



DIOCESE OF BRENTWOOD



Inspection Report

Name of School: St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Unique Reference Number: 115180

Inspection Date: 4 October, 2012

**Reporting Inspectors: Dr Michael Sutherland-Harper and
Mrs Maureen Cosgrave**

This Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

**Type of School: Primary
School Category: Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils: 4 -11
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 628
Appropriate Authority: The Governing Body
Date of previous inspection:
24.9.2007**

**School Address:
Ward Avenue
Grays
Essex
RM17 5RW
Tel. No. 01375 375826
Fax No. 01375 390572
Chair of Governors: Mrs Patricia Wilson
Headteacher: Mr Christopher Birtles**

Introduction:

The Inspection was carried out under Section 48 of the Education (Schools) Act 2005 by two inspectors appointed by the Diocesan Bishop at the request of the Governing Body of the School.

The Inspectors acknowledge and are appreciative of the full support, co-operation and courtesy they enjoyed from the Governors, Headteacher, Staff and Pupils of the School both before and during the Inspection. The Inspectors wish to express their gratitude to all concerned.

The focus of the Section 48 Inspection was:

- Classroom Religious Education
- The Catholic nature of the School through:
 1. Worship
 2. Links with the Catholic and wider community
- Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development

The Section 48 Report

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School
Ward Avenue
Grays
Essex
RM17 5RW

Head Teacher: Mr Christopher Birtles

Date of Inspection: 4 October 2012

Description of the School:

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School is a larger than the average-sized primary school. It is situated in Grays in the county of Essex and in the diocese of Brentwood. The school serves the parishes of St Thomas of Canterbury in Grays and St Peter in Stifford Clays.

Record of Evidence Base:

Two Diocesan Inspectors were in the school for the equivalent of two inspection days.

- The study of pre-inspection documentation including the Self-Evaluation Form/ Denominational Provision (SEF/DP).
- The observation of fifteen lessons.
- Scrutiny of pupils' written work.
- Meetings with the Headteacher, the Head of Religious Education (R.E.), the Chair of Governors and pupils.
- Observations of R.E. displays in the classrooms and around the school.

What the School does well:

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School is a good school. The school lives out its mission statement by showing respect and consideration for others in a safe and loving environment. Catholic provision is good in this well laid out, accessible school. The school is an inclusive community which offers good practical support to its pupils who are regarded as part of one Church family. St Thomas of Canterbury has good links to local parishes and an awareness of its responsibility to others. Knowledgeable and capable staff are well supported in their work by dedicated teaching assistants and benefit from the experienced leadership of an astute headteacher.

Learners achieve well because of their good behaviour and attitudes in response to good teaching. Teaching is good with a careful blend of teacher and pupil input in lessons but lessons are occasionally teacher dominated so that opportunities for pupils to achieve their full potential become more limited. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Together with a range of appealing resources and good use of questions to develop understanding, they use their strong understanding of each individual pupil to take learning forward. Lessons are, however, not yet outstanding across the school because expectations of what the pupils will achieve through challenging independent work are occasionally inconsistent and opportunities for them to take the lead in lessons are fewer in such lessons. There is sometimes a too rigorous emphasis on following the lesson plan at the expense of that spontaneous and pupil-led reflection which can bring learning to full bloom. A slight modification of planning in the best lessons accounts more carefully for the developmental needs of learners.

Provision of Religious Education (R.E.) is good. The new head of department has clear ideas about how to take the subject forward across the school and is working carefully to co-ordinate the delivery of the new 'Come and See' programme of study. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used creatively to deliver the subject and good attainment is the result of careful planning of how to put the subject across. Assessment procedures are good but could be enhanced by ensuring that pupils are always aware of how to reach the next steps in their learning journey and have increased opportunities to self-assess their work so they understand what they still have to do. Challenge to pupils to

provide extended answers through the consistent use of higher order questions – how and why – is at an early stage of development in some classes.

Clear leadership at departmental level is matched by effective work on the part of school leaders to take the school forward. R.E. is linked to the delivery of literacy and the religious and prayer life of the school but links with personal, social and health education (PSHE) are at an earlier stage of development. All pupils have equal opportunities to learn in this inclusive school and the school seeks to recruit high quality staff to make sure that learning is of a high quality.

The school has strong links with local parishes which help to develop its liturgical life in conjunction with the clearly delineated prayer corners in each classroom, focused assemblies and the calm, orderly atmosphere around the school. Pupils feel well supported so that they are confident in expressing their feelings and in asking for help to resolve any problems in their lives. Pupils have a very good understanding of their faith and of the Mass because they live it out each day in school. As a result, provision for prayer, collective worship and liturgical life is outstanding.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is of a high standard. The school provides clear moral guidelines about right and wrong which are understood by all pupils. Expectations of good behavior are high. Pupils and adults support others well. The school has good links with local churches and other spiritual centres. The sense of awe and wonder is enhanced by good display around the school but there are some inconsistencies in increasing that sense in the classroom when staff are too concerned with the timing of activities at the expense of those moments when reflection reveals deeper truths. The school benefits from a rich cultural mix amongst its pupils but the school is at an early stage of exploring this richness across the curriculum to feed into pupil development.

The school has a good capacity for sustained improvement because its self-evaluation is accurate, all staff work well together under the careful guidance of the head and his experienced senior staff and supportive governors are committed to the school and its welfare. Governors are now raising the challenge they offer to the school as it seeks to move even further forward. The confident, articulate pupils who make up the school are keen to support its work in any way they can and are ready to become ambassadors for their school in the world outside.

What needs to be improved?

- **Increase multi-cultural display and communication with all parents and carers to bring the rich cultural mix and heritage of the school community further into development of the R.E. curriculum. Develop links between R.E. and PSHE.**
- **Ensure that lessons are not teacher dominated and that pupils have many opportunities to be challenged through working independently, self-assessment and leading learning in the classroom.**

The Inspectors endorse the areas identified by the school for improvement in the Section 48 Self-Evaluation Form.

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School is a good Catholic school. The experienced head teacher, capable staff, governors and pupils are all keen to take the school to the next level and are well on their way. Self-evaluation is accurate and focused and therefore the capacity for continuing improvement is good.