

Diocese of Hallam

***INSPECTION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
(Section 23 of the 1996 School Inspections Act)***

St. Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School
Chancet Wood Drive
Sheffield
S8 7TR

Inspection Date: 13th – 14th November 2000
Diocesan Inspector: Mrs M. C. Johnson

The inspection of the denominational character of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School was carried out under the direction of the Governors of the school in fulfilment of their obligations under the requirements of Canon Law (ref. 804, 806), Section 23 of the 1996 School Inspection Act, Section 13 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992 and Sections 241 and 259 of the Education Act, 1993. This inspection was conducted according to the Handbook for the Inspection of Religious Education in the Diocese of Hallam

The process of Inspection in the Diocese of Hallam has been developed to support and encourage each school community. It is hoped that this report will celebrate all that is positive and praiseworthy in St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School and help promote sound development for the future.

A copy of this report may be obtained from the Governors of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School, Chancet Wood Drive, Sheffield S8 7TR or the Diocese of Hallam Schools' Department, Hallam Pastoral Centre, St Charles Street, Sheffield S9 3WU.

INTRODUCTION

Basic Information About the School

Name of School	: St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School
Type	: Infant and Junior
Status	: Voluntary Aided
Number on Roll	: 197
Age Range	: 4 - 11 years
Gender of Pupils	: Mixed
Chairman of Governors	: Father Mark McManus
Headteacher	: Mrs Anne Brighton
Address	: Chancet Wood Drive Sheffield S8 7TR
Telephone No.	: 0114 2745597
Fax. Number	: 0114 2746499
Date of Inspection	: 13 th – 14 th November 2000
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St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School is a well-established school which serves the local parish of Our Lady and St Thomas of Canterbury and also the Holy Spirit parish of Dronfield. It was opened in 1971 and has seen many changes over the years including the provision of a mobile classroom in 1992. The majority of the pupils live locally but others travel some distance from the areas of Dore, Totley and Dronfield. The pupils are from a cross section of backgrounds and ethnic origins. Sixty-three percent of the children are baptised Catholics.

The children are organised into seven classes. There are eight full time teachers including the headteacher, six of whom are Catholics and two of other Christian Churches, supported by a number of administrative and non-teaching staff. Parents also provide regular voluntary support both during the day and for educational visits.

The school has an integrated resource unit (I.R.) for pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need. The headteacher is the SENCO and the I.R. is staffed by two qualified childcare assistants as budgetary constraints have prevented the employment of a Special Needs Teacher for the past three years.

Class groupings are as follows:

Reception	30
Year 1	28
Year 2	30
Year 3	28
Year 4	25
Year 5	34
Year 6	22

PART ONE

ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL AS A CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

1. THE MISSION OF THE SCHOOL

1.1 The school logo was developed in 1992 as a direct result of the provision of a mobile classroom nicknamed 'the ark'. It aims to represent the living history of the school and was the inspiration for the school's Mission Statement which is rooted in Gospel values and the importance of educating all children to their full potential in a climate of love and peace, whilst maintaining a close home, school, parish community relationship. The Mission Statement which was revised in 1999/2000 provides a very good model for a Catholic Primary School and underpins all school policies. It is attractively displayed in the school entrance and lived out in the daily life of the school.

1.2 The school has a clear set of aims which lead directly from the Mission Statement.

1.3 Thirty questionnaires were returned by parents, all of whom expressed their satisfaction with the quality of Religious Education in the school. Parents also stated how pleased they are that their children are being educated in a warm Christian atmosphere of care and spirituality.

1.4 All parents are welcomed into the school and some give valued support in the classrooms. However due to the geographical spread of the parishes and catchment area it is impossible for some parents who are working or have younger children to be as involved as they would like. There is a small but active parent supporters group which regularly meets in the school.

1.5 The parents of children who are not Catholic said that they always feel welcomed and supported by the school.

1.6 Parents feel well informed about the Religious Education of their children. Information on the Religious Education programme 'Here I Am' is sent out termly to the parents which they welcome. Parents stated that this enables them to be involved in and support the Religious Education of their children at home.

