

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Bleakwood Road, Chatham, Kent, ME5 0NF

Inspection dates 7–8 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- In the words of one staff member, 'I feel privileged to work in such an outstanding school as St Thomas More.'
- Pupils achieve very well. Standards reached by all pupils by the end of Year 6 are very high compared to those reached by pupils in other schools.
- Outstanding teaching over time enables pupils to make good or better progress in all subjects. As a result, all groups, regardless of their level of ability, special educational needs or background, are doing very well throughout the school.
- Pupils, parents and carers are proud of their school. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they say they feel very safe. Pupils have a mature attitude towards their learning. They are polite and courteous, and readily accept responsibility.
- The headteacher provides excellent direction for the school to improve. She identifies areas for improvement accurately and acts quickly to deal with them.
- Teachers are skilled at planning challenging, interesting activities where pupils learn in meaningful everyday ways. Teachers' marking makes sure that pupils know how to improve the quality of their work.
- Children receive a good start to school life in the Early Years Foundation Stage where they are taught well by a highly committed team.
- Leadership and management at all levels, including governance, are outstanding. The headteacher regularly and thoroughly checks that all teaching is helping all pupils make at least good progress. Leaders set demanding targets to make sure that the school carries on improving.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all classes. They visited 27 lessons, of which two were joint observations with the headteacher. In addition, inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons, assemblies and the breakfast club.
- They held meetings with leaders and managers, staff and pupils, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors met informally with parents and carers at the beginning and end of the school day, and took account of the 42 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- They observed the school’s work and looked at a number of documents, including the school’s current assessment data, the self-evaluation summary, the school development plan, monitoring documents, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and safeguarding documents.
- Inspectors sampled pupils’ work, listened to them read, and checked information on pupils’ attendance.
- The inspectors analysed 20 questionnaires from staff.

Inspection team

Gay Whent, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Ken Bryan

Additional inspector

Maureen Coleman

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average-sized primary school.
- The school serves a mixed area that includes the local parish as well as communities further afield.
- The school runs a breakfast club and an after-school club.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in two Reception classes.
- All pupils are educated on the school site.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of those supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above average.
- The proportion of pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding (extra government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children looked after by local authorities, and children of service families) is below average.
- In 2011, the school was part of a national best practice survey in primary mathematics.
- The headteacher is a local leader of education and supports two local primary schools.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on existing outstanding practice by continuing to embed and develop the use of assessment information to set challenging targets for all pupils.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Pupils' progress is good or better in all classes. High proportions of pupils make exceptional progress.
- Children enter Reception with lower than expected literacy and numeracy skills. They make good and often exceptional progress in speaking, reading and writing, counting and carrying out simple calculations. They play and work together extremely well, listen to each other and share toys and equipment happily.
- Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 is above average and has been improving well year-on-year. At the end of Year 6, attainment is also above average, with almost all pupils making at least two National Curriculum levels progress, or more, between Key Stages 1 and 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, pupils achieve exceptionally well in English and mathematics, including the most able.
- Pupils eligible for pupil premium funding make good and often outstanding progress due to their needs being identified accurately, and effective strategies being put into place to aid their learning. In the 2012 national assessment at age 11, their attainment, as demonstrated by their average point scores, was in line with that of other pupils in the school, and above national comparative figures. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, as well as pupils from minority ethnic groups, also attain well and make good or better progress. This is because teachers set their work at just the right level of difficulty, and provide highly effective support and guidance whenever it is needed.
- Pupils read and write well and with confidence. The teaching of phonics (learning about the sounds that letters make) is very effective and involves actions which pupils enjoy repeating. Reading is a high priority in the school. Books and a joy of reading are celebrated across all age ranges.
- Pupils develop very good mathematical skills, due to consistency in teaching throughout the school, rigorous planning within all year groups, and clear guidance for teachers and learning support assistants.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Leaders' emphasis on rigorously improving teaching has resulted in the majority of teaching being outstanding and never less than consistently good.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, all adults work together closely as an effective team to plan work that promotes early reading and numeracy skills effectively.
- Throughout the school, adults teach small groups with great success, ensuring that skills improve quickly.
- Speaking and listening activities are used well to develop understanding across the curriculum. Learning is enhanced by many opportunities for pupils to discuss and explain their reasoning, both with 'talking partners' and in whole-class sessions. This enables pupils to develop fluency in explaining their learning.
- The teaching of literacy and numeracy, in particular, is outstanding across the whole school. It is effectively highlighted in other subjects such as music where, for example, pupils record how the theme tune they are listening to makes them feel. The correct use of vocabulary is given a high profile throughout the school, for example when exploring more powerful words to describe a panda's feelings under the threat of extinction, Year 1 pupils suggested being melancholy and distraught instead of being sad.
- Teachers have high expectations for pupils' behaviour and this ensures a calm and purposeful atmosphere as they work. Resources, including laptops, are used well to bring subjects alive and to reinforce learning.

