, talking partners and engaging learning tasks to motivate and interest pupils. In some lessons the tasks were not challenging enough to extend the pupils' learning. Teaching assistants are skilled in supporting pupils' RE knowledge and understanding.

The quality of the curriculum is good, and suitable for the age and abilities of the learners. It fulfils the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. 10% of curriculum time is used for religious education following the "Come and See" programme with additional work linked to Saints. Scripture is used well during teaching. For example, in one class pupils learning about Advent were researching Bible passages that refer to "waiting" and determining the particular circumstances of those in the stories. Pupils are encouraged to become aware of the demands of religious commitment. In the Reception class, each pocket of the Advent calendar contained a way of helping others and the children were encouraged to remember to put the suggestion into practice throughout the day. The curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Religious education is linked to other curriculum areas particularly to literacy, drama, poetry, art and information and communication technology (ICT). The curriculum raises pupils' awareness of other faiths. Colourful and attractive religious education displays around school give added value to this core subject.

Assessments are undertaken and these are linked to National RE Attainment levels. These are recorded so that pupil progress can be tracked. All work is well marked affirming achievement but does not challenge pupils to improve their work or strive to achieve their target attainment level. Pupils are sometimes involved in assessing how well they have achieved the lesson's learning objective.

The inspectors wish to thank the headteacher, staff and children for their very warm welcome and for contributing to their very enjoyable and interesting visit.