

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

URN: 147431

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Arundel & Brighton

08–09 May 2025

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

2

Catholic life and mission (p.3)

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission

1

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

1

Collective worship (p.7)

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

2

The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference

Yes

The school is fully compliant with any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop

Yes

The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection

Fully

Compliance statement

- **St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School** is compliant with the general norms of the Bishops' Conference in relation to 10% curriculum time.
- The school implements the diocesan bishop's requirements in relation to phased implementation of the *Religious Education Directory* and the Relationships, Sex and Health Education curriculum stipulation.
- The school has fully responded to the areas of improvement from the previous inspection.

What the school does well

- Leaders and governors ensure that the Catholic ethos permeates all aspects of school life and is at the core of the school community 'Christ is at the heart of the school'.
- All pupils thrive and are passionate to live out the school's mission at home and in the wider community.
- Pupils make excellent progress in religious education and achieve very high standards.
- Leaders have a clear and inspiring vision of religious education which is successfully communicated to all staff; therefore, the quality of teaching is consistently outstanding.
- The school's environment authentically witnesses its Catholic identity with many dedicated spaces for prayer and reflection.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve the monitoring and review cycle for prayer and liturgy so that leaders can accurately identify strong practice and plan how to disseminate across the school.
- Ensure that all staff have a shared understanding of high-quality collective worship in order to significantly enhance the prayer experience for all pupils.

Catholic life and mission

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

Catholic life and mission key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

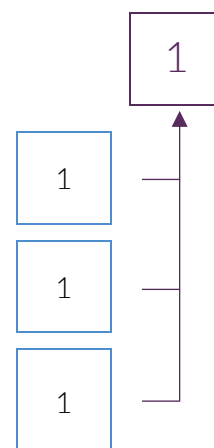
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school



Pupils at St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School are joyful, energetic and determined to fully live out the school's Catholic mission. They understand, embrace and can clearly articulate what makes their Catholic school different from other schools: several pupils summed this up as 'Christ is at the centre'. They can give countless examples of how they put this into practice, talking for example about friendship for all and 'always putting others first'. Because of their deep understanding of how to apply the principles of Catholic social teaching, they especially relish the many opportunities to serve those most in need and care for our common home, demonstrating this, for example, by raising money for Mary's Meals and Cafod or by joining the school's Eco-Warrior team. A particular highlight is the school's well-developed link with a school in Busenya, which was spoken about enthusiastically by many pupils. Pupils have a distinct sense that everyone is valued and cared for as unique persons. This can be seen, for instance, in the deep levels of respect they show towards each other, telling inspectors that they must 'treat other people as we wish to be treated ourselves'. Pupils know and wholeheartedly own the school's 'Golden Threads' and as a result their behaviour is exemplary.

Christ is clearly and consciously at the heart of St Thomas of Canterbury. This is witnessed through the strong sense of community, the exceptionally high quality of relationships, and the warm welcome that embraces you as soon as you walk through the door. Through these relationships, exemplified by the love and care they show for their pupils, staff embrace the school's Catholic life and mission. As one staff member told inspectors, 'Catholic life is at the heart of everything we do in St Thomas'. Staff enthusiastically participate in all aspects of school life from attending important Masses at the parish churches to welcoming their partner school colleagues from Busenya. They care deeply about the most vulnerable in their community and

are proud to support them, for instance with free clubs and childcare, wellbeing clubs and a group for young carers. The school's physical environment is exceptionally well cared for and is an excellent witness to its mission. Spaces such as the prayer garden, class prayer areas, and the myriad of beautiful displays throughout the site effectively promote the school's Catholic ethos.

Leaders and governors diligently ensure the school lives out the Church's educational mission. The headteacher inspires the whole community through her faith-driven leadership and her example permeates to other staff and pupils. Staff feel extremely well cared-for and talk of the school family that is always there for them. As one staff member put it, 'we can knock on any door at any time and we will always get support'. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school, saying that their children are happy and safe: they are proud that their children attend St Thomas', one parent sharing that 'no amount of money could provide what this school provides'. Governors are very well organised and committed to ensuring the outstanding Catholic character of the school. They are kept fully informed about the school's Catholic life and challenge leaders appropriately. There are exceptionally well-embedded links with the local parish: members of the clergy are regular and welcome visitors to the school and many parishioners are volunteers in school, for instance, listening to pupils read. The school equally sees itself at the service of the parish, for example by identifying families in need of parish support, contributing to foodbanks and leading a termly Sunday Mass.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

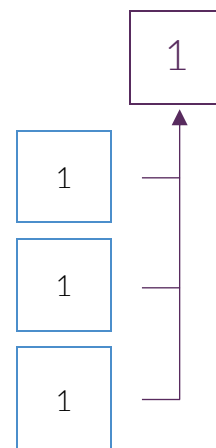
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for religious education



Pupils are passionate about their learning in religious education and say they really enjoy their lessons: their behaviour and engagement is exemplary. They make excellent progress in knowing more and remembering more because they routinely recall and consolidate prior learning before acquiring new knowledge, which increases their confidence. The school's innovative 'Rediscover' strategy enables pupils to recall knowledge from previous terms as well as make links to their current learning. For example, in a Year 3 lesson, pupils related their work on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit to previous learning about Pentecost. They subsequently speak confidently about what they have learned and use technical vocabulary accurately and with ease: in a Year 5 lesson observed, pupils were confidently using phrases such as evangelisation and spiritual growth to write an advert about the benefits of confirmation. Pupils produce work that is of a consistently high quality and which shows an admirable range of tasks through which to display their learning, such as writing diaries, art and craft work and drama activities. Many parents commented on how much their children enjoy religious education, with one parent saying, 'My daughter has even looked up Bible verses at home to read them in context after having discussed them in class.'