1.7 Sacramental preparation is rightly parish based and facilitated by the Parish Priest and Catechists. As some children making their First Communion are not able to attend the school due to distance the classes provide an opportunity for all parish children to join together in celebration. Every Sunday, during this time of preparation, there is a special children's liturgy of The Word. A special assembly on reconciliation also takes place in the school and the sacramental preparation is supported by the school's Religious Education Programme.

1.8 Relationships in the school are very good. All staff both teaching and non-teaching care for and co-operate with one another. Children feel secure and valued in a calm purposeful atmosphere.

1.9 The Parish Priest who is also Chairman of Governors is a frequent and welcome visitor to the school and supports the school with Masses which are usually celebrated in the Church, but in the school at the beginning and end of term. He also assists in liturgies and by speaking to the children about their Religious Education topics.

1.10 School and parish relationships are good and parishioners together with parents attend the monthly assemblies in school and are also invited to school or class Masses. Social and fund raising events are mutually well supported and the Parish Priest stated that a wide range of parishioners are interested in the school which is one of the parish joys.

1.11 St Thomas' school has good links with All Saints to which most of their children progress at the end of Year Six. A small number from the Dronfield area proceed to St Mary's Catholic High School in Chesterfield while other children move into other local Comprehensive schools. The headteacher liaises closely with all the schools to which the children progress.

1.12 The school accepts teaching practice students and also work experience students during the Summer Term.

1.13 As part of its Covenant with the Poor the school has supported a wide variety of charities including CAFOD, Mission Together, St Wilfrid's Drop-in Centre, Children in Distress, the Romania Shoe Box Appeal and Remembrance Day (British Legion) through the sale of poppies and Traidcraft through the 'Fruit and Nut' bar which is open in school.

1.14 The school joins in sporting events with other local schools and also has one very special day each year when they are able to play wheelchair basket ball. They took part in the 'School Championship's 2000' playing against the Sheffield National Wheelchair Basketball Team. This is organised by Within Reach (Sheffield) and gives the children a deeper understanding and appreciation of the courage and determination of the disabled.

1.15 Community Forum meetings are held in the school each term. These involve the Local Council, Residents Tenants, Social Services and Police and demonstrate the commitment of the school to the wider community.

2. THE SCHOOL AS A WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY

2.1 The school is currently in the process of updating its policy on worship using the Diocesan guidelines, as stated in the Action Plan. It is intended that this should be completed by the end of the Autumn Term.

2.2 Worship plays an important part in the life of St Thomas' School which has a good termly liturgy schedule. This outlines a carefully planned programme of assemblies, liturgies and Masses following the Liturgical year, special events in the life of the school and the 'Here I Am' programme. This certainly contributes to the school's aim of journeying together as a caring community giving witness to Gospel values and the teachings of the Catholic Church.

2.3 School Masses held in the Church are highly praised by both parents and parishioners who appreciate the enthusiasm and involvement of the children. They stated that the children behave well and take part with dignity and reverence. In addition to Masses celebrating the Special Feasts of the Church an additional Mass is held at the end of each term and there is also a special Leaver's Mass / Shared Supper at which all the Year Six children are affirmed for their personal gifts and talents.

2.4 Assemblies in the school are of a high standard and the whole school assembly on Remembrance attended by the inspector was a very spiritual and moving experience. Every class in the school was fully involved providing their own thoughts, prayers, poems, readings and reflections. Good use was made of the music provided by the children and the many dimensions of Remembrance were explored. The children behaved with dignity and reverence whilst illustrating joy and hope in their singing and prayers for peace.

2.5 The school is very fortunate to have its own Chapel, a real haven of peace which is a good focal point for prayer. This is very tastefully set out with good quality artefacts, candles and books and is used by class groups. At lunch times voluntary groups, individual children, and staff take advantage of the facility. In Advent the Jesse Tree Service is held there, in Lent the Way of the Cross is celebrated, in May and October the Rosary. These organised time lunchtime prayer sessions held on a voluntary basis are always very well attended.

2.6 The whole school meets together weekly for assembly and there are also weekly Key Stage assemblies usually based on the 'Here I Am' topics. Prayers are said in all classes each morning, before lunch and at the end of the day. These are clearly printed in the Staff Handbook to assist new or supply teachers.

2.7 Prayers and reflections are also used in Religious Education lessons and each Key Stage has a weekly period in which to learn new hymns and practice those already taught.

