

**ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK
COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS & COLLEGES**



SECTION 48 INSPECTION REPORT

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the
Archbishop of Southwark and inspection of
Denominational Education under Section 48

St Thomas More RC Secondary School
Footscray Road
Eltham
London SE19 2SU

Chair of Governors	Mr G Peters
Headteacher	Mr M Ryan
Inspectors	Mr J Lydon
	Mr P O'Connell

Inspection dates 15-16 June 2006

**ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK
COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS & COLLEGES**
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Introduction

Description of the school

The school is voluntary aided. It is situated in the Greenwich Deanery of the Archdiocese of Southwark. It is maintained by Greenwich LEA. The principal parishes which the school serves are Christ Church Eltham, St John Fisher & St Thomas More Well Hall and Our Lady of the Rosary Black Fen. The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholics is 99.7%. The average weekly proportion of curriculum time given to religious education is 6.67% in Key Stage 3 and 10% in Key Stage 4.

The school takes pupils from 11 to 16 years. The number of pupils currently on roll is 603. The attainment of pupils on entering the school is broadly around average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free schools meals is below average. Around 16.8% of the pupils receive extra support in class. 19.5% of the pupils come from ethnic minority groups compared to 18.6% nationally. The proportion of pupils from homes where English is an additional language is below average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding	Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 2	Good	Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness as a Catholic school

St Thomas More is a very good Catholic school with many outstanding features. The school's distinctively Catholic identity, within the Christian tradition, is at the very centre of the life of the school. There is an extremely positive atmosphere in the school, with relationships explicitly based on Gospel values. The headteacher, with the active support of his leadership team and governors, gives outstanding leadership to the Catholic life of the school. Together they have firmly established its Catholic character, predominantly through personal witness to Gospel values exemplified in the level of support given to both colleagues and pupils. The school has articulated clearly its strengths and areas for development in both its Self-Evaluation Form and the Section 48 School Self-Evaluation Statement.

The school has developed excellent links with the local parishes, in particular the parish nearest the school, namely Christ Church Eltham. Prayer and worship is central to the life of the school, evidenced in a wide range of liturgical opportunities for both staff and pupils. The chaplaincy is a seminal feature of the life of the school, evidenced particularly by the way in which the pupils made constant reference to various aspects of its ministry.

The Religious Education Department is led by an enthusiastic and appropriately qualified practitioner who models a genuine commitment to promoting the subject as central to the life of the school. The curriculum is well-structured and broadly consistent with local and national guidelines. Detailed schemes of work together with a standard range of policies underpin the good standard of teaching and learning that enables pupils to make good progress. The development plan for the department recognises the key priorities for improvement, namely to provide support for new members of staff and members of staff teaching RE from other departments, to ensure consistency in teaching, learning and classroom management.

Grade 1

What steps need to be taken to improve further?

- Concentrate efforts to recruit a specialist RE teacher by exploring further avenues.
- Extend opportunities for staff development .
- Support must be put in place for the current Head of RE. The demands resulting from the staffing situation could lead to excessive pressure on a promising and committed subject leader.

The Catholic life of the School

Leadership and Management

Leadership of the school is outstanding. The headteacher provides a strong presence around the school supported by a leadership team working collaboratively with a group of committed colleagues among both teaching and support staff. The work of the school is also supported by a committed governing body. This substantial commitment to the mission of the school was in evidence throughout the period of the inspection.

There is evidence of a concerted focus on what could broadly be described as school effectiveness, including the setting of clear targets for both pupils and staff. There is, also, an equally strong emphasis on developing the school as a Catholic community. This holistic approach ensures that the school provides, in essence, a hospitable space for learning, enabling the school to achieve one of the central aims of its mission statement, namely “to encourage each student to develop into responsible citizens able to make a positive contribution to society”.

The school’s self-evaluation statement reflects accurately the strengths of the school in the context of Catholic distinctiveness while recognising the need to focus on maintaining a core group of teachers committed to the Catholic vision of the school.

Grade 1

Quality of Catholic life of the school

There are visible symbols throughout the building that make a clear statement that the school is a Catholic community. The prominent plasma screens that greet visitors on entering the school display the *Thought for the Week* which reflects the standards and values of the school. The Mission Statement reflects a sense of community and tradition, recognising the importance of working collaboratively with all stakeholders in fostering an active faith community. The Mission Statement also underpins the school’s Self Evaluation Form which recognises the positive effect on achievement of the clearly articulated distinctive ethos of the school.

