

St Thomas Catholic Primary

Church View, Allendale, Ilkeston, DE7 4LF

Inspection dates 22–23 May 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Children enter Reception with levels that are broadly typical for their age and leave Year 6 with above average results in English and mathematics.
- Progress is good throughout the school. This is due to consistently good teaching in all key stages. Teaching is sometimes outstanding.
- Teachers' relationships with pupils are excellent. Pupils respond quickly to teachers' direction and guidance and learn very well.
- Pupils are at ease when working collaboratively. They check their own progress against their targets regularly and help others to understand the work they are set.
- Behaviour is good and pupils feel safe in school.
- The headteacher leads the school well. He keeps a close eye on how pupils are doing by tracking their progress carefully and he uses this information to set appropriate targets for teachers.
- Leaders have brought significant improvements to the school, particularly in teaching, assessment and writing. Pupils' attainment and progress in all subjects have shown notable rises in Key Stage 2 this year.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils' problem-solving skills in mathematics are not advanced enough.
- More-able pupils are not regularly challenged right from the start of lessons.
- Pupils do not always have opportunities to work independently in all subjects so that they can learn without relying on teachers' direct support and input.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all classes, including four joint observations with the headteacher. A total of 17 lessons were observed. Inspectors also made short classroom visits to observe pupils at work and to look at their books.
- Inspectors had discussions with three representatives of the governing body, a representative from the local authority, the headteacher, other members of the school leadership team, teachers and two groups of pupils. Inspectors also listened to pupils of different ages read.
- Inspectors looked at documents about past and current pupils' progress. They also examined information relating to behaviour, safeguarding, the school's own self-evaluation document and improvement plan.
- Inspectors took account of the views of the 31 parents who responded to the Parent View online questionnaire. Inspectors also considered the responses to the school's latest parent questionnaire and a number of parents were met informally at the start of the school day. One parent letter was also considered and one email.
- Inspectors considered the nine questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Kathryn Skan, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Debbie Vials

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is average in size for a primary school.
- The very large majority of pupils are White British.
- There are hardly any pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium (additional funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals, in local authority care, or who have a parent in the armed forces) is lower than in most schools.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- Pupils are drawn from a very wide geographical area, due to the school's Roman Catholic denomination.
- 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?

- Make more teaching outstanding by:
 - providing time for pupils to work independently in all subjects, so that they can learn without relying on the teachers' direct support and input
 - making sure more-able pupils are challenged right from the start of the lesson.
- Increase pupils' problem-solving skills in mathematics by providing more opportunities for these kinds of activities across the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils enter the Reception class with skills that are broadly typical for their age. Their skills are weaker in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils make good progress and leave Reception with skills that match national averages in these key areas. Their skills in other areas of learning are often above average.
- Pupils make good progress throughout Key Stage 1. Attainment at the end of Year 2 has been rising over the last three years. In 2012, pupils achieved above-average standards in reading, writing and mathematics and indications are that this will continue this year. The results of the Year 1 national reading check on pupils' knowledge and understanding of letters, and the sounds they make (phonics), were just above average last year. Indications are that they will be similar this year.
- Pupils also make good progress in Key Stage 2. They typically reach above-average standards by the end of Year 6. The reasons for a previous dip in the school's Year 6 test results in 2011 to average levels in English have been identified and addressed, and progress is now consistently good across Key Stage 2.
- The work in pupils' books and the school's own up-to-date assessments show that standards are rising. Levels are above average and based on robust teacher assessments and testing. Attainment this year in all subjects is predicted to reach well above the current national average. The progress made by current Year 6 pupils is likely to exceed national expectations.
- Pupils read regularly and widely for pleasure, and overall their reading is good. Teachers' improved assessment practice has also helped writing to improve significantly, as mistakes are picked up and corrected quickly.
- Pupils' key mathematical skills of calculation and number are good but they have not in the past had sufficient opportunities to develop their problem solving skills. This, together with the slightly slow start in some lessons, has prevented achievement, particularly by more-able pupils, becoming truly outstanding.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make as much progress as their classmates. This is because teachers plan for their learning precisely and the school makes sure their specific needs are met. Some of the more-able pupils are taking the new tests in reading, writing and mathematics this year, that are pitched at the level usually expected of much older, secondary pupils. Last year, a number of pupils performed well in these tests in mathematics.
- There were not enough pupils supported by the pupil premium in 2012 to comment on their attainment without identifying them, but, generally, they make good progress in line with other groups. The funding is spent on additional staff to support individual pupils according to their specific needs.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good throughout the school and is sometimes outstanding. Teachers create a positive environment where pupils learn well. Pupils show an active interest in all subjects and enjoy their learning.

