



Archdiocese of Birmingham

Section 48 Inspection Report

ST THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Part of The Pope Francis Catholic Multi Academy Company
Oxford Road, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 1EA

Inspection dates: 7-8 June 2022
Lead Inspector: Paul Madia

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS: **Good**

Catholic Life: Good

Religious Education: Good

Collective Worship: Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection: *Requires Improvement*

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

This is a Good Catholic school because:

- Despite recent challenges in leadership, there remains a clear sense of community at all levels, evident in the school's strong team spirit.
- Staff have a nurturing and caring manner in their approach to all pupils.
- Teachers use good subject knowledge effectively to plan and deliver Religious Education lessons.
- Teaching is mainly good because teachers consolidate previous learning and make appropriate links to new learning.
- Questioning in Religious Education lessons and teacher feedback allows pupils to reflect on their learning to deepen their understanding of what has been taught.

It is not yet Outstanding because:

- Pupils' knowledge of traditional prayers is limited and not progressive.
- Monitoring and evaluation processes, particularly within Catholic Life, need developing further, involving all stakeholders.
- The quality and variety of Collective Worship offered do not provide consistent opportunities for children to reflect and develop their spirituality.
- The quality and presentation of pupils' work are inconsistent across the school.
- Pupils do not have a secure understanding of Catholic social teaching; this needs to be embedded across the school.

FULL REPORT

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure traditional prayers are taught progressively and embedded across the school.
- Reflect the commitment of all stakeholders to the Catholic Life of the school in the school's processes for monitoring, analysis, and self-challenge.
- Develop a range of high-quality Collective Worship opportunities for pupils to reflect and develop their faith and spirituality.
- Improve the quality and presentation of all pupils' work to ensure consistency throughout the school.
- Enable staff to identify and make explicit cross-curricular links to Catholic social teaching to support pupils in connecting with their faith.

THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the Catholic Life of the school	Good
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school	Good
The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school	Good
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school	Requires Improvement

CL1 The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school

CL2 The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school

- Pupils, staff, and governors value the deep-rooted commitment of the headteacher, who is an inspirational witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ.
- Most pupils appreciate, value, and actively participate in the Catholic Life and mission of the school. This is particularly evident in the Catholic ambassador team, in which pupils have clear ideas about how they can improve the school's Catholic Life.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of the school's mission, '*With Christ, we achieve, believe and create*', and can talk confidently about it and how it relates to their lives. They stated that it allows them to 'grow in faith with Christ.'
- The behaviour of pupils in and around the classroom is generally good. Pupils demonstrate care and respect for each other and the adults in the school. There were short periods of low-level disruption in a few classrooms, especially during moments of prayer. The school needs to continue to develop high expectations of behaviour, so that moments of deep silence and genuine openness to the Spirit of God within can be experienced as a regular part of daily community prayer.
- The school nurtures the pupils in its care and puts the children's needs first. All staff take time to listen to the pupils, ensuring they are happy, confident, and secure in their spiritual, physical and emotional growth.
- There is strong outreach to the local community through a variety of pupil group actions, which is welcomed and appreciated by the parish and beyond. The pupils

and leaders speak highly of the parish initiative, 'pray, play and pizza', organised by some governors. Pupils attend this in Years 5 and 6 to strengthen community engagement with the parish.

