

St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, Canterbury

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118777
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	358441
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	196
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Marion Nash
Headteacher	Lisa D Agostini
Date of previous school inspection	17 June 2008
School address	Old Ruttington Lane Canterbury CT1 1NY
Telephone number	01227 462539
Fax number	01227 459655
Email address	headteacher@st-thomas-canterbury.kent.sch.uk

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2011
Inspection number	358441

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 15 lessons involving seven teachers and observed an assembly. They held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body and representative governors, staff and a group of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at planning documents, school evaluations, assessment information and pupils' work. In addition, inspectors received and analysed questionnaires from 47 parents and carers as well as those from a sample of staff and pupils.

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

- How well the school has sustained the recent improvement in pupils' progress, particularly that of pupils for whom English is not their first language and for those who join the school part-way through their primary education.
- The effectiveness of teaching and the curriculum in interesting and challenging pupils of all abilities.
- How well teachers use assessment information to identify pupils who are not reaching the expected levels and the impact of the school's action to accelerate their progress.
- The start children make in Reception, particularly in developing their early literacy skills.

Information about the school

The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds in this average-sized primary school is high, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Most pupils are of White British, Indian or African backgrounds, but other ethnic heritages are represented in small numbers. The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, with pupils' identified needs mainly relating to behavioural, emotional and social or moderate learning difficulties, particularly speech and language needs. A significantly higher proportion of pupils join or leave the school during their primary education than is found nationally.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a Reception class. Staffing has been stable for a number of years, but at the time of the inspection two classes were being taught by temporary teachers because of extended staff leave. The headteacher took up her post in January of this year. The school has many awards for its work, including Healthy School, Activemark and Modern Foreign Language awards.

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' Catholic Primary is a good school that has improved well since its last inspection. Parents and carers commented positively on the school's happy, community atmosphere, and how pupils are encouraged and supported. The school provides a safe and caring atmosphere where pupils are guided and supported well in developing respect for one another. As parents reflected, the school's positive ethos promotes all aspects of pupils' personal and academic development well. Pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is underpinned by the strong school ethos and is evident in the quality of the relationships that they have with one another and with staff.

The improvements in the school are reflected in a steadily increasing trend in pupils' attainment and progress, so that pupils are prepared well for secondary education. Children get off to a good start in Reception, and a focus on the teaching of letters and sounds gives them a firm basis for developing their later reading and writing skills. Attainment in the Year 6 in English and mathematics is broadly in line with national averages but has risen from being below average a few years ago, particularly in mathematics. This represents good achievement for pupils during their time in the school. Pupils make particularly rapid progress in Years 5 and 6, partly because pupils enjoy using their improved reading and writing skills, for example to research things for themselves, but also because stimulating teaching gives pupils confidence in their achievements. All groups of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who speak English as an additional language, or who join the school later, particularly through Key Stage 2, do well. Teachers know pupils well and provide additional support to ensure that pupils catch up quickly if they begin to fall behind.

There is good teaching throughout the school, but the most effective approaches observed are not used consistently in each class. For example, sometimes too many success criteria are shared with pupils so that they do not focus on the most important learning during the lesson. In a few lessons, the lesson introduction was overly long, which left limited time for pupils to consolidate their understanding and new learning. Teachers' marking is regular and gives pupils detailed advice on how to improve their work so that pupils have a good general understanding of what they have to do next. However, teachers do not routinely give pupils opportunities to check these comments or to carry out the advice, which limits the impact of marking.

The headteacher and other school leaders are ambitious for the school, and are using an accurate evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses to plan effectively for the future. Governors know the school well and are holding it to account through its current period of transition to ensure that there is no loss of momentum. The good partnerships with other schools and external agencies greatly enhance what the school does, for example in linking with a local nursery to provide before- and after-school care. Since the last

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 the quality of education has moved from satisfactory to good, showing the school's good capacity for sustained development.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment to above-average levels in English and mathematics and ensure that pupils make consistently good progress through the school, by:
 - identifying and sharing the most effective teaching approaches already evident in the school
 - making sure that the success criteria planned for pupils precisely identify the most important skills and knowledge to be practised or acquired during the lesson
 - ensuring that the introductions to lessons are not too long so that pupils have enough time to consolidate their understanding by doing things for themselves
 - giving pupils regular opportunities to follow up on the advice given in teachers' marking.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils show their positive attitude to learning in their neat and well-presented work. Their abilities are wide ranging, but taken together when they begin Year 1, pupils' literacy and numeracy levels are below those expected for their age. The good progress pupils make through the school is seen, for example, in the increase in the proportion of Year 6 pupils working at the higher levels. This is particularly evident in mathematics, which was a weakness in the last inspection. Pupils' good social skills and respect for one another mean that they collaborate well in groups, discussing their ideas maturely. This was shown to good effect in a lesson when groups of pupils successfully achieved a very challenging task to work out the probability of certain events happening. Imaginative themes and activities provide the stimulus for creative and interesting writing, such as when pupils developed their understanding of persuasive writing by creating advertisements for a new chocolate bar. Pupils work hard, and they sustain their concentration well, even when required to listen to their teacher for a long time. When working together, they show a genuine buzz of excitement about their learning.

