

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	133774
Local authority	Merton
Inspection number	381561
Inspection dates	22–23 February 2012
Lead inspector	Kevin Hodge

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	All-through
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	580
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ken Butt
Headteacher	David Feasey
Date of previous school inspection	10–11 June 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

Kevin Hodge	Additional inspector
Kusum Trikha	Additional inspector
Peter Sowrey	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed 30 lessons taught by 22 different teachers, which totalled approximately 15 hours. These included joint observations of lessons conducted with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Inspectors held discussions with groups of learners, staff, and members of the governing body. The inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at development planning, the school's website, tracking information showing learners' progress, teachers' lesson plans and pupils' work. In addition, the inspectors analysed the questionnaire responses of 161 parents and carers along with those returned by pupils and staff.

Information about the school

St Thomas is much larger than the average sized school. Pupils represent a wide diversity of ethnicities, but the largest groups are from Black African, Asian, and black Caribbean heritages. Nearly 75 per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The number of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is higher than average. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. The Early Years Foundation Stage children are taught in one nursery and three Reception classes. New classrooms for Years 1 and 2 pupils have just been opened.

There is also privately run childcare provision, which operates from within the school building, but was not part of this inspection. There is a pre-school breakfast club provided for pupils each day, which is managed by governors. The school has received a number of awards reflecting its commitment to developing pupils' healthy lifestyles, their environmental awareness and the professional development of staff.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. Its particular strengths lie in the way that it ensures pupils develop into responsible, enthusiastic learners so they achieve well. It is not yet outstanding, as planning in mathematics and science has some weaknesses. Teaching, while typically good, is not yet of the highest quality in all classes.
- Pupils achieve well through the school. Children have a secure start in the nursery and Reception classes gaining a good range of early reading, speaking and social skills. In Years 1 to 6, pupils’ reading skills, and more recently their writing skills, develop effectively. By the time they leave, they reach broadly average levels of attainment. In mathematics, while pupils achieve well, they do not have enough opportunities to apply their confident calculation skills to solve relevant ‘real-life’ problems. In science, investigations are also not linked closely enough to real-life situations.
- Pupils appreciate the typically good levels of teaching through the school and often say that learning is fun. There are some small variations in quality between classes as not all teaching or assessment routines are at the level of the best.
- Pupils’ typically good level of behaviour and mature approach ensure a high level of harmony among pupils. This means that playtimes are generally incident free and learning in lessons is purposeful. The high levels of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development ensure that they, regardless of their backgrounds, are good ambassadors for the school’s motto, ‘to love and serve’.
- Underpinning the school’s continued success are effective senior leaders who have managed the school’s growth in pupil numbers, maintained its very caring ethos and managed staff and teaching performance to good effect. The vast majority of parents and carers say they would recommend the school to others.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase pupils' achievement in mathematics and science in Years 1 to 6 by January 2013, through:
 - developing pupils' abilities to apply their mathematical skills in investigations and problem-solving activities.
 - ensuring that pupils have a clearer understanding of the relevance of science investigations to everyday life.
- Ensure that all teaching is at the level of the best by the end of this coming academic year by:
 - making teachers' explanations short, sharp and to the point so pupils can get down to activities more quickly
 - ensuring that teachers use open-ended questions to enhance pupils' thinking further
 - ensuring that teachers' assessment routines are consistently applied in the Reception classes, ensuring that outside activities build on the children's learning that takes place within the classroom.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils achieve well, given their below-average starting points. Their generally good progress means they reach broadly average standards by the time they leave school. Children enjoy being in the nursery and Reception classes. Their early reading and writing skills develop well with effective, regular teaching of letter sounds and combinations (phonics). For example, children's learning progressed well when they learnt letter sounds using songs and actions to make it fun. Their progress in number work, while satisfactory, is not as secure as the other aspects of their understanding. Simple role-playing activities, such as buying different ingredients for their imaginary pancakes, enhance their social skills. Outdoor activities, while enjoyable, do not always build on the good learning that takes place within the classroom. For example, good classroom activities on shape and space were not followed up in later play-based activities outdoors.

Pupils' early reading skills continue to develop well so that by the end of Year 2, pupils are confident readers and meet national expectations. The regular support to help pupils recognise and blend different letter sounds ensures they enjoy reading. In Years 1 to 6, pupils achieve well in their writing, speaking, listening and number skills. There are some variations between classes, normally related to the quality of teaching, when pupils' learning slows for some. In response to some dips in performance last year, a focus on writing has paid dividends and pupils' confidence has improved rapidly as a result. In a Year 3 lesson, for example, pupils' motivation increased markedly when trying to use words to describe the use of a mystery

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object. One child's comment, 'You could open it and it will take you through to another magical world', reflected their enthusiasm and imagination. Pupils enjoy learning and developing ideas in their 'Big Write' weekly sessions, for example, so that they become enthusiastic writers. Past work is imaginative, original and typically well presented.

By the time they leave school, pupils are fluent, enthusiastic readers, often exceeding the national average, with some saying they would like to follow in the footsteps of their favourite authors. In mathematics, pupils achieve well and their past work shows good calculation skills and understanding of mathematical concepts. However, these skills are not often applied to solving everyday or 'real-life' type problems. In science, practical activities, such as those seen in a lesson on investigating light and shadows, form a regular part of activities. However, these do not always have a clear link to an aspect of everyday life to help pupils understand their relevance. Pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs benefit from good identification of their difficulties, and additional support in classes or in small group work in adjacent areas helps them to achieve well. Pupils who speak English as an additional language also achieve well. They benefit from small group activities and specialist help to consolidate their writing and speaking abilities. The vast majority of parents and carers agree that their children achieve well during time at the school.