- Teachers encourage pupils to check their own progress against their targets regularly. The 'success ladders' that pupils work with ensure this opportunity is available for all pupils regardless of their level of ability. Pupils know what levels they are on and what they need to do next to reach the next level. Teachers then question pupils well in lessons to check they understand what they are learning.
- Teachers assess pupils' learning well and ensure future learning is set at the right level. They use marking well to create a dialogue with pupils and to help them improve their work. Marking and assessment are particularly good in writing. Appropriate amounts of homework are set to extend pupils further when appropriate.
- Teachers' planning of lessons is good. Expectations are generally good and teachers plan well to deepen pupils' knowledge and skills at all ability levels within the class in all subjects. However, on occasions, there is not enough pace and challenge built into the start of lessons to ensure more able pupils work with an appropriate degree of urgency right from the start.
- Pupils work well individually on tasks set by the teacher. They sometimes check the work of others to help them with their own understanding and they also work well in pairs. However, pupils do not always have opportunities to learn independently without relying on teachers' direct support and input, or to make choices about their own work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour is good. Any problems arising are isolated and dealt with appropriately. Parents unanimously feel the school makes sure its pupils behave well. Bullying incidents are very rare. Pupils interviewed during the inspection said they are happy in school and with each other and that bullying is not tolerated.
- Teachers' relationships with pupils are excellent. Pupils comply readily with teachers' guidance and direction and learn very well. Their eagerness to learn and their good behaviour contribute to their good progress.
- Pupils demonstrate enthusiasm, respect and good manners towards each other and adults. They show that they know the basic courtesies of life and say 'please' and 'thank you'. Pupils are mature and socially advanced due to the exceptional promotion of their social and moral attitudes by the school.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school. Parents agree and say they would recommend the school to other parents.
- Attendance is above average. This has been the case consistently over a number of years. Few pupils are persistently absent and there are no persistent absentees this year. In addition, there have been no exclusions, permanent or temporary, for a considerable number of years.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because older pupils are sometimes unnecessarily and excessively combative when taking part in team games at playtime.

The leadership and management are good

- The school is well-led. Leaders continually strive for improvement. A number of new initiatives have been introduced over the last few years that have been effective in improving the progress of pupils.
- Writing has been particularly improved this year. Improved assessment and target setting, including 'success ladders' where pupils can monitor their own progress towards their own targets for writing, have been effective. Pupils are now making accelerated progress in writing.
- Similar improvements are also being made in mathematics. 'Success ladders' and problem-solving lessons have been introduced across the whole school. Pupils are self-assessing their own learning and abilities well and are knowledgeable about the next steps needed to reach the next level they are working towards. There is already evidence that these innovations are beginning to improve pupils' knowledge and understanding, although it is too early to assess their full impact.
- Leaders at all levels are involved in monitoring key subjects. They carry out lesson observations and check learning in books. Leaders have shared planning sessions with the other teachers on a regular basis. Teachers have also observed each others' lessons and discussed what they have seen, and this has helped them improve their practice.
- The headteacher monitors pupils' achievement carefully through a comprehensive data-management system. Analysis of this information, including by all teachers of their own class, ensures that teachers are aware of, and are held fully accountable for, the progress of pupils in their care. Meetings are held to examine pupils' progress using this data, and these, in turn, inform judgements agreed in teachers' appraisal.
- Teaching programmes are broad and balanced, and are being helped by the newly introduced focus on problem solving in mathematics. Learning is reinforced through topic sessions whenever possible and cross-curricular learning is strong. This ensures enjoyment by the pupils. Many enrichment activities give learning the 'wow' factor, which includes making visits and trips out of school, and by having various visitors into school.
- Pupils' spiritual development is strong. Pupils' cultural development for life in a multi-cultural society is also considered well with links to Derby's multi-cultural centre, a multi-cultural city school, and also a school in The Gambia.
- Parent links are good. Plans are in place to improve the school website further for parents and workshops are provided for parents to enable them to support their own children with their learning at home. Good links with the local secondary school are in place for exchange visits for Year 5 onwards and for the school's gifted and talented pupils. Links with other agencies, including agencies supporting disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, are in place and effective.
- The local authority gives good support to the school. Although it considers the school to need only a 'light-touch', it has been particularly effective in supporting the headteacher and senior managers over the last twelve months and in helping them improve progress in Key Stage 2.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body gives good support and asks searching questions of the leadership team. Governors oversee the work of the school very well. The Chair of Governors links extremely

well with the headteacher via email, telephone and face-to-face. Governors use the strengths of individual members well, and report back to the governing body effectively. Governors have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, and compare it with pupils nationally. They know what the school is doing to improve teaching and pupils' learning, and make sure finances are used in a way that supports this. They also know how the pupil premium is being spent and how it is raising standards for qualifying pupils. The governors use their knowledge to make decisions about staffing and to make sure pay is linked to performance. They have had training on the safe recruitment of staff. Health and safety are given a high priority and procedures are well established. The arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet current national requirements.

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	112903
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	413035

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	249
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kirsty Andrews
Headteacher	Michael Geraghty
Date of previous school inspection	10 November 2009
Telephone number	0115 9320550
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