DIOCESE OF Arundel and Brighton

DENOMINATIONAL (S48) INSPECTION REPORT

St Thomas a Becket Federation of Catholic Infant and Junior Schools

Address: Tutts Barn Lane, Eastbourne, East Sussex. BN22 8XT

Telephone: 01323 737221

Email address: office@stthomasbecket.e-sussex.sch.uk

School Unique Reference Number: 114577 / 114578

Headteacher:	Ms R. Turner
Chair of Governors:	Mr J. McManus
Lead Inspector:	Ms A. Oddy
Associate Inspector:	Ms G. Askham
Inspection date:	1st December 2016

Overall Effectiveness	Previous Inspection:	2 (Infant) 1 (Junior)
	This inspection:	2
Catholic Life:	1	
Collective Worship:	2	
Religious Education:	2	

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS

St Thomas a Becket is a good Catholic school because:	The Catholic life of the school is outstanding because:
▪ St Thomas a Becket is a warm and welcoming school offering a very good standard of Catholic education. It has a number of outstanding features including its vibrant Catholic life. ▪ Pupils are happy and enjoy being part of their school community. They achieve well and make good progress, academically, spiritually and morally. ▪ The school community welcomes all into its Catholic life. Parents and carers know they are welcome and appreciate the role of the school in the community and beyond. ▪ The headteacher leads a committed and cohesive staff team, providing vison and direction for the school. She is at the heart of the school and is dedicated to uniting the Infant and Junior schools on their journey to becoming a Primary school. Pupils and parents value the school. One pupil said he would like St Thomas a Becket school to extend to Secondary provision, illustrating his love for the school. ▪ Governors are conscientious and committed to their role. They know their school well and provide support and challenge in their continued drive towards school improvement. ▪ Links with local parishes are excellent and the parish priests provide valued support to the school. ▪ The school is part of the wider community and encourages pupils to find ways of reaching out and helping others. Examples include singing at the local hospice and nursing homes, fund raising for a range of charities and sponsoring pupils abroad. ▪ Pupils know they are part of a wider Catholic community and enjoy participating in deanery and diocesan events. ▪ Parents are very appreciative of the school and the Catholic education it offers. Responses to questionnaires distributed as part of this inspection were overwhelmingly positive. A parent wrote, 'We are very pleased with the school's religious guidance and kind Christian attitudes as well as its strong Catholic values'. ▪ Areas for development suggested by the last inspection have been addressed.	▪ The mission statement is central to the life of the school and all it does. It is known by all members of the school community. Pupils have a simplified version which they are able to relate to all aspects of school life. ▪ Pupil behaviour is excellent. Pupils have a clear sense of moral purpose and are keen to help others, in school and beyond. ▪ Good relationships are a feature of the school. Pupils, parents, teachers and governors work in partnership in this happy school community. ▪ Spiritual and moral development is fostered and nurtured throughout pupils' time at the school. A wealth of prayer and worship opportunities enable pupils to develop their relationship with God and to see themselves as part of a Christian community. ▪ The school works in partnership with other local Catholic schools. Deanery and diocesan events enable pupils to be part of the wider Catholic community.

St Thomas a Becket is a good Catholic school because:

- Collective worship opportunities are many and varied. Class Masses, assemblies and liturgies are a regular feature of school life and an opportunity for pupils to explore and celebrate religious education topics and themes as well as coming together as a worshipping community.
- Worship in school marks and celebrates the liturgical year. Pupils are familiar with the traditions of the Church, its feasts and seasons, and speak appreciatively of how these are celebrated in school. They enjoy participating and respond very positively.
- School collective worship is inclusive of all in the school community, regardless of faith background.
- Parents, carers and parishioners are invited to join school celebrations.
- Pupils know that prayer enables them to deepen their relationship with God and that it is an important part of their daily lives, at school and at home. They are familiar with the traditional prayers of the Church and at ease with spontaneous prayer and composing their own prayers for class and school use.
- Teaching and learning in religious education is good. Pupils acquire knowledge and understanding of their faith and learn to respect the beliefs and faith practices of others.
- All groups of pupils make good progress and achieve well. Appropriate levels of support and challenge assist all pupils towards achieving their full potential.
- Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons. They are interested and keen to do well. Pupils' books show that they take a pride in their work.
- Comprehensive systems of assessment are in place to check pupil progress. School assessment judgements are validated by effective internal and external moderation procedures.
- Leaders and managers provide effective monitoring and evaluation of religious education to maintain and further develop current good practice and outcomes.

