St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

URN: 137081

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Brentwood

26–27 November 2025

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

1

Catholic life and mission (p.3)

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission

1

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

1

Collective worship (p.7)

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

1

The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference	Yes
The school is fully compliant with any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop	Yes
The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection	Fully

Compliance statement

- The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference.
- The school is fully compliant with any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop.
- The school has responded fully to the areas for improvement from the last inspection.

This Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection was carried out under canons 804 & 806 of the code of canon law. For maintained schools and academies in England it fulfils the statutory requirements of s.48 of the Education Act 2005. For maintained schools and academies in Wales it fulfils the statutory requirements of s.50 of the Education Act 2005.

What the school does well

- Pupils have a deep respect for others which they demonstrate in their polite behaviour and their strong sense of morality.
- Parents highly value the family atmosphere of the school, particularly citing the welcome they receive, inclusivity and the pastoral care afforded to families.
- Pupils have excellent knowledge in religious education knowledge, which they clearly articulate using exemplary vocabulary, and their written work is well presented.
- Teachers' subject knowledge in religious education is exceptional, evidenced in their planning of lessons and very insightful questioning skills.
- As they progress through the school, pupils plan, lead and evaluate class prayer and liturgy with increasing expertise and with scripture at the heart, incorporating time for reflection.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure pupils take a leading role in responding to Catholic social teaching and that they can clearly articulate the theology underpinning their actions.
- Ensure there is a consistent approach to self-assessment across the school so that all pupils know how well they are doing in religious education and what they need to do to improve.
- Work with families to fully include them in the prayer life of the school and support the developing prayer life of pupils.

Catholic life and mission

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

Catholic life and mission key judgement grade

1

Pupil outcomes

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

1

Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

1

Pupils at St Thomas More know and fully embrace the school's mission statement, 'learning to love and loving to learn through Jesus'. They demonstrate this mission through their kind interactions with each other. They take on increasing responsibilities as they move through the school, becoming buddies to younger pupils. In Year 6 they give unselfish and generous service as members of the school council, chaplaincy team and house captains. Pupils clearly understand that they are valued and cared for, with one Year 6 pupil explaining, 'I know that I am loved by God because, although I am not perfect, God's love for me is perfectly good and everlasting.' Parents also recognise the strong moral development of their children, with one parent stating that 'our child is growing to be a kind, responsible and empathetic person'. Pupils are actively engaged in responding to the demands of Catholic social teaching through a range of fundraising activities including ongoing donations to a clothing drive. They embrace the principles of care for our common home through a range of activities undertaken as an Eco School and as they develop their Cafod Live Simply action plan. Pupils now need to be able to clearly articulate the theology underpinning their actions. Pupils show deep respect for each other and welcome those who are new to the school, including pupils of all faiths. Pupils are very keen to work with adults and are active participants in the school's chaplaincy provision.

The mission statement is reviewed by staff on an annual basis and is clearly fully embraced by all staff. One staff member stated, 'it is a true joy and privilege to help nurture and deepen our pupils' love and understanding of Jesus Christ, grounded in the values of our Catholic faith that shape our wonderful school community.' There is a strong sense of staff commitment with a well-established team who also welcome new members. Staff at all levels volunteer to organise a range of after-school clubs and community events. Parents greatly value the lived sense of community. One parent expressed the view that the school provides, 'the absolute best environment for children to learn and

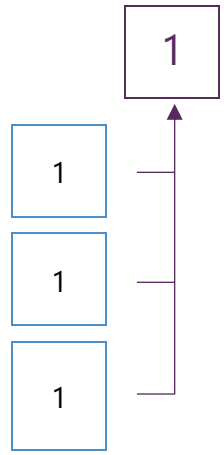
grow in their faith. Christ is really at the heart of this school.' Staff are excellent role models, particularly in their welcome for pupils of additional needs who are fully included in the Catholic life of the school. The environment truly reflects and celebrates the Catholic life of the school in displays and symbols of the faith. Additionally, the eco school area provides pupils with quiet a space for reflection. The relationship and sex education policy reflects the diocesan requirements and is rooted in the teaching of the Church.

