

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124376
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	359648
Inspection dates	18–19 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Susan Walsh

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	136
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Edward Bullivant
Headteacher	Diane Jones
Date of previous school inspection	12 June 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 10 lessons or parts of lessons and saw five teachers teach. Meetings were held with staff, members of the governing body and pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at the school's development plan, the school's records of pupils' progress and samples of pupils' work in writing. They scrutinised 39 questionnaires returned by parents and carers as well as questionnaires from pupils and staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The progress pupils in Key Stage 2 make in writing.
- How assessment is used to support learning, particularly how it is used to match work to pupils' needs and the way teachers tell pupils how to improve their work.
- The impact that support for potentially vulnerable pupils is having, including those who join the school late.
- How effective the school's self evaluation is, including the use and understanding of data by all layers of management.

Information about the school

The school is much smaller than most primary schools. Few pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The very large majority are from White British backgrounds although there are a few pupils from other heritages. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. An above-average proportion of pupils join the school other than at the usual times of entry, especially during Key Stage 2. The school has been through a period of uncertainty regarding the permanent status of the headteacher. During the school year 2009-2010, the school was supported part-time by an experienced headteacher while the former headteacher was working elsewhere. The deputy headteacher was appointed as acting headteacher in September 2010. The school plans to appoint a permanent headteacher in September 2011.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It has strengths in the way that it promotes pupils' personal development and strives to meet the needs of the local community. The school has been through an unsettling time recently but sensitive leadership from both the acting headteachers has ensured that staff moral has remained high and that the school has continued to improve some areas of its work. Pupils are happy in this small friendly school and say that they feel very safe and secure.

Children get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception class but the school is aware that this good start is not always built on effectively in Key Stage 1. Improvements to the quality of teaching have ensured that pupils are currently making satisfactory progress in Key Stage 1 but occasionally pupils do not make sufficient progress when they are working independently. This is because the learning intentions for these activities are not always crystal clear and teachers do not always rigorously check pupils' understanding when they are working without direct guidance from adults. Pupils continue to make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 2 to reach average levels of attainment. However, they make more rapid progress in developing their skills in reading and mathematics than in writing. Although the school's recent focus on writing has resulted in some improvement to attainment, especially in Years 3 and 4, pupils still do not have sufficient opportunities to write at length. The quality of teachers' marking and use of pupils' individual academic targets is inconsistent; consequently, pupils do not always know exactly how to improve their work. Overall achievement is satisfactory as a result of satisfactory teaching.

There have been times when the unbalanced distribution of management responsibilities has slowed the pace of improvement. For example, there has been an adverse effect on the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school is sometimes too slow to identify pupils with additional learning needs, particularly those who have joined the school late. Intermittently, the needs of pupils who find learning difficult are not met in lessons and their learning slows. Not enough is done to check their progress and to measure the success of various support programmes. Nevertheless, most pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

The school lacks a robust system for tracking the progress of pupils over time and the regular lesson observations do not always make sufficient links between teaching strategies and the progress of different groups of pupils. Despite these shortcomings, both acting headteachers have rapidly and accurately pinpointed where improvements need to be made and have already had an impact on important areas such as improving pupils' skills in writing and the effectiveness of the governing body. The good provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has been sustained and the curriculum now provides a greater range of enrichment opportunities for pupils. Additionally, a decline in attendance

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rates has been stemmed. This, along with the teachers' reflective practice and high levels of motivation, demonstrates the school's satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

Up to 40% of the 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 in Key Stage 1 by:
 - improving transition between the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1
 - ensuring that teachers are crystal clear about what they expect pupils to learn when they are working independently
 - regularly checking pupils' understanding when they are working without direct adult supervision.
- Increase pupils' progress in writing in Key Stage 2 by:
 - offering more opportunities for pupils to write at length in a variety of subjects
 - making certain that teachers' marking and the use of academic targets consistently provide pupils with clear guidance about how to improve their work.
- Improve the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and other potentially vulnerable pupils by:
 - ensuring that the additional needs of these pupils, including those who join the school after the Early Years Foundation Stage, are promptly identified
 - making certain that the needs of those who find learning difficult are fully met, particularly when they are taught as part of the whole class
 - carefully monitoring the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the impact of all support programmes.
- Improve the impact of leadership by:
 - developing easily accessible tracking procedures that provide the school with a clear picture of pupils' progress over time
 - ensuring that a clear link is made between teaching strategies and the progress of different groups of pupils during the monitoring of lessons
 - making certain that management roles are more equitably distributed.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