St Thomas a Becket is not yet outstanding because:

- Although standards in teaching and learning in religious education are good, in some lessons opportunities are missed to inspire and engage pupils.
- Prayer focus areas are of variable quality and need to be brought up to the standards of the best examples.
- Pace in some religious education lessons is slow and not matched to the needs of the learners.

FULL REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Thomas a Becket Federation of Catholic Infant and Junior schools is a two form voluntary aided school in the Eastbourne deanery of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. It is maintained by East Sussex Local Authority. The Infant and Junior schools federated in 2010.

The school draws pupils from four parishes and seven churches, including Our Lady of Ransom, St Gregory, St Agnes and Christ the King. There are currently 476 pupils on roll. 89% of pupils are baptised Catholics. Most pupils are of White or White British heritage. A number of pupils come from a variety of other backgrounds, principally Asian and Asian British. Four pupils have an Education Health Care Plan (EHC) and 6% of pupils are classed as having special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). 9% of pupils receive Pupil Premium funding.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Continue to work on raising standards in teaching and learning in religious education by sharing good practice and modelling lessons.
- Continue to develop and embed the current good practice in religious education assessment, including more consistent use of peer assessment.

CATHOLIC LIFE

THE QUALITY OF THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF THE SCHOOL	1
• The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.	1
• The quality of provision of the Catholic Life of the school.	1
• How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.	1

The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding because:

- St Thomas a Becket School has a vibrant Catholic life inspired by its mission statement, which is known and valued by the whole school community. This is reviewed on a regular basis, with pupils encouraged to reflect on its meaning to themselves and their school. A pupil said, 'The mission statement is important to us because it helps us to live like Jesus'.
- Pupils are proud of their school and have a real sense of belonging to a caring Christian community. They know they are one family and are inclusive and supportive of each other, regardless of faith or cultural differences. A pupil described the school as 'a warm community'.
- Pupils are aware of the needs of others, supporting a wide range of charities, local, national and global. They sponsor pupils in Africa and India, taking a close interest in their lives.
- They recognise that they have responsibilities towards their school community and are happy to serve their school in a variety of ways, including as prefects, classroom buddies and lunchtime helpers.
- The behaviour of pupils is excellent. During this inspection pupils were well behaved, courteous and considerate both in the classroom and around the school. Pupils know they have a responsibility to care for each other and forgive others. They can relate this to the teachings of Jesus and to their school mission statement.
- A rich programme of school collective worship celebrations, parish and diocesan events and retreat days is interwoven in the life of the school, ensuring that pupils have a wide variety of spiritual development and worship opportunities as part of the school's Catholic life.
- The school has strong systems of pastoral care to support pupils and their families. The Rainbows programme is well established and THRIVE training and resourcing shows the school's commitment to supporting family relationships and pupils' holistic development.
- The school actively fosters links with the four parishes which it serves, strengthening the partnership between home, school and parish. Together with participation in deanery and diocesan events, this strengthens pupils' perception of themselves as part of the wider Catholic community.

The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding because:

- The school's mission statement reflects its commitment to the church's mission in education. It underpins all school policies and practice. All areas of the School Development Plan (SDP) are closely linked to the mission statement. All members of the school community recognise its importance to the life of the school. A child friendly version of the mission statement makes it accessible and meaningful to the pupils, who are encouraged to apply it to all aspects of their lives, within school and beyond.

