

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

URN: 146299

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Brentwood

22–23 May 2024

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

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 curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference

Yes

The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop

Yes

The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection

Fully

1

What the school does well

- The school mission statement unites the school community and underpins all areas of school life.
- Pupils have a strong understanding of Catholic social teaching, applying it to their learning and worship and so living it out in their daily lives.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are warm and welcoming, embodying school values and enjoying school and their learning, as well as fully appreciating all the school has to offer them.
- Pupils have well-developed levels of religious literacy, which they use skilfully to produce work of a consistently high standard.
- The physical environment of St Thomas of Canterbury school is true testimony to its Catholic identity.

What the school needs to improve

- Provide even wider opportunities for prayer development in line with the new *Prayer and Liturgy Directory*.
- Implement the action plan for the introduction of the new *Religious Education Directory*.

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

Pupil outcomes

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

Provision

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

Leadership

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



St Thomas of Canterbury is a warm, vibrant and welcoming community where pupils can grow and develop in a safe, loving, inclusive environment with a parent commenting, 'The school is a joyous place to visit'. Gospel and school values, along with the principles of Catholic social teaching are at the heart of the school, and pupils have a well-developed understanding of the principles behind these. This can easily be seen in their willingness to serve as members of the faith council and school council. They fully appreciate their responsibility to serve those in need and are proactive in fundraising activities for various local and national charities, including a local foodbank, St Luke's Hospice, and Cafod, as well as joining residents at a local residential home to celebrate Christmas by singing with them. Pupils have a real sense of worth because they know they are loved, safe and valued as individuals made in the image and likeness of God. They know they are all children of God. Pupils demonstrate a deep sense of respect for each other in this diverse community. The Cultural Day, enjoyed and celebrated by all, was a time for pupils to share their unique identities, family traditions and to learn about the school's heritage, with pupils commenting that they were able to learn about everyone's culture and represent their own; and to appreciate their identities with one pupil commenting, 'we look different but are the same inside'. Pupils' behaviour in class and around the school is exemplary, further testimony to the respect they hold for everyone.

The school mission statement, 'We learn, achieve and love following Jesus' has a significant impact on the lives of the school, community who demonstrate it in all their interactions with others. Parents comment that, 'It is clear that the school's Catholic mission is central to every part of the day'. The school environment is fully reflective of its rich Catholic heritage and character. Beautiful displays and iconography all provide a stimulating environment in which

pupils can work, play, and grow spiritually, morally, and academically. Under the inspirational guidance of the head teacher and her senior colleagues, all staff contribute to the Catholic life and mission of the school. As a result there is a deeply embedded sense of welcome and inclusivity, clearly seen in the quality of relationships, and the respect and hospitality afforded to all. There is a powerful sense of family and community. St Thomas' has a carefully planned programme for relationships, sex, and health education which meets all statutory and diocesan requirements and is firmly rooted in the teachings of the Church.

School leaders and governors enjoy their partnership with the Christus Catholic Trust, and clearly articulate the Church's mission in education. The dynamic headteacher empowers her team to grow and develop, ensuring that all leaders are highly ambitious for the school's continuous growth; as a result all leaders are unwavering in their commitment to the Catholic life and mission of the school and the families they serve. The school has worked hard to engage with parents who are kept fully informed of events, and who are welcomed in to the school to join their children for liturgies. A parent commented : 'St Thomas' invites you to take part in the prayer life through Masses but also through dialogue with the home'. Very strong links with the parish ensure that the school and parish work in close partnership with each other for the benefit of the whole community. The two priests are welcome and regular visitors leading liturgies, training pupils to act as altar servers, and joining pupils in class to support their learning. School leaders and governors are committed to providing professional development opportunities for all staff to continually improve their practice.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

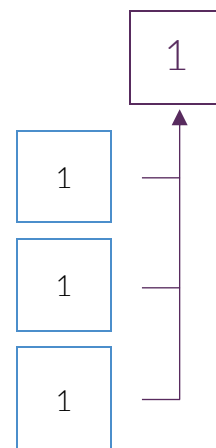
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 enjoy religious education lessons, developing into independent learners and displaying strong knowledge, understanding and skills as they journey through the school. As a result, all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs, make very good, and in many cases outstanding progress. Pupils readily share their knowledge with peers during discussions as well as demonstrating an excellent knowledge of scripture, and how it relates to their daily lives. During a lesson on the Good Samaritan, pupils were able to discuss with great confidence what the story teaches them about relationships and how they should treat each other. Using key concepts and subject specific vocabulary, pupils produce written work of a consistently high standard. This work clearly evidences curiosity, one of the school values, a love of learning, and a desire to continually develop their understanding and knowledge. Pupils' real enjoyment of learning leads to excellent standards of behaviour and motivation. They respond well to teachers' advice and guidance of their written work; as a result their books are beautifully presented, further testimony to the respect they have for religious education. Outcomes across all year groups and key stages are very high and comparable with those of other core subjects.

