

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Highfield, Letchworth, Herts, SG6 3QB

Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 14 November 2019



Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is good

- The headteacher and leaders are committed to providing high standards of classroom religious education.
- The curriculum meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory and leaders are ambitious to develop it even further.
- The religious education curriculum requires further planning and sequencing to enrich the learning and match the abilities of all pupils.
- Children make strong progress in religious education in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Both the Nursery and Reception environments are well set out to help young children learn. Children quickly acquire a good religious literacy.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and had positive attitudes. This was evident in their talking about inspiring people such as St Maximilian Kolbe and St Theresa of Calcutta.
- The teaching about other faiths is well developed in the school and pupils are being well prepared for the wider world.
- Outcomes for pupils are good by the end of Key Stage 2. However, there is a three year declining trend in achievement.
- Leaders of religious education have high expectations overall are judged to be good. Governors are strong and committed.

Classroom religious education is not yet outstanding because

- The religious education curriculum requires further refinement as it does not yet meet the needs of all pupils.
- Standards of attainment and progress need to rise further by the end of Key Stage 2.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The school's mission statement is known and can be recited with pride by almost all pupils from an early age. 'We follow Jesus as we learn, play and pray together'.
- There is 10% of curriculum time devoted to religious education in every class, as required by the Bishops' Conference.
- Parents and pupils recognise and value the importance the school places on its Catholic life; the passion and commitment from both staff and governors is evident upon entering the school.
- The children are quickly introduced to the prayer life of the school in an age appropriate way and children at all key stages play an active role in prayer and liturgy in a wide variety of ways. Prayer and worship are integral to the daily life of the school. The parish priest is a regular visitor and plays a key role in liturgical life.
- The school supports a wide range of local and international charities. Pupils can discuss how they follow in the footsteps of Jesus through acts of charity and fundraising work and by living a life of Christian service. All leaders are deeply committed to the notion of 'human flourishing.' The school seeks to recognise the unique gifts that each person brings to the school and wider community.
- Partnerships at all levels are clearly outstanding. Parents are very supportive of the school and its headteacher. The school is committed to close partnerships.
- The leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school is judged to be outstanding and the vision and mission are key drivers for school improvement. Governors are experienced and are dedicated to the school and its mission.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

The school has modified its curriculum since the previous inspection and now has a core programme for religious education. Pupils now have a clearer understanding of how to improve their work and what they need to do to ensure they make good progress.

The content of classroom religious education is good

The content of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School's religious education (RE) curriculum meets the requirements of the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory*. The curriculum is planned for by the subject leader of RE and the senior leaders of the school. Resources are being used to enhance the curriculum and this is evident in the growing use of religious art and design within the school. The school is seeking to broaden and enrich its curriculum further. Pupils throughout the school, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), study and learn about at least three other world faiths during academic year. These include Judaism, Islam, Sikhism and recently Buddhism. The school is developing its curriculum intentions to link the subject to other areas of learning to deepen pupils understanding and knowledge. This work now needs to be more carefully planned and learning sequenced for all pupils in the school to ensure progression.

Pupil achievement in religious education is good

Standards of pupil achievement overall have shown a declining trend over the last three years. Outcomes are however still high and pupils of all abilities do well by the end of Key Stage 2. Attainment is comparable to other key areas of pupils' learning such as writing. Pupils spoken to by inspectors demonstrate a good awareness of how to improve their work and are keen to learn. Pupils said they enjoyed their lessons in religious education. Inspectors spoke to a large number of pupils during the course of this inspection from every class. They were enthusiastic about what they were doing and had positive attitudes, particularly when learning about inspiring people such as St Maximillian Kolbe and St Theresa of Calcutta. The new display in the hall of pupils' writing celebrates Psalms, prayers and is ideal for this, 'The Year of the Word'. It is of a very high standard and deserves to be more widely shared. Some pupils found it difficult to recall their learning and the school needs to carefully plan and revisit key topics to ensure knowledge is retained. Pupils make strong progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage of the school. Children in the Nursery and Reception year quickly acquire age appropriate religious literacy and can speak about this to visitors. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils' outcomes and achievements are good from their starting points and therefore overall attainment and progress is judged to be good. Pupils are confident learners and a key feature of this school is the pupils' oracy and speaking skills. Pupils of all abilities display a good degree of religious literacy.

