

St Thomas' Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124365
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	380875
Inspection dates	17–18 November 2011
Reporting inspector	John Horwood

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	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Pennington
Headteacher	Antony Wretham
Date of previous school inspection	18 June 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 14 lessons taught by seven teachers. Meetings were held with groups of staff and members of the governing body, and discussions were held with several groups of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation including pupils' work, minutes of meetings, progress monitoring records and school policies. The responses to 86 questionnaires from parents and carers, 10 questionnaires from staff and 111 questionnaires from pupils were scrutinised.

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

- What is being done to ensure that boys can make as much progress as girls?
- Do some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make less progress than other pupils?
- Has academic guidance improved since the previous inspection?

Information about the school

This is an average-sized primary school. The vast majority of pupils are White British. Very few are from minority ethnic groups and none speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below that found in most schools. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is well-below average. The school is part of a federation of seven schools known as The Painsley Catholic Collegiate. The school has recently gained Healthy School status and the International Eco-School award. There have been a high number of staff changes due to retirement and transfers. Currently four teachers are new to the school this year and the vacant deputy headteacher role has not yet been filled on the leadership team.

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

3

Main findings

St Thomas' Catholic Primary School provides good quality education. The academic attainment has been above average over a sustained period which represents good progress from pupils' starting points. Attainment in mathematics is lower than in English and occasionally boys' attainment has been lower than that of girls. The vast majority of pupils make the same progress but a small minority, who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, do not. These pupils are well supported within the classroom but do not make accelerated progress through extra support beyond the classroom. The school has identified this as an area for improvement and has recently appointed a new coordinator to ensure effective support for these pupils.

Pupils make good progress in their personal skills. Behaviour is consistently good and pupils have good relationships with adults and with each other. Pupils also say they feel safe in school because they are well looked after and that there is no bullying. They enjoy school and this is reflected in their above-average attendance. They have a good understanding of how to keep fit and healthy and the good provision to support this is confirmed by the school being awarded Healthy School status. They have a good awareness of environmental issues and the school has obtained the International Eco-School award.

There has been satisfactory progress in issues identified at the previous inspection and good achievement by pupils has been maintained. The school self-evaluation document is accurate reflecting a good understanding of what has been achieved and what still needs to be done. Leaders have been pro-active in becoming an integral part of the federation to increase the opportunities for the pupils. Well-established systems to raise attainment have enabled the new teachers to ensure pupils make good progress. However, pupils are not always sufficiently involved in assessing their own work to make greater progress or fully aware of what they have to do to improve. The continuing good outcomes confirm that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve. There are already positive signs of improvement through the federation links and both leadership and teaching are good. Parents, carers and pupils are also very pleased with what the school provides. However, there have been exceptional circumstances that have prevented the school from moving forward at a more rapid pace. Significant staff and leadership changes have taken place in the past year. Recent additions to the staff have meant acceleration in improvement although the school does not currently have a deputy headteacher.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment especially in mathematics by:
 - consolidating the whole school system on the use of assessment within the classroom so that pupils always understand what they need to do to improve their work
 - ensuring that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least the same progress as others.
- Strengthen the school's capacity to improve by making the necessary appointments to the senior leadership team.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' attainment on joining the school has been improving over time and is now a little above expectations. All pupils have made good progress from their starting points. The progress has not been uniform throughout the school due to variations in the teaching, but this variation is now much reduced. Attainment is above average overall but is stronger in English than in mathematics. In 2011, boys made less progress than girls but this is not the case in every year. Much has been done to ensure all pupils make the same progress including increasing the proportion of male teachers who then act as role models to the boys. In most lessons there is a good pace of learning and pupils are actively engaged throughout. There is a strong focus on enjoyment and relevance to everyday life. This was seen in a Year 5 mathematics lesson about perimeters. Good use was made of information and communication technology (ICT) to introduce the lesson where pupils had to imagine themselves as builders looking at house plans to work out perimeters of components. Pupils were then actively involved in practical activities. The teaching assistants are very effective at supporting those with special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure they are able to learn throughout the lesson. However, over time, a minority of these pupils only make satisfactory progress because of limited additional support provided beyond the classroom. Good relationships are a feature of all lessons.

Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Almost all parents, carers and pupils say that behaviour is good. Pupils identify the many opportunities they have to take responsibility such as being a member on the school council, supporting the younger children and being playground leaders. They have good involvement in the community beyond school through activities within the Catholic community and with schools within the federation. Pupils' good behaviour is appreciated by the local community. Wider communities are supported through fund-raising. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This is demonstrated by their strong, positive relationships and they show respect to each other and to adults. Pupils' rates of attendance are above average.

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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	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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers' planning recognises the differing needs and abilities of pupils in the class and the work is consistently matched to pupils' ability. In an outstanding Year 3 literacy lesson the planning took full account of pupils' differing abilities in a class of mainly boys to ensure that they were all fully motivated to learn about aspects of poetry and presentation. The teacher ensured that pupils were fully aware of the learning objectives and were involved in assessing their own work and that of others. The marking of their work in books also clearly informed them how well they were doing and how to improve. These positive aspects of assessment within the classroom are more variable in some classes. Not all pupils are fully aware how to improve their work. There is a new system being introduced across the federation to provide more consistency. Teachers make good use of ICT to support teaching and learning although pupils say that some recent difficulties with the wireless laptops has caused frustration. Teaching assistants are experienced and work in close partnership with teachers.