- Across the school, teachers expect pupils to think for themselves. Teachers make learning fun and encourage pupils to explain their thinking rather than just getting the right answer. As a result, pupils have no fear of 'getting things wrong', as this is accepted as part of learning.
- Teachers use assessment well to establish what pupils have learnt. They set pupils' targets from Reception through to Year 6 so that they are able, consistently, to improve their work. The school is focusing on embedding this at an outstanding level so that data are used even more accurately to ensure even greater progress.
- Teachers mark books regularly and thoroughly. Written comments help pupils clearly understand the next steps in their learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils behave extremely well in their lessons and are enthusiastic learners, working together eagerly, and with good humour. They listen well to each other, check each other's work and often help each other. This also makes a significant contribution to their exceptional social, moral and cultural development.
- They say that behaviour throughout the school is always very good and that there is no bullying. They are confident that if they have concerns, adults will help them sort them out.
- Parents and carers, staff and governors unanimously agree that behaviour is outstanding. Courtesy and politeness towards each other and towards all adults are expected. Pupils are respectful to one another and to adults, and take pride in their school.
- All pupils spoken to say they feel well cared for. They know they can turn to each other or to any adult for help, and they are constantly reminded of how to keep safe, including when they use the internet.
- All Year 6 pupils enjoy being a prefect and value their badge. They care for the youngest pupils at lunchtime and eat with them every day. Pupils take responsibility seriously.
- Pupils' enjoyment of their school is evident. This is reflected in consistently above-average attendance which improves each year. The breakfast club provides a very positive start to the school day, punctuality is good, and there have been no exclusions since the last inspection.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher is passionate about making sure that all pupils are always helped to make at least good or better progress. Her leadership is rigorous and also supportive. Members of staff speak glowingly of her leadership; one commented that she is 'an inspirational leader. Her dedication to all members of our school community is unique'.
- The headteacher has created effective teams of senior and middle leaders who have very good levels of expertise through high-quality training opportunities.
- Leaders focus sharply on ensuring that all pupils fulfil their potential, that they have equal opportunities to prosper, and that there is no discrimination. They are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- School self-evaluation is robust and perceptive. Clear priorities for embedding outstanding practice are in place which demonstrates the capacity to bring about further improvement.
- A major driver for school improvement is that much teaching is outstanding and is at least consistently good. Teachers are aware that their work is closely monitored and linked to the system for managing performance. This process holds teachers to account for their work. It ensures that rewards are appropriately linked to the progress made by pupils and is tied in to the meeting of agreed targets.
- The school has very good relationships with parents and carers. Those spoken to at the start and end of the school day were very positive about the school's work. They agree that their children are happy at the school and doing well.
- The curriculum is rich and vibrant, and supports pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural

development very well. There are many opportunities for pupils to go on visits which support and enhance good learning throughout the school year. Lessons take place both inside and outside the classroom. Displays link well to current learning. Pupils' work is used to show best practice and good effort.

- The school works effectively in partnership with two other schools and, as a result, has improved leaders' understanding of effective practice, increasing the quality of learning opportunities for pupils at the school.
- Safeguarding arrangements are extremely thorough and fully in place.
- The local authority has provided light-touch support for this outstanding school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governance of the school is strong, well informed and very well organised. Members of the governing body know the school well and understand the data on pupils' progress. They vigorously challenge the school's performance in terms of achievement and the quality of teaching, and have very high expectations for the school to be outstanding. They monitor performance management well and ensure that it is used to recognise and reward good teaching. Governors are well trained and ensure that the school is a very safe place for all pupils. They keep a close watch on the budget, in particular ensuring that pupil premium funding is correctly directed at benefiting the learning of pupils in receipt of the funding, as seen in their high achievement. The governing body uses the valuable range of expertise among its members very well to improve the school's performance.

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	118769
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	403364

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	420
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs C. Nourse
Headteacher	Mrs S. Williams
Date of previous school inspection	12 November 2007
Telephone number	01634 864701
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