

St Thomas A Becket Catholic Infant School

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|---------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 114577 |
| Local Authority | East Sussex |
| Inspection number | 357575 |
| Inspection dates | 7–8 July 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | Calvin Pike |

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

| | |
|--|---|
| Type of school | Infant |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 4–7 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 180 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | John McManus |
| Headteacher | Ruth Jones |
| Date of previous school inspection | 16 January 2008 |
| School address | 3 Tutts Barn Lane Eastbourne BN22 8XT |
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed teaching and learning in 15 lessons, taught by seven teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher and other staff with leadership and management responsibilities, pupils and a member of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including the school improvement plan, the school's self-evaluation documents, records of pupils' progress and safeguarding procedures. In total 54 parents' and carers' questionnaires were analysed along with staff questionnaires.

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

- The progress made by different groups of pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The extent to which the school helps pupils to understand different cultures.
- The effectiveness of curriculum provision in improving pupils' outcomes.
- The impact of the school's partnership with the junior school, including the challenge brought by the governing body, on the school's overall effectiveness. The impact of the school's partnership with the junior school, including the challenge brought by the governing body, on the school's overall effectiveness.

Information about the school

St Thomas a Becket is a smaller-than-average Catholic infant school. It federated with the adjacent junior school in 2010 with reference to assuring that religious education and worship are followed in accordance with the teachings, doctrines, rites and liturgical norms of the Catholic Church. At the same time, a joint governing body was formed. In all other aspects, the infant school is managed separately. Just over a third of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups, a slightly higher proportion than average. Most pupils are of Indian heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average. The number of pupils who speak English as an additional language has increased in recent years. The proportion is now above the national average. Provision is made for the Early Years Foundation Stage in a Reception class. There is a private nursery on site which is inspected separately. The school runs an early morning club and a range of after-school clubs. The school has gained the Basic Skills award, Silver Healthy Schools Silver award, the Artsmark Gold award and became a Fairtrade school in August 2010.

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

This is a good school. It has a number of outstanding features. Pupils make good progress and achieve well. Attainment at the end of Year 2 has risen over the last three years and is now above average overall in the current Year 2. This is due to the school's success in building on improvements in all areas, although attainment in writing has dipped this year. Children enjoy a good start in Reception where they progress well. As a result, they join Year 1 with average attainment and continue to make good progress through Key Stage 1.

Good and sometimes outstanding teaching contributes to pupils' good progress. Teachers manage their classes skilfully and sensitively. Additional support for individuals and small groups, provided by experienced teaching assistants and outside specialists, is well focused to enable pupils involved to progress well. Lessons are planned effectively to stimulate pupils' interests. Assessment information is carefully used to ensure the work closely matches pupils' attainment, although time spent on activities is sometimes too long, reducing the opportunity to review fully the learning that has taken place. Frequent marking affirms what pupils have learnt. Pupils know how to get better as teachers spend valuable time talking about this in class.

Pupils' personal development is excellent. Pupils are valued as individuals which encourages them to have positive views of themselves and each other. They come to school keen to learn. Pupils behave extremely well and show they can take responsibility for their own learning. Attendance is now average even though a small minority of parents and carers take their children on extended visits overseas without authorisation. Pupils show inclusive attitudes in their learning and great respect for others within the school and the wider community. They develop skills of reflection through prayer and are encouraged to think about their work, others' qualities and the beauty of the natural world. This was shown in an assembly led by Reception pupils who included Jesus as one of their superheroes. Pupils feel very safe and know who to go to if they are worried. The curriculum stimulates pupils' interests in the world around them and provides very good opportunities for pupils to know how others live. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Effectively led by the headteacher, managers have developed a robust approach to self-evaluation. Governors provide good support, although the new governance structure and recent changes of membership mean that there is a need for more governors to become confident in providing challenge to the school. Together senior leaders and governors have a clear and accurate view of the school's priorities. Consequently, given the improving picture, capacity for sustained improvement is good.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase attendance levels overall by working with outside agencies to raise parents' and carers' awareness of the consequences of removing their children for extended periods of unauthorised absence.
- Improve the quality of teaching, to match that of the best in the school, by reviewing the use of lesson time to enable sufficient opportunity for all teachers to check pupils' progress and for pupils to be able to reflect fully on their learning in lessons.
- Strengthening the role of the governing body by sharing the expertise and confidence of the most experienced governors so that all feel confident to offer supportive challenge to the school.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils start school at levels that are below those expected for their age. By the end of Year 2, attainment is above average in most areas. In writing, current standards in Year 2 have dipped after three years of improvement but the pupils concerned have, nonetheless, made good progress from their starting points. Pupils of all abilities make good progress across the school. More-able pupils are challenged very effectively. Mathematical skills are developed well. For example, Year 1 pupils were excited by using real money to pay for games they played in a funfair set up in classrooms and the outside area. All could work out what coins they needed; more-able pupils calculated their own change and found relevant coins from the till. Pupils develop good understanding of the sounds that make up words (phonics). They tackle more difficult work with confidence because teachers model reading well, using big books to emphasise phonic sounds.

