

# St Thomas More RC Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	111704
<b>Local authority</b>	Middlesbrough
<b>Inspection number</b>	378340
<b>Inspection dates</b>	23–24 February 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Barbara Hudson

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	123
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Terry Cane
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jane Apolloni
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 May 2009
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## Introduction

Inspection team

Barbara Hudson

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector visited seven lessons or parts of lessons. Seven teachers were observed and approximately four hours were spent in direct observation of teaching and learning. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, parents and carers, members of the governing body and school staff. The inspector observed the school's work in and out of the classroom and looked at documentation relating to safeguarding pupils, school improvement planning, and documentation relating to governance. The inspector took account of parents' and carers' responses expressed in 38 questionnaires returned and others completed by pupils and staff. No responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) were available to the inspector.

## Information about the school

This is a smaller than average-sized primary school. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. A few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and nearly all speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The number of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is above average, as is the number of pupils who have a statement for special educational needs. The school does not meet the government floor standard. It has experienced a large number of changes of staff and long-term staff absence. The school holds numerous awards including Healthy School, Eco-Schools and Green Flag.

**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

<b>Overall Effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>3</b>

## Key Findings

- This is a satisfactory school. It is not yet good because, despite current rapid improvement in some aspects, attainment in writing is below that of other subjects and there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. The vast majority of pupils and staff and most parents and carers are very positive about the school. The good spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development the school provides ensures that pupils learn in a caring, welcoming, inclusive environment. Pupils' achievement in reading is a strength of the school.
- Children receive an excellent start to their education in the Early Years Foundation Stage because of strengths in the curriculum and adult support for learning. Pupils make satisfactory progress overall in Key Stages 1 and 2, but progress varies between subjects, being strongest in reading in Key Stage 2 and weakest in writing across the school. However, recent strategies to secure improvements in writing are proving successful. At the end of Year 6, attainment is above average in reading and broadly average in mathematics. In writing, attainment is low, but is rapidly improving.
- The large number of changes in teaching staff has hindered continuity in learning for the pupils. Currently, teaching is consistently at least satisfactory and, sometimes, it is good. However, sometimes, pupils are expected to listen to teachers talk for too long in lessons, instead of learning actively, and the most-able pupils do not work at a sufficiently brisk pace to ensure that they achieve their best.
- Most pupils behave well. Incidents of inappropriate behaviour have reduced quickly now that staffing has stabilised. Incidents are dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff in a caring, but firm way. However, some pupils do not always behave well and this is the reason behaviour is judged to be satisfactory. Pupils' safety and well-being are paramount.
- The senior leaders and the governing body have striven to minimise the impact of staff changes on pupil outcomes and have succeeded in creating a concerted

approach to improvement, particularly in improving the quality of teaching, indicating that the leadership of teaching and the management of performance are satisfactory. They have had recent successes in improving academic progress, particularly in reading and mathematics, and in ensuring greater accuracy in teachers' assessment of writing.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' progress and attainment in writing by:
  - building on the recently introduced system of providing pupils with small, clear, measurable 'next steps' for improving writing
  - ensuring that all pupils in all classes use the 'next steps' in all of their written work.
  
- Ensure that teaching is consistently good or better by:
  - increasing the time pupils are doing activities by reducing the time some teachers talk in lessons
  - enabling the most-able pupils to get on with their work at a very brisk pace and achieve their best.

## Main Report

### Achievement of pupils

Most parents and carers state that their children make good progress. Inspection findings support this view in reading and mathematics. Pupil progress in writing has been slow, but is now improving rapidly because of a different approach to teaching this subject. Pupils say that they enjoy lessons because they learn lots of new things. Most pupils show enthusiasm, motivation and take pride in their work. This was very evident in the way some Year 6 pupils described how they had taken a picture book and written a story, a newspaper article, and a poem about the book.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make excellent gains in their learning because of the rich curriculum and the sensitive and appropriate adult intervention. From starting points that are well below those typically expected, the majority leaves the Reception Year having reached the level expected for their age. Overall, pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 have achieved satisfactorily since the last inspection, but progress is now improving. Attainment is average in reading by the end of Year 2. In Years 3 to 6, pupils' progress varies between subjects. Progress is strongest in reading, where attainment is above average by the end of Year 6. This is because of the careful, focused support that the pupils receive individually and in groups. In mathematics, pupils make good progress and attainment is broadly average. In writing, pupils' progress has been stubbornly poor and attainment has been low and this is why the school did not meet the government's floor standard in 2011. However, the recent changes in teaching writing are having an extremely positive

impact on pupils' progress and their attainment. The gap between what the pupils were attaining, what they are attaining now, and what pupils attain nationally is narrowing quickly. Pupils who are disabled and those who have special educational needs are effectively supported by rigorous analysis of their needs and targets to provide well-planned interventions, which are helping them to make good gains in learning.

## **Quality of teaching**

During the inspection, teaching in the lessons observed was often good and occasionally better. As a result, pupils mostly learnt well. This was particularly noticeable in writing, where new approaches are being implemented. However, the impact of teaching on pupils' overall achievement in recent years and particularly in relation to their recent achievement in writing means that teaching is judged to be satisfactory. Pupils, parents and carers greatly appreciate the very positive relationships between pupils and the staff and these contribute to the pupils' good spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development. A large majority of parents and carers feel that pupils are taught well.