In the classroom, pupils of all ethnic backgrounds acquire knowledge and understanding at a satisfactory rate. Pupils are enthusiastic about learning and apply themselves well. In Key Stage 1, improved provision is boosting pupils' progress and, currently, attainment is average at the end of Year 2. Pupils in Key Stage 1 make better progress when they are directly supported by staff than when they are working independently. This is because pupils are not always sure about what they are expected to learn when they are working alone, however, they always try hard and do their best. These situations sometimes continue for too long because teachers do not always make sufficient checks on the

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understanding of these quiet and well-behaved pupils. Attainment in writing in Key Stage 2 has declined in recent years. Few pupils reached the higher Level 5 in writing in 2010. The quality of pupils' writing does not always match pupils' good oral skills and older pupils continue to use simple sentence structures and colloquialisms in their writing. Some extra support, such as one-to-one tuition, has helped some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and other pupils who were in danger of falling behind to make good progress in their reading, writing and mathematics. However, there are other pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities whose attainment is particularly low and whose progress is sometimes too slow, especially when they are taught as part of the whole class.

Pupils' behaviour is consistently good both in and out of lessons. They report that bullying is extremely rare and that pupils treat each other with respect. There is a strong awareness of what is right and wrong and pupils are able to empathise with the feelings of others. Although a recent visit to a Sikh temple elicited a very high level of interest and pupils are tolerant and keen to learn about other faiths and cultures, their knowledge of other ways of life is relatively weak. Pupils are proud of their school and make a good contribution to the school community by belonging to the school council, helping with environmental work and assisting younger pupils. They are aware that their opinions are being listened to and respected. Pupils have been able to contribute well to the local community through helping to develop the Parish Plan and promoting local road safety. There is a good awareness of the importance of a healthy diet and regular exercise. Although pupils are confident and articulate and attend school regularly, their progress in basic skills is satisfactory. Therefore, they are satisfactorily equipped for the next stage of their education.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ 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?

Relationships between teachers and pupils are consistently warm and supportive and encourage pupils to gain confidence. Pupils respect their teachers and behaviour management is unobtrusive and consistently effective. Additionally, teachers plan activities that interest pupils and ensure that they are keen to learn. The match of work to pupils' needs is improving although, occasionally, average and more-able pupils complete similar work, resulting in a lack of challenge for more-able pupils. The needs of those who find learning particularly hard are not always met during whole class teaching. For example, teaching assistants do not always help these pupils to become involved during the introduction to lessons and questions are not always pitched at their level. There is some good quality marking but it is not consistent and pupils themselves say they do not always know how to improve their work. Many pupils are aware of their individual targets, particularly for literacy, but these are not always referred to lessons and teacher's marking.

There have been recent improvements to the curriculum that have improved pupils' enjoyment of school and levels of motivation. More opportunities are being offered in Key Stage 1 to give pupils the chance to learn through engaging in practical activities but the school is aware that it needs to do more to smooth the transition of pupils into Year 1. Improvements to the way writing is taught mean that more pupils now enjoy writing. For example, pupils in Years 2 and 3 were clearly highly enthused by Allen Albert's poetry

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leading to them writing their own extremely amusing and imaginative poems. However, there are still too few opportunities for pupils to write at length about a range of subjects. The range of clubs has been extended and more use is being made of visits and visitors in order to bring learning to life. Partnerships are used well to extend opportunities for pupils, particularly in sport.

The school provides a very cheerful and welcoming environment where pupils feel safe and secure. Very good relationships mean that pupils are confident that adults will listen to them and will help them to resolve any problems they have. There are striking individual examples of where effective support and work with external agencies have resulted in pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities making good progress in both their personal development and school work. Conversely, there are potentially vulnerable pupils who have fallen behind their peers and whose difficulties have not been thoroughly investigated. The school has worked well in partnership with the local authority to improve the way that it records, monitors and promotes regular attendance. Consequently, attendance rates have risen.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders, class teachers and governors are ambitious for the school and are committed to securing a high quality education for the pupils. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body are very supportive of the school and interim leaders have ensured that governors are better informed about outcomes for pupils. The governing body's decision to appoint a very experienced acting headteacher, has been pivotal to keeping the school on track during uncertain times. The appointment has also resulted in helping the current acting headteacher to develop her leadership skills. The current acting headteacher is doing an effective job in providing the school with a clear direction and keeping staff and pupil confidence high, she is shouldering the vast majority of management responsibilities and this is slowing the rate of improvement because she does not have time to tackle every issue.