Good reading, speaking and listening skills support pupils' improving writing skills. Year 2 pupils showed very good understanding of punctuation and grammar rules as they had fun correcting mistakes when story writing and showed sensitivity when evaluating each other's writing and reading skills. Pupils' well-developed numeracy and literacy skills provide a strong foundation for their future economic well-being as evident in the school's Basic Skills award. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar good progress to their peers because they are well supported whether working in class or in small groups. Those who speak English as an additional language make very good progress as additional visual materials provided for them help them to understand language with which they are not familiar. Small group teaching provided by external experts is well focused and closely linked with the work of the classroom.

There is a positive ethos throughout the school. Pupils feel very safe and enjoy their learning. This is shown in most pupils' good attendance levels, although a small minority of families take unauthorised absence for extended visits abroad. In lessons, pupils are curious and work cooperatively. They behave exceptionally well, showing self-discipline and concern for each other. This is engendered by initiatives such as linking each class with one in the junior school and regular, paired meetings of pupils to share and celebrate work completed. Pupils contribute exceptionally well to school, willingly taking responsibilities in classrooms and as school council members and to the wider community in supporting charity causes and other groups locally and overseas.

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Reflected in the school's Healthy Schools Silver status, pupils show exceptional understanding of the importance of having a healthy diet. Their good habits are encouraged by eating fruit snacks daily and are evident in the high proportion of pupils involved in physical activities. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, noted in part by the school's Artsmark Gold award. They have a strong spiritual sense, predicated on the school's Catholic ethos, which shapes their clear understanding of right and wrong. Their well-developed social skills are seen in their sensitivity to each other and cooperative approaches in working together. The purchasing practices that led to becoming a Fairtrade school exemplify for pupils how they can support equal opportunity and help others outside their community. Pupils have very good understanding of different cultures. This is supported by the curriculum, such as work on other countries, historical periods and the arts, and by careful sharing of each other's customs and traditions.

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 | 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 |
| The extent to which pupils feel safe | 1 |
| Pupils' behaviour | 1 |
| The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| 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 | 2 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Pupils' attendance ¹ | 3 |
| The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |

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 exciting curriculum is planned extremely well to develop skills, knowledge and understanding consistently at each stage along with progression and continuity of learning across subject and topic work. Learning is good, relevant and, most often, fun. Teachers and teaching assistants plan effectively to help pupils work collaboratively in pairs and groups to investigate or solve problems. In a Year 2 history lesson, for example, pupils

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were fascinated by postcards of bathing scenes that they had to sort into different historical periods and categorise using a diagram. Teachers' skilled questioning helps pupils develop empathy and extends their thinking skills well, as seen when older pupils were encouraged to share concerns anonymously on a 'post-it' before these were explored through a teacher-led class discussion. Combined with motivating written marking, similar discussions help pupils know how well they are doing and how they can improve. The school's excellent partnerships with outside agencies, visiting musicians and artists, other services, including 'adopt a fireman', and several parish networks in the United Kingdom and abroad enhance learning significantly.

A range of professionals work with senior managers to provide good care, guidance and support for pupils and their families, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Good procedures are adopted to help ensure pupils join school without anxiety and move through year groups then on to junior school calmly and safely. This is recognised and appreciated by staff and a very large majority of parents and carers whose views concur with one parent who wrote, 'Lovely ethos - A caring school that truly considers each and every child.'

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 | 1 |
| The effectiveness of care, guidance and support | 2 |

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, senior team, all staff and the governing body share a strong vision to provide a happy environment in which pupils develop well. This vision has been revised in the previous year through a training day jointly held with staff at the junior school. The relatively new governing body contributes a wide range of skills. Governors visit regularly and are very supportive of the school. The governing body and its committees are well structured and effectively hold the school to account. However, although some governors offer appropriate challenge, not all governors are sufficiently experienced or confident to do so. Nonetheless, the school's strong monitoring and self-evaluation arrangements give governors a clear and accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development.

