

INSPECTION REPORT

**ST THOMAS OF CANTERBURY
 ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL
 BOLTON**

Inspection date January 2010

Reporting Inspector Joan Duffin

Inspection carried out in accordance with Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Type of School Catholic Primary/Secondary

URN 105221

Age range of pupils 4-11

Number on roll 336

Appropriate authority The governing body

Chair of Governors Mr. Paul Lochery

Headteacher Mrs. Frances Lysyj

Religious Education Co-ordinator Mrs. Cecilia Tandy

Date of previous inspection January 2007

The Inspection judgements are:	Grade	Explanation of the Grades 1 = Outstanding 2 = Good 3 = Satisfactory 4 = Inadequate
Overall effectiveness of the school	1	
Leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school	1	
The quality of Collective Worship	1	
Achievement and standards in Religious Education	2	
The quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education	1	
The quality of the Religious Education curriculum	1	
Leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education	1	
<i>The following pages provide reasons to support these judgements</i>		

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Thomas of Canterbury is a voluntary aided Roman Catholic primary school which serves the parishes of St. Thomas of Canterbury, St. James the Great and St. Edmund in Bolton. The school is situated in a residential area of Bolton. The age range of learners is 4 to 11. The indicative admission number is 45 and there are currently 336 pupils on roll. 316 pupils are baptised Catholics. Learners come from a wide range of socio- economic backgrounds. Most are white British. 29 learners have been identified as having special educational needs and 6 of these have a statement of special educational need. 14 of the 17 teachers (82%) are Catholics.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

St. Thomas of Canterbury is an outstanding school. It has very strong Catholic values which establish a very good climate for work. The Catholic life of the school and the range and quality of provision for collective worship are outstanding. The well informed governing body offers challenge and support to the headteacher. The headteacher is an outstanding leader who has a clear vision of what makes an excellent Catholic school. Together with the Religious Education curriculum leader she sets clear direction for the teaching of curriculum Religious Education. The standards attained in curriculum Religious Education are good. Less able pupils are well supported by teachers and support staff. More able pupils are not always challenged to achieve their potential. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Systems of assessment and tracking of pupils' progress are in place. These now need to be used more effectively to raise standards further. The curriculum is well planned. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They show respect for themselves and others. There is excellent provision for pupils' spiritual and moral development. Opportunities are taken to foster pupils' awareness and respect for other faiths and cultures and to promote community cohesion. All members of staff fully support the Catholic ethos of the school. Excellent relationships exist between the school, parents, parish and the wider community.

Improvement since the last inspection

Following the last Section 48 inspection in January 2007 the school was asked to continue to implement development plans already agreed and established. It has worked hard to do this.

Capacity to improve

The school's self-evaluation is accurate. Priorities for Religious Education and the Catholic life of the school have an appropriate place in the School Improvement Plan and in its action plans. The headteacher has a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and its areas for development. The headteacher, staff and governors are committed to improvement. There is, therefore, an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standards in curriculum Religious Education by using the results of the established systems of assessment and tracking more effectively.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

The leadership and management of the Catholic life of the school are outstanding. The Mission Statement lies at the heart of the school's aims, policies and expectations. The governing body fulfils its role well in relation to the school's Catholic foundation. It has knowledge of the Catholic life of the school through headteacher reports, the close involvement of the chair and other governors in the life of the school such as the class governor initiative. The very knowledgeable and experienced parish priest, who is also a governor, is a frequent and welcome visitor to the school. The headteacher has a clear vision of the nature of the Catholic school and, together with the Religious Education curriculum leader, promotes the Catholic life of the school very effectively. All members of staff promote learners' spiritual and moral development in all they do. There is a very strong Catholic ethos in the school. Community cohesion is strongly promoted. Pupils gain an understanding and respect for other faiths and cultures through, for example, the close links with two local schools with very different cultural diversity. The parish based Sacramental Preparation Programme is well planned and run very effectively with strong support from the school. Children are given many opportunities to care for those less fortunate than themselves by supporting charities such as CAFOD, cystic fibrosis and the Bolton hospice. The choir sings for local groups and takes part in services with the parish choir.

