



INSPECTION REPORT

St Thomas More

Lewis Rd Cheltenham

Telephone: 01242513339

e-mail address: admin@st-thomasmore.gloucs.sch.uk

URN: 115710

Executive Headteacher: Mr Andrew Darby

Chair of Governors: Mrs June Little

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

Date of inspection: 19 April 2012
Date of previous inspection: 7/8 December 2010

Reporting Inspector: Mrs A Fowler

Description of School

St Thomas More School serves the parish of St Thomas More in Cheltenham and its catchment area includes the parish of St Joseph's in Tewkesbury. The school has an executive head in post and has recently been deemed a good school by Ofsted bring it out of special measures. St Thomas More is a smaller than average-sized primary school. The vast majority of the pupils are from White British or White other backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is over double the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.

Since the last inspection the school has undergone building work to extend the buildings and produce a better learning environment. The School was placed in special measures by Ofsted in June 2010 and has since made remarkable progress with Ofsted revisiting the school in December 2011 and bringing the school out of special measures and placing the school in the Good category. This section 48 monitoring visit follows on that inspection and is therefore a briefer report than normal intended to provide a snap shot of the school at present.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Satisfactory; Grade 4: Unsatisfactory

Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

St Thomas More's is a good Catholic school which due to the dedication and commitment of staff, pupils and governors has made excellent progress over the last eighteen months. Catholicity is central to its mission with the staff and governors committed to promoting the ethos of the school. During the last twelve months the focus has been to raise standards; this drive has also raised standards in RE. The introduction of a new syllabus has also helped staff to refocus the structure and planning of their lessons. Pupils are proud of the school and clearly excited by their learning. The whole community is able to articulate and reflect on the values the school promotes. The school has been assigned a chaplain from the Gloucester deanery and this collaboration is clearly working well and helping to drive improvement.

Grade 2

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

The capacity of the school to improve is good for the following reasons:

- Since the previous inspection the school has already taken steps to address the issues identified.
- The leadership team and the governors are committed to raising standards and to promoting the Catholicity of the school. They have a vision of where they want the school to be in the future
- Pupils are engaged in their learning and want to succeed.

Grade 2

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to embed the new RE Syllabus and focus on achieving a balance between AT1 (learning about) and AT2 (learning from). Create tasks which reinforced the ability of the pupils to think critically,

-
- Continue to develop assessment techniques especially assessment for learning.
 - Moderate pieces of RE work as a whole staff and produce an exemplar file providing examples of moderated work at the various different levels
-

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

Pupils are extremely proud of their school community. Classrooms are vibrant places of learning as well as displaying pupils' work. Within lessons pupils are taught to value themselves and others. During the PSHE lesson observed the focus was on our gifts and talents with each pupil able to recognise and celebrate the gifts and talents of others. Pupils feel safe and develop well as individuals, both socially and morally. Pupils behaved well and showed a genuine concern for others.

Pupils' capacity to give praise and to see in others a person worthy of respect was very mature. They understand implicitly that this ability, to see and celebrate the worth of another, is part of what it means to be a Christian. They recognise the need to work hard and to take responsibility for their learning. Pupils work well independently. A strength of the school is the relationship between staff and pupils which enables pupils to grow in confidence.

Pupils' response to the prayer life of the school is good. During the assembly which took place during the inspection year 4 pupils were fully involved in the planning and delivery. They wrote their own prayers, poems and a rap. They produced PowerPoint's and selected the music. This high level of involvement, as well as giving pupils the skills they need to take ownership of the prayer life of the school also impacts on other pupils as they are more engaged in assemblies. All pupils sang joyfully and listened attentively.

The school's focus on learning has translated well into RE lessons. The introduction of the new syllabus has meant that pupils have a greater awareness and understanding of scripture. During the lessons observed their joy in learning was apparent. The organisation of groups, the selection of tasks and the support of teaching assistants has meant that all pupils have the ability to succeed. Because the lessons are focused around success criteria pupils understand the purpose of tasks and are encouraged to check their own learning. Pupils are able to work as a team and reflect on their own work. All pupils were showing an increasing use of religious language and an ability to work independently. In the lessons observed pupils clearly understood the meaning of the scripture passages they were studying and had begun to make connections between faith and life.

Grade 2

How effective are leaders and managers in developing the Catholic Life of the school?

Good leadership and management promote the Catholic life of the school. The school at present does not have a substantive head and is being supported by an executive head who is not a Catholic. This however has created a culture where everyone in the school is clearly focused on what it means to be a Catholic School. The Governing Body has shown inspirational leadership in this area. The mechanisms they have put in place, for example, the ethos committee and the chaplaincy team are extremely effective in monitoring and developing the Catholic life of the school. The Governors have given explicit attention to the distinctiveness nature of the school as well as clearly focused on improving standards. Pupils within the school clearly know and value the work of the Governing Body who visit the school on at least a weekly basis and draw the information about the school from first hand experiences. The challenge for the governing body is now to ensure that mechanisms are in place to continue to maintain the distinctiveness whilst they gradual withdraw from this intensive support. As a further development pupils should be included at least for part of the time in the ethos and

chaplaincy teams so that too can begin to help evaluate the ethos of the school. The chaplaincy and ethos teams reports to the full governing body and thus acts as another source of information for the governors to help them monitor the Catholic life of the school.

