

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

High Street, Puckeridge, Hertfordshire, SG11 1RZ



Date of inspection by Westminster Diocese: 9 November 2017

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

A. Classroom religious education is outstanding

- The standard of religious education offered by the school is outstanding. High quality teaching and learning ensures that all pupils achieve their full potential.
- All groups of pupils achieve well. Standards of attainment are high and are better than in other core subjects.
- The content of classroom religious education fully meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory.
- Religious education is well planned, with interesting activities to engage and enthuse pupils. Pupils appreciate the value of religious education and its importance to their own lives. Interesting and varied activities are enriched by cross curricular links, which engage and motivate pupils.
- Pupils are very enthusiastic in their learning and demonstrate excellent understanding of religious literacy in both spoken and written form. They are keen to do well. Their behaviour is outstanding both in lessons and around the school. Pupils are friendly, confident, articulate ambassadors for the school.
- The quality of leadership and management of religious education is outstanding. Leaders demonstrate a purposeful commitment to continued school improvement. School self-evaluation is accurate, reflective and is strongly evidence based. Governors are conversant with current school data and fulfil their role of support and challenge.

B. The Catholic life of the school is outstanding

- The Catholic life of the school is outstanding, characterised by a distinctive warmth and sense of welcome. It enables pupils to celebrate and deepen their relationship with God.
- Religious education receives at least 10% curriculum time as required by the Bishops' Conference and is very well resourced.
- The mission statement is known by all and reflects the Church's mission in education. Beautiful displays and religious artefacts reflect the school's Catholic identity and enrich the learning environment.
- Prayer is at the heart of the school and is a real strength. Pupils are familiar with the traditional prayers of the Church and compose and share their own prayers. Pupils enjoy preparing and participating in worship and respond very positively.
- Pupils are fully aware of the need to work together in a community, be sympathetic and supportive to the needs of others and act with justice and inclusivity to all members of the school and wider community.
- The partnership between parents, school and parish is highly effective. Parents are appreciative of the school's inclusive approach.
- The headteacher and her team are passionate in their leadership and are committed to working to build further this strong Catholic community. Leaders including governors have high expectations and a strong vision for the school. They demonstrate a purposeful commitment to school improvement and to ensuring that the strong Catholic ethos of the school permeates all areas of school life.

A. Classroom Religious Education

What has improved since the last inspection?

The monitoring of religious education (RE) books has improved and as a consequence at least one piece of written work per week is evident in books. Coverage is closely monitored through work scrutiny and lesson observation.

The content of classroom religious education is outstanding

The content of classroom religious education fully meets the requirements of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory (RECD). In addition to a published scheme, the school uses other resources to enhance the learning of the pupils and further develop aspects of Catholic Social Teaching. Resources are used creatively to ensure the provision of an interesting and challenging curriculum. Medium term planning illustrates how the content of the RECD is studied across the key stages. There is a wide range of evidence to demonstrate how topics are revisited to show progression and greater depth, and resources are creatively used. Pupils have the opportunity of studying other faiths at an age-appropriate level each year, including Judaism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism.

Pupil achievement in religious education is outstanding

Pupil achievement is outstanding; all groups perform better in religious education than they do in other core subjects. Comprehensive systems of assessment in religious education ensure pupils make sustained progress and receive appropriate levels of support and challenge, but the school must work to ensure that the existing systems are consistently and robustly applied. Pupils are very enthusiastic in their learning and demonstrate excellent understanding of religious literacy in both spoken and written form. Their work reflects the considerable pride with which they approach their learning and they are keen to do well. Their behaviour is outstanding both in lessons and around the school. Pupils are friendly, confident, articulate ambassadors for the school.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

The typicality of teaching and learning in religious education is outstanding. Teachers are enthusiastic and convey this to the pupils. Careful planning, well-established routines and interesting activities ensure that pupils are engaged and learn well. Open questioning helps pupils to think deeply and reflect on their learning. During the inspection, lessons observed were good or better. Pupils were engaged and enthusiastic as teachers used open ended questioning, discussions with talk partners and an interesting selection of tasks and resources to deepen pupils' learning. In outstanding lessons, teachers demonstrated a deep understanding of the faith and imparted this to pupils in interesting and dynamic ways. There was fluidity about the pace of outstanding lessons, with pupils constantly challenged by well-tuned teacher expectations. In a Key Stage 1 lesson on the story of the Annunciation and how Mary might have felt, inspectors observed particularly creative approaches which allowed pupils to explore their own feelings towards an unknown gift. In another lesson, imaginative approaches were evident in 'hiding' resources for children to find. Such techniques ensured all pupils were engaged and made progress in the lesson, building excitement and anticipation into their learning. In most lessons observed, assessment opportunities building on previous learning were evident; the pace was lively and teaching strategies varied to meet pupils' needs. Evidence from conversations with individual pupils, members of the school council, workbook scrutiny and monitoring and planning files indicated very good practice.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in promoting religious education is outstanding