The curriculum is matched to most learners' abilities and interests. It reflects the current focus in raising standards in mathematics and suits the high number of boys in some classes. The use of literacy, numeracy and ICT across the curriculum is good. The curriculum is enhanced by the teaching of modern foreign languages and music and through the federation arrangements for pupils to come together for particular activities. There is a range of well-attended sporting activities. The curriculum is enriched by a good range of trips, visits and other activities. Although

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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the curriculum is adapted to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities the support beyond the classroom, although provided, is not resulting in improved progress for a small minority of pupils.

Pupils, parents and carers agree that pupils are safe and well cared-for in school. The school monitors attainment well and provides support where needed. The opportunities for the most-able pupils are enhanced through the federation provision. Within the classroom there is good support and guidance for all pupils. The welfare provision for pupils is good with health and safety well addressed. There are good partnerships with external agencies and the local authority to ensure additional support for pupils' academic and social needs. There are good systems in place to identify quickly any pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and to support their learning and well-being. Arrangements to support pupils joining the school from the local pre-school provision and to prepare them for the move to secondary school are good. The procedures for promoting improved attendance and behaviour are robust and effective. The school provides a well-managed breakfast club to extend its care beyond the school day and this is enjoyed by those who attend.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides good, clear leadership and is well supported by staff at all levels. The staff survey clearly shows that they are united in their vision for the school. The school development plan reflects a good understanding of what needs to be done to improve further and there are well-established systems to support the school vision. Leaders have steered the school through a period of change to ensure good outcomes have been maintained. Governance is good. The federation arrangements have produced a well-structured governing body whilst maintaining governors who have previous association with the school. They provide good support to the school and challenge when appropriate. They ensure statutory requirements are fully met.

The effectiveness with which the school promotes equal opportunities is satisfactory. There is no evidence of any discrimination and pupils say that they are all treated fairly. All pupils have the same opportunities for learning and participating in lessons and other school activities. Performance data are analysed by leaders to look for and remedy any variations in performance between groups of pupils. The vast majority

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make good progress from their starting points. However a small minority, who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, do not. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements including risk assessments and child protection procedures. Records of the suitability of staff to work in the school are exemplary. Good partnerships have been established to support pupils' progress and well-being.

The senior leaders have developed community cohesion well since the previous inspection. Within the local community pupils are involved in projects such as the local well-dressing and the 'keep Tean clean' campaign. Opportunities through the federation involve pupils with the wider community where they meet pupils from a wider range of backgrounds. Pupils have also visited places of worship from different faiths. The school has developed a link through the diocese with a school in India.

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	3
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

All of the children have experienced some form of pre-school provision. They make good progress in Reception and most are at above the expected levels when they leave. Parents and carers make many positive comments about the provision such as 'I feel the team in Reception provide a caring, pastoral approach that is perfectly suited to the early years development and my child is making good progress.' Children are happy, settled and learning routines well. Their social skills develop well through playing together, sharing resources and helping each other. They are friendly and polite as was seen when they excitedly talked about the book character Kipper's party that was taking place later in the day.

All the staff in Reception work well as a team with a common sense of purpose. Resources are well-maintained and there is a strong focus on ensuring children's

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health and safety. Children benefit from good teaching in a well-resourced environment. Activities are well planned to link closely to the early learning goals for their age. Staff monitor children's progress well and identify and meet any specific needs early.

The outdoor space is well resourced and well used. Activities link well to all areas of the curriculum and there are good opportunities for children to make their own choice of activities and to move between the areas. Parents and carers are encouraged to be involved in children's learning. The leadership and management are good and the experienced and knowledgeable leader has high expectations of all pupils.

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 very large majority of parents and carers are happy with their child's experience at school. There were a relatively high number of questionnaires returned and in all areas the positive responses exceeded those seen nationally. Many parents and carers wrote positive comments about the school such as, 'St Thomas' has a good reputation locally and I would say that it is well deserved' and, 'Both of my children love school. The teachers in both classes have stimulating lessons which encourage independent learning.' A very small minority of parents and carers had individual concerns which were all considered as part of the inspection process, while preserving anonymity.

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 inspection team received 86 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 209 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	60	70	23	27	3	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	51	59	30	35	1	1	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	38	44	44	51	3	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	49	57	32	37	4	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	47	55	35	41	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	37	43	43	50	4	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	47	55	36	42	3	3	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)	48	56	32	37	2	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	53	62	25	29	4	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	47	55	28	33	5	6	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	44	51	26	30	6	7	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	47	55	27	31	3	3	3	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	58	67	22	26	1	1	1	1

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.



21 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST10 4DS

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We really enjoyed talking with you, hearing your views and looking at the work you do. Your school is giving you a good education.

Here are some of the things your school does well.

- Leaders look at every opportunity to improve opportunities for you and this includes joining a federation.
- You attend school regularly.
- The development of your spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is good.
- We know that you feel safe in the school, where behaviour is good.
- The vast majority of you make good progress as a result of good teaching.
- Adults look after you very well and there are good procedures to keep you safe.

To become even better we have asked the school to:

- ensure that teachers always use assessment systems in the classroom to give you an understanding of how well you are doing and how to improve further
- ensure that those of you who find learning difficult are always given help to make at least the same progress as others
- make appointments to the senior leadership team that will help the school improve even more quickly.

All of you can help the school move forward by continuing to work hard. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

John Horwood
Lead inspector

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