2.8 The children join with the wider community of schools in worship, at the Mission Club Mass at the Cathedral, the special Birthday assemblies which are attended by parents and friends, the Big Praise! Big Picnic! and the Anglican Diocesan Pageant.

2.9 All children take part in a collective act of worship each day, fulfilling legal requirements.

3. SPIRITUAL AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Spiritual Development

3.1a The spiritual and moral development of the children at St Thomas' School is a great strength of the school and clearly contributes to the happy, caring environment which it provides.

3.1b A warm, friendly but purposeful atmosphere which is rooted in gospel values promoted by the headteacher and staff prevails throughout the school. Parents spoke of the entrance to the school as being welcoming and peaceful, enhanced by beautifully presented school work, the written explanation of the school logo, Mission Statement and prayers.

3.1c In some classes children write their own prayers and are building up their own anthologies which illustrate depth of thought and spiritual growth. It would be good practice to extend this throughout the school.

3.1d In a Religious Education lesson in which a reading was introduced with a period of quiet reflection and well-selected music, the children listened attentively concentrating on the reading in an atmosphere of reverence and calm. This led to a deeper appreciation of the Scripture reading which they then discussed with the teacher providing an opportunity for developing their spirituality.

3.1e Of very special value in the school's spiritual development is the integrated resource unit, which enables all children, both able and those with disabilities, to learn and grow together in an atmosphere of love, understanding and care for one another.

3.1f The school chapel which was created in 1995 is a great asset to the school and provides a dedicated area for reflection and group prayer.

3.2 Moral Development

3.2a The school has a good Behaviour Policy which states its aims "To foster the development of positive relationships rooted in Gospel values and responsible attitudes towards self, others and the environment".

3.2b The consistent and unobtrusive application of the school's Behaviour Policy, the teaching of issues such as responsibilities of working together as a caring community and the good role models of staff provide an excellent framework for the children to develop a sense of right and wrong, fairness, caring, self-discipline, respect and responsibility for others.

3.2c Behaviour observed by the inspector was very good. The school makes every effort to monitor the behaviour of children in and out of the classroom and the special needs children are very carefully monitored and supported.

3.2d At playtimes the children played happily together at each Key Stage.

PART TWO

CURRICULUM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

4. STANDARDS ATTAINED BY PUPILS

4.1 Attainment and Progress

4.1a The Religious Education policy for St Thomas' school which was reviewed in July 2000 is clear and succinct. It affirms the importance of Religious Education as a subject in its own right "not one subject amongst many but the foundation of the entire education process". (Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 1998). It has clear aims and objectives and emphasises both the implicit and explicit aspects of Religious Education in the classroom. There is evidence that most of the aims are being met but the commitment to ten percent of the school timetable to curriculum Religious Education needs to be addressed as this is only being met in one of the classes.

4.1b Attainment throughout the school is good in most classes. Children are attentive and interested in their lessons and participate fully in discussions showing knowledge and understanding of the Christian values and Scripture appropriate to their age.

4.1c The inspection took place immediately after the October half term at a time when the topic 'Invitations' was being explored. There was very little written work in the children's' books for the current school year and similarly very little from the previous year. Written work was generally less than satisfactory particularly at Key Stage Two and often incomplete. This made it very difficult to form judgements regarding progress other than by discussion with and listening to children during their lessons and through teachers' planning.

4.2 Attitudes to Learning

4.2a Children have good attitudes to learning. They are involved and interested in the topics, respond well to questions and are happy to discuss their work with others. There is obvious enjoyment in most Religious Education lessons.

4.2b The children show good recall of previous learning with knowledge and understanding of the topic being explored and of the Christian faith appropriate to their age.

4.2c The children enjoy taking part in assemblies and liturgies and enjoy the short periods of reflection built into some lessons and assemblies.

5. QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROVIDED

5.1 Teaching

5.1a The quality of teaching is good to very good throughout the school with an excellent lesson being observed at each Key Stage. In the best lessons long term planning was good, individual lesson plans very tightly focused and had clear objectives which were explained by the teacher at the beginning of the lesson, referred to during the lesson and returned to at the end. There was a good balance of pace with time built in for quiet reflection, teacher input and discussion. The children were on task, affirmed by the teachers and encouraged to share ideas. There were high expectations of the children and suitable resources were ready to hand.

