

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104236
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	377045
Inspection dates	10–11 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Georgina Beasley

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	211
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Quinn
Headteacher	Jean Richmond
Date of previous school inspection	23 September 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 20 lessons and observed eight teachers. They held meetings with the headteacher, groups of pupils, teaching staff and representatives of the governing body. They observed the school's work and looked at progress data, assessment information, pupils' work, safeguarding procedures, improvement plans and monitoring reports. Inspectors received and analysed 52 questionnaires from parents and carers, 81 from pupils and 16 from staff.

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

- The effectiveness of teaching in promoting learning and progress in writing, especially for boys and more able pupils.
- The impact of mobility on pupils' attainment, learning and progress.
- How effectively the curriculum engages pupils and gives them opportunities to practise reading, writing, mathematics and computer skills in real-life contexts and other subjects.
- How well school and subject leaders use information about pupils' progress to monitor the effectiveness of learning and teaching.

Information about the school

This is a slightly smaller-than-average-sized primary school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds is close to the national average, as is that for pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average while the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. A well-above-average number of pupils join the school at intermittent times throughout the school year. Children first enter the school's Nursery at the beginning of the term after they become three and move to the Reception Year in the September after they become four. The school has received several awards, including Healthy School status.

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 which pupils are proud to attend. Pupils feel safe in school. They comment that 'teachers care about us'. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and this is reflected in pupils' good behaviour. Pupils get along noticeably well together because of the good level of respect they have for others' feelings, beliefs and cultures. They say, 'We are all the best of friends.'

Parents and carers say that the school has improved considerably since the previous inspection. They appreciate the strong and caring leadership of the headteacher and say that she 'has a good team behind her'. The headteacher's clear vision of high expectations and her drive for success are shared by pupils, staff and members of the governing body. Consequently, there has been strong improvement in pupils' academic and personal achievement since the previous inspection. Attendance has improved significantly and is now broadly average. Pupils' previous low attainment has been successfully tackled. Attainment is average at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 and reflects a trend of good improvement across the school. A detailed analysis of pupils' learning and progress guides staff training and school improvement. As a result, the school has developed an accurate view of its strengths and areas in need of development. It displays a good capacity for sustained improvement.

Teaching is consistently good. Teachers think carefully about how best to present lessons to motivate and interest pupils. Positive relationships promote pupils' keenness to do well. Pupils say that 'teachers want us to do well and try their best to help us'. Learning and progress are good and pupils achieve well. Pupils who join the school in different year groups soon make friends as a result of good induction arrangements. They settle quickly and make good progress. The curriculum is broad and balanced and pupils have good information and communication technology (ICT) skills which they use well to support learning in a range of subjects and topics. However, there are few opportunities for pupils to consistently develop their speaking skills in lessons or to apply writing skills in a range of different subjects. In addition, boys' attainment in writing is lower than their attainment in reading and mathematics.

Care, guidance and support are good. Families whose circumstances render them particularly vulnerable are well supported and this enables their children to make good progress. The governing body supports and challenges the school well. Comprehensive safeguarding procedures are monitored rigorously to ensure they are understood and followed consistently by all staff and visitors.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Give boys more interesting topics to write about so that, by July 2013, they attain as well in writing as they do in reading.
- Provide regular opportunities for pupils to write across a broad range of subjects and topics which are linked to their real-life experiences.
- Increase opportunities for pupils to develop speaking skills in lessons and across curricular topics.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Children enter the school's Nursery year with knowledge, skills and abilities well below the levels expected for their age. Their speaking skills are particularly low and this limits their confidence to talk about their experiences and learning. Achievement is good across the school for all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, pupils who speak English as an additional language and those who join the school in different year groups.

Learning and progress in lessons are good. Pupils in Reception and Years 1 and 2 learn how to read and spell confidently. They work in small groups according to their ability and tasks and individual adult attention are matched closely to individual pupils' needs. In Years 3 to 6, pupils make good progress in English and mathematics lessons. Boys attain similar levels to girls in reading and mathematics but not in writing. Pupils are clear about their targets and the next steps they need to take to reach a higher level. They are encouraged to check their work carefully and make improvements independently. This was the case in a well-taught Year 3 literacy lesson when pupils confidently recorded the similarities and differences between two postcards written by different characters in a story. They made good progress because they checked their work closely and then made improvements to their spelling of words and to their ideas.