Quality of teaching

Pupils, parents and carers are appreciative of the typically good teaching that takes place. There are some small variations between classes so that progress for some pupils slows on occasions. Pupils say that their lessons are often fun as teachers try to make their learning together interesting and lively, reflecting the impact of the good planned curriculum. For example, pupils enjoyed learning about how to construct headlines and newspaper-style stories when interviewing a character from a well-known children's book, played by a fellow pupil. Classrooms have attractive reflection corners to remind pupils of the school's values. Key skills, especially in reading, writing and information and communication technology (ICT), are taught well across a range of subjects and thus are reinforced well. Pupils enjoy using a range of ICT equipment to enhance their learning. Those pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs benefit from help in small groups or one-to-one activities that enable them to keep pace with their classmates. A good range of activities for pupils who may be at the early stages of learning to speak English and regular 'booster' activities help them become more confident within day-to-day lessons. In Years 1 to 6, in some activities, teachers' explanations are overly long, which means pupils do not always get promptly down to working and not all teachers use effective questioning to enhance pupils' thinking further. Activities for children in Reception classes are normally well conceived, particularly in the range of indoor activities available. The outside activities do not always build on the good learning that takes place within the classroom. Pupils who are at an early stage of learning English are supported by staff who, when needed, can speak children's home languages. Assessment routines, through marking of pupils' past work, are generally

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systematic and helpful in guiding pupils to improve. However, on occasions there are variations between classes in the way this is completed, so not all pupils benefit from the good quality guidance that is typical.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

In this calm, orderly and harmonious school, pupils report that behaviour is typically good over time. Although they recognise that bullying does take place on occasions, it is relatively rare. They understand the different forms that bullying can take, recognising, for example, that using the internet can pose difficulties and knowing what to do should bullying occur through this medium. Around the school, pupils are generally very courteous and well mannered and play together well despite their differing cultural backgrounds and beliefs. Pupils' attendance levels are high because of their feeling valued and the school's caring approach. Within lessons particularly, pupils are typically well behaved and are occasionally excellent. This enables lessons to proceed with little fuss and only when the pace of lessons drop or activities are not quite as well planned do some pupils become restless or find it harder to cooperate with others. The pupils recognise there are well-developed systems to deal with their concerns and feel confident that the school will be quick to address their worries. The vast majority of parents and carers agree that the school provides a safe place for their children, with only a very small number feeling that improvements could be made. The school is quick to identify and support children with potential behavioural difficulties; the good links developed with parents, and carers are an important factor in the success of this approach. A nurture group meets regularly to provide support for those pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable, to help them feel more confident to integrate with others and learn alongside them.

Leadership and management

Senior leaders, supported by governors, have successfully managed significant growth in the number of pupils attending. Pupils' levels of achievement have been maintained, and in the case of reading and writing, improved. Following the previous inspection, a review of roles and responsibilities resulted in an expansion of the senior leadership team. This enabled a sharper focus on pupils' progress, so that any dips or weaknesses in performance were quickly remedied. Pupils' better reading and writing skills and promotion of high levels of attendance are notable successes and reflect the school's good capacity to continue to improve. In this rapidly growing school, monitoring of teaching has helped the many new staff settle in successfully and has ensured that teaching is typically good. There are some remaining variations across the school, which school-based monitoring has identified. Weaknesses in teaching, while being recorded systematically, often highlight teachers' approaches without linking this closely enough to the impact on pupils' learning. The revised curriculum develops pupils' basic communication skills well across a range of subjects, and makes a strong contribution to pupils' good achievement and social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Governors give the school good levels of

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support, particularly in managing accommodation improvements and in helping senior leaders maintain the ethos of the school through good links with parents and carers. Visits to the school are regular and staff value this support. Governors ensure there are good levels of safeguarding and site security, that checks on staff are rigorous, and that discrimination of any sort is not tolerated. Where there are gaps between the performances of different groups of pupils, these are closing rapidly, helping to ensure equal opportunities for all. The vast majority of parents, carers and staff indicate they feel the school is led and managed effectively, concurring on inspection evidence.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



24 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury, Mitcham CR4 1YG

Many thanks for your welcome when we visited your school. We think yours is a good school, which everyone is keen to keep improving. Here are some particular things we found out.

- The children in the nursery and Reception classes have a good start to school.
- You make good progress in your learning in Years 1 to 6 and achieve well, especially in your reading and writing.
- You behave well, everyone gets on with each other and you told us you enjoy lessons because they are fun.
- Your attendance levels are high – keep it up and well done!
- The school cares for you well, particularly those who find learning hard.
- The school makes good links with your parents or carers. Many said that they would recommend your school to others.
- You told us that you all feel safe in school and that bullying is rare.
- The headteacher, staff and governors like working at the school and are helping it grow into an even bigger school.

We have asked the school to improve two particular aspects of the school to help it get even better:

- Help everyone make even faster progress, by ensuring that you have more opportunities to apply your mathematical skills in everyday situations and that your science work always starts with an exciting problem to solve.
- Make all teaching exciting and to the level of the very best in school.

All of you can help, too, by trying to keep up your good behaviour and in giving your ideas about how the school can keep improving. We hope you like your new classrooms.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Hodge
Additional inspector

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