Good behaviour contributes well to learning in lessons and to the positive playground atmosphere. Pupils are safety conscious and take responsibility for their own and others' safety, for example, helping as playground supervisors. Pupils' good understanding of the benefits of eating healthily and keeping fit, choosing salad and fresh fruit at lunchtime, are reflected in national awards. Pupils are very active and energetic at playtimes, making the best use of the extensive grounds and facilities. They participate in a range of sports activities within and after school. Pupils willingly contribute to the school, taking on responsibilities such as helping younger children to water in the playground. School council members are articulate and reflective, and have made a good contribution in determining playground improvements alongside the parents' association. They have had more limited opportunities to give their views about other aspects of school development and to participate in local events, although they do from time to time, such as in a conservation project at Canterbury Cathedral. Pupils initiate fundraising, for example in response to international disasters and in support of a school in Nigeria. The diverse

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

backgrounds within the school are used effectively to promote pupils' awareness of other faiths and cultures through themed events, such as celebration of Divali.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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
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	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
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?

The school has effectively improved all aspects of its provision since its previous inspection. A significant strength is the way in which teachers use their knowledge of pupils and their attainment to plan work at different levels within the class which ensures that all are challenged. Teachers have good relationships with pupils and have clear expectations of their behaviour. Consequently, pupils are confident to ask when there is something they do not understand. In lessons, teachers explain things well and make skilled use of whiteboard technology to illustrate and enliven learning. Teachers effectively develop pupils' computer skills by encouraging pupils to research issues for themselves and use software to present their work, such as for newspaper articles or illustrating their findings in bar charts when collecting data in mathematics. An emphasis on enabling pupils to talk together in pairs or small groups is successfully developing pupils' spoken language across the curriculum and is used particularly successfully in helping them to plan their writing. This was seen to good effect when a mysterious atmosphere was created using an image on the screen to help pupils explore emotion and feelings before writing their own myth. Teachers draw effectively on the expertise of teaching assistants and brief them carefully so that they support learning well in lessons or in small

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

withdrawal groups. Teachers give pupils helpful opportunities at the end of lessons to reflect on their own work and to make improvements.

The curriculum promotes enjoyment of learning because topics are made interesting for pupils. Some effective links are made across subjects, such as when pupils used their understanding of the First World War to write poems. Visits are a regular feature of how teachers enrich learning. For example, the recent series of reciprocal visits with a boarding school in France culminated in a whole-school French afternoon during the inspection. This provided the basis for enrichment and fun cross-curricular work including broadening pupils' understanding of French geography and culture, and strengthening their knowledge of forces and materials by making newspaper models of the Eiffel Tower.

The school skilfully ensures an inclusive ethos while also regarding pupils as individuals. Pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable are supported well because their needs are diagnosed carefully. Care for all groups of pupils is well documented and shown, for example, in the good achievement of pupils who join the school at an early stage of speaking English. Good transition arrangements ensure that children start school or move on to secondary school with confidence. Year 6 pupils are rightly proud of the work they are currently undertaking and which they will take to their secondary schools in September. The success of the school's promotion of good attendance is seen in the reduction of persistent absence and fewer extended holidays taken in term time.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has brought a renewed energy and fresh eyes to school self-evaluation. New tracking systems have been introduced which are helping teachers to make the most of available assessment information. For example, regular meetings are held with teachers and senior leaders to review pupils' individual progress and plan any changes necessary to ensure good ongoing achievement. This reflects the school's commitment to equal opportunities and tackling any discrimination so that any discrepancy in the achievement of different groups is identified and addressed quickly. Consequently, any gaps between the attainment of different groups of pupils are narrower than found nationally. An external review of teaching and learning has been used effectively to strengthen teaching, and inspection shows that teaching is becoming more consistent. Teachers work well together as a team to discuss developments, but have not had many opportunities recently to share the most effective practice through direct observation of one another's lesson.