Pupils are becoming increasingly involved in planning and guiding their learning. They apply and practise the skills they will need in later life in a satisfactory way. There are few opportunities for them to develop writing skills in other subjects and cross-curricular topics. Pupils across the school still require considerable support to talk about their experiences and learning across a range of subjects. Pupils have good ICT skills, as reflected in Year 6 pupils' portraits, created during art week in the style of Andy Warhol.

Pupils know how to behave because expectations are clear. They like receiving 'gold stars' as rewards for good behaviour and conduct and are confident that the rare incidents of bullying and misbehaviour are handled immediately and effectively. They understand the importance of keeping fit and leading a healthy lifestyle, as reflected in the Healthy School award. Many walk to school each day. Pupils enjoy 'Wake and Shake' at the start of some mornings and this gives them an active start to the day

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and helps them to understand that 'fitness can be fun'. School meals are healthy and cooked freshly each day, and the uptake is high. Pupils like being able to give their views through dropping a note into one of many suggestion boxes around the school or by consulting a school council member. Pupils make a good contribution to church and local community events. Most parents and carers ensure their children arrive in school on time every day.

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	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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers plan lessons that are interesting and motivate pupils to do their best. Modern technology is used well to present learning in different ways and so help pupils to work hard in lessons. Teachers use assessment information well to plan tasks that meet pupils' different needs. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who need additional help from time to time receive focused support when they work in small groups outside the classroom on different skills. Support from teaching assistants is inconsistent. When teachers are clear about what they want pupils to learn, teaching assistants are able to give focused guidance to help pupils make good progress in lessons. However, on occasion they focus on the completion of work rather than the quality of a task.

Pupils enjoy the varied range of after-school clubs and numerous trips that enrich learning well. Visitors and theme days and weeks enrich pupils' learning well. Pupils enjoy lessons, especially when they have opportunities to discuss their ideas with partners before sharing them with the rest of the class. Teachers model language

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

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and explain new vocabulary well to pupils in English and mathematics lessons. As a result, pupils are developing the vocabulary they need to describe characters and events in literacy and to talk about how they solve problems in mathematics. Opportunities to develop speaking skills across a range of subjects and curricular topics and to practise writing skills are less well planned. While some links are made between different subjects, such as studying historical novels in English, the planning of pupils’ application of writing and oracy across a range of subjects and topics is not embedded.

Pupils like the rewards for good behaviour and special achievements and look forward to receiving a prize when they reach a particular target. The school checks closely to make sure rewards are given and celebrated consistently across the school. The level of care, guidance and support for pupils is good and this has, for example, resulted in a significant improvement in attendance. Pupils who join the school at different times through the year receive good care and support to enable them to settle quickly and make good progress. Pupils are well prepared for secondary school through joint sporting and musical activities with other local schools. The school supports individual parents and carers effectively to ensure applications for secondary school are completed on 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’s good leadership sets the tone for the school. An ethos of high expectations and constant drive for improvement permeates the school’s work and governors, teachers and teaching assistants are fully committed to the school’s continued development. Rigorous monitoring of learning has resulted in individualised staff training which in turn has resulted in improved teaching.

The governing body plays a full and active role in evaluating the school’s performance and identifying and allocating resources to support planned improvement strategies. The school regularly reviews and evaluates all procedures to safeguard pupils’ health and welfare. Accidents are monitored closely to check the suitability of space and equipment.

The school promotes pupils’ equal opportunities and tackles discrimination well. It analyses the learning and progress of all its different groups closely and acts promptly and effectively if any dip in progress is noted. A careful analysis of

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assessment information guides frequent and regular discussion about pupils’ progress. Pupils who are on track to exceed or reach expected targets are noted and those not on track given additional support in lessons to help them catch up quickly. As a result, all groups of pupils quickly close the gap with their peers nationally and most reach broadly average attainment.

