

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	100176
Local authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	376363
Inspection dates	22–23 May 2012
Lead inspector	Brian Oppenheim

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	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Drake
Headteacher	Peter Finlay
Date of previous school inspection	23 January 2008
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Brian Oppenheim

Additional inspector

Jan Edwards

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 20 lessons taught by all eight teachers and held meetings with pupils, staff and the Chair of the Governing Body. They evaluated pupils' achievements over three years, progress in lessons and in pupils' books, and analysed the school's assessment data. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation and planning, and listened to pupils read. They analysed the school's data on pupils' achievements and looked at the results of tests. Inspectors also analysed 93 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents and carers.

Information about the school

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is smaller than most primary schools. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress set by the government. The majority of pupils who attend live within the school's immediate locality. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is about average and decreasing year by year. Pupils come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The majority are White British followed by equal proportions of pupils from White European and Black African backgrounds. The proportion of pupils new to English or who speak English as an additional language is above average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action plus or who have statements of special educational needs is broadly average. Their needs relate mainly to specific learning difficulties and speech, language and communication. The Early Years Foundation Stage is in one Reception class. The school is involved in university research projects looking at how to enhance learning opportunities for pupils.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- St Thomas More is a satisfactory school. The school is improving but inconsistencies in teaching and pupils’ rates of progress mean that it is not yet good overall. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Overall, achievement is satisfactory and attainment is above average in English and mathematics at the end of Years 2 and 6. Pupils do better in mathematics and reading than in writing. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall with some making good progress. They are suitably supported and, as a result, gain the confidence to learn.
- Satisfactory teaching means that pupils make the expected progress in core and other subjects as they move through the school. There is some good and outstanding teaching. The support provided by teaching assistants is mostly effective. In a few lessons, teachers use questions well to get pupils thinking but this is not consistent. In some lessons, expectations are not high enough and the work does not stretch all pupils.
- Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. Relationships are excellent and pupils work together very well. The school provides a safe environment and supports those whose circumstances make them vulnerable well. Attendance is above average.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and the active governing body provide satisfactory leadership. Standards have risen steadily in Key Stage 1. Initiatives to improve writing and the performance of the more able are leading to rising standards in Key Stage 2. The role of middle leaders in leading teaching and managing performance is satisfactory. The school has a great deal of data about pupils’ progress but it is not used fully to set challenging work for all.

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Good practice and in-house expertise are not used consistently to improve teaching.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching further so that by December 2012 all teaching is at least good by ensuring that:
 - the good practice seen in the good and outstanding lessons is shared with all staff
 - pupils' writing skills continue to improve
 - teachers use questions more widely to check pupils' understanding, extend their learning, and to ensure that all pupils are involved
 - expectations are suitably demanding so that tasks challenge all pupils sufficiently
 - marking helps pupils to improve and extend their learning.
- Improve the role of middle leaders further so that they have a strong impact on achievement by:
 - ensuring in-house expertise is used to model good practice
 - ensuring that the wide range of data used to track pupils' progress is simplified so that interventions are timely and effective.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Parents and carers think that their children achieve well. While there are pockets of good progress it is inconsistent and is satisfactory overall. When children start in the Reception class they have better developed skills than those expected for their age. These have improved gradually over the past three years. They make satisfactory progress and this gives them a sound start to Year 1. Pupils achieve satisfactorily throughout Key Stage 1. Attainment by the end of Year 2 has risen steadily over the past three years and is now above average in mathematics and in English, particularly in reading. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

Although attainment in Year 6 has fallen over recent years, and dipped to below average last year, it has improved this academic year. Current Year 6 pupils started Year 3 with average attainment and are on track to achieve at least average results in the national tests in July 2012. The school has been successful in closing the gap in performance compared with pupils nationally. This is because the school's recent programme to raise standards by focusing on writing and more-able pupils is effective. As a result, pupils' writing skills are now average, but there is still room for improvement in this subject, as generally writing performance lags behind that seen in reading and mathematics. A greater proportion of more-able pupils are likely to reach the higher National Curriculum Level 5 in the Year 6 tests. However, inconsistencies in teaching mean that rates of progress across the school remain

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satisfactory.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall; some make good progress due to careful planning by teachers and the good support that they receive from teaching assistants.

Pupils' attitudes to school and to their work are very positive. A particular strength is the way they work together to solve problems, develop ideas and support each other. They are enthusiastic, keen to learn and enjoy their lessons. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils were calculating the costs of a range of items. They were highly engaged, enthusiastic, worked together very productively and produced good quality work. The pace of their learning was brisk because they were excited and interested by the task and were given clear information about what to do. Where learning is only satisfactory this is often because the work does not challenge pupils sufficiently and expectations are not high enough.

The teaching of phonics (linking letters with the sounds they make) is good. As a result pupils read well. They enjoy reading and are able to sound out words effectively. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is rising but the school supports them effectively to become fluent readers. As a result, standards of reading at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 are above average.

Quality of teaching

All parents and carers think that teaching is good. Inspectors judge it to be satisfactory and improving. There is some good and outstanding teaching but not enough to ensure pupils make consistently good gains in learning. The best teaching ensures that tasks are matched to pupils' specific needs and capabilities, that activities are imaginative and exciting and that pupils are engrossed in their work. Good features include the high quality relationships between teachers and pupils, the way teachers encourage pupils successfully to work together and the suitable support provided by teaching assistants. This support, in close cooperation with class teachers, ensures that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are engaged and make at least satisfactory gains in their learning in lessons and over time. Teachers use a variety of teaching approaches to engage and motivate pupils. In an art lesson, for example, an imaginative and creative project encouraged pupils to be ambitious and creative so that they made good progress in developing their evaluation skills.

