

# St Thomas More Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	114275
<b>Local Authority</b>	Durham
<b>Inspection number</b>	357511
<b>Inspection dates</b>	5–6 October 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Georgiana Sale

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>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	114
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Helen Haywood
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Lesley Wright
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	27 September 2007
<b>School address</b>	Thorndale Road Belmont Durham DH1 2AQ
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited nine lessons and observed five staff teach. They held meetings with governing body, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation including records of pupils' progress, the school improvement plan, assessment information, policies and samples of pupils' work. Information about safeguarding was evaluated. Inspectors also took into account the views of staff and pupils expressed in questionnaires. They received and analysed 67 questionnaires from parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- How well pupils are attaining and the rates of their progress throughout the school.
- How effectively the school monitors the academic performance of all pupils.
- How information from assessments is used to ensure that pupils make good progress.

## Information about the school

St Thomas More is smaller than most primary schools. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than average. There is a lower than average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Nearly all the pupils are from White British backgrounds. There has been a significant turnover of staff since the last inspection. The school has Healthy School status and an International Schools award.

**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: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

St. Thomas More is a good school. Most parents and carers are very positive about the school and make approving comments such as, 'The staff are excellent, knowledgeable and dedicated.' Some aspects of its work are outstanding, such as the extent to which pupils feel safe and adopt healthy lifestyles, and the care, guidance and support the school provides. These contribute significantly to pupils receiving a good education.

Children join reception with skills and knowledge broadly similar to those found nationally and they are given a good start to their education. Pupils make good progress to attain above average standards in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6. Pupils get on very well with their friends and adults, and are very confident that they are safe. They understand very well what they need to do to stay healthy and how to keep themselves safe, and they use information and communication technology (ICT) safely.

Good teaching ensures that pupils achieve well from their starting points. Teachers make lessons interesting by using a variety of methods. ICT is used particularly well to engage pupils. The analysis of data about pupils' attainment and progress has improved since the last inspection, so that staff know about the progress being made and whether pupils are on track to meet their targets. Marking has also been improved, in English and mathematics in particular, but pupils do not yet receive enough verbal advice during lessons about how to improve further. The good curriculum includes all pupils and is relevant to their needs. A good range of activities designed to enrich pupils' education, that includes visits, visitors and clubs, makes a significant contribution to the curriculum and the pupils' personal development.

The headteacher and governing body share a determination to correct any weaknesses, and recognise that other leaders in the school should play a greater role in coordinating and monitoring actions taken to ensure that pupils' needs are met fully. Nevertheless, honest and accurate self-evaluation, above average attainment, good progress and strong leadership from the headteacher, supported by an effective governing body, give the school good capacity for sustained improvement.

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

- Increase accountability and share leadership more widely across the whole staff, by involving middle managers more in monitoring processes and coordinating actions.
- Ensure that more feedback on how to improve is given to pupils, by:
  - increasing the frequency of verbal feedback in class
  - increasing the quality of written feedback across all subjects.

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## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils say they enjoy school, and this is reflected in their above average attendance and good progress. They work together well in teams and undertake independent research, as when Year 2 pupils used laptop computers to find out about the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb. Their behaviour is good, with most pupils showing very positive attitudes to learning.

Pupils enter Year 1 ready to learn because they have developed good classroom habits in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Progress over the following six years is good, promoted particularly by the good curriculum and pupils' receptiveness to learning. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because they are well-supported by an effective team of teaching assistants who help to modify the work for individual pupils and give extra help to develop the pupils' reading skills when necessary. Differences between the progress of different groups of pupils are minimal.

Pupils enthusiastically put into practice their excellent understanding of how to keep healthy, with all pupils eating a healthy lunch and nearly all joining in an out-of-school physical activity club. Many pupils contribute to the school as buddies to the younger children and prefects. The school council has designed play areas and all pupils help in raising funds for charity. Pupils have some links with the wider community through the church, and with international links in Japan and India. They leave the school with well-developed basic skills and the confidence and personal qualities they need to succeed at secondary school.

The highly positive ethos of the school is a good testament to the pupils' good social, moral, social and cultural understanding, which is well planned for through numerous opportunities both in and out of school. The school is beginning to provide opportunities to introduce pupils to other cultures within the United Kingdom.