Teachers are deeply committed to the value of religious education and understand its importance as a core subject in a Catholic school. They always have high expectations and demonstrate secure subject knowledge because of the good quality support they receive. As a result, they enthuse pupils and challenge them to achieve high standards. In a Year 6 lesson, for example, pupils were asked to decide on the nine most important reasons why Christians believe in the Resurrection. Effective questioning is a real strength throughout the school and teachers are skilled at encouraging deeper thinking by asking probing follow-on questions, such as 'how do you think the apostles knew they needed the strength of the Holy Spirit?'. All pupils, including

those with Special Educational Needs/Disabilities are challenged to attain the more demanding learning objectives, regardless of their previous achievements, and are effectively supported through scaffolding and support from staff. Teachers plan varied and creative opportunities to maximise learning, such as the use of role play and playdough to demonstrate the story of Pentecost in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the use of puppets and *Godly Play* for the story of the walk to Emmaus in Year 1.

Leaders and governors ensure that religious education aligns with other core subjects when making decisions about staff training, resourcing, timetabling and staffing as evidenced by the high quality of work completed by pupils. The subject leader for religious education has a compelling and inspiring vision for the subject and, alongside the headteacher, she is forensic in her monitoring, evaluation, and improvement approach: this ensures a consistently excellent standard of teaching in the school. She has developed planning and lesson formats that ensure all pupils make progress and she leads regular staff workshops to disseminate strengths and areas for improvement with all staff. Staff feel fully supported by leaders and work together to share their expertise for the benefit of the whole school; they are confident in asking for support and guidance when necessary. Leaders and governors have a self-evaluation and monitoring schedule for religious education, which is rigorous, challenging, and searching; governors and leaders are jointly involved in regular learning walks which are then fed back to the governing body. This enables governors to understand and check the quality of provision and provide appropriate challenge and support for leaders.

Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

2

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

2

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship

2

2

Pupils respond enthusiastically to the opportunities they have to participate in prayer provided by the school. They are keen to lead in such ways as reading aloud and writing prayers. Most pupils are engaged by the prayer opportunities they experience, but in several collective worships observed, some pupils were not attentive and fully participating in the worship. Pupils work well with each other and with staff to prepare and lead class worships, undertaking roles and ministries appropriate to their age. In early years, for example, pupils were invited to light the candle, lead the sign of the cross and offer spontaneous prayer, while in a Year 5 worship observed, a group of pupils prepared and led the entire liturgy. While the involvement and preparation by pupils is confident and admirable, these experiences are not always of a high enough quality to engage all pupils deeply. Pupils regularly evaluate the prayer and liturgy they have experienced, using for example worship evaluation templates and prayer journals. However, their reflections are not developed well enough to identify how to improve next time. They do not yet have an impact on improvements in the school's provision. Pupils know the liturgical cycle and that the Church uses colours to show the different times of the year. They know there are times of the year when specific prayers and services are appropriate, for example, a Passion play during Lent and praying the rosary during May and October.

Prayer and liturgy are central to school life. Regular opportunities for worship are embedded within the school timetable, reflecting a variety of prayer opportunities and promoting regular pupil involvement. These include a range of traditional prayers, scripture-based worship and more formal liturgy such as Mass and Stations of the Cross. Although worship is well planned and threaded through school life, several collective worships observed did not always engage participants fully and deeply. Staff require further training on the use of focal points, music and art forms to ensure collective worship experiences are engaging, accessible and relevant for all

pupils. Leaders make imaginative and creative use of the school site to provide many and varied spaces conducive to prayer. Pupils and staff speak of the well-used prayer garden and prayer room, explaining how they can use them whenever they feel the need to pray or be still and quiet. There are many opportunities for parents to be involved in prayer and liturgy; for example, invitations to class worship and Masses, prayer bags sent home weekly and the Travelling Crib during Advent. Of particular note is the monthly parent prayer group which is highly valued by parents as an opportunity to pray for the school community.

Leaders and governors have ensured a prayer and liturgy policy is in place, which defines a route for pupils' clear progression for developing their participation skills in each year group. The school calendar for prayer and liturgy is carefully planned alongside the parish team to include holy days of obligation and other important times within the church year, such as Ash Wednesday, Lent and Advent. Leaders have devoted much time to supporting staff to improve their practice; however leaders need to ensure that all staff have a clear and shared understanding of what makes a high-quality prayer and liturgy experience in order to deeply engage all pupils. Leaders, including governors, regularly review prayer and liturgy as part of the school's self-evaluation. They now need to improve the monitoring and review cycle so that staff and pupil evaluations of collective worship are more robust and precise in order to lead to improvements. Financial resources are allocated appropriately, for example, ensuring that there are plentiful resources for maintaining beautiful prayer spaces.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	147431
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	9365209
Full postal address of the school	Horseshoe Lane West, Merrow, Guildford, GU1 2SX
School phone number	01483 888388
Headteacher	Kate Carter
Chair of local governing body	Nicola Powell
School Website	http://www.st-thomas.surrey.sch.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Xavier Catholic Education Trust
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	15 th November 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

The inspection team

Michael Lobo
Ursula Hargrave

Lead
Team

Key to grade judgements

Grade	England	Wales
1	Outstanding	Excellent
2	Good	Good
3	Requires improvement	Adequate and requires improvement
4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and in need of urgent improvement