



## **INSPECTION REPORT**

School: St Thomas More Roman Catholic Primary School  
Address: Evesham Road, Alkrington, Middleton. M24 1PY  
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URN: 105820

Headteacher: Mr Don McCorriston  
Chair of Governors: Mr Mark Gifford  
Religious Education Manager: Mrs Andrea Weekes

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

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Date of inspection: April 2012  
Date of previous inspection: June 2009  
Reporting Inspector: Mrs Margaret Dolan

## **Information about the school**

**St Thomas More's is a Roman Catholic voluntary aided primary school in the Diocese of Salford. It serves the parish of St Thomas More, Alkington. The school serves a large residential estate but also takes pupils from a wider catchment area. It is a larger than average primary school with 317 pupils on roll – 291 full time and 26 part time in the nursery. There are 311 Roman Catholic pupils. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average and the proportion of pupils who have English as an additional language is lower than average. 17 children are on the special needs register and 2 children have statements of Special Educational Need.**

**There are 15 teachers and all (100%) are of the Roman Catholic faith. 8 teachers have the Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies and 3 are working towards this qualification.**

## **Overall Effectiveness**

**Grade 1**

**St Thomas More's Roman Catholic Primary School is an outstanding school where pupils feel safe and cared for and parents are welcomed. Behaviour in the classrooms and around the school is excellent and this is achieved through positive reinforcement, encouragement and praise. There are high expectations of staff and pupils and the children are well motivated and keen to achieve high standards.**

**The staff and governors are justifiably proud of the prayer life and spiritual development of the pupils in the school. The pupils knowledge and understanding of their faith is exemplary and a great credit to the school staff, parish and families. There are many opportunities to celebrate Mass, take part in meaningful liturgies and to learn reflective and private prayer.**

**The headteacher with the support of staff and governors strives for high standards of achievement through excellence and enjoyment and attention to the spiritual development of the children.**

## **Capacity for sustained improvement**

**Grade 1**

**Capacity for sustained improvement at St Thomas More's is outstanding. The dedicated and enthusiastic headteacher and his staff are committed to the continuous faith life of the school and the Religious Education curriculum. The Religious Education manager is an excellent role model and ensures that all staff share the same vision of excellence in the development of the spiritual lives of the children.**

**The school mission incorporating the bringing of Christ to all is central to everything that happens in the school. The children feel safe and cared for and the relationships between staff, pupils and parents is excellent. The**

enthusiasm and motivation of staff, governors and pupils ensure that the school is well placed to maintain the very high standard of good practice.

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

There are no major issues to address. The school needs to maintain the excellent spiritual life of the school and to continue to deliver the outstanding practice seen in the Religious Education curriculum.

## **PUPILS**

### **How good outcomes are for pupils, taking particular account of variations between different groups**

Grade 1

St Thomas More's is an outstanding school. Attainment on entry is broadly average but pupils make good progress during their time at school and leave making above average progress. There are high expectations of achievement for all pupils and work is well differentiated to include pupils with special educational needs. Support is given where appropriate and the small number of pupils with English as an Additional Language are well catered for. Teachers use a variety of resources and teaching styles to cater for individual children's needs. The use of the Kagan style of cooperative learning enhances class discussion and debate including drama and hot seating. Classroom management and organisation is very good and there is a very calm, working atmosphere throughout the school.

The Sacramental Programme is well organised by the outstanding RE Manager. She is also a catechist within the parish and is fully supported by the school in its mission of bringing Christ to all. Other members of the school staff are also catechists alongside members of the parish community. Fortnightly Masses in church are organised by different classes and attended by the head teacher, deputy headteacher and other staff members. Prayer services in school are organised by class teachers and reflections during Advent and Lent, lead by the Religious Education subject manager, have made significant contributions to the children's understanding of their faith. Reconciliation takes place during Lent for Key Stage 2 children and by the school staff who lead by example. Holy Week services are well attended by parents and families as seen on inspection when the Religious presentation by Year 3 and Year 4 was repeated in the evening to accommodate parents who were unable to attend during the day.

Prayers are said at the beginning and the end of each day. There are also regular assemblies following the liturgical year that are planned and prepared with the children. The provision for liturgical music is enhanced by the music coordinator and by the accompaniment of the excellent school choir. Collective worship is very good and the prayer service seen on inspection, that began the day in the nursery was appropriate for the age of the children and referred back to the Lenten message of forgiveness. The children talked about caring, sharing and helping in Lent and sang 'Be careful little eyes,'

beautifully. The excellent prayer service in Year 5 reflected on Reconciliation. There was a focal display of a crown of thorns and each thorn was replaced by a rosebud by the children as they thought of what was distancing them from God and how during Lent they would turn back to God. In Year 3 the children sat around a display of spring flowers as a child read the story of the Garden of Gethsemane with great feeling. After a discussion of the story the children placed pebbles around the flowers and named a person they were going to pray for and try to do something special for that day. In the Key Stage 1 assembly observed on inspection, the children performed the story of Bartimaeus and considered our response to people who seem different. They also looked at the story of Zacchaeus and the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and they sang clearly whilst waving palms. After a short reflection the assembly finished with a well remembered rendition of Lord of the Dance. The behaviour of all the children was exemplary and the children left the hall in silence. The next day Year 3 and Year 4 presented 'Resurrection Rock' for the parents and parish community. The hall was full and there was a very good response from parents. The dramatisation, acting and singing was exceptional and the reverential way the story was retold was a fitting beginning for Holy Week.