The quality of leadership and management of religious education is outstanding. Leaders demonstrate a purposeful commitment to continued school improvement and to ensuring that the strong Catholic ethos of the school permeates all areas of school life. School self-evaluation is accurate, reflective and is strongly evidence based. As a result of the continued focus on school improvement, there is an excellent understanding of the strengths and areas for development in religious education. Teachers are very well supported through shared resources, mentoring, monitoring and professional development. The headteacher has clear commitment to encouraging staff to develop with Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies. There is a creative approach to religious education which results in highly engaged and committed teaching and learning, and sustained progress being made across the key stages. Teaching is regularly monitored and although effective systems and structures are in place to monitor and assess pupil progress, the school recognises that this needs further strengthening to ensure that progress is equally scrutinised in the absence of key personnel. The school improvement plan clearly identifies issues for action and evaluates current provision effectively.

What should the school do to develop further in classroom religious education?

- In order to secure more consistent levels of outstanding teaching throughout, the school needs to provide more opportunities for pupils to take greater responsibility for moving aspects of their own learning forward.
- Continue to improve tracking, assessment and monitoring procedures to ensure that they are relevant and robust and progress is sustained.

B. The Catholic life of the school

What has improved since the last inspection?

The proportion of children participating in social justice activities has increased significantly. Links with other Lea Valley schools has led to further development in the prayer life of the school. A dedicated chaplaincy team, whose members were interviewed for the role, has been a driving force for pupil leadership and development and is now embedded in school life. Further links have been developed with an RE link teacher from a local Catholic secondary school. There has been significant development of the Catholic life on the school website. The introduction of Love in Action Caritas Catholic Social Teaching programme has yielded an increased emphasis on reflective practice, furthered links with the parish and provided welcome resources for parents. The school has reviewed its timetable to ensure that lessons are of an appropriate duration and time of day to ensure optimum pupil learning. Much impressive work has been undertaken to develop the Common Good and pupils understand the Gospel call to justice and service, both locally and internationally.

The place of religious education as the core of the curriculum

is outstanding

Religious education receives at least 10% curriculum time and has a budget which exceeds that of other core subjects. All teachers, including those new to the school, are well supported in improving their practice in the teaching of religious education and regularly attend diocesan training. The school makes excellent use of additional support from a local Catholic secondary school and is exploring ways in which to develop further links with other Catholic schools in the Lea Valley area. Resources are very good and are constantly reviewed and replaced when necessary. The learning environment is outstanding with attractive classroom displays and prayer tables which reflect the Church's year and are used as a focus during classroom liturgies. School leadership, including well informed governors, offer very good support in developing and reviewing the quality of religious education. Governors play a key role and are involved in self-evaluation and the school improvement plan. The priest from the local parish liaises with the school for a planned programme of Masses and liturgies and is a welcome regular visitor to the school.

The experience of Catholic worship – prayer and liturgy – for the whole school community

is outstanding

Prayer and worship are central to the life of the school for pupils and staff. The quality of collective worship is outstanding, offering a wide range of prayer and worship opportunities to develop and nurture the spiritual growth of pupils. Pupil's spiritual development is encouraged through the excellent opportunities they have for quiet reflection, sharing and discussion. Pupils, staff, governors and parents are included in a wide variety of liturgies, masses and other prayer and worship opportunities throughout the year. Pupils welcome their involvement in preparing and participating in these and respond very positively. The quality of the preparation of prayer opportunities enables worship to be a real celebration. Through the 'Chaplaincy Team', pupils are very much involved in the prayer life of the school and are skilled in helping to prepare and lead worship, supporting the understanding of younger years. They are familiar with a range of prayer forms including the traditional prayers of the Church and can confidently compose their own prayers which are shared with the wider community through the school newsletter and prayer books. Beautiful prayer focus areas in every classroom are well used and relevant. The mission statement is known by all and reflects the Church's mission in education. It is at the heart of school life. The experience of being in a praying community has a strong and visible effect on the development of all pupils and enables pupils to 'learn, love, respect and accept our responsibilities through our faith in Jesus Christ'.