Teaching remains satisfactory overall because of the inconsistencies in the level of challenge and expectations of teachers, and not enough teaching is good. In an English lesson where teaching was satisfactory, for example, some pupils lost interest because they had to listen to the teacher for too long.

Parents and carers value highly the school's support for their children. One parent noted that 'The school provides an excellent environment that fosters learning coupled with human and attitudinal properties.' Teaching and the curriculum,

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particularly music and religious education, promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. This helps pupils to behave well and gain an understanding of cultural diversity in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony.

There are some examples of good assessment practice, including marking, where pupils are given clear advice about how to improve their work or where questions are used to stretch pupils' thinking and move them to the next level. However, this good practice is not consistent across the school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Typically, behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Relationships are very good; pupils are courteous, respectful and well behaved. A particularly strong feature is the way pupils work together in lessons to discuss and complete their work. This was evident in many lessons and has a positive impact on their learning. Nearly all parents and carers are positive about standards of behaviour and only a few are concerned about disruption in lessons. One parent noted that 'Respect and behaviour are considered vital to this school which ensures the vast majority of pupils' exhibit very good behaviour and manners.' Pupils also feel that behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Inspectors found that there is very little disruption in lessons because teachers manage behaviour successfully. This, and pupils' very positive attitudes to school, ensures that they are able to concentrate on learning.

Pupils said that they enjoy school a great deal and feel very well supported by their teachers. They feel safe at school and that bullying, including physical, cyber and emotional bullying, hardly ever happens. They are confident that teachers deal with it quickly and effectively should it occur.

Attendance is high with absence rates well below the national averages. The school has effective systems to encourage pupils to attend regularly, including the very good partnership it has with parents and carers. As a result, attendance continues to improve year on year.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body have high aspirations for the school and its pupils and show strong commitment to improvement. They have evaluated the school's strengths and weaknesses effectively and as a result have identified school improvement priorities focused on standards in Years 1 and 2, improving writing across the school, and the achievement of Years 5 and 6 pupils. The impact of these initiatives is now evident although improvement in the last academic year was slow. However, the fall in the standards achieved by Year 6 has been halted and they are now rising. Attainment is steadily rising in Key Stage 1, particularly in reading. These improvements demonstrate the school's capacity for further improvement.

There are strengths in leadership and management. All staff share the commitment

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of senior leaders to improve further the school's performance. They work together effectively to plan and improve the curriculum, particularly for reading, and new approaches to teaching are accelerating pupils' progress. As a result, there is a strong team and positive ethos that pervades the work of the school enabling it to tackle discrimination and promote equality satisfactorily. The school has a wide range of data about pupils' achievement but the amount and complexity means that they are not easily accessible. As a result, the use of data to identify trends in school and pupils' performance, and identify timely interventions, is not sharp enough. Professional development for new teachers, provided by the local authority, has ensured that teaching is improving.

Senior leaders are ambitious for the school and its pupils. They share this effectively with parents and carers with whom there is a strong partnership. Parents and carers are very positive about the school praising it for the way it ensures good behaviour, deals promptly with issues and questions, and makes each child its priority. Links with parents and carers are particularly strong; attendance at meetings to discuss the work of the school and their children is typically high. One parent noted that 'The teachers and the head are always available to listen to and promptly deal with/resolve any issues or questions regarding my child.'

The governing body understands the school's strengths and weaknesses, and provides appropriate challenge and support in equal measure. Governors have supported the initiatives to drive improvements by ensuring that the school has the necessary resources. For example, in music, they allocated funds to give pupils opportunities to learn a musical instrument which helped to further develop pupils' musical skills and talents. They also ensure that safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements.

The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets the pastoral needs of pupils well. It provides some good opportunities for enrichment, particularly in music, which pupils enjoy and parents and carers value. One parent said that 'The emphasis the school places on music is brilliant and has led to my child learning to play the violin from Year 1.' The quality of pupils' singing is good, especially that of the choir. These activities support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. Teachers plan the curriculum together and this enables them to make links between subjects. The focus on writing provides opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy skills to other subjects, for example in art. This said, in-house expertise to model good practice is not used consistently.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



24 May 2012

Dear Children

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Eltham SE9 6NS

Thank you very much for welcoming inspectors to your school and helping us with our work. You and your parents and carers told us that you enjoy being at St Thomas More very much, that you learn a lot and that you feel well cared for. Your school gives you a satisfactory standard of education. You feel safe from any type of bullying but if it did happen you know who to go to for help. Your behaviour is good and you treat others with a great deal of care and respect. You always show good manners.

You work hard in your lessons, are very keen and enthusiastic and always try to do your best. You are doing well in mathematics and reading, and enjoy many of your subjects including music and art a great deal. Your writing is improving because teachers are concentrating on helping you to develop your literacy skills. However, your writing skills must continue to improve. You get on very well with your teachers. You also get a lot of help from all the adults in the school. This helps your learning and behaviour.

Your headteacher and all the staff know what needs improving in school. We have asked them to improve the following things to keep your school moving in the right direction.

- Improve teaching so that you are given work that is closely matched to your abilities, so that marking in your books helps you to improve your work and that you are asked more difficult questions so that you are all appropriately challenged.
- Improve the way teachers use all the information they have about how well you are doing at school so that they can help you make even better progress. We also want the good practice that exists to be shared more widely to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school.

Thank you for a very enjoyable and memorable visit to your school.

Yours sincerely

Brian Oppenheim
Lead inspector

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