The quality of teaching is good

The quality of teaching is generally at least good in all classes seen with outstanding aspects also in evidence in some areas of the school. Teachers have high expectations for their pupils. They use a range of questioning techniques and strategies to help pupils engage during lessons. For example, in Year 6 work about vows and the religious life generated some interesting pupil discussion and helped in developing critical thinking skills. Children get a really good start in the both the Nursery and Reception years. Classrooms are bright and attractive and well set out for indoors and outside learning. The school environment is well maintained and the EYFS classrooms provide a rich learning environment for RE. Children in these early years were engaged in learning about the wonders of the approaching time of Advent and used Godly play to further their language skills. The school is seeking new ways to encourage creativity in RE lessons. Pupils are starting to use art and design in

their lessons and in Year 5 pupils were using ICT to record their liturgies and plan further acts of worship. A detailed scrutiny of pupils' books and discussions with pupils about their learning showed a range of coverage of the RE curriculum. Feedback from teachers on how to improve work is in place in most year groups, which is proving to be useful in helping pupils work more independently. In some classes, opportunities were missed for practising the skills of extended writing. Pupils had positive attitudes to RE and many were keen to respond to questions asked by teachers. In some lessons seen, there was a lack of challenge for some pupils with everyone doing the same task. This is particularly evident and reflected in the written work in books. Homework opportunities are offered and help pupils in their learning. Behaviour in lessons, around the school and at playtimes, was of a high standard. Lessons are characterised by mutual respect between all pupils and adults.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education is good

The leadership and management of RE are judged to be good. The headteacher sets high expectations for her staff and challenges them effectively to attain these standards. Her planning and documentation is of a very high standard, which is noteworthy. This is leading to a greater awareness among staff of the need to have an enriched curriculum for RE. She is supported by an RE leadership team who help to promote religious education in the school. There are structures developing to assess and monitor standards in RE. The school is working effectively with partner schools to refine this process. The school participates in moderating pupils work at a deanery level and staff attend all diocesan meetings relevant to the development of RE. Training and professional development opportunities are made available for all staff. The school self-evaluation (SEF) is a thorough and comprehensive document. It is well written by the headteacher and identifies areas of strengths and areas for development. Leaders do however need to be more objective in evaluating current aspects of the curriculum, its content, planning and implementation. There is a strong and committed governing body. It is being well led by an experienced chair, a well-informed RE link governor and the parish priest. Together they are passionate in their support for the school and its Catholic ethos.

What should the school do to develop further in classroom religious education?

- Plan and sequence the RE curriculum further to enrich the learning and meet the needs of all pupils.
- Raise further the standards of attainment and progress for pupils of all abilities by the end of Key Stage 2.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

The school has addressed the two areas for development outlined in its previous report. The school displays its links to the foundation sisters, the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, in a variety of ways. The school continues to work closely with Cafod and is looking to use further Cafod resources in its taught curriculum.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

In a relatively new town and a rapidly changing environment, the school proudly celebrates its 55-year history and Catholic traditions. There is 10% of curriculum time devoted to RE, as required by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. This is timetabled for every class and is central to the life of the school. The timetabling of the curriculum time should be further reviewed as some lessons are too long for the ages of the pupils. An appropriate budget has been allocated for the last three years and resources bought to support the development of a more creativity in the RE curriculum. Parents and pupils recognise and value the importance the school places on its Catholic life. The passion and commitment of the leadership of RE from both school staff and governors are fundamental to the awarding of an outstanding judgement for this aspect of school life.

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community

is outstanding

Prayer and worship are central to the life of this school and are judged to be outstanding. There are extensive opportunities within the school for collective worship and prayer. Pupils are deepening their understanding of the richness of Catholic traditions and the various celebrations that occur during the course of the liturgical year. The children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are quickly introduced to the prayer life of the school in an age appropriate way. All classes have prayer areas; they have a prayer focus and liturgical colours that reflect the seasons of the year. Displays of work and around the school are of a high standard. The display in the hall is of a very high standard and celebrates and prepares pupils for the upcoming 'Year of the Word'. Children at all key stages play an active role in prayer and liturgy in a wide variety of ways. Prayer and worship are integral to the daily life of the school. The parish priest is a regular and welcome visitor into school. Feast days and special times of the academic year are marked by acts of liturgy and prayer, either in school or at the parish church. Mass is carefully planned and prepared by the priest, headteacher and pupils. Pupils participate during the Mass by altar serving, singing, reading, praying, and bringing up the offertory. Parents are invited to attend these services. Leaders would like to develop pupil participation and active chaplaincy even further. Many other sacramental celebrations are offered at key times throughout the liturgical year. Pupils' spiritual development is carefully fostered in this school. Leaders are ambitious for pupils to experience a wide and rich experience of prayer and worship. Weekly assemblies focus on readings from scripture. This deepens pupils' awareness of the liturgical year. Opportunities for quiet reflection, sharing thoughts and ideas are widely encouraged by staff.

The contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice

is outstanding

The school is outstanding in its work to promote the Common Good. All leaders, teachers and governors are deeply committed to the notion of 'human flourishing.' The school articulates its vision by stating: 'What we are is God's gift to us. What we become is our gift to God'. The school seeks to recognise the unique gifts that each person brings to the school and wider community.