The children are very aware of the needs of others both in their local community and internationally. The Mary Livesey Award for Friendship is presented to pupils who show a special regard for others and a Garden of reflection in being constructed in honour of the past member of staff. The children support local and charities including Fairfield Hospital and Caritas. In the diocesan Relay of Prayer, the school were partnered with Uganda as their special project. This has led to establishing links with an orphanage in Kampala and to an exchange of information as well as fund raising to help financially. The Relay of Prayer has been greatly enjoyed and has enhanced partnerships with local schools as well as international links.

The pupils are very proud of their school. Pupils personal development is reflected in their behaviour and their attitudes and care for others less fortunate. They also show a very good knowledge and understanding of their spiritual life and of all aspects of their Religious Education. Their understanding of the sacraments is exceptional and reflects on the good teaching and example of school staff as well as their families. The impact of this teaching was also seen when a child said that if someone was being unkind to him he would say a little prayer to God first to consider the best way to act. Children are given the opportunity to reflect on their spiritual lives through retreats arranged from Year 1 to Year 6.

The school council meet regularly and ideas are taken to staff and governors by the deputy headteacher. Older children act as playground pals and arrange activities for younger children and Year 6 help to care for the children in reception class. There are good liaison links with the High school which includes curriculum links and staff attendance at inter school events. Masses and religious events are also arranged to facilitate transition for pupils from Year 6.

## **How effective the provision is for Catholic Education**

**Grade 1**

**Effective provision for Catholic Education at St Thomas More's is outstanding. The quality of teaching is at least good with many outstanding aspects. Pupils overall attainment and knowledge of Religious Education is very good because teacher knowledge and understanding of the subject is good and Religious Education lessons are consistently well taught. Resources are updated regularly and well organised and the use of the whiteboard provides stimulation and enjoyment. There are high expectations of children and staff and a variety of teaching styles which include different writing genres, role play and higher order questioning. The use of Kagan strategies promotes and develops cooperative learning and engagement through mixed ability discussion groups. The children respond well to questions from the parish priest on his regular visits to school and in assemblies and prayer services.**

**The Religious Education manager monitors samples of pupils books each term and gives individual feed back to staff and reports back generally to whole staff on strengths and areas of development. A well presented file is updated termly with pupils levels and examples of assessment. Progress is enhanced by development and use of 'The Way, The Truth and The Life', and by the regular staff training and review. Lessons observed were well planned and delivered.**

**In a very good lesson observed in Year 3/4 the children reflected on what happened on Palm Sunday by 'hot seating' various members of the crowd including Jesus and the Pharisees. The children used good questioning skills and answered thoughtfully. The children then wrote newspaper reports on the events of that day. The work was well differentiated and was appropriate and was supported. A sense of awe was created in a lesson observed in reception class as a candle was lit. The story of Palm Sunday was displayed on the whiteboard and the children shouted 'Hosanna' as Jesus arrived in Jerusalem. The children were reminded about the events of Holy Week. The teacher used 'I wonder' questions to encourage the children to reflect on each event and then the candle was passed around and the children were able to 'say something special to Jesus.' Children in Year 5 reflected on how Jesus would have felt in the Garden of Gethsemane. Photographs of the children in role play taken the previous day, were displayed on the whiteboard and the children wrote down how they thought Jesus would have felt. The children were constantly encouraged and praised by their teacher. At the end of the very good lesson petals were placed in a bowl and the children considered how they could give Jesus one hour of their time. Children in Year 1 were looking at different aspects of The Stations of the Cross. The children responded well with different questioning skills, a good use of words and an extended vocabulary. All the pupils had a very positive attitude to the Religious Education curriculum. The school with the help of the music coordinator and the Religious Education manager has an excellent and constantly developing school choir. The choir takes part in local festivals as**

well as supporting and accompanying prayer services, assemblies and Masses in school and church.

## **LEADERS AND MANAGERS**

### **How effective leaders and managers are in developing the Catholic life of the School**

Grade 1

The Catholic life of St Thomas More's school is outstanding. The mission statement is regularly reviewed and displayed prominently around the school and it is the first thing you see as you enter the school. Parents are informed about the life of the school through monthly newsletters and a texting service delivers up to date reminders of school events. Parents attend Masses, prayer liturgies and assemblies in great numbers. They are also referred to information on the diocesan website and have been able to follow the relay of prayer through the evangelisation website. Parents are welcome to talk to members of staff informally as well as at regular parent/teacher meetings.

The dedicated and hard working headteacher with the support of the deputy headteacher and senior leadership team, are very committed to the spiritual development of the children and they are keen to encourage good relationships between pupils, staff, parents and the parish community. They have developed a staff culture of caring first and foremost for the pupils and making the children aware that they can approach a staff member if they have any worries or concerns. The Religious Education manager is held in high regard by the school and by parents and parishioners and she is an excellent role model for staff and pupils. The Religious Education curriculum is well organised, monitored and reviewed and aspects of the curriculum are regularly discussed and evaluated.

The Parish priest is a regular and welcome visitor to the school. He is keen to maintain the strong school and parish links and has noted the recent increase in the number of families attending Sunday Mass. The strong, professional governing body are very supportive of the school. They also act as critical friends and are willing when appropriate to question aspects and developments in school life. The governors are welcome to come into school to observe lessons and attend all school events making themselves visible and approachable to parents. Governors attend diocesan and local authority training and they are participating parish members. The chair of governors maintains weekly contact with the headteacher through visits, telephone conversations and e-mails. He is also keen to monitor the development of the Religious Education curriculum and often meets with the Religious Education manager. Many of the governors have skills from other disciplines that are introduced into the school to enhance management, observational and business skills.

