

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Saffron Walden

South Road, Saffron Walden, CB11 3DW

Inspection dates 15–16 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	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

- Teaching is usually good and some is outstanding. The teaching in Key Stage 2 is most effective.
- Pupils of all ability levels make good overall progress by the time they leave the school. Year 6 standards are well above average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The teaching of mathematics in Key Stage 2 is a particular strength. At times it is outstanding.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make rapid progress.
- Pupils enjoy school, feel safe and attend regularly. Year 6 pupils are proud of their leadership roles within the school.
- The school has developed an enriched curriculum providing all pupils with a wealth of opportunities. Specialist subject teachers are well deployed in Music and French.
- The school makes excellent use of its grounds to develop its 'eco curriculum'.
- The headteacher has provided excellent leadership, supports staff well and has established a culture of continuous improvement that is shared by all the teachers.
- Governors are knowledgeable about the school and are well aware of the strengths and where improvements need to be made.
- Parents overwhelmingly support the work of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The best practice in school is not yet shared fully to help all teachers move their teaching to outstanding.
- Teachers do not always plan tasks that meet the needs of all of the pupils, particularly the most able, to ensure they make quick progress in every lesson.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 18 lessons or parts of lessons, six of them together with the headteacher.
- They examined pupils’ work in their books, as well as looking at displays of pupils’ work in the classrooms and corridors. In addition they spoke to pupils about their learning and other aspects of school life and listened to pupils from Year 1 and 2 reading.
- The inspectors held meetings with members of the school’s leadership teams, as well as several governors. They also met a local representative from a neighbouring school.
- Inspectors analysed a range of documents, including the school’s self-evaluation, the school development plan, a range of policies, records of meetings held by the governing body, information about pupils’ progress and records of behavioural incidents. They also looked at the school’s website and information on how its results compare to others, and records relating to the quality of teaching and learning.
- Inspectors took account of the 68 responses to the online survey and the views expressed on the playground. Inspectors also took account of the views of the 25 staff who responded to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Nicola Edwards, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Alan Jarvis

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average sized primary school.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well below the average. (The pupil premium is the funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals.)
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school converted to become an academy in August 2011. When its predecessor school of the same name was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to outstanding and thereby improve achievement across the school by:
 - sharing the very best practice in teaching already evident in the school so that other teachers can learn from the outstanding practice of their colleagues
 - making sure that all teachers use the information available to plan work that is at the right levels for pupils
 - making sure that the most able pupils are always provided with appropriately challenging tasks which help them to reach the standards they are capable of in every subject.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils start the school with skills and knowledge that are typical for their age. The school works hard to ensure that transition into the school is smooth. Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage because teaching is good and most reach, and many exceed, the learning goals set for this age-group.
- Attainment by the end of Year 6 is well above the national average in reading, writing and particularly mathematics because of the consistently outstanding teaching in Year 6. Progress in Key Stage 2 is frequently outstanding. However, standards in Key Stage 1, improved in 2013, it is too soon to know whether this improvement will be sustained. Given children's good progress in Reception, their progress across Key Stage 1 has not always been as marked as elsewhere in the school.
- Reading standards are now consistently good. The percentage of pupils in Year 1 who met the expected standard in the government's phonics screening check was above average last year because of the way phonics (Letters and the sounds they make) is taught. A high priority is given to developing pupils' reading skills. Pupils throughout the school read a wide range of books with confidence and enjoyment, making the most of the school library. Classroom environments reflect the importance placed on books and reading, with attractive displays in many classrooms.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs achieve well because they receive tailored support from a large number of highly skilled support staff.
- Only very small numbers of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium. It is not possible to report on their achievement by the end of Year 6 without identifying individual pupils. Throughout the school, however, eligible pupils make good progress. The school has used this funding to provide eligible pupils with additional one-to-one support and small group work and this has been effective. As a result, the gap between their attainment and that of their classmates is narrower than seen nationally.
- The school's individual pupil data shows that almost all pupils' are working at the level expected for their age in English and mathematics, and many older pupils exceed it, particularly in mathematics. This includes a growing number of pupils with English as an additional language, reflecting the school's commitment to providing equality of opportunity for all.
- Pupils have access to specialist sports coaching and this has led the school to be successful in competitions and external events.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is usually good and some is outstanding in Key Stage 2. Teaching is consistently outstanding in Year 6.
- Teachers often demonstrate excellent subject knowledge, especially in classes for older pupils in mathematics. The use of ability groups for the teaching of mathematics has been highly successful in providing challenge to all pupils and is leading to consistently good and often outstanding achievement in this subject.

- Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive and they know the pupils well, creating a calm and purposeful environment in the classroom, with pupils consistently displaying attitudes that are conducive to learning.
- Skilled teaching assistants and other adults support pupils well. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs receive good support that helps build their confidence. They make good progress and achieve well because of the way activities are carefully tailored to meet their individual needs.
- Specialist teaching in music and French has led pupils to acquire a good range of skills. Pupils have opportunities to learn to play instruments and perform on a regular basis. The new music block has supported this development.
- Pupils enjoy the outside area and talk about their work as an eco-school with great enthusiasm. The eco-curriculum developed by the school has led to pupils having a wider understanding of the world and its resources.
- Planning in the Early Years Foundation Stage is very good. Teachers identify the next steps for children to learn on an individual basis. Recent developments have led to new resources being available to extend children's independence.
- Where teaching seen during the inspection was weaker, the work set for pupils, especially of the most able, was not demanding enough and the pupils did not learn with the speed that was typically seen in the best lessons.

The behaviour and safety of pupils is good

- Pupils enjoy attending school and their attendance is above average. Punctuality, both to school and to lessons, is excellent.
- Pupils are knowledgeable about types of bullying and state that they feel safe in school. Pupils are particularly knowledgeable about e-safety which has been a priority for the whole school.
- Pupils say they feel very safe and well cared for in school. They say that if they have a concern, it is dealt with quickly.
- School records show that the rare incidents that occur are swiftly dealt with and the school is effective in promoting strong relationships.
- Pupils are constantly encouraged to be mindful of the needs of others and to reflect on their own situation and that of others less fortunate than themselves. This is a key factor in the pupils' positive attitudes and successfully develops their spiritual, moral and cultural awareness
- The prefects and house captains discuss with pride their work and their involvement in the school. They describe their leadership roles and how these contribute to the schools ethos.
- Pupils enjoy the well-developed outside area. Pupils describe their 'love' of the adventure play areas. They also share with enthusiasm their eco garden and their produce.

- Parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire and those spoken to directly were positive about behaviour and safety of their children.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because when activities are not sufficiently challenging, pupils lose concentration and some pupils become too easily distracted.

The leadership and management is good

- The headteacher personally has provided excellent leadership for the school over a sustained period, and is well supported by the deputy headteacher. All staff work together as a cohesive team and they know what needs to be done to drive forward further improvements. However, the new middle leadership team charged with bringing about improvements in Key Stage 1 has only recently been put in place and although there was an upturn in standards just last year it is too early in the school year to know yet whether this will be sustained.
- All staff clearly understand their roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability. Subject leaders are well supported and lead their subjects well. Staff development is of high importance to the leadership team. The system for reviewing staff performance management recognises strengths within the staff and ensures any increases in salary are linked directly to the teacher's impact on pupils' achievement.
- Each pupil's progress is carefully tracked and discussed regularly and if pupils are not doing as well as they should, tailored programmes are immediately put into place for individuals. This is particularly successful in mathematics at the top end of the school.
- The primary sports funding is being used to provide pupils and staff with expert tuition from specialist sports coaches. The school also intends to train staff in order to make the sports activities sustainable over time. New sports have also been planned for such as curling. The school intends to monitor carefully the effectiveness of these activities in improving the health and well-being of pupils.
- Pupils are motivated by a stimulating curriculum which makes excellent use of well-developed grounds to enrich their experiences. They also benefit from a wealth of opportunities beyond the classroom, for example 'bikeability' and work in the eco-garden. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted extensively.
- The headteacher and governing body ensure that good use is made of pupil premium money to help eligible pupils to achieve well, make good progress and take part in all aspects of school life.
- Parents spoken to directly and those who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire are overwhelmingly supportive of the leadership team and would recommend the school to other parents. Several of their comments expressed appreciation of the way in which their children's particular needs had been met.
- Since the school converted to academy status there has been no contact with the local authority.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - All statutory duties are fulfilled effectively by governors. The arrangements for safeguarding have been thoroughly reviewed and refined to ensure pupils are safe particularly in relation to

e-safety. Development needs are accurately identified and resources, including staffing, sports funding and the pupil premium, are used effectively to raise achievement. Governors are committed to providing the very best opportunities for all pupils to achieve high standards, and they measure effectiveness in terms of pupils' attainment and progress. They know what the quality of teaching is and what the school is doing to reward good teaching and to tackle any underperformance. The governing body is clear about the strengths of the school.

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	137081
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	427217

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	211
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ken Lowe
Headteacher	Mrs Mary Jo Hall
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
Telephone number	01799 523248
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