Governors and senior leaders are aware of the need to balance pupil-led initiatives with long-term and sustainable commitments. The school has in the recent past supported a wide range of local and international projects. These include the Kanyike Project in Uganda; the British Legion's Poppy appeal and MacMillan Cancer Care. Locally, the school has developed fruitful links with Trembaths home for retired people; Garden City Hospice, and with a group for the older members of the parish and the food bank. The school is an Eco-Friendly School. Environmental issues are currently a growing cause for concern for pupils, parents and staff. The school has initiated a partnership with Caritas to expand work on promoting social justice and Catholic social teaching in the school. This Love in Action programme commenced in the autumn term 2019. Leaders are now very eager to move this project on even further. Pupils are aware and can discuss how they follow in the footsteps of Jesus through acts of charity and fundraising work and by living a life of Christian service.

The partnership with parents, school and parish, and collaboration as an integral part of the diocese through its relationship with the diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf

is outstanding

Partnerships at all levels are clearly outstanding. Parents are very supportive of the school and its headteacher. Parents highlighted this in response to a recent survey and in letters sent to inspectors. Parents say that their children receive a very good start in their Catholic life when they enter this school in the EYFS. Parents are invited in to the school for all assemblies, Masses and liturgies and participation is strong. The parish priest is a key member of the governing body and is equally well informed about Catholic education and its development in the school. The school participates in all diocesan activities and regularly attends both deanery and diocesan moderation of pupils' work. Opportunities for staff training are regularly provided for all staff. The school works closely with the diocesan adviser and staff value the clear guidance, objectivity and support. The school is highly committed to working in close partnership with all stakeholders.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school

is outstanding

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school is judged to be outstanding. The school mission statement is central to the school's identity. Leaders ensure that this mission is a living entity. Pupils know that they should aim to follow in the footsteps of Christ in all that they do – *'We follow Jesus as we learn, rest and play.'* The vision and mission are key drivers for continuous school improvement. Leaders ensure that staff well-being and managing workload is a key priority. As a result, staff and teacher turnover is low. New staff are being well supported and an effective induction programme is in place. Senior leaders ensure parents are fully engaged in all aspects of their child's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Governors are experienced and are dedicated to the school and its mission. They provide senior leaders with a balance of support and challenge. Governors are regular visitors during the school day and have provided clear oversight for strategic development. The school environment ensures that the school's unique identity as a Catholic community is proudly celebrated. On arrival there are clear displays and signs of the Catholic nature and identity of the school. Self-evaluation of the Catholic life of the school is rigorous and reflects the high standard of documentation provided elsewhere by the headteacher. It is also accurate and reflects the inspection judgement of outstanding.

What should the school do to develop further the Catholic life of the school?

- Work with the parish priest to enhance pupil-led prayer as part of preparations for Mass.
- Develop further pupil's awareness of Catholic Social Teaching through the school's partnership with Caritas.

Information about this school

- This school is a one-form entry Catholic primary academy in the Local Authority of Hertfordshire and the locality of Letchworth.
- The school serves the parish of St Hugh of Lincoln, Letchworth.
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 96%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 2% and from other faiths is 1%. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 80%.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 2.
- There are 30 (14%) of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 3 have statements of Special Educational Needs and /or Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is 28% is above average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is above average 28%.
- There is a well below rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 6 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (3%).

Department for Education Number	919/3400
Unique Reference Number	138354
Local Authority	Hertfordshire

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	210 and a 30 place Nursery onsite
The appropriate authority	The Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust
Chair	Mrs Christine Gracie
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Perry
Telephone number	01462 620670
Website	www.strcjni.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@strcjni.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	26 March 2015
Grades from previous inspection:	
Classroom religious education	Good
The Catholic life of the school	Outstanding

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out (i) under the requirements of the Canon 806 and (ii) in accordance with the Framework for Diocesan Inspections 2015 approved by the Archbishop of Westminster and (iii) under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

- The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection.
- During the inspection, 8 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended 1 act of worship in class.
- Meetings were held with school staff, pupils and governors.
- Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

Mr Sean Flood

Lead Inspector

Mrs Jade Cahill

Associate Inspector

Mrs Norah Flatley

Associate Inspector

Information about inspection

The purpose of Diocesan inspection is to report to and advise the Archbishop on the quality of classroom religious education and the Catholic life of the school. The inspection report is also used to inform parents and carers, and the wider Catholic community. Inspection provides an opportunity to support, challenge, evaluate and promote the work of Catholic schools. It also assists schools in the work of self-evaluation and improvement, and enables the Diocese to celebrate with schools their sense of identity and their strengths as Catholic schools.

Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

This report is published by the Diocese of Westminster and is available at:

<http://rcdow.org.uk/education/schools>

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