



# Diocese of Westminster

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## INSPECTION REPORT

### **St Thomas More Catholic School**

Glendale Avenue, Wood Green, London N22 5HN

Telephone: 020 8888 7122

e-mail address: [headteacher@stthomasmoreschool.org.uk](mailto:headteacher@stthomasmoreschool.org.uk)

DCSF Number: 309 4703

URN Number: 102161

Headteacher: Dr Colm Hickey

Chair of Governors: Mr Issac Phillips

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Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Archbishop of Westminster  
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Date of inspection: 8<sup>th</sup> February 2010  
Date of previous inspection: 21<sup>st</sup> February 2005

Reporting Inspector: Mr D Scott

## **Description of School**

St Thomas More Catholic School is an 11-19 mixed Catholic comprehensive school in the Diocese of Westminster and is situated in the parish of St Paul the Apostle in Wood Green, in the borough of Haringey. It serves a community facing increasingly difficult social and economic challenges. The majority of pupils come from Edmonton, Hackney, Tottenham and Wood Green. 66% of pupils are baptised Roman Catholics; the remainder being from other Christian and non-Christian faiths. There are 69 teachers in the school of whom 59% are Catholic. Five hold the Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies (CCRS) qualification. The school is a specialist Sports College and holds the Full International Schools Award, Sportsmark and the Leading Parent Partnership Award. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is twice the national average at 27.3% (283 pupils) and 96.2% (926 pupils) of the pupils are from ethnic minority groups, which is almost five times the national average. The percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs, including those with statements, is 47.8% (460 pupils) which is over twice the national average, the largest group being those with behavioural, emotional and social needs. There are more boys than girls in each year group and attainment on entry is well below average.

### **Key for inspection grades**

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

## **Overall effectiveness of this Catholic school**

The Catholic life, leadership and management and provision for religious education are currently satisfactory, but are improving. The school, supported by the governors and the headteacher, shows a commitment to living its Mission Statement which emphasises the provision of an education which will enable each pupil to reach their full potential academically, personally and spiritually. The headteacher, leadership team and governors work hard to turn the school's mission aims into a living faith. Gospel values are evident in lessons and there are many opportunities to promote equality and respect. Staff can point to real successes in helping pupils overcome difficult histories and challenging episodes in their lives to again enjoy learning. Their development benefits greatly from the close links between the sports specialism and religious education. Team work, support for vulnerable members of the community, 'magnanimity in winning and graciousness in defeat' are characteristics encouraged by both areas.

**Grade 3**

### **Improvement since the last inspection**

Progress since the last inspection has been steady. Systems for self-evaluation have improved and are now conducted with a greater degree of rigour. Improvements have been made to the Chaplaincy and the provision of prayer in the school. Arrangements for the monitoring of assemblies and sharing good practice are working well but the evaluation of whole-school Masses and other large-scale events tend to be informal and anecdotal. Positive developments have been made in the teaching and assessment of religious education. Nevertheless, a number of these developments have been introduced relatively recently, and although 'green shoots' are beginning to emerge, it is still too early to assess their full impact.

**Grade 3**

## **The capacity of the school community to improve and develop**

The school has good capacity to continue to improve and develop. There is a clear vision and direction from the headteacher, leadership team, the religious education department, and governors to secure the very best education for all pupils. With an experienced and stable religious education department and the planned expansion of the Chaplaincy programme, the school is poised to accelerate its performance and is well placed to meet the exciting developments that lie ahead.

**Grade 2**

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make, so that they are consistently satisfactory or better by:
  - ensuring teachers use day-to-day assessments to provide activities that are challenging and are carefully matched to the varied needs of all pupils
  - asking probing questions in lessons which give pupils opportunities to develop and explain their ideas fully, especially for more able pupils
  - setting and reviewing targets more systematically with pupils so they clearly understand how to improve
  - ensuring that lessons are active with an emphasis on pupils' learning in order to increase the pace and in turn accelerate pupils' progress.
- Continue to raise standards in religious education by:
  - ensuring that tracking and monitoring information is analysed robustly by setting quantifiable measures against which to evaluate success
  - extending the capacity of leaders and governors still further to manage their areas of responsibility through coaching and training
  - improving the accuracy of self-evaluation in accelerating pupils' progress in religious education.
- Continue to strengthen the liturgical programme by:
  - appointing a new Chaplain
  - encouraging a higher participation in the prayer opportunities in the school
  - extending the Retreat programme to all year groups.

## **The Catholic Life of the School**

### **Leadership and Management**

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The headteacher communicates a strong sense of commitment in promoting the fullest personal development of all pupils. He has a clear vision for the Catholic life of school and is enthusiastically supported by the leadership team who are confident about their roles within the school. Governors are fully involved in the life of the school and care deeply about its well-being. They share their talents and expertise freely and wisely and are becoming increasingly confident in challenging and holding the school to account. The School's self-evaluation has accurately identified its strengths and areas for development and drawn up plans for improvement. Here, responsibilities and lines of accountability are clear and designed to enable middle and senior leaders to monitor and evaluate the work of the school with increased rigour.