- Pupils have a good knowledge of whom St Thomas More is, linking this to the time of Henry VIII; however, clear links need to be made to his sainthood and Catholicism.
- Whole school saints are linked to the school's behaviour system, and class saints are displayed across the school. Pupils need to deepen their understanding of these saints, their mission, and how this affects their lives.
- The pupils have a good understanding of vocation and God's calling to everyone. They speak confidently that everyone has a vocation; however, this needs to be further developed so pupils can apply their understanding to everyday life.
- The pastoral care of staff and leaders is a strength. Staff are highly motivated and demonstrate a profound dedication. They say they are well supported in their work. They feel their contribution to the school is valued by the current leaders and governors. Despite the significant challenges the school has faced over the past few years, there is a powerful sense of community amongst staff at all levels.
- The school environment reflects its mission and identity through obvious signs of Catholic character. Each classroom has displays and prayer focuses, reflecting the times and seasons of the liturgical calendar and collections of pupils' prayers in classrooms and throughout the school. Time is needed to review the provision of prayer spaces within classrooms and elsewhere to ensure such areas create sacred space, are valued by all, and can inspire prayer.
- The school is a prayerful community, with prayer forming a part of the school day through briefings, mission, traditional prayers, and reflections. However, pupils are not yet exposed to the full range of progressive, traditional prayers of the Church.
- There has been a broad range of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities offered to teachers from the diocese and the school staff, which has enabled rapid improvement in teaching and learning. In particular, staff received training around creative teaching approaches, and this was seen in religious art being used effectively in some of the lessons observed.
- Catholic social teaching is developing across the school. Leaders have identified that pupils and staff do not have a secure understanding of it, so this needs work to become embedded across the school. Leaders should support staff in identifying and developing explicit cross-curricular links to Catholic social teaching to support pupils' connection to their faith.
- The Catholic ambassadors are a strength of the school, working together to promote their faith across the school and in the community and thinking of others through their charity drive. The Catholic ambassadors have supported several national and local charities through their social action work, including CAFOD, Fr Hudson's Home, Red Cross and Kidlington Food Bank. They expressed a preference to be able to decide what charities the school should support in the future. To continue the excellent work of the ambassadors, a broader range of year groups need to become involved with the initiative.
- Relationships, sex, and health education (RSHE) is taught within the context of the Catholic Church through TenTen's 'Life to the Full' programme. As a result, of this curriculum, pupils' understanding of appropriate relationships based on respect for the dignity of the human person, made in the image and likeness of God, is strong. Pupils can articulate key contemporary themes, explaining that 'life lessons help you to love well and love each other.'
- Pupils have limited involvement in evaluating the Catholic Life of the school, which needs further development.

CL3 How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision of the Catholic Life of the school

- Since her appointment, the committed and passionate headteacher, along with the staff (especially the leaders of Religious Education), has increased the school's Catholic identity with an ambitious vision and drive.
- The leadership team are committed to the Church's mission and living out the Gospel. As a result of placing mission at the heart of all they do, leaders are quick to celebrate the many successes within the Catholic Life of the school and have begun to identify areas they wish to develop.
- The new governance is a strength of the school. The school has been on a long journey, and the headteacher and governors have begun stabilising the school through their commitment to their faith and generosity of spirit. They acknowledge that there is still work to be done and have plans to ensure this happens over time.
- Following several visits from staff from the archdiocese and stakeholder attendance at diocesan training, senior leaders have established processes to monitor Catholic Life, with some planned improvements. However, monitoring and evaluation processes need further development and should involve all stakeholders to strengthen this further.
- Due to Covid, the engagement of parents and the wider community has been limited; however, the school developed ways to ensure the Catholic Life of the school was of high priority through remote mission assemblies and school Masses.
- The chair of governors is a committed Catholic with a clear vision and commitment to the school. She has strengthened many links with the parish and has brought the community into the school by leading and nurturing prayer groups for parents during lunchtime. She has also introduced the 'three Ps – praying, playing and pizza' for children in Years 5 and 6 to re-engage pupils to attend Mass after the few years of disruption caused by the pandemic.
- The Catholic Life link governor enthusiastically promotes the Catholic Life of the school and is a visual presence around the school.
- The governors have taken part in the school's self-evaluation and have some understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Formal, rigorous, regular monitoring activities need to be in place so that leaders can evaluate the school more accurately and drive further improvements.
- Parents appreciate the quality of pastoral care the school gives to the pupils of St Thomas More. Parents feel that children are treated as individuals and are cared for emotionally. Parents appreciate the 'family community' that the school nurtures, with one parent commenting, 'We are incredibly lucky here because the teachers nurture our children.' Another parent commented, 'Despite any ups and downs, the staff have always been there to resolve them.' Parents chose the school because of its reputation and how diversity is celebrated.
- The induction of new staff and support of existing staff is comprehensive.
- Leaders and governors ensure that the school responds well to diocesan policies and initiatives. They promote the Archbishop of Birmingham's vision for the diocese throughout the school.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The quality of Religious Education	Good
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education	Good
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education	Good
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for Religious Education	Good

