

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Huthill Lane, Great Wyrley, Walsall, WS6 6PG

Inspection dates

4–5 December 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Although progress has improved significantly so that pupils made good progress in the last year, there has been too much variation in the two years previously for achievement to be good overall. Previously the proportion of pupils making the expected progress varied between year groups and, in some instances, between boys and girls.
- Over time the progress older pupils have made in mathematics is not as strong as it is in reading and writing.
- Although teaching has improved significantly this year, it has not been good enough over time.
- Progress sometimes slows in mathematics lessons when more-able pupils are not challenged well enough. At times, pupils are not given enough time to explore and investigate mathematical ideas.
- Pupils are not regularly given enough opportunity to reflect on teachers' marking so that they can improve their work.

The school has the following strengths

- A determined drive by the headteacher has rapidly brought about improvements to teaching. Consequently, progress this year has improved sharply for pupils across the school.
- Middle leaders are making an important contribution in supporting school improvement.
- Lessons are often stimulating and interesting and enjoyed by pupils.
- The school's spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision significantly helps pupils' personal development.
- Additional government funding (the pupil premium) has been used effectively to support pupils who need extra help. This is helping these pupils to make good progress.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited six lessons taught by six teachers. Some of these visits were made jointly with the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team. In addition, the inspector and headteacher visited all classes to look at pupils' work and to check how well work was marked.
- The inspector held meetings with senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils, some members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documents, including school procedures for keeping pupils safe, and the school's website.
- The views of 19 parents were analysed through the Parent View website.
- The inspector considered the views expressed in seven questionnaires returned by school staff.

Inspection team

Ian Jones, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than most primary schools.
- Almost all of the pupils are from White British backgrounds and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported by the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children from families who are known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after children and those from families with parents in the armed forces, is lower than average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below average.
- A smaller than average proportion of pupils is supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum requirements for pupils' attainment and progress.
- There are separate classes for children in Nursery, Reception and Year 1. Pupils in other years are taught in mixed-aged classes.
- The school has had a number of temporary headteachers in recent times. A permanent headteacher took up the post in September 2011.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by strengthening the quality of feedback given to pupils and providing them with time to correct their errors and understand what they need to do next.

- Quicken the rate of progress in mathematics by:
 - ensuring that more-able pupils are consistently challenged in their learning
 - providing regular opportunities for pupils to investigate and explore in mathematics.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Over the last three years most pupils have made the progress expected of them by the time they leave the school. Attainment at the end of Year 6 has remained at average levels, although it dipped in 2011 in mathematics.
- Over the last school year, the school has successfully focused on quickening the rate of progress for pupils across the school, so that all groups are currently making good progress. Almost all parents and carers rightly believe that their children are now doing well.
- Children enter the school with skills and experiences that are broadly in line with national expectations, although this varies from year to year due to the small numbers involved. They have made consistently good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage since the previous inspection. The Early Years Foundation Stage has been particularly successful at raising standards of early literacy, and this momentum is maintained through Key Stage 1.
- In the 2012 Key Stage 2 tests and assessments, girls reached higher standards than boys in mathematics, while the performance of boys was a little stronger than girls in writing and reading.
- The rate of progress for Key Stage 2 pupils in mathematics is not as rapid as their progress in writing. Sometimes the work set for more-able pupils is not challenging them quickly enough or teachers talk for too long so that valuable learning time is lost. At times, pupils are not given enough opportunity to investigate and explore in mathematics lessons.
- Effective teaching in early reading ensures that pupils are equipped with the skills to read unfamiliar words. Reading is promoted well across the school and the newly refurbished and restocked library, which contains a good range of fiction, has been enthusiastically welcomed by pupils. Interest in different types of books is encouraged through a wide range of activities.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress as a result of well-targeted teaching in small groups and on an individual basis.
- The school makes good use of pupil premium funding to support the small number of eligible pupils. The additional individual and small group teaching they receive enables these pupils to do well in their learning and close the gap between them and others.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although teaching has improved recently, there has been too much variation in quality over time. As a result, pupils do not make consistently good progress. In mathematics, for example, work is sometimes not matched closely enough to the needs of pupils; in these lessons, more-able pupils are given work which is not hard enough.
- A new policy has led to improvements in the quality of marking, although inconsistencies remain. In a few good examples, pupils are given time to reflect on the comments made by teachers; they are expected to respond to show that they have understood and know what to do next. More usually, however, the comments that teachers make are not as useful and pupils are not expected to respond to them.

