



# Archdiocese of Birmingham

## INSPECTION REPORT

### ST THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC FIRST SCHOOL REDDITCH

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Inspection dates 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> October 2009  
Reporting Inspector Brenda Beale

Inspection carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

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Type of School	Primary
Age range of pupils	4-9 years
Number on roll	192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governors	Mrs Laura Smiles
School address	Woodrow Centre Studley Rd Redditch Worcestershire B98 7RY
Telephone number	01527 525821
E-mail address	head@st-thomasmore.worcs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	June 2007
DCSF School Number	885/5202
Unique Reference Number	116910

**Headteacher** Mrs Elizabeth Fitton

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one Diocesan Inspector. The inspector visited three full religious education RE lessons to observe teaching and learning and students' behaviour, and held meetings with governors, staff, and groups of students. They observed the school's work, including Mass, assembly, prayer time and looked at a range of evidence, including key documentation such as the school's development plan, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in RE, and students' work.

## Information about the school

St Thomas More Catholic First School is a slightly smaller than average school situated in the parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Redditch. There are 192 pupils on roll, of whom 101 (52.6%) are baptised Catholics. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average but a significant number of children come from hard pressed backgrounds. More than a third of pupils are identified as having special or individual needs. Two pupils have statements. The majority of pupils are from White European backgrounds with 20%, slightly above the national average, from minority ethnic backgrounds. On starting school children's skills and knowledge are well below national expectations. The children enter the school from a wide variety of pre-school settings. The Catholic life of the school is supported by local priests and a deacon.

## Overall effectiveness of the school as a Catholic school

The provision for Catholic education in this school is good. Outcomes for all pupils are good as a result of good to outstanding teaching and a well planned spiritual and worship life. Achievement is predominantly average but pupils make outstanding progress. Pupils with special or individual needs are given excellent care and support and actions are taken to assist them in their learning and full participation in the Catholic life of the school. Pupils benefit greatly from the spiritual and worship opportunities presented to them. They enjoy RE lessons and consequently show consistent improvement. The school's capacity for improvement is good. Since the last inspection the school has put effective systems in place to monitor performance and has provided professional development particularly in the area of assessment which has led to improvement in the delivery of religious education. The RE subject leader, who was appointed prior to the last inspection has retired and a new appointment made, so there is further need for appropriate training and development. The school has made some headway with the use of ICT within RE lessons but progress has been restrained by financial considerations. The necessary equipment is now in place and teachers are seeking creative ways to use the facility in lessons. The headteacher and senior management team are highly motivated and have created a united team determined to drive the Catholic life of the school forward. They have put in place realistic but challenging plans that are rooted in an accurate analysis of the pupils' achievement and solid knowledge of the Catholic life of the school.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Provide training and identify resources to make greater creative use of ICT in lessons and collective worship.
- Identify and access training and professional development provided by the diocese for all staff but particularly for the newly appointed subject leader.

## How good outcomes are for individuals and groups of pupils

Standards in RE are generally average with a significant group of pupils attaining above average standards in their knowledge and understanding and their ability to reflect upon meaning of their faith. Progress is outstanding. Baseline assessment shows that on entry many pupils have very limited or no experience, knowledge and understanding of God, scripture, the Church and its teaching. Many come from backgrounds of little or no faith. Pupils concentrate hard and, in lessons observed, were rarely off task. They are fully involved in their lessons and show a willingness and keenness to succeed. To reach the levels of attainment achieved by the end of Year 4 all groups of pupils have made remarkable progress. Pupils do make very good progress because they enjoy their well planned and skilfully delivered RE lessons; thus although attainment is generally average learning and progress are outstanding. Assessment procedures, scrutiny of books and discussion with pupils during the inspection show that all groups of pupils make very good progress.

Pupils benefit considerably from and contribute greatly to the Catholic life of the school. They are reflective and enquiring due the support they are given and the positive approach of both teaching and support staff. They understand the importance of spiritual and moral values which impact favourably on their conduct and behaviour in school. Behaviour is outstanding and pupils are courteous and polite to both adults and other pupils. They show humour, care and consideration towards each other. They have a good knowledge and understanding of key celebrations in the school and liturgical year. They feel secure enough to express their own views willingly and with confidence. They are very aware and understand the necessity to give and receive forgiveness. The school provides a haven for those pupils who come from hard-pressed backgrounds.

The pupils' response to the excellent provision of collective worship is good. They are keen to participate and show respect and reverence and sing with gusto and enjoyment. Pupils sing a wide variety of hymns from memory. They are able to be reflective and appear to make prayerful use of silence. They are involved in the planning, preparation and delivery of liturgical celebrations. They have an appropriate knowledge of religious seasons. They are able to discuss a range of bible stories, religious artefacts and various forms of prayer. They appear comfortable and at ease when praying. They were fully involved during a lively and well-planned assembly and showed enjoyment and appreciation of a vibrant joyful Mass that was celebrated during the inspection.

