

# St Thomas' Catholic Primary School

South Park, Sevenoaks, TN13 1EH

**Inspection dates** 11–12 February 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
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.

- The school's effectiveness has improved to outstanding levels as the headteacher, staff and governors have succeeded in improving key aspects of its work.
- Notable improvements are pupils' level of achievement and the quality of teaching. Both are now outstanding. Pupils gain much higher levels of English and mathematical skills than are typically found. This prepares them extremely well for their next schools.
- Teaching meets the needs of pupils both academically and in helping them to become avid learners. This helps them to make excellent progress in nearly all areas.
- Pupils' behaviour and safety are typically outstanding. Parents and carers commented that it is an 'amazing school' and 'provides a wonderful experience for my child'.
- Children have a very good start in the Reception class, where their welfare, social and early number and language skills are catered for very well.
- Pupils are mature and confident. They support each other really well, as the school skilfully weaves high levels of care for individual needs, while developing pupils' sense of community and respect for the school's Christian values.
- Those pupils who find learning more difficult or who are eligible for extra funding are supported extremely well both within class-based activities and by one-to-one support. Along with those pupils at the early stages of learning English, their needs are catered for remarkably well. Parents and carers are very praiseworthy of the efforts put in by the school to meet their child's individual needs.
- The headteacher has very clear expectations and has promoted high levels of teamwork among staff. Governors provide conscientious support, which has been instrumental in helping to raise the school's level of effectiveness since its previous inspection.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all seven classes, along with observing small-group activities around the school. They visited 16 lessons or part lessons. Three were observed jointly with senior leaders. Activities were also seen related to the teaching of pupils with special educational needs.
- The inspection team held meetings with staff and governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and had a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. They looked at documents, including the school plans for improvement, safeguarding information, recent local authority reviews, assessment records, attendance information and the school's checks and information on pupils' progress.
- Inspectors met with a representative group of pupils, heard pupils read in Year 2 and Year 6, observed lunchtimes, playtimes and two assemblies. They looked at the past work of pupils in Years 2 and 6 as well as other work during lesson observations. Years 4 to 6 had a visiting theatre company leading drama and English activities in the hall on the first morning of the inspection.
- Account was taken of the responses in questionnaires completed by 22 members of staff and 55 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View).

## Inspection team

Kevin Hodge, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Alastair McMeckan

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is smaller than average and serves pupils both from the local area and from much further afield.
- The majority of pupils are White British, but an above average proportion are from other ethnic heritages, which is an increase since the previous inspection. An average proportion are at an early stage of learning to speak English.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals, in the care of the local authority, or with a parent or carer in the armed services, is much lower than normally found.
- The proportions of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through 'school action', 'school action plus' and statements of special educational needs, are just below average.
- There is a pre-school accommodated on the school site, which is managed independently and therefore inspected separately.
- The school provides and manages a breakfast club.
- The school meets the government's floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the range and use of information and communication technology resources, particularly in Years 1 to 6, so pupils have more frequent opportunities to use them to support and extend their learning.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### is outstanding

- High-quality teaching, combined with pupils' enthusiasm, to learn means that they achieve outstandingly well through the school. A slight dip in writing results last year has been tackled so all pupils of all backgrounds and abilities, including the most-able pupils, currently achieve extremely well across all subjects. Some pupils reach levels more typical of those of secondary school age.
- Building on their very good foundation of learning number, language and physical skills in the Reception class, pupils continue to improve on their recognition of letter sounds and combinations as they move into Years 1 and 2. For example, in Year 2, pupils confidently sounded out unfamiliar words quickly, recognising the number of sounds each one contained. Not surprisingly, results in the national phonics (letter sounds and combinations) check last year were above average.
- In Years 3 to 6, pupils write creatively and accurately, whether it be writing an article for a newspaper or exploring the subtleties of writing play scripts. A number of initiatives with local universities and schools have helped boost pupils' writing skills even further so that pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, leave the school with extremely well-developed literacy skills.
- Pupils' achievement in mathematics is excellent, reflected in national test results over time. Their current work shows they have highly accurate calculation skills, and are quick to solve problems mentally. They know how the skills can be used in day-to-day situations. Extra specialist teaching for pupils of higher ability helps to extend their knowledge, understanding and problem-solving abilities.
- Those pupils eligible for pupil premium funding achieve as well as their classmates and there are virtually no gaps in the learning in English and mathematics for these pupils compared to others in the school or nationally. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs often reach higher levels than those of their peers nationally. High-quality teaching and support of teaching assistants enable them to make accelerated progress. Those pupils from different ethnic heritages achieve to the same high level as other pupils as they benefit from specialist 'in-school' help.
- Pupils also achieve well across different subjects such as history and geography, while their musical and artistic talents are developed to high standards. Additional physical education funding enables a high number of pupils to take part in sports related activities ranging from basketball and ju-jitsu to street dancing to raise activity and fitness levels.