5.1b Unfortunately due to the thirty-minute sessions for Religious Education during the inspection, several of the teachers ran out of time before the completion of their lessons which they intended to continue further at a later time. From lesson plans and discussion with the teachers it was possible to envisage the completed lessons but sadly the impetus could be lost due to the lapse in time.

5.1c One of the strengths of St Thomas' school is the affirmation and encouragement given to the children by the staff, providing an environment where every child is special. This helps to create a good self-image in the children which is reflected in their work and attitudes.

5.1d All of the classrooms have Religious Education focal points for prayer and displays of Religious Education work which has been attractively arranged sometimes with artefacts brought in by the children or their teacher. A Key Stage One class had a very attractive class prayer book which contained the prayers of the children.

5.2 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

5.2a The school has good clear policies on Religious Education, Spiritual Development, Personal Relations, Behaviour, Equal Opportunities and Special Needs all of which are based on the Mission Statement.

5.2b St Thomas' follows the new 'Here I Am' Education Programme approved by the Diocese and incorporates the multi-cultural / multi-faith aspects of the topics.

5.2c The Religious Education Co-ordinator attends all training sessions organised by the Diocese and is given time to feed back information at staff meetings. There is a job description for the post but this does not reflect the centrality of Religious Education at the heart of the Catholic School. In order to reflect in practice the aspirations of the Mission Statement the management of the co-ordination of Religious Education needs to be reviewed as a matter of priority.

5.2d There has been some work on assessment carried out in Religious Education but this is patchy and requires to be more structured and inclusive of all teaching staff.

5.2e Reports to parents on Religious Education are consistent and thoughtful. They reflect on the children's attitudes to their faith and their Religious Education teaching, their consideration for others and some of the areas they have covered. They should, however, be extended to give parents more detailed information on the children's progress in knowledge and understanding of their faith and the Religious Education programme they have followed.

5.2f The ethos of the school affirms all the children especially those with special needs who are affirmed not only by the staff but also by the other children. This is certainly a strength of the school which loves and cares for all its children and in which they are valued and led by example.

6. THE MANAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

6.1 Leadership and Management

6.1a The school is led by an able and dedicated headteacher who has been in post for four years. She has a clear vision for the school which is rooted in its Mission Statement and is both sensitive and perceptive to the needs of children and staff.

6.1b The school governors play a valuable part in the life of the school. They meet regularly, support the headteacher and are involved in many aspects of the life and work of the school.

6.1c The Chairman of Governors, who is also the Parish Priest, is very proud of the school and gives support in many ways through liturgies, Masses and assisting with Religious Education topics whenever staff require. This is much appreciated and he is always a most welcome visitor to the school.

6.2 Staffing, Accommodation and Resources

6.2a St Thomas' school was built in 1971 in a quiet residential area of Sheffield. The premises are in good condition and provide the children with a stimulating, attractive environment. It is well cared for by pupils and staff alike and benefits from the hard work and care of a loyal caretaker.

6.2b Resources for Religious Education in the school are good providing a wide selection of books, drapes and good quality artefacts. The Religious Education Co-ordinator has recently made a comprehensive list of resources in the school which when in catalogue form will greatly assist staff with their planning.

6.2c A matter under consideration at the present is the re-siting of the Chapel to a smaller room in order to provide a computer suite for the children. The headteacher and governors have given great consideration to this matter, as the room under consideration is not large enough to accommodate two whole class groups. However, it is large enough for smaller groups and could quite successfully be used for quiet prayer and reflection.

6.2d Adaptations have also been made in the school to provide special rooms for toilet and changing facilities for children with special needs. This has proved to be a great asset to both children and staff providing privacy, dignity and respect for those who need extra special care.

6.2e St Thomas' school benefits from a good hardworking headteacher and staff who are all dedicated to the well being and good spiritual and moral development of their pupils.

6.2f The non-teaching and administrative staff are well trained, cheerful and welcoming and set good examples to children of consideration and care for others.

6.2g Peripatetic support staff and visiting teachers are seen as important parts of the school community and work closely with permanent staff.

6.2h The entrance to the school is warm and welcoming and throughout the school there are attractive, well presented displays of children's work.