This distinctive ethos is characterised by its witness to the local and global community. The school’s recognition of those less fortunate is outstanding. This is exemplified by the raising of £15,000 over a period of 18 months for the building of a house in Bosnia. As well as the raising of funds, there is a focus on issues of justice, recognising that helping those less fortunate is an essential part of the individual’s commitment to the Christian mission, which is seen as a whole school responsibility. The Geography department, for example, includes within its curriculum a focus on the issue of *Fair Trade*. The pupils are very much involved in planning fund raising activities through the

medium of the Charity Group which includes elected representatives from each form.

The chaplaincy provision is outstanding. The chaplain, who is also a trained counsellor, has been in post 8 years. Several parents specifically expressed in writing the outstanding contribution of the chaplain to the life of the school. She leads a chaplaincy team which, as well as the Head of RE and another RE teacher, includes representatives from other departments and the senior leadership team. The chaplain has been responsible for the development of spirituality and prayer across and beyond the school, encompassing parents, governors and the local parish communities. The chaplaincy is centred around the small chapel, a calm oasis which was built and financed entirely through volunteer help.

Pupils feel cared for and valued and they are proud to be members of the school community. Pupils described relationships between pupils to be excellent, asserting that they are courteous and considerate towards each other. Pupils are also highly respectful of staff, both in the classroom and around the school.

The majority of parents agree strongly that the school offers a distinctively Catholic education. They also agree that the staff care effectively for the students. Several commented specifically on the strength of the Catholic ethos and the excellent opportunities provided for spiritual development.

Grade 1

Quality of provision for personal and collective worship

Prayer, reflection, worship and liturgical celebration form an integral feature of the life of St Thomas More. The statutory daily act of worship is monitored effectively by the Heads of Year and by members of the senior leadership team. Members of the leadership team are also involved in ensuring that the programme for assemblies is linked to the liturgical calendar. The celebration of achievement also shapes the content of Assemblies, seen clearly in the assembly during the inspection which included a resume of the whole school project '*My Friend Needs a Teacher*', together with an evaluation completed by all pupils Years 7 to 9 in silence at the end of the Assembly. The fact that every pupil in Years 7-9 gathered in the playground before lunch to say grace before meals to mark the end of an activity morning on this theme reflects the commitment of both staff and students to the promotion of Christian values and to the centrality of prayer.

The school recognises that the Eucharist is the centre of worship for the Catholic community by ensuring that each form group celebrates Mass once a year in the chapel. During the inspection, a considerable number of pupils joined the community of Christ Church Eltham in celebrating the Eucharist on the Feast of Corpus Christi. The general demeanour of the pupils was outstanding and representative members of the school community were involved in music ministry while others delivered a moving drama reflecting

the message "Christ has no body now but yours". The Eucharist is also celebrated at significant moments in the life of the school, for example at the beginning of each school year and when pupils leave school at the end of Year 11, each pupil writing a prayer reflecting their experience of belonging to the community of St Thomas More.

The chaplaincy team animates a range of opportunities for prayer and reflection. A residential retreat experience is organised for Years 9, 10 and 11 at either at Kintbury (a Retreat Centre run by the De La Salle Brothers) or the Retreat Centre of the Archdiocese of Southwark in Whitstable. In 2005 the whole of Year 9 went to Kintbury, a retreat experience financed in part by the school leadership team. Years 7 and 8 experienced a Day of Reflection at Aylesford Priory. There was also a School Mission led by the Sion Catholic Community for Evangelism in 2004.

As well as the daily Act of Worship, voluntary Morning Prayer takes place in the Chapel each day before school, prepared and led by pupils from the student chaplaincy team. Special liturgies are also organised for Ash Wednesday and Reconciliation Days take place throughout Lent during which pupils engage in an Ignatian meditation and are given the opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The chaplaincy team has built up an effective partnership with both parents and the local parishes. A Half-termly Prayer Service was instigated by a parent governor to pray for the needs of the school. A group of committed parents have helped with the Bosnia House project, the building of which has strengthened the school community.

All staff are encouraged to play a full role in the spiritual life of the school. Each term begins with a prayer service for staff. There is an annual staff retreat day which encourages all to recognise that each person contributes to the mission of the school in a special way.

Grade 1

Religious education

The aims and objectives of the religious education programme are in line with the Curriculum Directory of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales published in 1996. The religious education department is led by a very focused practitioner who is committed to ensuring that religious education is in reality at the heart of the curriculum. The department is exemplary in promoting the religious, spiritual and moral development of all pupils. There is currently one other full-time teacher of religious education while the teaching of religious education has been supported by members of staff from other departments.

