



## **DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD**

### **Denominational (S48) Inspection Report**

**Name of School:** ST THOMAS MORE'S PRIMARY SCHOOL  
**Local Authority:** THE ROSARY TRUST  
**Inspection Date:** 25 MARCH 2022  
**Reporting Inspector:** ANGELA PODMORE (Lead Inspector)

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005 and 2011.

**Type of School:** Multi Academy Trust  
**School Category:** Primary  
**Age range of pupils:** 4 - 11  
**Gender of pupils:** Mixed  
**Number on roll:** 208  
**Appropriate Authority:** The Rosary Trust  
**Date of previous inspection:** 22 October 2015

**School Address:** Priory Street  
Colchester  
Essex  
CO1 2QB

**Tel. No.** 01206 865722  
**Headteacher:** Mrs Bridget Harris  
**Chair of Governors:** Mr Simon Fenning

## Information about the school

St Thomas More's Catholic Primary school is a one form entry primary school serving the parishes of St James the Less and St Helen's in Colchester, St John Payne in Greenstead and St Monica's in Wivenhoe. It is part of the Rosary Trust, a Catholic Multi Academy within the Diocese of Brentwood. There are currently 208 pupils aged 4- 11 on roll, 93% of whom are Catholic with the remainder coming from other Christian denominations or other world faiths. There are a higher than national average number of pupils who have English as an additional language, but a lower number of pupils deemed to have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities. There are three members of staff who have the Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies in addition to a further member of staff who has an MA in Catholic School Leadership. The school provides extended services to support families and pupils with a wide range of activities including breakfast and after school clubs. The school is the centre for the Venn Essex Maths Hub.

## Key grades for inspection

1: Outstanding      2: Good      3: Requires improvement      4: Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school

**Grade 1**

St Thomas More's School is a joyous community of faith where every child is recognised as a unique gift from God. It is a place where every child can grow and develop in an atmosphere of mutual Christian love and respect. It is a kind, nurturing, family orientated community, committed to ensuring that its pupils are provided with an outstanding Catholic education. A community in which they can grow and develop into responsible citizens of the future. Pupils are excellent ambassadors for their school, they are welcoming to visitors and happily share their experiences with visitors. They enjoy coming to school and feel secure in the knowledge that their well-being is given the highest priority through excellent pastoral care. They describe their school in the most fulsome terms saying it is 'amazing, incredible and kind.' School leaders and governors have been instrumental in maintaining and building upon the high standards of its previous inspection, thus ensuring that there is strong capacity for sustained improvement. Governors work closely with the school and are kept well informed of the life of the school. They visit the school regularly offering both support and challenge. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school commenting on the strong links with the parish and the community feel of the school. They report that the school is a community with dedicated staff and a nurturing atmosphere where every child is encouraged to do their best. All leaders, under the direction of the outstanding Headteacher, share a passion and ambition for St Thomas More's to be the best it can be.

## What the school should do to improve further:

- Continue to develop the CAFOD Club and Liturgy teams so that they are once again whole school based teams rather than the class based ones they have been during the pandemic.
- Continue to develop and fully embed the electronic assessment systems so that relevant data can be shared.

The Catholic Life of the school is evident as you walk around the building and see the lovely displays and iconography and meet the school community. The welcoming display in the entrance hall, of photographs of all the pupils designed in the shape of a cross, is testimony to the inclusivity of the school. The school Mission Statement, 'As we walk together with Jesus, we love, live and learn' is prominently displayed around the school and truly lived by all members of the community. Pupils know the Mission Statement very well and can clearly explain, in an age appropriate way, what it means to their daily lives.

St Thomas More's is a school which puts a great emphasis on the pastoral support it gives, not just to its pupils but also their families and staff. Parents are overwhelmingly positive reporting that the support they receive is 'tremendous' and that the integration between year groups promotes a real family atmosphere.

Pupils' excellent behaviour and positive attitudes make for an environment which is highly conducive to learning and personal and spiritual development. They were keen to report to the inspector that they are all responsible for their own learning. Staff act as excellent role models of mutual respect thus ensuring that pupils also show a deep respect for one another, especially when working in groups. This was clearly seen during the inspection across all key stages. Pupils listen to each other carefully and ensure that everyone is included in discussions and everyone's ideas are respected, valued and considered. Pupils told the inspector that their favourite assembly is the celebration one because it is a time to acknowledge the hard work and achievements of everyone. During a lesson on the CAFOD theme 'Walk against Hunger', pupils were deciding on ideas for fundraising. After discussing various good ideas, they finally decided on a food tasting event, where they could celebrate the diverse cultures of the school community as well as raise funds. This is truly Gospel values in action.

Pupils take their responsibilities seriously. They have a good understanding of Pope Francis' Laudate Si initiative. They take their role as Eco Ambassadors very earnestly from a young age. They recognise that they are guardians of the world and need to leave it in a better place than that in which they find it, in order that it will be there for everyone to enjoy. They fully appreciate that there is always more that they can do and are always ready to do their bit, they are already looking forward to Earth Day. They enjoy fund raising for various charitable organisations, locally, nationally and internationally, including CAFOD, Red Nose Day, collecting toiletries for local Afghan families and Children in Need. They are to be congratulated on their recent Lenten almsgiving efforts to support the people of Ukraine where they raised £1000 in only two weeks. Pupils have a strong understanding of Catholic Social Teaching reporting that Jesus told us to help everyone so that 'they are with Jesus all the time' even in the small 'acts of kindness' that they show to each other on a daily basis.