The head teacher is providing excellent leadership with a clear vision of where he wants the school to be and has created a culture where improving learning is the overriding priority for everyone in the school community. There is a strong sense of mutual support and optimism amongst the staff who all model to pupils values they would like to see in practice. The team reports to the full governing body and thus acts as a source of information for the governors to help them monitor the Catholic life of the school.

The coordinator has successfully introduced a new syllabus in RE which is helping improve standards throughout the school. The appointment of a priest from the Gloucester Diocese as chaplain to the school is also helping to raise standards in RE as staff feel they can ask questions about areas they are uncertain about. Staff knowledge is improving all the time but this is an area that the school needs to continue to monitor and must make sure that it continues to offer opportunities to staff to further increase and develop their own understanding so they can better present to pupils the excitement and challenges of faith. Assessment procedures have been introduced and are already beginning to impact on learning and there are plans in place to further develop monitoring and assessment procedures.

Community cohesion underpins the thinking behind many school activities. Pupils receive information about other faiths through their RE lessons. Parents are invited in to assemblies and to mass and involved in the life of the school. This is supported by initiatives from the school which focus on different cultures. Display work around the school reflects the pupils' interest and understanding. The school takes part in various charitable events including supporting CAFOD.

Grade 2

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education?

Prayer is central to the life of the school and provision for spiritual and moral development well thought through. Adults role model the kind of attitudes towards prayer that they would like to see in the pupils. Pupils are offered opportunities to experience the sacraments and to develop in their understanding of what these mean. Pupils are able to express their own thoughts and prayers in a creative way. Many of the focal points in classrooms and displays around the school reflect their work. Pupils are encouraged to make links between faith and life and understand for example that we support organisations like Cafod because of our beliefs and the teaching of Jesus. The school has an ethos committee which constantly reviews aspects of the schools prayer life and ethos and this explicit attention to distinctiveness is clearly impacting on the life of the school in a very positive way. The school also has a chaplaincy team who are responsible for planning various activities, for example the retreat day. The next step would be to include pupils on both the chaplaincy and ethos group (where appropriate) so that they could also be involved in the evaluation of the prayer life of the school. The school's policy on collective worship has recently been redone and this should help drive the planning of activities. All the RE lessons seen were well planned and resourced with effective use being made of ICT. Success criteria were clearly explained to pupils with teaching checking throughout the lessons to be certain they understood what was being asked of them. In one class for example part of the task was to create an Easter Garden. Pupils were allowed to go and find their own materials before they began as a group to design a garden. This lesson could easily have become a purely artistic endeavour but the skill of the teacher was in constantly focusing the pupils on why they were choosing the symbols they had? What did the pupils think their symbols meant in the context of the resurrection stories? This approach meant the lesson, whilst being fun and engaging also had an explicit RE content. In another lesson a group of year pupils were trying to understand why the Gospel writers had included differing accounts of the resurrection stories. The teacher showed the pupils a picture made up of differing images for a short space of time and then asked what they remembered. Because they all remembered differing images and in some cases interpret the images in a different way they were able to begin to see how people might record things differently. Moreover some pupils were able to say that we remembered

different things because we are all interested in different things and we remember what's important to us. Although by no means a full explanation of the different Gospel styles for a young group of pupils they were being enabled to reflect in a mature way with some difficult questions. In all lessons observed pupils prior knowledge was excellent. Effective use was made of other adults in the classroom so that all pupils were supported effectively. Pupils are offered the opportunity to write in depth and to use their literacy skills in RE. as the syllabus is fully embedded tasks for older pupils need to become more evaluative to allow more critical reflection and evaluation. The use of assessment is still in the early stages but the use of descriptor words from the levels of attainment to set tasks and inform planning is helping to drive improvement. The use of prior assessments before a module is completed enables pupils to see the progress they are making. This technique needs adapting for younger pupils. Marking needs to be more diagnostic. The use of assessment however though in its early stages is giving pupils a sense of ownership and responsibility for their progress.

Grade 2

Overall Effectiveness **Grade 2**

Capacity to Improve **Grade 2**

How good are outcomes for pupils? **Grade 2**

1. To what extent do pupils understand, contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life of the school? **Grade 2**

2. How well do pupils respond to and participate in the prayer life of the school? **Grade 2**

3. How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning? **Grade 2**

How effective are leaders and managers in developing the Catholic life of the school? **Grade [insert grade]**

1. How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life of the school and plan improvement for pupils **Grade 2**

2. The extent to which the governing body provides effective challenge and support for the Catholic dimension of the school. (This includes how far all statutory and canonical responsibilities are met) **Grade 1**

3. How effectively leaders and managers promote community cohesion **Grade 2**

How effective is the provision for Catholic Education

Grade [insert grade]

1. How well the school meets the spiritual needs of pupils in its prayer and liturgical life **Grade 2**

2. The extent to which the Religious Education Curriculum meets pupils' needs **Grade 2**

3. The quality of teaching and purposeful learning in Religious Education **Grade 2**

4. The effectiveness of assessment and academic guidance in Religious Education **Grade 22**