RE1 How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education**RE2 The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education**

- Pupils are engaged in the vast majority of Religious Education lessons. This is because teachers plan engaging lessons that pupils enjoy. During the inspection, a wide variety of tasks were observed, which motivated pupils to engage with the messages being taught.
- In one class observed, pupils were researching their knowledge of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and how they can be applied to their own lives. The teacher used various open-ended and challenging questions to check the children's understanding. One child commented, 'Wisdom gives people the ability to make good decisions.' The children had clear feedback from the class teacher, enabling them to delve deeper into the theology around the gifts of the Holy Spirit, linking back to their Sacraments of Baptism and the Feast of Pentecost. In another class, the children confidently used Bibles to identify the presence of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. Prior learning discussions demonstrated the children's secure knowledge of this area: 'The Holy Spirit enabled the Disciples to share the Good News about Jesus.' By the end of the lesson, the class teacher assessed what had been learnt, and the children commented, 'There are a lot more stories about the Holy Spirit than I thought.'
- Given their starting points, most pupils make good progress in Religious Education throughout their time in school.
- Pupils make good progress in Religious Education during Reception Class and Key Stage 1. Many pupils start school with a shallow baseline knowledge of key religious facts, and teachers work well to ensure that most pupils meet expectations at the end of Reception Class. This steady progress continues in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, where most pupils meet expectations for their age group. By the end of Key Stage 2, some pupils exceed age-related expectations.
- Discussions with the pupils make it clear that they understand and appreciate the broader implications of the Religious Education teaching for their spiritual and moral development.
- All groups of pupils make good progress in Religious Education, including those pupils from minority ethnic groups, disadvantaged pupils, pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). More able pupils need to be challenged further to reach their full potential.
- Standards in Religious Education are at least in line with those in other core subjects.
- Most pupils are religiously literate, using their knowledge, understanding and skills to reflect spiritually. Pupils can reflect by utilising a variety of approaches which are recorded in their high-quality journals.
- The school's wider curriculum supports pupils in applying their understanding of the Gospels to the world they live in.

- The curriculum is based upon the diocesan scheme, 'Learning and Growing as the People of God', and follows its recommendations in terms of planning and assessment.
- Children have limited knowledge of other faiths. Improvement is needed in the pupils' understanding of them.
- The quality and presentation of pupils' written work are varied and inconsistent across the school. Leaders and teachers must ensure that work is of a good standard in every class and that pupils take pride in their work.
- Pupils can articulate a deep understanding of what they are learning due to the differentiated 'next step' questioning provided for the children at the end of their Religious Education lessons. Books are marked with the following steps to enable the pupils to reflect on the Religious Education teaching and apply this knowledge to their lives. The class teachers should follow this up to check for understanding. A minority of pupils do not always answer their next steps; all should be encouraged to answer the questions posed by teachers to ensure maximum learning.
- Pupils are very keen to answer questions and contribute to their lessons.
- All teachers are confident in their subject knowledge, which was evident when observing lessons and speaking to staff. This results from the high level of support provided by leaders, including the subject leader, and enables pupils to make good progress in most lessons.
- Teachers plan good lessons, and as a result, behaviour in classes is generally good, with the vast majority of pupils saying that they enjoy Religious Education lessons.
- Lessons are linked to pupils' current assessment so that most pupils learn well. As a result, teaching is mostly good.
- In some lessons, the pace is a little stilted due to teachers' introductions being either too long or overly detailed, limiting the amount of work pupils can complete. This can impact negatively on their capacity to embed new learning. Teachers should consider planning various approaches to learning and facilitating tasks to engage all learners.
- The use of additional adults in the classroom is varied throughout the school. Some teaching assistants are very effective in supporting and challenging learning. However, teaching assistants could be more effectively deployed in some lessons to impact learning significantly.