Positive partnerships with outside bodies enrich pupils’ learning. All Year 6 pupils are accomplished musicians as the result of an effective music partnership. Visiting artists, authors, librarians, and members of local sports clubs all contribute positively to pupils’ learning. Community cohesion is well supported. The school has made an accurate evaluation of its socio-economic, ethnic and religious characteristics and has implemented an action plan to raise pupils’ awareness of communities different to their own. Active links with local schools and schools abroad help pupils learn about different communities from first hand.

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	2
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	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Nursery year with little confidence to interact with others or to talk about themselves. Their experiences of life are particularly limited. Adults welcome the children and their parents and carers individually at the start of every nursery session. This helps to break down barriers and forge positive relationships between home and the school. It also helps the children to settle down quickly at the start of each school day.

Learning and development are good and, by the end of the Reception year, the majority of children reach broadly average levels in all areas of learning. Learning is most effective when adults plan activities that focus on developing speaking skills.

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For example, the nursery children yelped in delight when they mixed cornflour and water and enjoyed talking about how the mixture felt as it changed from a dry to a wet mix. After watching an egg smash on the ground, children in the Reception class were supported well to explain what happened to Humpty when he fell off the wall. Adults listen and note carefully what children say and do and use the information to plan activities that are intended to match children’s individual needs. However, there are occasions when activities do not respond sharply enough to these assessments of children’s learning. As a result, tasks do not then meet children’s specific learning needs and adults do not always interact with enough focus in activities.

Leadership and management are good. A detailed evaluation of indoor and outside learning environments has resulted in well-organised learning areas and a greater range of resources and opportunities for the children to plan and guide their own learning. As a result, the children play amicably alongside, and increasingly with, each other. Assessments cover all areas of learning but are not always used effectively to monitor any gaps in learning or to plan activities that would enable target groups and individual children to make even better progress.

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

A below-average proportion of parents and carers returned the inspection questionnaire. Those who did agreed with the positive views expressed by parents and carers in the school’s own survey carried out last year. The inspection endorses the view that their children enjoy school and that they feel safe. Numerous positive comments in the returned questionnaires praised the school and especially school leaders and managers, They commented favourably about the good teaching and the good level of care, support and guidance provided by staff. Many parents and carers recognise that ‘the school treats each child as an individual to ensure their specific needs are met’. A very small number of parents and carers stated that they would like more information about their children’s progress so that they could be sure that they were making enough progress. The inspection found that the school is open to discuss their children’s progress and willing to listen to their concerns.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas of Canterbury 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 52 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 211 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	35	67	16	31	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	35	67	17	33	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	27	52	19	37	4	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	28	54	19	37	4	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	34	65	15	29	2	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	30	58	19	37	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	52	22	42	2	4	1	2
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)	27	52	20	38	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	30	58	17	33	2	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	30	58	19	37	2	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	27	52	20	38	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	32	62	18	35	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	31	60	17	33	2	4	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



12 October 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School, Walsall
WS3 1SP**

Thank you for your warm welcome when we visited your school recently, and a special thanks to those of you who completed a questionnaire and who talked to us about your learning. Nearly all of you told us that you enjoy school for lots of reasons but especially taking part in the after-school clubs, visits and special days and weeks that the school organises for you.

St Thomas of Canterbury is a good school. You make good progress because teaching is good. You all try hard to do your best work, which supports your good learning in lessons. You behave well and you get on well together, which makes your school a safe and friendly place to be. We agree with you when you say that your teachers and adults care about you and help you to learn. You know how important it is to keep fit and eat healthily and play a positive role in the school's success. This includes playing with younger pupils at playtimes and giving your views to the school council members. Your attendance has improved significantly. Well done.

The school makes sure that learning is enjoyable. You told us that literacy is fun in your school. We have asked your headteacher and teachers to give you all more opportunities to develop your speaking and writing skills. We have also asked them to make sure that boys do as well in writing as they do in reading.

You can all help by continuing to try your best in lessons and by helping the adults in your school plan the curriculum topics by telling them what you are interested in and what you would like to learn about next. Thank you again for your welcome.

Yours sincerely

Georgina Beasley
Lead inspector

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