Leaders and governors can clearly articulate how the school serves the Church's mission to educate the whole child. They work closely with the diocese and have accessed a variety of training opportunities for staff and governors. Links with the local parish are very strong, with the parish priest visiting the school often for liturgical celebration. The school has a range of strategies for positively engaging with parents, including a well-established Parent Staff Association (PSA) which organises summer and Christmas fetes. Furthermore, support for parents during times of crisis is gratefully received. One parent explained, 'I was at my lowest, I felt Christ's presence through the love and support that I received'. This support for those within the community and beyond embodies the commitment of leaders to Catholic social teaching. Leaders and governors are committed to the well-being of staff through their 'open-door policy' and designated wellbeing days. The Catholic curriculum is robust, with clear links being made between the Catholic life of the school and art, history, science and forest school. Governors are highly ambitious for the school with an excellent knowledge of key events and school operations. Through governors' regular visits to the school they effectively monitor the Catholic life of the school and are therefore involved in school self-evaluation. They are exceptionally aware of the impact the school ethos has on the pupils' behaviour, with those beyond the school community recognising a 'St Thomas More pupil by their moral orientation, politeness, the manner of behaviour and the respect they have when interacting with others'. Leaders are committed to the professional development of all staff.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade



Pupil outcomes

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for religious education

Pupils are developing excellent knowledge and skills that exemplify the *Religious Education Directory*. Their progress is evident within lessons, across each branch of study, and as they progress through the school. Pupils have a strong recall of their prior learning and use increasingly challenging vocabulary. In the Reception class pupils described Jesus as 'the Saviour'. In Year 2 a child rationalised how Mary is the Mother of God, explaining that 'Mary gave birth to God in the form of Jesus'. Pupils clearly love and enjoy their religious education lessons. They are highly engaged and their behaviour is exemplary. Their commitment to religious education is evident in their well-presented books. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 are now self-assessing their work in religious education, against success criteria for each branch of the *Religious Education Directory*. This practice should now be cascaded across the school to ensure all pupils know how well they are doing in religious education and can articulate what they need to do to improve their learning. Overall pupils' outcomes in religious education are excellent.

Teachers' subject knowledge in religious education is exceptional. This is demonstrated in their commitment to planning, very high expectations and their particularly insightful questioning skills. Teachers are adept at building on prior learning to support pupils in their understanding of religious education and to make links between lessons. In a Year 4 lesson the teacher proficiently built on pupils' prior learning of the phrase 'He will come again in glory' in the Nicene Creed. She incorporated a scripture reading from Revelation, before posing the question, 'I wonder what type of King He will be when He returns?' Marking of pupils' work celebrates their learning and pupils are often asked questions to deepen their understanding. In Year 5 the teacher encouraged pupils to reflect on a scripture reading that highlighted Samuel's recognition of David's qualities. She sensitively enabled pupils to consider which of these characteristics were applicable to their lives today. Teachers plan with creative care to ensure pupils have access to a range of resources, including sacred art. They

provide opportunities for pupils to present their work in a variety of ways including poems, writing their own psalms, and reflecting on scripture and its meaning. Moreover, pupils' own art work in a variety of medium, including clay, water colours and pastels, is encouraged and celebrated. Younger pupils' own drawings and their responses are beautifully presented in a highly valued floor book.

Leaders and governors have given the highest priority to the implementation of *Religious Education Directory* ensuring relevant staff attend diocesan training. Additional training, planning time and the purchase of a range of resources have enhanced its delivery. Leaders ensure that religious education is highly valued by the school community. This is evident in timetables and particularly in the quality and quantity of religious education work in pupils' books. Religious education is always discussed at parents' evenings and pupils' books are available for parents to view. However, religious education homework could be developed more fully to further pupils' learning. The high quality of religious education teaching and pupil outcomes witnesses the religious education leader's outstanding vision, high expectations and the impact of her leadership. Pupils' needs are very well met with appropriate adaptations made to lessons and excellent support being provided by additional adults when it is required. Leaders and governors ensure that religious education is effectively monitored thereby informing the school's self-evaluation. The governors regularly visit the school and have good knowledge regarding the practices in the school. They effectively engage in the self-evaluation process which is recorded in the governors' minutes.

Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

Collective worship key judgement grade

1

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

1

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship

1

Pupils are deeply engaged in all the prayer and liturgy opportunities provided by the school, be it class prayer, whole-school celebration of the word or a quiet moment of reflection before a religious education lesson. Music enhances prayer and liturgy, supporting pupils to be calm and prayerful or to join in with the communal singing of hymns, with great joy and jubilation**.** Pupils in the Reception class are able reflect in silence, and respond to appropriate imagery. Pupils know how the school celebrates throughout the liturgical year, including Reconciliation services during Advent and Lent, saying the Rosary in October and May and celebrating Mass for their House Saints' feast days. Pupils show increasing ownership and skill in collaborative planning, leading and evaluating class prayer and liturgy. They are familiar with the structure of gather, listen, respond and go forth. They make reasoned choices about scripture passages, ensuring that they are liturgically correct, either linking to a saint's feast or the Sunday Gospel. Additionally, times of reflection are provided for pupils when they write and draw in their prayer journals, which contain heartfelt prayers of gratitude, penance and thanksgiving. Pupils are able to make connections between their learning, the needs of the world and their own prayers of petition. Pupils understand that prayer can provide them with a moment of calm in their lives and draws them closer to God.

Prayer is central to the life and daily rhythm of life at St Thomas More. In addition to prayers that punctuate the beginning, middle and end of the school day, the class prayer and liturgy profoundly enhances the prayer life of the school. Staff are increasingly innovative in their approaches. For example, in one class liturgy white sheep were placed around a cross symbolising each child being shepherded by Christ. In another liturgy, small stones were placed in water symbolising the washing away of sin and pupils were able to sign 'sorry' and 'Jesus'. Scripture is at the heart of all prayer and liturgy. For younger children this is reinforced with art, images and artefacts to further develop their understanding. All staff are exemplary role models in leading prayer and liturgy. They have the necessary skills to engage pupils and support them in their planning. Sacred art is increasingly used in the school to support reflective prayer times and deepen pupils' spiritual understanding. Staff have

been inspired by 'Soul Spaces', an external provider who works with the school twice a year. Imaginative and reflective prayer trails, incorporating prayer stations provide staff with additional creative ideas. Focus areas in classes, the use of the school hall for Holy Mass, alongside the sympathetically developed willow prayer garden provide well-cared-for areas that are conducive to prayer. Furthermore, the forest school lessons provide times for reflection on God's creation and pupils' spontaneity of prayer. Parents are invited to attend school Mass and celebrations. The school should develop additional strategies to further involve families in the prayer life of the pupils.

The school has a relevant policy available to staff in line with the *Prayer and Liturgy Directory*. Additionally, there are supportive guidelines to help staff lead prayer and liturgy. The impact of these guidelines alongside a strong programme of professional development has clearly had an impact on staff skill and confidence. Staff speak positively about their increased confidence in leading whole-school prayer and liturgy. They are grateful for the planned programme, which is sympathetically connected to the Church's liturgical year, to enable them to deliver relevant themed assemblies. The parish priest celebrates Mass on Ash Wednesday and at other times during the year. On holy days of obligation, the school ensures there is appropriate liturgy within school. Time of reflection for staff and consideration is given to their formation during staff training days. As a result of these times, alongside professional development and engagement with Soul Spaces, staff are increasingly skilled in supporting pupils and leading prayer and liturgy. Leaders model well-structured prayer and liturgy with great confidence. A growing bank of resources is being compiled to enhance the provision of creative prayer and liturgy. Leaders are now involving a range of stakeholders, including pupils, parents and governors in the evaluation of prayer and liturgy. This is helping to shape and inform future plans to improve this aspect of school life.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Thomas More Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	137081
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8815223
Full postal address of the school	St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, South Road, Saffron Walden, CB11 3DW
School phone number	001799523248
Headteacher	Anneka Stockdale
Chair of governors	Luisa Bonomo-Jackson
School Website	www.stmsw.co.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	St Thomas More Catholic Primary School
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	December 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

The inspection team

Gael Hicks	Lead
Angela Moore	Team

Key to grade judgements

Grade	England	Wales
1	Outstanding	Excellent
2	Good	Good
3	Requires improvement	Adequate and requires improvement
4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and in need of urgent improvement