RE3 How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for Religious Education

- Leaders ensure that the Religious Education curriculum, including curriculum time, meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and the additional requirements of the Archbishop of Birmingham in every respect.
- Governors ensure that Religious Education is comparable with other core subjects in every respect.
- The subject leader has a clear vision for teaching and learning and an excellent level of expertise to enable this vision to be secured. She shows a real commitment to the development of her staff across the school and their support in the classroom. This results in increased confidence in those staff members who welcome the support. Staff commented that they feel looked after and that staff 'stick together.'
- School self-evaluation is detailed, and subject leader evidence files detail monitoring and analysis. Action has taken place by the school, despite significant leadership changes, which has led to at least good outcomes in Religious Education.
- There are clear action plans for Catholic Life, Religious Education and Collective Worship, detailing action and impact statements.

- There is a planned cycle of monitoring and evaluation in Religious Education. The subject leader has scrutinised books, monitored assessments and spoken to pupils. This has resulted in leaders having a clear and detailed development plan, resulting in improvements across the school.
- Ongoing coaching and mentoring have been used effectively to improve the quality of teaching in Religious Education through coaching triangles. This model enables staff to learn from each other and provide challenges and areas for development in a safe and supportive environment.
- The subject leader attends governors' meetings regularly and presents a comprehensive report about the quality of Religious Education in the school. There is clear evidence of monitoring, along with high-quality professional development, led by members from the diocese and in school.
- Governors are updated about the progress of the subject improvement plan, and they challenge leaders appropriately. As a result, the governors accurately understand the quality of Religious Education at St Thomas More.
- Leaders and governors ensure Religious Education is planned to meet the general needs of all pupils.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

The quality of Collective Worship	Good
How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship	Good
The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school	Good
How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship	Good

CW1 How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship

CW2 The quality of Collective Worship provided by the school

- Most pupils act with reverence during Collective Worship. They join in with prayers and listen with interest. This could be further improved by increasing opportunities for singing, reflection, and meditation, so that moments of deep silence and genuine openness to the Spirit of God within can be experienced as a regular part of daily community prayer. This will ensure that children have the opportunity to reflect on and develop their spirituality.
- In a Key Stage 1 pupil-led Collective Worship, observed during the inspection, pupils were asked to think about acts of kindness. Pupils showed genuine compassion, commenting, 'If someone is feeling sad and lonely, you must help them' and 'God sees us as a family; one family; one Church.' On entering another classroom, children smiled and welcomed adults saying, 'Peace be with you', and handing all visitors a special prayer pebble.
- Pupils prepare and lead liturgy regularly; however, this needs to be further developed to ensure consistency across the school when planning joyful and creative Collective Worship.

- Most pupils have a good understanding of the Church's liturgical year, its seasons, and feasts. This is reflected in the school environment and Collective Worship plans.
- Each classroom has a prayer area to create a sacred space for the children. These are displayed with artefacts, statues, Bibles, and prayers. In some classrooms, the prayer area is either at the side or the back of the classroom; these need to be made more prominent.
- The experience of living and working in a faithful, prayerful community positively impacts the spiritual and moral development of all pupils, irrespective of their ability or faith background.
- Collective Worship is part of the school's daily life, and prayer is included in school celebrations. However, pupils' knowledge of traditional prayers is limited.
- The themes chosen for Collective Worship reflect the school's liturgical seasons and Catholic character.
- Staff are supportive in helping pupils plan and deliver Collective Worship. To further enhance this, staff need a more secure understanding of high-quality Collective Worship to enable them to act as role models of good practice.
- Pupils understand that prayer is their opportunity to talk to God and can happen anywhere, at any time. They would appreciate additional areas in and around the school to inspire spontaneous prayer.
- The school needs to increase the range of hymns and songs used in Collective Worship to include a broader range of traditional and more modern songs to maximise the different ways of worship.