PART THREE

MAIN FINDINGS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

7. MAIN FINDINGS

7.1 St Thomas' is a good Catholic school with a warm welcoming atmosphere. Its Mission Statement is rooted in Gospel values and affirms the importance of "educating children to their full potential in a climate of love and peace whilst maintaining a close home. school, parish relationship". The ethos and rigour of the school gives evidence of that mission being a lived reality in its daily life. The Mission Statement leads all documentation and is both prominently and aesthetically displayed in the school entrance.

7.2 The school is well led by a dedicated and able headteacher who has been in post for four years. She has a clear vision for the school which is rooted in its Mission Statement and is both sensitive and perceptive to the needs of children and staff.

7.3 The school is well supported by the Parish Priest who is also Chairman of Governors. He assists the school in Masses, liturgies, Sacramental preparation and many other ways. He is a welcome visitor in the school.

7.4 Parents take great pride in the school and when possible like to assist there. They praise the school's achievement in creating a happy, caring community in which their children are affirmed and valued. They also praised the very good spiritual and moral development of their children. Parents who are not Catholic said that they always feel welcome and supported by the school.

7.5 The spiritual and moral development of the children at St Thomas' school is a great strength of the school and clearly contributes to the happy, caring environment which it provides. Children have a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong and are taught to affirm and support one another. Behaviour observed by the inspector at playtimes, lunchtime and inside the school was exemplary at all times.

7.6 Good opportunities are provided for cultural development. The children are introduced to other cultures and other faiths, in their Religious Education Programme and across the curriculum in practical ways relevant to their own experience and understanding.

7.7 The Chapel, which plays a large part in the prayer life of the school, is to be re-sited in order to provide a Computer Suite for the children. Great consideration has been given to this matter and although the intended Chapel will be smaller every effort is being made to ensure that this will provide the same focus and enhancement to the prayer life of the children and staff as the present one.

7.8 Planning and reporting procedures are now in place but structures for procedures in assessment and evaluation need to be further developed in order to inform future planning.

7.9 The quality of teaching is good to very good throughout the school with an excellent lesson being observed at each Key Stage.

7.10 In most lessons there was evidence of good recall of previous learning. Children were attentive, showed good language development, offered some challenging ideas and obviously enjoyed their Religious Education lessons. However, the quality and variety of written work in Religious Education is less than satisfactory in Key Stage Two.

7.11 Reporting to parents is inconsistent. There are thoughtful comments made about the children's social and moral development but in some classes there is insufficient evidence given of their progress in knowledge and understanding of the Religious Education programme.

AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

To develop further the improvements made since the last inspection, the Governors, headteacher and staff of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School should now:

1. Celebrate and consolidate the school's strengths in good leadership, teaching strengths, parental support, provision for children with special needs and the spiritual and moral development of the children.
2. As identified in the last inspection:- Further develop and structure procedures for assessment and evaluation in Religious Education.
3. As a matter of priority review management and the co-ordination of Religious Education in school.
4. Develop a consistent policy for children's written work in Religious Education throughout the school based on the good standards already in place and the very good oral work.
5. In reports to parents clarify information given on progress in knowledge and understanding of faith, doctrine, Scripture and liturgies.
6. Ensure that ten percent of curriculum time is allocated to Religious Education as required by the Bishops' Conference.

APPENDIX : EVIDENCE BASE

The programme of inspection included a pre-inspection visit to the school, a meeting with parents and governors and two full days inspection. One Religious Education lesson was observed in each class but one and a whole school assembly.

Interviews were held with the headteacher and Religious Education Co-ordinator, the Chairman of Governors, the Parish Priest, a Child Care Assistant (Integrated Resource), Parent Governor and a Key Stage Two assistant who is also a Special Needs Support Worker.

There were informal discussions with ancillary staff, the school caretaker, parent helpers – a parent who as a Minister has a particular responsibility for special needs in his own Church and children at lunchtime and playtime.

Parents were consulted through a parents' meeting and questionnaire. Thirty replies were received from parents all of which were positive and expressed support for the school.

A comprehensive range of documentation was provided by the headteacher, which included all items requested on the Diocesan list. A sample of children's work, reports and teachers' planning was also provided.

CONCLUSION

The Diocesan Inspector wishes to place on record her thanks for the kindness and co-operation shown by the Governors, Parish Priest, headteacher and all staff, parents and children during the inspection.