



Archdiocese of Birmingham

INSPECTION REPORT

ST THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL GREAT WYRLEY, STAFFORDSHIRE

Inspection dates 10th - 11th February 2014
Reporting Inspector Mr Joseph Skivington

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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| Type of School | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 4-11 years |
| Number on roll | 144 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governors | Georgina Keeling |
| School address | Hut Hill Lane Great Wyrley Staffs WS6 6PG |
| Telephone number | 01922 857075 |
| E-mail address | office@st-thomasmore.staffs.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | February 2011 |
| DFE School number | 860/3485 |
| Unique Reference Number | 124376 |

Headteacher Mrs Stephanie Hewitt

DIOCESAN EDUCATION SERVICE



Evidence

The inspection was carried out by 1 Diocesan Inspector. The focus of the inspection was on the effectiveness and use of the school's self evaluation of religious education (RE) and Catholic life. To validate the effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation of teaching and learning, the inspector observed 5 RE lessons. In addition the inspector completed a work scrutiny and held a discussion with pupils to evaluate the impact of teaching on their learning over time. He held meetings with the chair of governors, staff, and parish priest He observed a Mass, and prayers in the reception class, the presentation of the Catholic life of the school, and pupils' behaviour. He looked at a range of evidence related to the school's self evaluation such as RAISEonline, the development plan, and teachers' planning.

Information about the school

St Thomas More is a smaller than average size Catholic primary school within the parish of St Mary and St Thomas More. There are 144 pupils on roll, of whom 26% are Catholic. Pupils come from mixed socio-economic and mainly White British backgrounds, with lower than average percentages of free school meals and special needs pupils. There are two mixed age classes. The close relationship and involvement with the parish is a strong feature, together with another Catholic primary in the same parish. The headteacher has been in post since September 2011 and the RE subject leader since April 2013. Prior religious knowledge and experiences on entry are broadly in line with expectation.

Main Finding

St Thomas More is a school that requires improvement to be good. All pupils benefit from and contribute with developing commitment and involvement in every area of school life, and consequently to its Catholic ethos. Their response to collective worship is good. The provision and outcomes from the religious education programme require improvement to become good. The governors and senior leadership team know the school well but have yet to fully embed well-proven, effective procedures for monitoring provision and outcomes in order to move the school into the good category. The provision for the prayer life of the school is a strength. The school community is welcoming and fully inclusive.

School self evaluation

The school has yet to establish effective self evaluation procedures through frequent reviews and reflection on its current practice, the results of which would then be assessed in detail, and lead to articulated aims and measurable objectives incorporated into the school development plan. It cannot easily produce examples of its effectiveness in articulating, for instance, the impact of assessment for learning on individual progress. The governors and senior leadership are now realising the vital importance of encouraging frequent feedback and reflection on the school's mission, to include it in its development plan and to involve all the pupils as well as staff and parents in its continuous interpretation. The governors have undergone the relevant diocesan training, and all statutory requirements are fully met. They are generally knowledgeable about the day to day life of the school, but not in sufficient detail to pose effective challenge and drive up achievement. Reports on the provision and outcomes for RE are not sufficiently detailed and evaluative for the governing body to get a clear picture on which to act.

The closer monitoring of teaching and learning through subject review, lesson observations, and book trawls has become a focus for development and there are positive signs of improvement under the new subject leader and headteacher. The presentation and

quality of written work is not yet consistently good and the school recognises the need to encourage more extended writing to achieve a good balance between the content of RE, and the pupils' grasp of what it means in their daily lives.

The curriculum is broad, balanced and accessible to all pupils and the schemes of work are sometimes enriched or re shaped to inspire or meet individual needs. It provides pupils with the opportunity to gain an insight into the life and message of Jesus as well as the central beliefs that Catholics hold, and the link between belief and action. The well planned and presented liturgical life of the school is enriching as the Church's calendar unfolds, and is celebrated well. Evaluation of impact, however, is not yet an integral aspect of reviewing the quality of collective worship. The relationship education programme *In the Beginning* is taught effectively throughout the school during the summer term. The sacramental preparation programme is run closely with the parish and this year the children will join with the parish sister school for the First Holy Communion celebration. Pupils' knowledge of other major religions is sound, and the Multi-faith Day in November was a great success, as was the celebration of Divali. Pupils willingly take every opportunity presented to exercise their generosity and do much charity work in the local community and beyond.

The school leadership acknowledged the need for continuous focus on self evaluation and review which touches every area of Catholic life and RE, and it is the attention to detail and a determination to improve even further, which will result in good and better outcomes. The areas identified at the last inspection have been addressed, for instance, encouraging pupils to lead the prayers, and a good start has been made on assessment procedures, the data from which must now be used to inform learning objectives and track individual progress.

