



INSPECTION REPORT

St. Thomas More

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D/ES Number: 3359

Acting Headteacher: Ms S Cox
Chair of Governors: Mr John Kyffin

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: May 14-15th 2007
Date of previous inspection: June 2003

Reporting Inspector: Mr Joseph Skivington

Description of School

St Thomas More is a smaller than average sized primary school. About a third of the pupils are baptised Catholics. Prior levels of attainment on entry to Reception class are below expectation. There is above average mobility and this has recently increased following the closure of a local school. Numbers are now up by a fifth. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is above the national average. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The acting head teacher has been in post since January, and a new head teacher has been appointed, taking up the post in September. The parish church is a short walk from the school.

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 is a satisfactory and improving school with some good features. Despite a recent considerable time of upheaval and uncertainty, the senior staff and governors have maintained the Catholic ethos and mission intact and sustained a satisfactory level of academic achievement. There is now a new drive forward with the new head teacher in waiting, stable times are returning, and morale in the school is high. The provision for collective worship and the spiritual and moral development of the pupils is good. The quality of the provision for religious education is satisfactory. Standards of attainment are below national expectations but achievement is satisfactory, due to sound teaching and learning. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory.

Grade 3

Improvement since the last inspection

The school has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection, addressing the areas identified for development. The school community have reflected on and reviewed the mission statement, making it more relevant to the daily life of the school and incorporating it into the development plan. Standards of attainment at the end of Year 6 are still below national expectation but improved teaching and learning has contributed to satisfactory progress overall. The marking and monitoring of pupils' work needs to become more effective, now that well planned assessment procedures have been put in place. Parents are better informed and involved in their children's education.

Grade 3

The capacity of the school community to improve and develop

The school has a good capacity to improve because of the more stable staffing, and the work which has already been done to raise standards of achievement. The school knows itself well, has identified key areas for improvement, and already taken effective action. Although not yet in post the new, experienced head teacher has spent time in the school and with the senior leadership team, to move things forward, shaping a clear vision for the future.

Grade 2

What the school should do to improve further

- To advance effective assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress linked more securely to the level indicators
 - To share good teaching practice so that the quality of teaching throughout the school matches the best in challenge and high expectation
 - To review the marking policy so that correction and guidance become really effective in raising standards of achievement, as well as informing teaching
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The Catholic Life of the School

Leadership and Management

The quality of the leadership of the head teacher and senior staff in leading and developing the Catholic life of the school is good. Together with the invaluable support of the governors and parish, this has ensured that a strong, Catholic ethos has been maintained despite the very difficult and challenging recent history of the school. Leadership is aware that having secured academic stability, a renewed focus on the school's Catholic mission is now needed. The last formal review of the mission statement was some four years ago. Closer appraisal and monitoring of the Catholic life of the school is now needed. All staff are fully committed to promoting the Catholic life of the school, and their witness and role modelling are crucial in fostering the spiritual and moral development of the pupils, which is good. The governors fulfil their role well in relation to the school's Catholic foundation.

Grade 2

Collective Worship

The quality of the provision for prayer and collective worship is good. Opportunities for formal and informal prayer are built into the school day, both in and outside of lessons. The pupils show reverence and put feeling into their prayers, making the Sign of the Cross carefully and listening attentively. The school is well-supported by the chaplain who is a frequent and welcome visitor. The liturgical life of the school is well planned and reviewed, all pupils both Catholic and non-Catholic participating enthusiastically in Masses and assemblies. The sacramental preparation programme is run jointly with the parish very successfully, and is proving a significant opportunity for the faith renewal of the parents. The spiritual and moral development of the pupils flows to a large extent from the occasions of collective worship, through the stories about the life of Jesus, the messages in the Parables, and the frequent exhortations to respect life and care for others reiterated in lessons and assemblies. The result is seen in the invariably good behaviour of pupils around the school and the care they show towards each other. Older pupils look after the younger ones. They are encouraged to think further and support others through fundraising activities for charities.

Grade 2

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education

The level of religious knowledge and experience of pupils joining the school is below what is expected. Their progress has inevitably been disrupted by recent leadership and staffing

problems. By the end of Year 6 standards are still below national expectations. Achievement is satisfactory. Year 1 pupils are able to express religious ideas, name and understand some symbols, and can sequence stories, such as the Nativity. In Year 2 and Year 3 they progress to retelling stories in their own words, such as the Last Supper, with understanding. Some reflective work is well written, for instance, on sadness and loss. By Year 5 and Year 6 more able pupils can write at some length, compose their own prayers, and their Bible referencing skills are satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as the others because of the extra support from teaching assistants and some work which is tailored to meet their learning needs. Examples of unfinished assignments suggest that on occasion the task set is too difficult for them. They have a sound grasp of the main tenets of the Faith. In conversation they were able to speak of Jesus' divinity and the significance of events in Holy Week, and the efficacy of prayer. Pupils say they enjoy their lessons. They work well and show a caring responsibility for other pupils in, for example, paired and group work.

Grade 3

Teaching and learning in Religious Education

Teaching and learning are both satisfactory, with some very good teaching observed during the inspection. Good teaching was characterised by challenging questioning, which made the pupils think, and high expectation of their effort and participation. A lesson on the power of the Holy Spirit involved all the pupils, the contribution of the less able pupils was particularly affirmed, and the drama activity reinforced the Gospel account. There was some effective reinforcement of links with past knowledge, as well as relating the message to their own lives. Other teaching was less secure, using material that had little challenge, especially for the more able. The marking of pupils' written work is inconsistent and often poor work is accepted without challenge. Teachers' comments generally do not help the pupils or really show them how to improve. This is a barrier to learning and further progress. Assessment procedures are in place but do not fully inform teaching or let the pupils know where they are and what they must do to move on.

Grade 3

Quality of the Curriculum

The curriculum is balanced and meets the needs of all the pupils. There is still work to be done to ensure the schemes of work meet the learning needs of the more able, and to provide further material to match the abilities of the less able. With the chaplain and parish, the school delivers the sacramental preparation programme very effectively, involving the parents and the whole parish. The curriculum is enriched through activities and projects, which encourage good social cohesion. These include the exploration of other faiths, such as Islam, through themed days, visits from outside speakers including multicultural groups, and many charity fundraising activities. These encourage the pupils to exercise responsibility, to put into action their feelings of generosity, and grow into concerned and active citizens. A new sex and relationship programme 'In the Beginning' is to be introduced shortly, and staff have received diocesan training. The curriculum makes a good contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils.

Grade 3

Leadership and management of Religious Education

The leadership and management of religious education are satisfactory. The subject coordinator has shown good vision and has supported the staff well, through helpful lesson observations and Inset training. The improvement plan has highlighted areas for development, and has linked objectives securely to the aims of the school mission statement. Assessment and monitoring are in place but need to be made more effective, particularly through the more precise levelling of

pupils' work, and better quality of marking which is consistent in every class, and which really shows the pupils how they can improve. Equality of opportunity is promoted well so that all pupils can achieve their potential.

Resources are adequate and managed well, with information technology used effectively in lessons and to encourage independent research. Wall displays and class altars are attractive, affirming the pupils work and demonstrating to the visitor the strong Catholic ethos of the school.

The governors discharge their responsibilities towards religious education satisfactorily, with all statutory requirements being met. They are totally committed to the future of the school and its mission to the pupils and the wider community.

Grade 3