The School's Self-Evaluation Statement recognises that RE results at GCSE have not improved in line with other subjects. Further analysis does, however, reveal that the principal reason for this was the fractured teaching experienced by some groups. The school has plans to address this issue. The results are, however, slightly above the average for maintained schools in the South East of England.

Achievement and standards

The inspectors agree with the school's self-evaluation that achievements and standards in religious education are good.

At Key Stage 3 pupils are making good progress. In the lessons observed the standard of pupils' behaviour in the lessons observed was excellent. The classroom was in reality a hospitable space for learning. Pupils responded enthusiastically to lessons and there is a very positive working relationship between staff and pupils.

The school recognises that attainment at Key Stage 4 is the key area for development within the department. The head of department has employed innovative means to raise achievement without a full complement of specialist staff. Examples of this include revision sessions before school, during the lunchtime and after school. She has also taught different classes on rotation as well as preparing extra resources, reflecting a vigorous and substantial level of commitment to the pupils concerned.

The school recognises that the promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is not the exclusive responsibility of the RE department and there is evidence of support through other curriculum areas. The chaplaincy team is, for example, supported by members from several departments within the school. There was evidence in the lessons observed that the promotion of the pupils' spiritual and moral development is a key focus for the department.

Pupils find RE interesting and highlighted the opportunities they are given to explore not only Catholic Christianity as well as other religions. They emphasised the value of discussions about key moral issues, for example, the separation of Siamese twins. These opinions were reflected in the level of pupil interest in the lessons observed.

Grade 2

Quality of provision for religious education

The quality of teaching overall is good. The inspectors agree with the school's own judgements on teaching and learning. The objectives of lessons are clearly drawn up and intended outcomes are shared with the pupils.

Pupils respond enthusiastically to lessons and there is a very positive working relationship between staff and pupils. The lessons are clearly structured and purposeful. There was clear evidence that the teacher concerned has a very secure subject knowledge, plans effectively and sets clear objectives that are understood.

The department's assessment policy together with detailed records of tracking of pupils' progress is held on computer and is available to the leadership team and other teachers. During the lessons observed, pupils' understanding is assessed throughout the lessons by means of effective question and answer techniques.

The advanced ICT skills referred to in the school's self-evaluation were evidenced clearly in the lessons observed. These enhance the quality of the interaction between teacher and student and add value to the engagement of pupils throughout the lessons. The Head of Department has been involved in providing INSET to other members of staff on the use of the interactive whiteboard.

The provision within the RE department for pupils with SEN reflects the excellent provision overall across the school. Resources are produced in the department which are specifically concerned with the provision for pupils with special needs.

In the lessons observed the overall pace and challenge is good with opportunities afforded for spiritual and moral development. Pupils are positive in their attitude towards RE and engaged in some thoughtful discussion. It could be argued, however, that use of peer and self-assessment within lessons would have led to a greater sense of participation and enjoyment for the pupils.

Grade 2

The religious education curriculum

The percentage of curriculum time at Key Stage 4 is 10% which meets fully both diocesan requirements and those recommended by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. The percentage time at key Stage 3 is 6.67% which is significantly below this recommendation. Achievement of this recommendation in respect of curriculum time was noted as one of the ways in which the school could improve further at the last inspection (Section 23) in May 2001. The fact that the issue has failed to be addressed is, however, related to the critical issue of recruiting suitably qualified RE teachers.

The RE department is currently undertaking a review of the curriculum at both Key Stages 3 and 4. In an attempt to engage the pupils more fully at Key Stage 3, the department is exploring the possibility of introducing the National Project scheme Icons recommended by the diocese. In an attempt to drive up standards of achievement at Key Stage 4, the department is changing the Key Stage 4 specification from AQA (St Mark's Gospel and Christian perspectives) to Edexcel Catholic Christianity Unit C (Religion and Life based on a study of Catholic Christianity) and Unit J (Catholic Christianity)

Grade 2

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of the subject are outstanding. The department is led by a committed professional who has a clear vision for the department. She leads by example and is an excellent role model for both staff and pupils. She has ensured that the complete range of policies is kept up-to-date, reflecting ongoing curriculum development. The departmental records include comprehensive details of monitoring and tracking arrangements. The schemes of work include detailed lesson plans and a range of suggested resources. The school's self-evaluation describes accurately the situation within the RE department when asserting that "the Head of Department encourages and maintains a professional and effective working atmosphere".

Grade 1