- The school's Catholic identity is evident in its attractive learning environment which features displays and artefacts relating to religious education and the Catholic life of the school.

- Supportive and caring relationships are a strength of the school. Effective pastoral care systems support staff, pupils and their families. Parents and pupils value the 'Open Door' policy the school offers. Good relationships between members of the school community reflect their commitment to the school and each other. Pairing of classes and members of staff from the Infant and Junior schools successfully builds a bond between the two schools, making a cohesive community. The parish priests regularly visit the school, providing valuable support for the school's Catholic life.

- Spiritual and moral development is fostered and nurtured. Pupils are offered a variety of opportunities including class and parish Masses, retreat days and diocesan celebrations.

- Personal, Social and Health Education and Relationships and Sex Education policies are in place. These have recently been revised following consultation with parents and governors. These policies are in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

- The school has good links with other Catholic schools in the deanery, providing opportunities for shared training and expertise.

- Links with local secondary schools help to ensure effective transition for pupils. Particular care is taken to ensure a smooth and supportive transition for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities.

- The school's strong Catholic life is recognised and valued by parents. One wrote, 'I am very happy with the Catholic life of St Thomas a Becket School. We are so pleased with this Catholic school. All my children have really made a good relationship with God.'

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school is outstanding because:

- Leaders and managers are wholeheartedly committed to the Church's mission in education and to maintaining and developing the school as an all-embracing Catholic community.

- School leaders are excellent role models and inspire a staff team united in delivering an education in which each child's academic, moral and spiritual development is nurtured and developed.

- School leaders and managers recognise the importance of school and parish links. Members of the senior leadership team serve their parishes as Eucharistic Ministers and Readers and many staff play an active part in parish life. The school is featured in the parishes and parish events are regularly publicised by the school. Parishioners are also invited to celebrations at the school.

- The school has a planned and comprehensive programme of events relating to its Catholic life, including celebrations linked to the liturgical year. These events are regularly attended by governors as part of their monitoring role and as members of the school community.

- Governors ably fulfil their role of support and challenge, regularly discussing and evaluating aspects of the school's Catholic life. Feedback to the school celebrates school strengths and informs school improvement.

- The school's self evaluation of its Catholic life is accurate, reflective and evidence based. It effectively informs school development planning.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP AND PRAYER LIFE

2

- How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship and Prayer Life. 2
- The quality of provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life. 2
- How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life. 2

How well pupils respond to and participate in the school's Collective Worship and Prayer Life is good because:

- Collective worship and prayer are central to the life of the school and its pupils. A planned programme of collective worship includes celebrations linked to the liturgical year, themes in religious education and events in the wider life of the Church, such as the Year of Mercy.
- Pupils recognise and appreciate the importance of prayer in their own lives and know that their prayers can help others. They are familiar with the traditional prayers of the Church and are at ease with composing their own prayers and participating in spontaneous prayer.
- All members of the school community are welcomed into its prayer life and collective worship. Pupils of other faiths are included and are happy to be members of this worshipping community. Pupils know that other faith beliefs and practices must be respected.
- Prayer is part of school daily life. Pupils contribute to school prayer and worship in a variety of ways. Liturgy Leaders have recently been introduced to give pupils greater opportunities to lead and contribute to class worship. Sixteen pupils from across the school help to lead class liturgies and corporal works of mercy across the school. In recognition of the importance of their role, they were commissioned at a school Mass by one of the parish priests. As this becomes embedded in the life of the school it will empower pupils in making a significant contribution to school worship.
- Pupils are active participants in collective worship and enjoy using drama and song as part of worship. The act of collective worship observed as part of this inspection was a Key Stage 2 assembly on the Advent theme of Preparation. The assembly was led by pupils, who used drama, readings and photographs from school life to enhance the experience. The assembly had a clear scriptural basis. Joyful and tuneful singing, particularly of the school mission song was a feature of the assembly. It was well attended by parents. It was a good example of the school as a worshipping community, however a sharper focus on the theme would have made it more of a learning experience.
- Guided meditation and a prayer room session were also observed. Pupils were able to use moments of stillness and reflection as part of their prayer and were encouraged to offer their own prayer intentions, both personal and in the light of world events.