- Children settle quickly into school. They grow in confidence because of the range of interesting activities they carry out inside and outside the classroom. There is an appropriate emphasis on early reading and writing. The teaching of early reading is well planned and regular. Lessons are carefully planned to ensure that pupils have frequent opportunities to practise speaking and listening skills.
- The school has focused successfully on developing the quality of teaching in the last year so that there are clear improvements, for example in the use of planning and questioning to engage pupils and to get them to think carefully. In a poetry lesson, Years 5 and 6 pupils were given interesting and enjoyable models of writing techniques. Through careful questioning, showing the teacher's good subject knowledge, pupils developed their own skills while thoroughly enjoying the lesson.
- The planning and timing of learning experiences has been revised this year to help pupils develop the appropriate skills at the right time. Lessons are increasingly presented enthusiastically and imaginatively and this stimulates learning while promoting pupils' enjoyment of school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils have positive attitudes to school and enjoy their lessons. Pupils say that lessons are rarely interrupted by poor behaviour. At times, a few pupils begin to lose interest when they are inactive for too long. Pupils usually concentrate well on the tasks they are set and persevere to complete them.
- Pupils enjoy positive working relationships with their teachers and all the adults who work at school. They recently enjoyed contributing to the new behaviour policy and are motivated to behave well in lessons and around the school.
- Pupils of all ages work and play together very well say that they feel safe in school. Older pupils are very considerate towards younger ones.
- In discussion, pupils report that behaviour is good and bullying is rare. They have a good understanding of various types of bullying, including cyber bullying. They say that, should an incident arise, they are confident to seek the help of staff and know that it will be dealt with promptly.
- Pupils welcome the opportunities provided to take responsibility around the school, such as school councillors, eco warriors or house captains. They help raise a significant amount of money each year to buy additional equipment for the school and to support a range of local and international charities.
- Attendance has improved this year because the school has supported some vulnerable families well. The school has also taken a firmer stance on pupils taking holidays during term time.
- Pupils are keen to learn because adults very effectively promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through praise, encouragement and celebrating all learners' achievements in different subjects. As a result, pupils look forward to all their lessons and are keen to share their ideas, knowing that their contributions are valued. Pupils show that they respect the opinions of others, even when they differ from their own ideas.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has effectively gained the commitment of staff, governors and pupils with a focus on raising standards. Under her leadership the school is working effectively to improve the quality of teaching; as a result, progress is rapidly accelerating in year groups across the school.
- The local authority is effectively contributing to school improvement. Detailed and helpful reviews assessing the quality of teaching and the provision of good quality training for teachers has led to significant improvements, for example in the teaching of writing.
- Under the careful leadership of the headteacher, the school has reorganised the curriculum to ensure that pupils acquire the skills and knowledge they need at the right time. Well-planned lessons ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is promoted well. A consistent feature of lessons is the regular inclusion of an interesting introduction which successfully motivates pupils and contributes to their enjoyment. Lessons are successfully planned to ensure that pupils enjoy learning and are eager to learn more.
- School leaders have accurately identified the key areas for further development. Planning for the future, coupled with accurate self-evaluation, is effectively focused on securing the gains made since the last inspection and providing a firm base upon which to build for the future. Although achievement requires improvement due to the legacy of some weaker teaching in the past, the proportion of pupils achieving well is rapidly increasing across all year groups.
- The headteacher has developed middle leadership well and these staff now play an increasingly important role in supporting the improvements made, for example in checking the quality of teaching and conducting pupil progress meetings with colleagues. Together with the effective governing body, the school demonstrates a good capacity to sustain the improvements required.
- Teachers now use performance data from the school's tracking system to plan effective lessons. This means that underachievement is quickly recognised and addressed. Despite this, there are some gaps in pupils' knowledge as a result of weaker teaching in the past.
- The school has used pupil premium funding well, employing additional teaching support to provide one-to-one and small group support, especially in reading and writing.
- Teachers are clear that they are accountable for the pupils in their care. The regular meetings for discussing pupils' progress and revised arrangements for setting and reviewing teachers' targets are helping to bring about the improvements needed.
- The parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire rightly expressed much confidence in the school and its leadership. Parents and carers appreciate the weekly newsletters from the school and the opportunities to develop their understanding of teaching methods through the recent parents' workshops.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing have been trained so that they provide effective challenge to the headteacher and meet her regularly to learn about pupils' current progress. Governors are regular visitors to the school and this helps provide a good insight into its daily life and work. The performance management arrangements for the headteacher are robust and suitably focused on raising standards. The governing body manages the school's budget efficiently. Improvements in the quality of teaching are taken into account appropriately when

considering whether to award salary increases. The governing body closely checks on the use of the additional funds from the pupil premium to provide extra teaching for those pupils eligible for it. The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet the current government requirements and the governing body ensures that procedures are systematically followed.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	124376
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	406239

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Georgina Keeling
Headteacher	Stephanie Hewitt
Date of previous school inspection	18 January 2011
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