The contribution to the Common Good – service and social justice –**is outstanding**

The school is a welcoming community which recognises the gifts and uniqueness of each individual. Pupils are encouraged to share their gifts with others in acts of service to the school through well-established systems including the school council and Chaplaincy Team. Pupils are fully aware of the need to work together in a community, be sympathetic and supportive to the needs of others and act with justice and inclusivity to all members of the school community. They understand the call to serve others and are knowledgeable about the wide variety of charitable causes for which they fundraise such as Cafod, The Brain Tumour Charity, and Barnardos amongst others. Conversations with pupils indicate that they have a very good understanding of the theology underpinning their support for people in need. Particularly powerful is the connection made between toilet twinning fundraising, raising awareness of social justice, the ethics of the marketplace and human dignity in an age appropriate manner. This has been driven by the Chaplaincy Team. Opportunities to nurture and celebrate achievement and talents are plentiful and ensure that every pupil is known, valued and respected.

The partnership with parents, school and parish, and collaboration as an integral part of the diocese through its relationship with the diocesan Bishop and those acting on his behalf**is outstanding**

The partnership between parents, school and parish is highly effective. Parish links are very good with the priest from the local parish serving on the governing body and actively engaged in the life of the school. Class Masses and informal visits help pupils and parents to see the Church as a vital part of school life, as does the involvement of the link governor. The school works closely with parents and families and keeps them very well informed through newsletters, questionnaires and consultations. The school welcomes parental participation and actively seeks to communicate a shared understanding of the mission of the school. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the provision offered by the school and spoke of it being a 'friendly, supportive and caring family' where 'all children were known as individuals'. In discussion with an inspector, one parent from a non-Catholic background described the school as 'brilliant'; another commented that they were 'delighted that their children embraced their faith on a daily basis'. The school participates fully in all diocesan activities and regularly attends both deanery and diocesan moderation of pupils' work. Senior leaders attend diocesan conferences and courses.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in promoting the Catholic life of the school**is outstanding**

The mission statement of the school is known by all and impacts on all policies, procedures and the daily life of the school. The headteacher and her leadership team have high ambitions for the school and work hard to ensure the Church's mission in education is demonstrated in a dynamic and creative way. They have built a strong and cohesive staff team united in their aim to deliver quality education in a Catholic community. All staff are made welcome and participate fully in the religious life of the school. Governors are committed and conscientious in their role. They know their school well and play an active part in the school community.

What should the school do to develop further the Catholic life of the school?

- Further develop the role of pupils in planning, preparing and leading school Masses and liturgies through the Chaplaincy Team.

Information about this school

- The school is a 0.5 form entry Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary school in the locality of Puckeridge.
- The school serves the three parishes of St Thomas of Canterbury and St Edmund of Canterbury and the English Martyrs, Puckeridge and Old Hall Green, and St Richard of Chichester, Buntingford
- The proportion of pupils who are baptised Catholic is 61%.
- The proportion of pupils who are from other Christian denominations is 25 % and from other faiths is 0 %. The remaining pupils are from families who have not declared a faith.
- The percentage of Catholic teachers in the school is 43 %.
- The number of teachers with a Catholic qualification is 3.
- There are 3 % of pupils in the school with special educational needs or disabilities of whom 2 have statements of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)/ Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well below average.
- The number of pupils speaking English as an Additional Language is well below average.
- There is a well below average rate of families claiming free school meals.
- 5 pupils receive the Pupil Premium (4 %).

Department for Education Number	919 3367
Unique Reference Number	117454
Local Authority	Hertfordshire

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Aided Academy
Age range of pupils	4 -11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on roll	121
The appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Breda Jackson
Headteacher	Mrs Michelle Keating
Telephone number	01920 821450
Website	www.stcanterbury.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@stcanterbury.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	April 2013
Grades from previous inspection:	
Classroom religious education	Very Good
The Catholic life of the school	Very Good

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out (i) under the requirements of the Canon 806 and (ii) in accordance with the Framework for Diocesan Inspections 2015 approved by the Archbishop of Westminster and (iii) under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

- The inspectors would like to thank the governors, headteacher, staff, pupils and parents for their co-operation over the conduct of the inspection.
- During the inspection 4 lessons or part lessons were observed.
- The inspectors attended 1 assembly and a 2 of acts of worship.
- Meetings were held with school staff, pupils and governors.
- Other evidence was gathered from contacts with parents through a questionnaire, scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work, observation of pupils in and out of lessons and examination of school documents.

Inspection Grades

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement
- Causing concern

Inspection Team

The inspectors are appointed by the Archbishop.

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Lead Inspector

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Shadow Lead Inspector

Mr Daniel Keane

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