Overall effectiveness of the school¹

Outcomes for pupils in RE require improvement to be good, and these are closely linked to the quality of the teaching they receive, which also needs improvement to be consistently good and better. Pupils' base assessment scores in RE indicate prior knowledge and religious experience to be broadly in line with expectation. Pupils make good progress in Reception so that by the end of Key Stage 1 they are slightly exceeding expected attainment levels. Progress slows in Key Stage 2 reflecting more inconsistent teaching and learning, so that by the end of Year 6 they are again in line with expectation. Their knowledge and understanding of the topics covered is not always secure for instance, the meaning of Jesus' parables or the significance of His miracles: and while their living out the Gospel values in their daily lives is a real strength, there is little opportunity for them to express this aspect of learning from religion in more extended reflective written tasks. They already compose their own heartfelt prayers, which are displayed around the class prayer corners, and there is real potential and scope to employ even further imaginative, creative and poetic expressions of their faith. Pupils with particular learning needs are well catered for and make the same progress as the others. Independent, peer and group learning are all employed, to a greater or lesser degree effectively. Pupils say they enjoy RE lessons and appreciate the recent opportunity to give written feedback to their teachers on how best they learn in lessons. Their positive behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent and this contributes much to their learning.

The pupils through their time at St Thomas More absorb and internalise the attitudes and values inspired by the message of Jesus. They understand the connection between these and how they should act towards others and behave in their own lives. They are quick to praise, to thank and to forgive. Every pupil regardless of faith, or none, feels a valued

¹ As the quality of the school self evaluation has been affirmed, the judgements in this section of the report conform to those of the school.

member of the school community. The pupils know the child friendly mission statement and can explain it in their own words. They are more than willing to contribute to the Catholic life of the school, for example, asking to set up a liturgy group, with the help of the Catholic cluster chaplain, and which is now in place. This came from the pupils themselves, and they would jump at more opportunities to take more ownership of the liturgies, assemblies and the specifically Catholic aspects of the school. The feedback to staff on their perceptions and experience of RE is a good start, and is a valued contribution to help the staff evaluate outcomes. A whole school community revisit of the mission statement to build on that by the school council would fruitfully involve their active participation

Pupils' response to prayer invitations and the rich provision for spiritual development is good with an enthusiastic response to leading prayer, enthusiastic singing, to serving in school and the parish. They are increasingly taking the lead in planning and presenting their own class assemblies, and express a wish for more autonomy in devising their liturgies from the start with but a light steer from their teachers. They pray well, even the youngest, and their own prayerful compositions reflect their growing maturity and understanding. This pupil response will become outstanding with the school's own improved self evaluation and also, given time, will demonstrate the value of pupil evaluative feedback on their prayer life as well as RE. The capacity for excellence is there.

Provision for RE requires improvement to be good, though some good teaching was observed during the inspection. The best teaching involved the pupils fully in their own learning and encouraged independent and peer work, which enhanced involvement in the lessons. Teachers need to be particularly alert to pupils who do not fully understand an aspect and probe this by questioning which checks understanding, but also challenges the more able to explore further. This could allow the teacher to signal discreetly to the teaching assistant to take them aside and go through the learning with them.

Lesson objectives are not consistently pitched to meet the learning needs of individual pupils. The task/activity sometimes becomes the main focus while the meaning of what they are learning is lost. Teacher expectation is set too low in terms of building on prior knowledge, but also in respect of content and presentation in many of the older pupils' books, and the encouragement of more extended writing of quality. For example, there is on occasion rather overmuch retelling and re-writing of Gospel stories and parables in older pupils' work, rather than reflection and evaluation. With these isolated snippets it becomes difficult to track real progress over time in their books. The marking of written work has been a focus over time to bring RE in line with the other core subjects, and there is some very good practice which is very helpful because it shows pupils how they can improve and creates a formative dialogue between teacher and pupil. There are still some inconsistencies which the school is working successfully to eradicate.

Assessment for learning is a work in progress, with teachers becoming familiar with levelling and moderating. The joint moderation days with the other Catholic schools in the cluster have been very successful so that teachers are becoming increasingly adept at moderation using the diocesan level indicators. This in time will help the school arrive at a more accurate judgement on pupil progress particularly at Key Stage 2.

The provision for collective worship and prayer life of the school is a strength. The parish priest and the lay chaplain are familiar figures who support and enliven Catholic life. Parish and school links are strong with pupils often leading and serving at Sunday Mass. A significant number of pupils and parents have come to conversion to the Faith through the evangelising ethos of the whole school community. The liturgical year is duly marked, planned and celebrated with parents and parishioners attending Advent and Lent Reconciliation services, Stations of the Cross, May Procession and other traditional

Catholic practices. Prayer corners and displays in classrooms are well tended. Parents come to the Friday assemblies. Pupils have the opportunity to go on retreat, the Year 5 retreat already planned while the Year 6 use St Chad's Cathedral.

Recommendations

Improve the quality of teaching by

- Raising expectation and challenge in lessons by using supplementary questioning, and tailoring learning objectives more closely to learning need
- Embed the dialogue marking of pupils' work to drive progress over time, ensuring the high quality of teacher comment and then pupil response.

Give pupils more ownership and initiative in contributing specifically to Catholic life and collective worship

Set up robust and rigorous processes for school self evaluation, review, and the monitoring of outcomes, followed by swift action to ensure maximum impact.