THE QUALITY OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Provision for collective worship in the school is outstanding in relation to the range and quality of opportunity available. The liturgical life of the school is well planned by the Religious Education curriculum leader, the headteacher and the parish priest. Whole school Masses are held at the beginning and end of term and the school joins the parish community in church on Holydays. Class Masses are led by the pupils with support from their teachers. Whole school and class based assemblies are well planned and reflect liturgical and curriculum themes. The excellent whole school assembly observed during the inspection was led by a Lower Key Stage 2 class. It involved drama, poetry, singing, a Powerpoint presentation and a Gospel reading to convey the message that we should celebrate all the things which make us unique. The children responded prayerfully and the governor and many parents who attended were pleased with them. Pupils left with a mission - to treat others as they would like to be treated. A timetable of reconciliation services provides pupils with an opportunity for reflective thinking. Each classroom has a prayer focus. All families are provided with a copy of the school prayer book. The liturgical year is acknowledged with Harvest, Advent and Lenten celebrations. Extracurricular activities such as JAM (Jesus and me), the prayer group and the choir provide further opportunities for pupils to develop their own prayer life. In the prayer group session observed a calm, prayerful atmosphere was created by the use of candles and soft music. Pupils were encouraged to reflect on the plight of the children on Haiti and how they could help. Collective worship makes an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Achievement and standards in Religious Education are good. Pupils' attainment on entry to school is slightly above that which is expected nationally. They make good progress and, by Year 6, their attainment is good. Learners with special educational needs are very well supported by teachers and support staff and achieve well. Learners of above average ability are not always challenged to achieve their potential. The school is aware of this and has plans to develop the systems already in place in the school to identify more able pupils in Religious Education through a skills analysis. The school is encouraged to continue with this initiative. Systems of assessment and standardisation of pupils' work have been established and are developing well. Assessment for Learning is used to inform planning and a tracking system enables staff and learners to monitor progress. Pupils are confident in discussion and respond to teachers' questioning with knowledge and understanding. Learners are familiar with stories from the Old Testament. They have a good knowledge of the life and teachings of Jesus and can apply these to their own lives. Pupils' written work is developing well and benefits from the cross-curricular emphasis on writing. The school provides very well for pupils' spiritual and moral development. The children have a clear idea of right and wrong. Their behaviour during the inspection was exemplary. Pupils are given opportunities to develop leadership, independence and responsibility through their involvement in the School Council and Eco Warriors and with older pupils helping younger ones.

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. The teaching observed during the inspection ranged from good to outstanding. Lessons are well prepared and conducted at a pace to maintain interest and enjoyment. Questioning is effective with good use of open-ended questions. The use of technology is very well developed. An outstanding lesson observed in Upper Key Stage 2 made excellent use of the interactive whiteboard to tell the story of Don Bosco when exploring the challenges faced when following our vocation. The pupils were faced with a series of thought provoking situations to put themselves in and they responded with thoughtful and insightful answers. Creativity is encouraged. An outstanding lesson in Lower Key Stage 2 used drama and sound effects to explore how Elijah spoke to God. The pupils were fully involved and planned the activities themselves very successfully. At the end of the lesson a period of reflection enabled the children to learn how they, too, can speak to God. A good lesson observed in the Foundation Stage used an altar, font and role play to enable the children to learn about Baptism. This was a follow-up to a lesson in church with the parish priest. The children were then able to reinforce their learning with activities in the classroom. Teachers ensure the purpose of the lesson is shared with the pupils and often consolidate learning with a plenary session. Marking is good with most teachers taking the opportunity to advise learners of ways in which they can improve their work.

THE QUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The Religious Education curriculum is outstanding. It meets diocesan and national requirements in respect of time allocated to curriculum Religious Education. Governors are given regular updates on the Religious Education curriculum from the headteacher, curriculum leader and the Religious Education link governor. The school uses the diocesan curriculum *REvision 2000* and teachers have been asked to use creativity in their planning and to make use of cross-curricular links especially with writing. The curriculum is adapted for mixed age classes. Teachers' planning and pupils' work are scrutinised and effective feedback given. Systems of assessment and standardisation ensure that effective teaching and learning are taking place. Excellent resources, including interactive whiteboards, are used to good effect. Curriculum provision is enhanced by prayer and worship and the extracurricular activities offered. The school choir is made up of a mixed group of children and attains a very high standard. The study of World Religions, Multi Faith Week, visits to the Jewish Museum and visitors to the school promote community cohesion and provide an opportunity for pupils to develop an awareness and understanding of other faiths and cultures. Excellent links with the associated high school ensure a smooth transition for pupils. The caring relationships between all members of the school and parish community create a happy atmosphere. Parents are pleased with the school and pupils are happy to attend. The clean, bright attractive rooms and excellent displays contribute to the effective working environment.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The leadership and management of curriculum Religious Education are outstanding. The governors provide support and challenge to the headteacher. They are well informed of the curriculum and its delivery. The parish priest who is also the link governor for Religious Education advises, challenges and supports staff in fulfilling their mission. The headteacher sets a clear direction for the teaching of Religious Education. The Religious Education curriculum leader has a clear view of her role and is developing it well. The school's self-evaluation is accurate. The diocesan guidelines for assessment and standardisation are in place together with a tracking system and the use of Assessment for Learning. The non-Catholic teachers have support from the curriculum leader, the headteacher and the parish priest. One of them has obtained the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies. Religious Education is well represented in the School Improvement Plan and its action plans. The staff have embarked upon a series of learning walks to share good practice. Parents are kept well informed through reports, parents' evenings and regular newsletters. Equality of opportunity for all is promoted and the excellent behaviour of the pupils contributes to this. All members of staff uphold the Catholic ethos of the school and help to create an atmosphere of happiness and belonging. The school is committed to creating an effective learning environment with Christ at the centre.