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

The governing body provides focused support and challenge because governors are knowledgeable about the school's work. Governors bring a variety of relevant skills to the governing body and effectively contribute to setting priorities for improvement. They are giving the school a strong strategic lead during the current period of transition. The school has clear, accessible channels of communication with parents and carers to provide a regular exchange of information, including newsletters and letters about specific activities. Safeguarding procedures are well considered and ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for. The school works well with a range of key agencies to ensure that pupils' individual needs are met. Procedures require some minor administrative upgrading to ensure that all best practice recommendations are met. The inclusive nature of the school is shown in the way pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable are carefully integrated into their classes and engaged in lessons, helping the school to operate as a cohesive community where pupils have a good first-hand understanding of diversity. The school has reviewed the way in which it promotes community cohesion and is using this evaluation to strengthen its provision, for example in finding more ways in which pupils can help within the local community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children are well supported in Reception so that they become confident young learners and ready for Year 1. The good relationships they develop with adults contribute very well to their personal development and well-being. As a result, children are happy and relate well to one another. They enjoy sharing what they are doing and are confident to ask for help when there is something they are unable to do. Children's attainment when they enter the Reception class varies from year to year, but generally their skills and knowledge levels are below those expected of their age, particularly in their speech and language skills and understanding of number. Children make good progress in their early reading

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

skills and understand many of the links between sounds and letters. Many are enthusiastically using this in their writing. Children's vocabulary and language are reinforced effectively through ongoing dialogue with adults, although sometimes opportunities are missed to deepen children's understanding by making them think things through for themselves. The strategies introduced this year for improving children's language and literacy skills, including writing and the achievement of boys, are successfully raising attainment. This reflects the effective and enthusiastic leadership of the area. Staff work as a close-knit team to devise activities which engage children well. For example, during the inspection, children were developing their writing well because they were keen to record their thoughts, stimulated by photographs of their visit to a local zoo. Staff know the children well and are sensitive to their needs. The classroom is organised so that it is welcoming and interesting. It offers ample space to promote a range of practical activities and develop good learning skills. For example, a group of children concentrated for a long time playing and talking together on their own using phonics games. A good start has been made in developing the outdoor area so that it reflects all areas recommended for children's learning. New resources have been purchased and further planning is in place so that more activities can be undertaken outside.

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

The proportion of parents and carers responding to the inspection questionnaire is lower than that found nationally. Most parents and carers are positive about all aspects of the school's work. In particular, they feel that children are safe and that they enjoy school. A few parents or carers expressed concerns about the disruption caused through staff leave and indicated that they did not feel that they had been given enough information about recent changes, and this is reflected in their judgements of leadership. This is recognised by the school leaders, who now have clear plans in place to improve communication further, for example, introducing additional events where parents and carers can learn more about how to support their child's learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas' 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 inspector received 47 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 196 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	66	14	30	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	33	70	13	28	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	24	51	19	40	3	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	40	22	47	3	6	3	6
The teaching is good at this school	25	53	17	36	4	9	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	20	43	20	43	4	9	2	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	53	18	38	4	9	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)	15	32	25	53	2	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	19	40	22	47	2	4	2	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	34	28	60	2	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	21	45	18	38	2	4	3	6
The school is led and managed effectively	20	43	16	34	5	11	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	23	49	19	40	2	4	2	4

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



29 June 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, Canterbury CT1 1NY

Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming when we visited your school recently. We thoroughly enjoyed talking to you and seeing how much you learn in school. You go to a good school and there are many positive things about it.

Adults look after you and care for you well so that the school is a safe place for you to work and play together. You get on well together and help others, and this helps you to enjoy your time at school. You know how to look after yourselves well and to stay safe, fit and healthy. You are very active in the playground at lunch and break times. Your teachers and teaching assistants help you to make good progress because they plan a good range of exciting activities, such as school visits, which help you to enjoy learning. Many of you take part in sports and other clubs after school.

You told us that you find your lessons interesting and we saw that you work hard. Some of you said that you could not think of anything which would improve the school. We have discussed a few ways with your headteacher which we think will help you to make even better progress. Firstly, we have asked teachers to share with each other the ways you learn best so that these strategies are used more often. We have also asked them to make sure that you do not have to listen for too long at the beginning of lessons so that you have more time to do things for yourselves. In some lessons, we think that you have too many success criteria for each activity so that you do not always concentrate on the most important one. Finally, we noticed that you do not often respond to the advice that teachers give you when they mark your work, and we have asked them to give you some time to do this.

We are sure that you will continue to work hard and remember to try out your teachers' suggestions for making your work better.

We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings

Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.