### The quality of teaching

### is outstanding

- The quality of teaching over time is typically outstanding through the school, which is an improvement from the last inspection. Teachers are adept and highly skilled at bringing the best out of their pupils, whether it is Reception class children benefiting from a wide range of activities in and out of the classroom or Year 5 learning Latin or a modern foreign language to aid their learning of grammar.
- Pupils of all abilities are avid learners, as activities are matched closely to their interests. Pupils often help teachers decide which topics or displays they would like in their classrooms. For example, in the Reception class pupils voted overwhelmingly to have a 'class spaceship'. In an excellent lesson, pupils excitedly put on their spacesuits to explore planets displayed on the walls, while others investigated symmetrical shapes and patterns or used computers to develop their number skills.
- Pupils' writing, speaking and listening skills are taught extremely well, often through projects as well as stand-alone lessons. Teachers create opportunities to develop and apply pupils' writing and number skills in different subjects such as science and history based topics such as the

Second World War. Staff demonstrate good speaking, listening and writing skills.

- High-quality teaching in mathematics has helped maintain very high levels of pupils' attainment over time. For example, in an excellent lesson in Year 6, pupils readily simplified fractions and showed how fractions can be written differently, but keeping the same proportion. Excellent use of audio-visual resources helped enhance pupils' understanding.
- Displays around the school and within lessons are testimony to pupils' excellent understanding of topics ranging from the rainforest to different countries of the world. Teachers use these subjects to skilfully develop pupils' moral, social, cultural and spiritual understanding to high levels.
- Those pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable or who are eligible for pupil premium funding achieve to high levels because activities are planned well to meet their specific needs. Additional adults help provide high-quality support, often one-to-one or in small groups so pupils succeed at a rapid pace.
- Those pupils, who may be new to the school and might not speak or write English fluently, benefit from specialist language support to settle quickly and to make up ground rapidly in their learning.
- Teachers' marking is regular and effective, and pupils say they like having targets to work to which enable them to judge how well they are achieving and to set challenges for those capable of harder work.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is excellent. Their attendance levels are well above average. Pupils are mature, helpful and polite and are only too pleased to tell you that their school is a 'great place to be'. Pupils are quick to say that you must 'respect the rules' and value the role of peer mediators who help other pupils if they have difficulties. Assemblies help reinforce school values very well and concepts such as 'freedom', 'greed' or 'vanity' develop pupils' maturity and respect.
- Pupils say that bullying is extremely rare and could not recall any taking place recently. Around the school at playtimes and lunchtimes, as well as within lessons, pupils' behaviour rarely dips from being kind, thoughtful and helpful toward others. Within lessons pupils are very eager to please and settle extremely quickly to their learning to maximise the time they have. Responses to their teachers are often thoughtful and well considered and their attitude towards visitors is kind and helpful.
- Pupils often say they love their school and the staff. Those attending the breakfast club enjoy the range of food available and the activities provided. Parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire indicated that they agree that behaviour is excellent in the school.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils say that they know what to do when using the internet and are very aware of how to deal with any difficulties should they arise. Initiatives such as anti-bullying week, friendship week, cyber bullying awareness and signs in the computer suite warning of the dangers of internet misuse, combine to make pupils feel extremely safe.

### **The leadership and management** are outstanding

- An excellent combination of teamwork, clear priorities for improvement, spotting of areas needing improvement and then taking clear actions to bring this about, have succeeded in raising the school's overall level of effectiveness.
- With the support of other schools, partner universities or colleges, the school develops different ways to enhance pupils' writing. These initiatives ensure that pupils' current written work reflects high standards of content and presentation.
- Both the headteacher and middle leaders (those responsible for subjects or year groups) regularly check upon the quality of teaching in others' classes. This helps identify high-quality

teaching, and helps ensure that salary progression is linked to the progress pupils make. Staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire are unanimous in their support of the headteacher, the pupils and the way the school provides for their professional development.

- The school's distinctive Christian ethos is a notable presence felt within the school which pupils, staff, governors and parents and carers say is one of its significant strengths. Links with parents and carers, other schools, professionals and partner colleges are also used to good effect to enhance staff training and pupils' experiences.
- An excellent range of subjects and activities provides extremely well for pupils in nearly all respects. Visits to places of interest both locally and further afield and well-thought-out project work combine to stimulate pupils' interest in learning. Pupils are skilful at using computers, often within the computer suite, although those in Years 1 to 6 do not benefit from a wide range of opportunities to use information and communication technology within their day-to-day activities to help boost their learning further.
- The local authority, recognising the quality of the school's work over time, has provided light touch but effective support to the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors have succeeded in supporting senior leaders to identify those aspects which could help raise the overall level of the school's effectiveness. Although results have remained relatively high over time, governors quickly identified and challenged a dip in performance, which the school remedied quickly. Their regular visits to the school provide them with good information to gauge the progress of initiatives and in judging how well the school promotes Catholic values and understanding. Regular training enables governors to keep abreast of latest developments, and to gain a greater knowledge and understanding of how the school compares to others in terms of results. Governors are keenly aware of how teachers' pay and progression are linked to maintaining excellent levels of progress, along with their knowledge of how additional pupil premium funding is allocated and assessed. Governors also helped the school in developing its use of extra funding for physical education, so that more pupils were able to participate in a wider range of games and activities both during lessons and after 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	118778
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	431425

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	209
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Germaine Campbell
<b>Headteacher</b>	Elizabeth Baldock
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	26 February 2009
<b>Telephone number</b>	01732 453921
<b>Fax number</b>	01732 460501
<b>Email address</b>	office@st-thomas-sevenoaks.kent.sch.uk



Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store St  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2014