The quality of provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is good because:

- A wide range of collective worship and prayer opportunities are a feature of the school.
- The liturgical year is marked by a wealth of celebrations, ensuring that pupils have an excellent experience of the Church's feasts and seasons. Pupils spoke appreciatively of saying the Rosary in October and May and of their moving and meaningful Ash Wednesday liturgy.
- Provision includes offering pupils the opportunity to engage in different forms of prayer and pupils respond very positively. Pupils enjoy quiet reflection and meditation as well as class prayers and writing their own prayers. A pupil said, 'The meditation session helps us to be calm and ready for the day.'
- Provision is also made for staff prayer. Prayer is part of staff meetings and INSET days as well as prayer woven into the school day. Staff are encouraged to lead collective worship, with training and support offered as appropriate.
- Parents and carers are welcomed and encouraged to participate in the school's collective worship and prayer life and value being part of this aspect of school life.
- Pupils contribute their own prayers to class prayer books and to school displays. Their prayers demonstrate a high standard of religious literacy and a close relationship with God.
- Parents value the recently introduced Liturgy Leaders and Discipleship groups. One commented that these were a wonderful way for pupils to gain confidence in leading worship and that 'It allows the serving of others and the gaining of a deeper respect'.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life is good because:

- Leaders and managers are deeply committed to ensuring high quality provision for collective worship and prayer. Worship is carefully planned so that style and content offer a range of provision to all pupils and members of the school community.
- Themes are linked to topics studied in religious education, the liturgical year, school events and celebrations and events in the community and wider Church. A pupil said, 'On Jubilee Day we all went on to the field and praised God!'
- Pupils are encouraged and supported to lead and contribute to worship, using drama, song and dance as appropriate to enhance liturgy.
- Governors and school leaders monitor this aspect of school life, giving regular feedback to the governing body. Evaluation makes a significant contribution to school development planning.
- Senior leaders act as models of good practice in leading worship. They seek the views of parents, carers and pupils and incorporate these findings in school development planning.
- Prayer focus areas are a feature of every classroom and reflect the liturgical year and themes in religious education. The best examples have strong visual appeal and include interactive elements to engage and involve pupils. This good practice should be shared to ensure consistent high quality in this respect across all year groups.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE QUALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION	2
• How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.	2
• The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education.	2
• How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.	2

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education is good because:

- Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons and appreciate the importance of religious education to their lives. They take a pride in their work and enjoy talking about their learning. They show good knowledge and understanding of the topics they have studied and demonstrate a high standard of religious literacy.
- In the lessons observed as part of this inspection pupils responded thoughtfully and confidently to teachers' questions. They were interested and settled quickly to the activities.
- Standards of attainment in religious education are high and in line with other core subjects. All groups of pupils make good progress and achieve well. Standards have been maintained over the last three years. Significant numbers of pupils achieve the higher levels at the end of Key Stage 2. Although these numbers have fallen this year, the school feels that this reflects the changes in assessment rather than a drop in standards. Pupils with special educational needs or disabilities are appropriately supported to access the curriculum and achieve well.
- Work in books is of a good standard. Pupils know that their religious education books are special books and are motivated to do their best work.
- Parents and carers are encouraged to support their children's learning in religious education. They are kept informed regarding religious education topics and events in regular newsletters and on the school website. Parents appreciate the religious education the school offers. One wrote, 'Right from Reception and into Junior school my daughter has deepened her faith – lessons at school complement the teaching of the Church.'