Good communication systems involving home visits, newsletters, workshops and open evenings inform parents and carers so that they can support their children's learning. A number of parents and carers volunteer their time to the school; they work as effective team members because they are well prepared for the roles they play. Pupils' learning and well-being are promoted outstandingly well through an extensive range of external partnerships. When parents and carers are invited to partnership-supported events, such as witnessing the visit of Gruffalo as part of an after-school book sale during the inspection, they gain valuable additional insights about their children's development. Close

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partnerships combined with up-to-date training also help ensure the school's good safeguarding procedures.

The school's open and welcoming atmosphere underpins its successful promotion of community cohesion. For example, the school has analysed the profile of its families and made very good provision to translate information for parents and carers who speak English as an additional language. Although the federation with the junior school is related to the school's provision of religious education and worship, additional benefits have already been realised. These include the development of joint policies for mathematics and literacy, meetings between coordinators of these subject areas to plan the curriculum across the key stages and the frequent linking of classes to share learning and ease pupils' transition from infant to junior school. The high quality of curriculum provided, strong partnership links, good teaching and rigorous monitoring ensure that the school promotes equal opportunities and tackles discrimination well.

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 | 2 |
| The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being | 1 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination | 2 |
| The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money | 1 |

Early Years Foundation Stage

Most children leave Reception with skills that are at least in line with those expected for their age. All make good progress. The majority of children speak confidently, using a wide vocabulary, and can read simple stories with their teacher. For example, children expressed their reasons for deciding which percussion instruments would best accompany music describing different types of dinosaurs very clearly. Most children can write simple words accurately. Their skills in using a computer are developing well as shown when some were able to produce a picture and write a sentence with minimal help. Numeracy skills are good.

Children settle well and enjoy purposeful learning in a happy environment. They develop independence through a good balance of classroom and outdoor activities that are initiated

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by children and directed by adults. These encourage enquiry and make learning fun. Children play well together, share resources cooperatively and develop good independent learning skills, such as in conducting a survey on favourite dinosaurs. They respond positively to responsibilities given to them, such as clearing up particular areas or after morning snacks. Children behave very well encouraged by the excellent relationships they enjoy with staff and with each other. Teachers and teaching assistants plan carefully and monitor children's achievements well in order to build on their interests and promote progress effectively as each stage of learning is reached.

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

Nearly a third of the parents and carers responded to the questionnaire about the school, which is slightly below the average response rate. Of these, the vast majority responded positively to most aspects of the school's work. In particular, they affirmed that their children enjoy school, that it helps to keep them safe and healthy and that the school keeps parents and carers informed about their children's progress. Slightly fewer parents agreed that the school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors observed behaviour in lessons and around the school, discussed this with pupils and staff and scrutinised behaviour records. This showed that behaviour is managed very effectively and that relationships between staff and pupils are warm, supportive and mutually respectful.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas a Becket Catholic Infant 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 54 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 180 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|---|-------------------|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 44 | 81 | 8 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 45 | 83 | 7 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| My school informs me about my child's progress | 36 | 67 | 15 | 28 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 39 | 72 | 12 | 22 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 41 | 76 | 10 | 19 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning | 39 | 72 | 12 | 22 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 36 | 67 | 15 | 28 | 1 | 2 | 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) | 39 | 72 | 11 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs | 39 | 72 | 11 | 20 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 33 | 61 | 14 | 26 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 31 | 57 | 20 | 37 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 45 | 83 | 5 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 46 | 85 | 5 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 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 | 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.



11 July 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas A Becket Catholic Infant School, Eastbourne, BN22 8XT

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we visited your school. What we saw and what you told us helped us to decide that you go to a good school. The headteacher, staff and governing body work hard to make sure that you are happy, you do well and the school continues to improve. The following things are particular strengths of the school.

- You are looked after well and this helps you to feel very safe.
- Your behaviour is excellent and you show great consideration towards others.
- You know a lot about how important it is to eat healthily and take part in physical activities, and you do both.
- You are developing very well so that you are able to think hard about all the lovely things in the world and know what is right and wrong. You are considerate of others in and outside school and you are very interested in what happens in other countries and how children in them live.

Teaching and your progress are good and improving. To help the school get even better, we have asked your headteacher to remind all parents and carers how important it is for you to come to school regularly. We have asked teachers to give you a little more time to think about and share what you have learned in lessons. Although the governors give lots of their time and support to the school, we have asked them all to ask more questions about how well the school is doing and how it can get better. You can help by continuing to behave so well and by taking every opportunity to get the most out of lessons and your experiences at school.

Yours sincerely

Calvin Pike

Lead inspector

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