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

The extent to which leaders and managers are effective in developing the Catholic life of the school is good. The headteacher and her senior management team fully understand and uphold the school's role in the mission of the Church. They are strongly committed to the Catholic life of the school through the provision of good religious education and making spiritual and moral development its highest priority. They have a range of monitoring systems and the whole staff work together to ensure good planning. Members of staff are effectively deployed to make sure religious education is delivered competently. The parish deacon's considerable contribution to developing the Catholic life of the school is greatly appreciated and encouraged by the leadership to provide support and guidance for pupils, their families and staff. Priests from the parish visit the school regularly. The staff are justly proud of the number of families who come forward through the school to be involved in the parish *Journey of Faith* programme. Areas for development are thoroughly considered and systematically tackled. Views of parents and pupils inform school development planning. Pupils' views are gathered through specific questionnaires, circle time and school and class councils. Parents' views are gathered through the parent governor, induction meetings, parent consultations, an open door policy and the return comment slips on annual reports. Pupils and staff have a high regard for the Catholic life of the school. Leaders systematically monitor and evaluate religious education and other aspects of the Catholic life of the school and improvement is consistent and built on areas of strength. Areas in need of development are identified because the headteacher and her senior management team have an accurate view of the school. Consequently outcomes for pupils and their families are good.

The governing body is thorough and well organised and has the ability to assist and influence the development of the Catholic life of the school. The governors effectively discharge their duties and responsibilities in regard to the school's Catholic Foundation. They are well informed through monitoring processes, regular sub-committee meetings, the link RE governor, visits to the school and the headteacher's report and deacon's chaplaincy report. Governors are involved in setting priorities for improvement and ensuring a target related to the Catholic life of the school is included in the headteacher's performance management plan. The governors are very aware of the barriers encountered by the school to learning in religious education and they know what the school is doing to overcome them. The governing body provides challenge and support for the staff and is very mindful of the spiritual and physical well-being of all members of the community.

Governors and leaders are highly effective in promoting community cohesion. Quality provision for and inclusion of all is a very high priority and is shared by all staff and governors. For the headteacher it is a central goal; it is deeply rooted in gospel values and her personal commitment to the teaching of Christ. Children and people of all backgrounds are made to feel welcome and whilst pupils are taught to value the Catholic faith they are also encouraged to respect people of other faiths or those with none. Pupils' friendships cross cultural, faith, social and economic boundaries. The school works closely with extended services to ensure the best possible outcomes for its pupils. The school shares a site with the Woodlands Centre which is used for many *Sure Start* and other community schemes. The school takes full advantage of this to support some of its pupils with disadvantaged backgrounds. The school has many links with the parish and the deacon is particularly successful in working with pupils, parents and staff. Several members of staff attend Mass in the parish providing additional links between home, school and parish. The school is proud of the number of families who have been received into the Church or are gently encouraged back to the practice of their faith. The arrival of Polish and Keralan families to the community has had a positive effect on the practice of the Faith in both school and parish. This has been welcomed and encouraged by the school. Although the school is not in an area of great affluence the children respond generously to the needs of others. During the inspection Year 4 held a successful fundraising event for CAFOD which involving the participation of all and resulting in a profitable outcome. The children understood the reasons for their work and how it would help others in a distant community. The school is involved in a range of local activities and initiatives. Parents are made to feel welcomed and their contribution to the life of the school is valued. The school works closely with those families who are hard pressed and experiencing difficulties.

## **The quality of the school's work in providing Catholic education**

Teaching observed during inspection is predominantly good with some that is outstanding. Staff are effectively deployed to ensure pupils receive their lessons from teachers with good subject knowledge. Support is provided by the school deacon and senior members of staff to ensure good quality delivery of the curriculum. As a consequence pupils enjoy and are interested in their learning and they make very good progress. Pupils' achievement is tracked and assessment informs teachers' planning so that work and activities are matched to ability and needs. Lessons observed were lively and creative. Good questioning, well deployed skilled support staff, excellent pupil behaviour and an ethos of calm and security ensure pupils make very good progress and the best possible level of achievement. ICT is used to support learning; the use of whiteboards, laptops and video recording is in evidence, but the school has identified the need and has plans for further development in this area. Pupils are aware of how well they are doing and in Year 4 there is evidence of self assessment. The time allocation for RE meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference and the curriculum fulfils the *Curriculum Directory for Religious Education*. The pupils follow the diocesan *Curriculum Strategy for Religious Education*. Long term planning is clear and explicit and medium term planning is incorporated into individual teacher's planning. The RE curriculum and Catholic life of the school provide very good opportunities for spiritual and moral development.

The curriculum is enriched by good sacramental preparation and well planned and resourced collective worship. Pupils and staff pray together and Masses and assemblies are attended by parents. Pupils lead prayer and are involved in the planning and preparation of liturgies and assemblies. The curriculum and school activities foster pupils' awareness of the needs of others in the wider world.