The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education is good because:

- Standards in teaching and learning are high. Evidence includes pupil outcomes, pupils' confidence in lessons and samples of moderated work.
- School self evaluation indicates that teaching and learning is good and this is in line with the findings of this inspection.
- Four lessons, across three key stages were observed as part of this inspection. All showed a good standard of teaching and learning. In the best lessons, pace was monitored effectively and activities engaged and enthused learners. In some lessons observed, opportunities to interest and inspire pupils were missed. All lessons observed showed thorough planning and appropriate differentiation, including targeted questioning to enhance the learning of individuals. The school should now continue to work on raising standards in teaching and learning in religious education by sharing good practice and modelling lessons to bring all lessons to the standard of the best.
- Interesting lessons and effective use of questioning encourage pupils to explore and reflect on their learning. 'Big Questions' are used to deepen pupils' thinking and understanding. Staff, governors, priests and pupils contribute to reflections on these 'Big Questions'.
- Pupils are invited to share opinions and ideas in group discussions, open forums and circle time. This enables them to respect and value the opinions of others, including those of other faiths.
- Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons. The teaching of religious education is enriched by using cross curricular links where appropriate and the school plans to further develop this.
- Planned differentiation and the effective use of other adults to support learners enables all pupils to access the curriculum and achieve their potential.
- Marking is regular and in line with the school marking policy. It is affirmative and developmental. Pupils respond well to teachers' questions and suggestions, recognising that it helps them to deepen their understanding.
- Pupil self assessment is well established. Pupils are confident in using the success criteria to evaluate how well they have met the learning objective. Self assessment is also used at the end of each topic. There is limited use of peer assessment, the school should now extend this more comprehensively.
- Regular assessment in religious education contributes to pupil tracking and progress, enabling the school to monitor the progress of individuals and groups and target support and challenge appropriately.
- Assessment is effectively used to inform planning and school improvement. Assessment tasks are moderated within school and at deanery level to validate teachers' judgements.
- The school continues to develop and embed its current good practice in religious education assessment and should now use more consistent use of peer assessment as part of this.

How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education is good because:

- Religious education is seen as an important area of the school curriculum and as an important contribution to the ethos and Catholic life of the school. Leaders and governors ensure that this is recognised in provision and resourcing. Religious education receives an appropriate budget share and training and development needs are considered and addressed.

- Leaders and managers conduct a range of systematic monitoring activities relating to provision and outcomes. These include lesson observations, work scrutiny and learning walks.

- The results of monitoring enable the school to accurately identify strengths and areas for development. This is clearly illustrated in its self evaluation, which is honest, reflective and evidence based. This enables school development planning to be effectively targeted to secure improvement.

- Religious education development planning is well established, with clear objectives, time scales and lines of responsibility

- Religious education is well led and managed across the Infant and Junior schools. The subject leaders, supported by senior leaders, ensure that monitoring and evaluation is regular and comprehensive.

- Governors play an active role in monitoring religious education. The religious education governor carries out termly visits. In addition, class link governors carry out termly visits to fulfil their monitoring role. Governors evaluate the school development plan and discuss progress.

- Good practice is shared across the school. Training is provided in school, in partnership with St Richard's Catholic College and by diocesan training courses. The subject leaders lead staff meetings, disseminate information and provide guidance and support.

- The school follows the 'Come and See' programme of religious education. The curriculum meets the requirements of the Curriculum Directory and diocesan policy. 10% of curriculum time is allocated to religious education, which is in line with the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. The study of other faiths is well established as part of the religious education curriculum and is enhanced by visits and outside speakers.

Summary of Inspection Judgements

How effective the school is in providing Catholic Education.	**2**
Catholic Life	**1**
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic Life of the school.	**1**
The quality of provision for the Catholic Life of the school.	**1**
How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic Life of the school.	**1**
Collective Worship and Prayer Life	**2**
How well pupils respond to and participate in the schools' Collective Worship and Prayer Life.	**2**
The quality of provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life.	**2**
How well leaders and managers promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for Collective Worship and Prayer Life.	**2**
Religious Education	**2**
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education.	**2**
The quality of teaching and assessment in Religious Education.	**2**
How well leaders and managers monitor and evaluate the provision for Religious Education.	**2**