The strong and dedicated Headteacher and her equally committed senior colleagues are fully committed to the Church's mission in education. they share a passion and drive to make St Thomas More's a Christ centric place of learning. All staff are models of excellence of Gospel values.

St Thomas More's follows the diocesan approved 'Come and See' programme for Religious Education and the 'Journey in Love' programme for RSE, supplemented by Ten Ten RHE resources. Pupils clearly enjoy their lessons because staff plan lessons well and use a variety of strategies to enhance learning opportunities. Children in Early Years are given a very strong start to their learning so that they are very well prepared for the challenges that lie ahead as they journey through the school. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to participate in role play, dance, hot seating, conscience alley and responding to and analysing religious art, as well as discussions, to support and develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in R.E lessons. During a discussion on ordination in key stage 2, pupils asked the priest 'When God called you, was it an immediate yes?' and 'Are there times when you struggle?' showing a very good understanding of vocation.

Achievement in R.E is high and in line with that of other core subjects. Teachers ensure that planning of lessons builds on prior learning and takes into account the needs of all pupils so that everyone, regardless of their starting points makes very good progress and achieves excellent outcomes. Data is analysed regularly to identify any gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding or underachievement and strategies are implemented to support these pupils. Teaching assistants are well deployed to support pupils with additional needs and it was evident during the inspection, and when looking at work books, that this support is having a good impact on pupils' learning and outcomes. Moderation of pupils' work is frequent and staff take part in moderation activities with their colleagues from across the trust. This ensures that all teacher assessment is accurate. The use of 'We Came and Saw' books provides a good record of pupil self-evaluation as well as providing a record of work and progress over time.

Teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge. High quality questioning is a key feature of lessons enabling pupils to demonstrate and extend their knowledge and understanding. Teachers introduce age appropriate religious vocabulary throughout lessons, they have high expectations of their pupils and this is clearly seen in lesson observations and work books. The pride pupils have in their work is evident as they strive for success.

The leadership of Religious Education is under the strong guidance of a dedicated and passionate subject leader, and is a strength of the school. She is very well supported by her colleagues on the senior leadership team. Staff comment that she is always approachable and supports all her colleagues especially non Catholic and newly appointed members of staff in providing the very best opportunities for all pupils. She is never complacent and is continuously seeking out ways to improve and move learning onwards. She ensures that staff are fully informed of any training opportunities which would help their classroom practice and expertise, as well as giving priority to R.E topics at staff meetings. This ensures that discussions can take place, ideas generated, resources located and any possible difficulties resolved prior to delivering the topic in class.

Parents are kept well informed of what pupils are learning in Religious Education via the termly newsletters and are very positive in their praise of the subject.

Governors are kept well informed about pupil progress and attainment and the religious education curriculum via detailed subject leader reports. They visit the school regularly and undertake learning walks, book looks, classroom visits and chats with pupils. They know the school well.

All staff, under the excellent leadership of the Headteacher, make sure that Religious Education is given a high status in the school. The curriculum fully meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference that a minimum of 10% of teaching time is dedicated to Religious Education. Leaders ensure that staff have regular opportunities for continuing professional development to improve their practice and that the funding is in line with that of other core subjects.

Collective worship is central to the life of the school and pupils are given many opportunities to pray, reflect and worship throughout the school day. Parents are appreciative that prayer is introduced to pupils very early in their school life. Pupils have responded very well to the daily reciting of the Our Father in recognition of and unity with the people of Ukraine. Pupils are exposed to the traditional prayers of the church and also enjoy creating their own prayers. They are developing their understanding of different types of prayer – thanksgiving, praising, adoration and sorrow. Key stage 2 pupils' books evidenced a detailed analysis of the 'Our Father' prayer and what it means in their day to day lives. Pupils enjoy visiting the Convent garden for special occasions and photographs of them celebrating events there show the deep respect they have for this very special place. Their Celebration books provide an excellent record of the many liturgies they enjoy throughout the school year – Feast day Masses, Harvest celebrations, Nativity celebrations and Ash Wednesday celebrations amongst others.

Pupils are given the opportunity to plan, prepare and deliver class room Acts of Worship and do so with respect and dedication. During the inspection the school choir led a very strong and moving performance of the Easter story in Church for their peers in year 2 to year 6. The readings, singing and acting were very powerful and pupils remained focused and attentive throughout. Younger pupils had earlier made palms in class to celebrate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and eagerly waved them as the choir sang 'Sing Hosanna'.

The school has developed excellent links with the parish and visit the church regularly to celebrate key times in the liturgical year as well as termly class Masses. Pupils prepare readings, prayers, choose hymns and act out the Gospel reading. The Parish Priest is a welcome and frequent visitor to the school and, along with a fellow priest, led a Reconciliation service for the school community the day before the inspection, in preparation for Easter. The parish priest visits the school weekly and comments that he is always made to feel very welcome and that he always finds the children very happy. Along with his fellow priest they visit classes and talk to the children about their R.E lessons and what they are learning.

Leaders are visible and highly committed role models for the whole school community. The Headteacher, her staff and School Governors are outstanding in promoting the provision for Catholic Worship. They are passionate and committed to delivering meaningful and purposeful worship to bring pupils closer to God.