Safeguarding procedures are satisfactory. Although pupils are looked after well on a day-to-day basis, some of the staff's training is out of date. The school is committed to promoting equal opportunities and is quick to challenge stereotypical views and discrimination. However, the school is acutely aware that it does not have a system for tracking pupils' progress over time that is easily accessible to staff and provides sufficient information about the progress of different groups of pupils. Consequently, there is insufficient information about the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or

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disabilities and those that join the school late or about the impact of extra support. Nevertheless, the school has introduced more regular checks on pupils' attainment and has introduced regular pupils' progress meetings in order to keep a closer check on pupils' achievement. The process of updating computer software and hardware has already started and plans are in place to implement better tracking systems. The school promotes community cohesion and understands its local context well and ensures that pupils are fully involved in neighbourhood life. Links with the wider community in the United Kingdom and beyond are used to develop opportunities for pupils to meet others from backgrounds different from their own and to develop the staff's expertise.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Early Years Foundation Stage

Good leadership and management result in good provision and good outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. When children join the Early Years Foundation Stage, their skills are generally similar to those expected for their age; they make good progress and usually leave the Reception class with skills that are above expectations. However, in 2010 more children than usual joined Year 1 with skills that were comparable to other children of their age, although they had still made good progress from their individual starting points. Children make good progress because they have access to an exciting range of activities that are carefully matched to their needs and interests. There are plentiful opportunities for children to develop their writing skills. Children work and play well together because of a strong focus on developing their personal and social skills. Staff are skilled at questioning children and moving their learning on. They are very clear about what children are expected to learn from activities, including those where children are expected to work independently, and frequently check children's understanding. Leaders are aware that they cannot plan a wide range of exciting opportunities for learning outside

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because the outdoor area is very small and cramped and cannot be used in inclement weather.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
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

Views of parents and carers

Parents are very pleased with what the school provides. They are particularly happy with the quality of provision in the Nursery and Reception class. Parents are delighted with the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, saying it is good at meeting their children's individual requirements and improving their children's confidence. Inspection findings corroborate these views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas More Catholic Primary School 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 39 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 136 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	24	62	14	36	1	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	28	72	11	28	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	15	38	22	56	2	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	46	20	51	1	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	23	59	15	38	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	17	44	22	56	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	54	18	46	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)	20	51	18	46	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	17	44	20	51	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	54	18	46	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	46	19	49	1	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	20	51	19	49	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	24	62	15	38	0	0	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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



20 January 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Walsall, WS6 6PG

It was a delight and a privilege to visit your school. You go to a satisfactory school that is warm and friendly and where you all get on well together. I could see that you are well-informed about how to keep healthy and I was pleased to hear that you feel safe. Your behaviour is good and you make visitors very welcome indeed. I enjoyed meeting the older members of the school council and listened very carefully to what they had to say. It is good that you have been so pleased with the work of the two acting headteachers and that you can see that your school is getting better all the time. I was pleased to hear that you have more clubs in school and are enjoying lessons more.

Provision for younger children is good. Pupils in Key Stage 1 and 2 are making satisfactory progress because teaching is satisfactory. By the end of Year 6, you are reaching standards that are similar to those reached by children in schools nationally. However, your attainment in writing is below average. I have asked your teachers to give you more opportunities to write at length and to make sure they always tell you how to improve your work. I noticed that children in Key Stage 1 do not always make enough progress when they are working on their own so I have asked your teachers to make sure that pupils always know exactly what they are supposed to do when they are working without an adult.

The people who run your school are working very hard indeed to make it an even better place but some people have too much to do. This is slowing the rate of improvement in your school. Lots of checks are made on teaching but sometimes the school does not do enough to check your progress in lessons and over time. The school does not always try to find out why some children find learning very hard and to make sure that they are fully involved in lessons. So I have asked your school to make improvements in these areas.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Susan Walsh

Lead inspector

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