As a result of strong subject knowledge and skilful practice, teachers demonstrate high levels of confidence when delivering the well-planned religious education curriculum. They have high expectations of their pupils, and plan a carefully constructed series of lessons incorporating a variety of tasks which allow pupils to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Staff are enthusiastic about teaching religious education and offer lots of praise and affirmation to learners, leading to high levels of motivation. Careful planning and structured tasks build on prior learning to consolidate and extend learning. Questioning is used effectively to challenge and encourage pupils to think more deeply as well as assessing whether an individual may need

additional support or guidance. Staff take advantage of the many opportunities to participate in in-house and across-trust moderation tasks to ensure the accuracy of their judgements of pupils' work. The learning environment in classrooms and around the school is purposeful and focused with beautiful displays supporting and celebrating pupils' achievement.

School leaders and governors ensure that the curriculum meets the requirements of the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory*, and that it has equal parity in terms of funding and time allocation of other core subjects. The headteacher and her religious education team articulate and share a clear vision for the subject which is shared with staff. Consequently, teaching of religious education is of a consistently high standard. Staff report that they are very well supported by their senior colleagues in the teaching of the subject, and can seek advice and guidance whenever they need. Those staff new to teaching also comment on the excellent support they receive to allow them to develop their skills and expertise, but also report that their views are valued and sought. Senior leaders and governors are fully committed to providing high quality and regular professional development opportunities for staff from within the school, across the trust and from the diocese. Leaders fully appreciate the importance of regular monitoring and evaluation, ensuring that secure systems are in place for monitoring the delivery and impact of religious education, utilising the expertise from the Christus Catholic Trust to conduct peer reviews.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

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

2

1

Pupils actively engage in prayer and liturgical experiences, attentively responding to and reflecting upon the shared messages. They confidently participate in liturgies, contributing to responses, singing, and frequently signing with great enthusiasm, thereby enhancing their collective sense of belonging. Expressing themselves through music and song is evidently a source of enjoyment for pupils throughout the school. Pupil-led celebrations of the word in classrooms across the school adhere consistently to a four-part model: 'gather, word, respond, and go forth'. The youngest pupils select hymns, write prayers and select a 'go forth' activity while older pupils are able to plan these celebrations independently. Pupils are less confident and experienced when accessing and leading a wider range of prayer opportunities. Older pupils evaluate the quality of their liturgies well, completing evaluation activities regularly as part of the process. For example, in Year 6, pupils recognise that 'the choice of scripture and hymn linked well to the theme of always trusting Jesus.' They also clearly identify that their questions 'could have encouraged greater depth of thinking.' Pupils use prayer journals to make a personal response to scripture. For example, pupils in Year 3 write prayers linked to Pentecost in their home language because 'the apostles could speak in different languages'. Pupils understand the presence of God in their lives; they have a deep understanding of scripture and it is clear that prayer and liturgy experiences support them to go forth into the wider world, inspired to act.

Prayer is central to the rhythm of school life through timetabled sessions of prayer and liturgy and the recitation of known prayers. Senior leaders lead Gospel liturgies focusing on the Gospel's message from the preceding Sunday. Musical celebrations of the word reinforce this later in the week. Through such opportunities, leaders act as positive role models for staff and pupils as leaders of prayer and liturgy. This contributes to the staff's confidence in working with

pupils, enabling them to lead their own sessions of prayer and liturgy. Good quality resources, such as prayer pebbles, prayer boxes and prayer stems support pupils as they pray. Time and resources have been allocated to create beautiful spaces conducive to prayer around the school, including the wildlife garden outside, and these are well-used by pupils. Parents comment that, 'The school has added amazing prayer areas where children can reflect and pray'. Families appreciate the opportunities they are given to join in with the school's prayer life through activities such as the 'Easter mystery bags' which encourage family prayer time at home. Year group Masses take place in the parish church and class celebrations of the word are well attended, demonstrating the way that the school, home and parish work in partnership with each other.

The school's prayer and liturgy policy is helpful to staff and clear in its expectations. Significant efforts have been made to provide professional development which supports staff to plan and deliver liturgies using the four-part liturgy structure and facilitate pupil-led worship. This has resulted in age-appropriate participation and progression throughout the school. For example, in Reception, pupils are expected to repeat and learn simple prayers while the prayer stems used in Key Stage 1 support pupils to formulate their own prayers independently. The leadership team and parish priest work collaboratively to plan opportunities for pupils to celebrate the Eucharist at regular intervals throughout the year; they ensure that events characteristic of the main liturgical seasons are observed. Leaders and governors see prayer as a priority of the school, allocating time, staff and a range of resources and artefacts to ensure that pupils continue growing in faith at St Thomas of Canterbury.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	146299
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8833603
Full postal address of the school	St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School, Ward Avenue, Grays, RM17 5RW
School phone number	01375375826
Headteacher	Emilie Poulteney
Chair of Local Governing Body	Helena Taylor
School Website	http://www.stthomasofcanterbury.thurrock.sch.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Christus Catholic Trust
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	6 December 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

The inspection team

Mrs Angela Podmore	Lead
Mrs Laura White	Team
Miss Christine Curtis	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