**Grade 3**

## **The Prayer Life of the School**

The provision for prayer and collective worship is satisfactory overall. Much of the provision is led by staff but pupils are more involved than they were at the last inspection. They are generally attentive and orderly in assemblies, many of which provide a challenge for pupils to live up to. This was seen during the inspection when the Feast Day of St Josephine Bakhita was celebrated with a House Mass followed by a range of activities designed to strengthen pupils' awareness and understanding of her life and mission. Classroom prayers are an integral part of religious education lessons. Each House has its own Feast day Mass once a year; the whole school meets for the annual St Thomas More Feast Day Celebration Mass; and the recently introduced class Masses for Years 7-10. Opportunities for prayer in the Chapel take place each lunchtime, and whilst attendance at these has improved since the last inspection, as a proportion of the entire school it remains low. The use of music to support liturgy provides increased opportunities for spiritual reflection and development, for example with the recently formed Gospel Choir. The Retreat programme is offered to pupils in Year 7 and there are plans to extend this provision to other year groups, as the school recognises that this will offer good opportunities to deepen pupils' understanding of their faith. The Chaplaincy is currently organised on a rota basis of visiting priests who celebrate Mass and provide invaluable counsel during their visits. The school hopes to appoint a Chaplain for September 2010. Relationships with the local parish are excellent and pupils are keen to make use of the many opportunities for personal, moral and spiritual development. This is seen in the school's Mission to strive to help pupils to 'grow in their faith and to benefit from an enriching education'.

**Grade 3**

## **How effectively does the school promote community cohesion?**

The school is outstanding in its promotion of community cohesion. It works hard to ensure that there is a welcoming community atmosphere, where pupils' respect for those less privileged than themselves is clearly evident in the high levels of personal commitment to working together for the common good. Fund-raising activities support a number of pupil nominated charities including Catholic Children's Society and CAFOD where pupils raise money through their Advent and Lenten alms-giving. Pupils from a diverse range of backgrounds, difficulties and challenges are able to integrate successfully which fully supports the school's philosophy on inclusion. This has been demonstrated through its specialist Sports College outreach programme which has cultivated highly successful sports partnerships with 39 primary and 6 secondary schools in the borough. Pupils have also participated in 'Kick racism out of football' and a range of innovative projects in preparation for the Olympics. Pupils are encouraged to gain a global perspective as part of their spiritual journey. For example, younger pupils study Jewish views on complex social and moral issues in order to gain a greater understanding and tolerance of cultural differences. The school has developed a number of successful overseas partnerships with schools in Ghana, South Africa and Trinidad.

**Grade 1**

## **Religious Education**

### **Achievement and Standards in Religious Education**

The achievement and standards in religious education are satisfactory. Most learners make expected progress given their prior attainment. There is a generally improving trend at Key

Stage 3 and 4 with results broadly comparable to those of English. The achievement of more able pupils is beginning to accelerate and other groups of pupils, including those with specific learning difficulties, achieve similarly to their peers. The slight dip in the 2008 results was due mainly to significant staffing challenges. Nevertheless, in 2009 the department was successful in ensuring that almost all pupils achieved a pass in religious education at GCSE. The school's information on pupils' current attainment and progress indicates that just over half of Year 11 are on target to gain grade C or better in their GCSE examinations. Religious Education is an increasingly popular choice at post 16 with many students being very enthusiastic about the new accredited course open to them with many working towards post-16 Levels 1 or 2 qualifications.

**Grade 3**

### **Teaching and learning in Religious Education**

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education are satisfactory. Teachers display strong subject knowledge and commitment to teaching Catholic belief and religious literacy. Relationships between staff and pupils are good and the use of topical religious issues encourages pupils to think for themselves and to develop their own ideas. Where teaching is effective, the pace is fast, activities are varied and pupils' enjoyment is evident. In less successful lessons there is insufficient challenge, the pace is too slow, the delivery is unimaginative and there is an over-reliance on teacher-led activities. Assessment for learning is developing, with some good practice. However, although most pupils knew their targets or could locate them they were less clear as to what they needed to do to reach the next level. Marking needs to be more consistent and focused on giving 'next-step' guidance which is clearly linked to pupil-friendly level or grade criteria. Pupils with diverse learning needs are well supported.

**Grade 3**

### **Quality of the Curriculum**

The quality of the curriculum is good and meets the needs and aspirations of all learners. The liturgical year is well integrated into the life of the school and the religious education curriculum meets the Diocesan requirements of 10% of curriculum time. Schemes of Work for all Key Stages follow the Curriculum Directory and provide a systematic programme of study which is currently being adjusted to give more opportunities for pupils to reflect on contemporary moral and ethical issues. All pupils are taught to respect other faiths and cultures in order that they can live in a harmonious community where everybody matters. Visits to places of worship from other World faiths further deepen understanding and appreciation of global issues. At GCSE all pupils are entered for religious education and through a stimulating curriculum 'diet' are afforded many valuable opportunities to reflect on moral and ethical issues. Teachers make increasingly effective use of information communication technology (ICT) resources. However, the interactive nature of the whiteboards and the full utilisation of new technology in religious education classrooms have not yet been fully exploited.

**Grade 2**

### **Leadership and management of Religious Education**

The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory but are improving under the positive leadership of the head of department. Following a period of considerable staffing instability the department is now fully staffed with experienced religious education teachers.

The head of department has developed a good team ethos amongst the departmental staff. She cares deeply about her pupils and colleagues are supportive of one another and create and share resources freely. At the heart of the subject leader's vision for religious education is the establishment and maintenance of positive working relationships which permeates the department at all levels. Staff and pupils alike are very appreciative of this. As a group of pupils commented, 'teachers in religious education really enjoy their jobs; they are kind and are always happy to help you when you don't understand something'. Teaching and learning are monitored regularly and there are clear priorities for development. However, whilst self-evaluation is embedded in departmental practice, a greater degree of rigour is needed to ensure that all new initiatives and developments are clearly focused on accelerating pupils' progress and are fully realised by establishing more formal systems for the sharing of good practice to accelerate pupils' progress. The increasingly collaborative links between the religious education and PE departments further support the aims and ethos of the Specialist Sports College.

**Grade 3**