Teachers and teaching assistants are very adept at helping pupils to become more confident in their abilities by well-timed and focused praise given verbally and through written comments in their books. They manage the few pupils with challenging behaviour well. Pupils are motivated to learn and say most lessons are fun. This was evident in a Year 6 writing lesson, when pupils were challenged by teachers and classmates to make improvements to their work. Pupils listen attentively and follow instructions carefully. This was very evident in the Early Years Foundation Stage, when children were engrossed in planting seeds. Teachers plan work that is matched well to the different ability groups in the class. Sometimes, the most-able pupils could do more work if they were allowed to move on at a quicker pace than the rest of the class. In the minority of satisfactory lessons observed, progress slowed because pupils spent too much listening to the teacher talk, rather than being actively engaged in doing activities to move their learning on faster.

The significant improvements in writing are due to accurate assessment of pupils' writing abilities. As a result, pupils are given clear, well-focused, attainable 'next steps'. Most pupils are using these 'next steps' well and consistently apply them in all subjects whenever they are asked to write.

Teaching and the generally well-planned curriculum have a good impact on pupils' enjoyment of learning and on their spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development. They develop pupils' awareness of their responsibilities as good citizens, so that most are tolerant of difference and caring and supportive of each other. They teach them about risks to their well-being so they are able to keep themselves safe, and provide memorable experiences that continually develop their curiosity and motivation to learn. This was evident in the enthusiasm with which the Key Stage 2 pupils described their work on 'Time Travellers', which included research into the Beatles and Mother Teresa, and also they created multi-media presentations on changes in technology and fashion. Teachers are planning more interesting topics to stimulate pupils' writing and providing more opportunities to write in other subjects.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils are very appreciative of the care and help provided by staff and feel very safe in school. They have a good understanding of right and wrong and most get along together well. In the pupils', parents' and carers' questionnaires, the majority felt that behaviour is good. However, a minority felt a few pupils' inappropriate behaviour disrupted lessons. Discussions with staff, some pupils, and parents and carers indicate that a few pupils can be disruptive in lessons, but the incidents are reducing because there is less change in the teaching staff and greater consistency in managing behaviour. One incident was observed during the inspection and the very quick, effective way in which the incident was managed meant that the pupils in the rest of the class were not disturbed and the majority were unaware that an incident had occurred. Inspection findings show that, whilst most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, some behave inappropriately in lessons and so behaviour is judged to be satisfactory overall.

Pupils report that bullying in any form is rare. When it does occur, staff deal with it quickly and effectively. The work the school does to promote good, punctual attendance has resulted in attendance improving year on year and the number of pupils arriving late and the frequency of their lateness has reduced. Pupils' attendance is currently satisfactory.

## **Leadership and management**

The senior leaders are passionate about improving the school. They have effectively managed the recent long-term staff absences and changes. They have also quickly created a strong whole-school team ethos because new staff are made very welcome, are provided with good support, and expectations are explained clearly and becoming consistently applied. The senior leaders have a very accurate view of the school's strengths and where it needs to improve. Because of this, they are acting successfully to improve progress in reading and mathematics and to enable teachers to make more accurate assessments of the quality of pupils' writing. Until recently, the speed of improvement has been hampered by staff absence, which has led to the need to revisit some aspects of performance. This reflects the school's satisfactory capacity to improve. The drive and support provided by senior leaders is helping staff to sustain and build on recent successes. This and the recent successes resulting from it show the impact of the school's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. Pupils benefit from a caring and supportive environment in which everyone is valued.

The governing body holds the school to account well. Its members bring a wide range of expertise and experience to the service of the school and the community. They ensure that school policies are well-understood and implemented by all staff, including those for safeguarding. They are vigilant about ensuring that every pupil has equal access to all the school has to offer. They have striven to minimise the disruption of the changes in teaching staff on pupils' outcomes to a minimum. The governing body and staff make good links with most parents and carers and try very hard to engage with those who are hard to reach.

Teaching is developed through careful identification of needs, targeted opportunities for professional development, professional dialogue, and sharing good practice. Ensuring consistency of expectation and practice is a high priority for senior leaders and has been a constant thrust during the period of staff instability. Links with other schools and organisations are very well-developed to increase the range of support and expertise available to the school. Parents and carers appreciate very much the way in which the school meets the needs of their children and helps them to support their child's learning. The school tries very hard to engage with parents and carers who are more difficult to reach. The curriculum is largely matched to pupils' needs and interests well. Until recently, it had not addressed the poor attainment in writing, but school leadership is taking the necessary actions to remedy this weakness. Teachers plan opportunities carefully that bring together all aspects of pupils' developing skills and knowledge, including the school's faith ethos, which ensures good spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development.



## 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](http://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.
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.**



27 February 2012

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of St Thomas More RC Primary School, Middlesbrough, TS4 3QH**

Thank you very much for the friendly welcome you gave me when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed talking with you and watching you work. Your school gives you a satisfactory education. This means that the school has some good features, but there are some things that need improving. The best things about your school are the excellent start you get in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the outstanding progress you make in reading throughout the school. You enjoy learning because of the high-quality care you receive and the many opportunities to develop spiritually, morally, socially, and culturally. Those of you who find learning difficult and those who find it hard to behave also make good progress because adults give you lots of support.

To help your school to improve, I have asked your headteacher, staff, and the governing body to look at more ways to:

- help you improve your attainment and progress in writing. I have asked teachers to build upon the 'next steps' writing targets that they give you and ensure that all of you apply them consistently whenever you are asked to do some writing.
- ensure that teaching is always good or better. I have asked some teachers to talk less in lessons and give you more time to do your work. I have also asked them to give the most-able of you more opportunities to work at a brisker pace to achieve your best.

You can help the school to become even better by continuing to attend regularly and punctually and working as hard as you do now in your lessons. It would also help if the few of you who occasionally misbehave take more responsibility for your own behaviour and try even harder to get it right.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Hudson  
Lead inspector

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