CW3 How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship

- Leaders have taken effective action to plan and deliver a growing range of Collective Worship for pupils and staff. Themes for Collective Worship reflect the Church's calendar, seasons, and feasts.
- Staff have made good use of the diocesan resources and training to promote pupils' planning and leading Collective Worship.
- Staff and leaders use the diocesan Collective Worship model of 'Gather, listen, respond, go forth' to support the structuring of Collective Worship.
- Staff and leaders need to act as role models for pupils to develop a range of pupil-led prayer styles.
- Several teacher and pupil-led Collective Worship responses were incorrect when responding to scripture or prayers. Leaders must ensure that the correct liturgical responses are used when reading scripture during prayer services.
- Collective Worship is monitored but is not consistently evaluated. Leaders are aware that Collective Worship is a development focus and plans are in place to ensure this is given the highest priority.
- All additional requirements of the Archbishop of Birmingham regarding Collective Worship are fully implemented.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Unique reference number	139530
Local authority	Oxfordshire
<i>This inspection was carried out under Canon 806 of Canon Law and under Section 48 of the Education Act (2005).</i>	
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy
Age range	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	203 (including Nursery)
Appropriate authority	The board of directors
Chair	Anna Capilli
Headteacher	Breda Bowles
Telephone number	01865 373674
Website address	https://st-thomas-more.oxon.sch.uk/
Email address	head@stthomas-more.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	June 2018

INFORMATION ABOUT THIS SCHOOL

- St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is a smaller than average-sized primary school serving the parish of St Thomas More in Kidlington, North Oxford.
- The school is part of The Pope Francis Catholic Multi Academy Company, comprising eleven Catholic primary and secondary schools in the Oxfordshire area of the Archdiocese of Birmingham.
- The percentage of Catholic pupils is currently 31%.
- The percentage of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average.
- The percentage of SEND pupils is below the national average.
- The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic origins is above the national average.
- The percentage of pupils with EAL is broadly in line with the national average.
- Attainment on entry is below average.
- The school has experienced substantial leadership changes. The substantive headteacher retired in December 2019, following which there have been several turbulent changes in leadership. A substantive headteacher has been recruited and will take up the post in September 2022. These changes have resulted in the loss of pupils to other schools.

INFORMATION ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

- Two Diocesan Inspectors carried out the inspection: Paul Madia and Michelle Walsh. Marina Smith shadowed the inspection.
- The focus of the inspection was on the impact, quality, and leadership of the school's provision of Catholic Life, Religious Education and Collective Worship.

- The inspectors observed teaching across seven Religious Education lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Some of these lesson observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders and governors.
- The inspectors completed work scrutiny and held discussions with pupils to evaluate their understanding of Catholic Life, the impact of Religious Education teaching on their learning over time and their experience of Collective Worship.
- Meetings were held with the CSEL, chair of governors/the RE link governor, governors, the headteacher, the RE subject leader, pupils, parents, staff and the Catholic Ambassadors.
- The inspectors attended several classes and the whole school Collective Worships and undertook a learning walk to look at aspects of learning and teaching in Religious Education, the presentation of the Catholic Life of the school and pupils' behaviour.
- The inspectors reviewed various documents, including the school's self-evaluation, data about pupils' attainment and progress, Analyse School Performance (ASP) data, the school development plan, the RE action plan, teachers' planning and learning journals.