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

## How effective is the provision?

A key strength in the effective teaching and learning is the good relationships established between staff and pupils. Classrooms are calm and purposeful places where pupils work together sensibly. Teachers carefully assess pupils' work, set challenging targets and give clear written feedback on how to improve, especially in English and mathematics. However, this is not as consistent in other subjects and verbal feedback in class is not always detailed enough to ensure that pupils know what to do to move to the next level.

The curriculum is good and is enhanced by many visits in order to make learning come alive, for example, to places such as Shipley art gallery, Rainton Meadows and the 'Centre 4 Life'. The majority of pupils take part in after-school clubs, choosing from a wide range that includes dancing and gardening.

Pupils appreciate the benefits of a small school where everyone knows one another and realise they are very well cared for. The school has strong, effective partnerships with other professionals to give timely, targeted support when necessary. Transition arrangements for pupils leaving or joining the school are very effective and ensure that pupils have a smooth passage through school and beyond.

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*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and the governing body have provided a strong sense of direction through a time of significant staff turnover and have ensured that above average attainment has been maintained. Accurate school self-evaluation has meant that development priorities have been, and remain, correctly identified. New subject coordinators are being supported to develop a greater understanding of their roles and responsibilities and their leadership capacity is improving. However, the full impact of the subject coordinators on raising standards further has not yet been fully realised.

The school promotes community cohesion well. Interaction with the local community is strong and the church plays a fundamental role in the life of the school. Effective links with schools across the globe developed through its involvement in the Comenius project, a French film week, and African drumming and dance workshops are promoting pupils' understanding of world faiths, cultures and global citizenship.

Safeguarding procedures meet all statutory requirements well. They are regularly updated and integrated into the curriculum so that pupils have a strong understanding of how to keep themselves safe. The governing body is increasingly offering more challenge to the school and a more effective system has been introduced to monitor the performance of the school and increase accountability at all levels. The school's effective promotion of equality is seen in the high quality of its care and the seamless way in which pupils with special educational needs and/ or difficulties are supported in school and how well they achieve.

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*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

In the Early Years Foundation Stage children have a good start to their education and progress well. By the end of the Reception Year, the majority of children have reached the nationally expected level and many have gone beyond it. They enjoy their learning. Both the indoor and outdoor areas provide a stimulating and fun learning environment and, as a result, children explore and investigate a wide range of experiences, which contributes to their good progress. Teaching is good and activities are well planned and purposeful. For example, children on board their 'pirate ship' worked with enthusiasm and sustained concentration learning lots of new 'pirate words' to help their literacy skills. Leadership and management are good. The new Early Years Foundation Stage leader has a clear vision of how to develop provision further. She has ensured that all the welfare requirements are met and that children's progress is monitored closely. Good relationships with parents and carers and outside agencies are developed and these contribute to the good quality care that children receive.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2



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## **Views of parents and carers**

The vast majority of parents and carers support the school. A very small minority were concerned about the size of the mixed-age classes. Inspectors found that teachers' planning and the tasks given to the pupils took account of the range of ability and most pupils were making good progress. A very small minority were also concerned about the rigour of the procedures in school, but all the pupils spoken to said they were happy, felt very safe and trusted all the adults in the school.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas More Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 67 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 114 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	33	49	31	46	2	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	40	60	26	39	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	16	24	37	55	10	15	3	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	24	36	35	52	6	9	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	24	36	35	52	3	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	22	33	37	55	7	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	33	49	32	48	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	26	39	33	49	4	6	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	39	34	51	1	1	2	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	37	28	42	7	10	3	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	21	34	51	10	15	4	6
The school is led and managed effectively	17	25	35	52	6	9	6	9
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	31	46	29	43	4	6	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.

**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.**



6 October 2010

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Thomas More Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Durham, DH1 2AQ**

We really enjoyed visiting your school and we are writing to thank you for two very interesting days. Your thoughts and views helped us to make our judgments about the school. This is what we found out.

- You make good progress and you work hard in lessons.
- Children in the Reception class thoroughly enjoy school and learn quickly.
- You are taught well and we agree with you, that your lessons are fun and interesting.
- You are very well cared for and supported by all the adults in the school. You were very sure of this when we spoke to you.

We have asked your school to look at how it can make things even better. These are the most important things.

- Your teachers need to make sure that they tell you exactly how to improve your work. You need to make sure that you listen to them and then put their advice into practice.
- The teachers in charge of a subject should make sure that they know how well all pupils in the school are progressing and make sure that all lessons in their subject are good.

We wish you every success in your time at school.

Yours sincerely

Georgiana Sale

Lead inspector

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