

St Thomas of Canterbury School, a Catholic Voluntary Academy

Chancet Wood Drive, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S8 7TR

Inspection dates 20–21 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	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.

- Pupils' achievement is outstanding. From the time they enter school, all pupils make rapid progress in English and mathematics. When they leave in Year 6, pupils reach standards that are well above average. Pupils often exceed what is expected of them. Mathematics is a particular strength.
- Activities are highly creative and interest pupils. This ensures that every pupil achieves well by developing the skills they need in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils really enjoy learning and love the opportunities provided to learn both inside and outside of the classroom.
- Pupils are encouraged to develop an enquiring mind and are given the freedom to work individually and with others to explore learning. They take responsibility for their own learning and support others to improve.
- Pupils' behaviour and safety are outstanding. The school works like a family to create a strong community where mutual respect is tangible. Attitudes to learning, even amongst the youngest children, are often impeccable.
- The headteacher is a gifted and talented professional who is ambitious for the school. Actions reflect his relentless pursuit of high achievement. This goes alongside fostering a love of learning and the development of well-rounded children.
- The senior leader and middle managers are equally determined that all pupils do as well as they can. Leaders check the quality of teaching and learning weekly. They work as a team to quickly eliminate any weaknesses and, as a result, teaching is improving.
- Pupils are set challenging targets to encourage them to work towards higher levels. However, sometimes the language used to describe what they need to do is difficult for them to understand.
- Members of the governing body care deeply about their community and rigorously support the headteacher. The Chair of the Governing Body has skilfully gathered a very strong team with a broad range of specialist knowledge. This is used successfully to hold leaders to account for their decisions. This ensures the school is improving.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection observed teaching and learning in 12 lessons and six phonics (the sounds made by letters) groups. Two of the lessons were jointly observed with the deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, two members of the governing body and with the deputy headteacher and middle leaders. A telephone conversation was held with the Director of Schools for the diocese.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work, looked at a wide range of pupil progress data, the school’s view of its own effectiveness and its performance management information.
- Inspectors scrutinised behaviour and attendance records as well as documents relating to safeguarding and observed behaviour in all classrooms and around the school.
- The inspectors looked at a range of pupils’ work books, listened to pupils read and talked to groups of pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Inspectors took account of 50 responses to the online survey Parent View and a recent school survey and spoke with lunch time supervisors and parents at the beginning of each day.
- Account was taken of the responses to 15 inspection questionnaires returned by members of the school staff.

Inspection team

Pauline Pitman, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Keith Bardon

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average primary school.
- It became a voluntary academy in October 2012 which means there is no previous data before 2013.
- The school works within the partnership of Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Umbrella Trust.
- The headteacher works closely with the local primary academies and offers wider support to schools requiring improvement within the diocese. The deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2013 and three further teaching appointments have been made for September 2014.
- Children enter the school into Reception Year from a range of nursery provisions.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is lower than average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is much higher than the national average. This is because the school has an integrated resource for five pupils with significant and complex learning needs and disabilities. In addition, there are pupils with statements whose parents have sought specialist provision for their children.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium is well below the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard which is the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school provides a breakfast club.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Use more straightforward language, especially for the least able, to describe and help pupils understand what they need to do to aspire towards even higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are often below what is typical for their age. They make rapid and outstanding progress and enter Year 1 with development often higher than expected of children of the same age.
- Pupils continue to make excellent progress across the school. The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 is well above average. Standards seen in books continue to rise across the school with the majority of pupils reaching very high levels in both English and mathematics. Achievement in mathematics is especially strong due to the introduction of a range of innovative strategies including a focus on enquiry and investigation.
- Standards in reading are high because of some excellent teaching of phonics. This has led to significant improvements in the skills needed to support pupils to read and write. Older pupils read a wide range of books, such as adventure stories and factual information, enabling them to extend their knowledge and gain a love of reading.
- The most able pupils make exceptional progress, especially in mathematics, with high proportions reaching the high Level 6. They are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and to stretch themselves to the limit and beyond.
- The school is very inclusive and works very hard to ensure that all pupils achieve equally well. Pupils with special educational needs make outstanding progress. Their progress is regularly checked and they are supported superbly well. Last year, a small group of pupils in one class did not do quite so well in reading but the school quickly put in place rigorous support and additional teachers. These led to even better improvements this year.
- The small group of pupils with very complex special needs and disabilities, who are part of the integrated resource, make important small steps towards achievement. For example, a simple physical response is accepted to show understanding of questions and instructions. All of these pupils benefit from the excellent resources available and are working towards the highest performance levels possible.
- The number of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, is too small to record their attainment. However, since the school opened, support has been individually tailored allowing them to make rapid progress. As a result, the attainment gap is narrowing in relation to others in the school.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching is outstanding overall because it is innovative, imaginative and inspires pupils to learn. Expectations are very high and inspiring learning experiences support pupils to progress to a higher level.
- Staff are highly supported and appreciate the school's drive to further develop their skills in analysing data on pupils' progress. This ensures a consistent approach to assessment and high quality and constructive guidance for pupils.
- An effective team approach and sharing of skills by teachers have developed imaginative and creative approaches that capture pupils' enthusiasm. For example, adjustments to the teaching of phonics have dramatically improved teachers' knowledge and practice.
- Marking and feedback in pupils' books are very strong. Pupils receive very constructive advice on how to improve. They act upon this advice and learn from their mistakes. The introduction of a system to promote different ways to learn is used consistently. For example, the use of 'magpie cards' encourages pupils to work together and explore different ways of thinking.
- As well as advice from marking, pupils also have targets to guide them to reach the next level. Sometimes, the language used is not understood easily by pupils which makes it more difficult for some pupils, particularly the least able, to challenge themselves.
- The teaching of mathematics and English is very effective and pupils enjoy using their skills in

different lessons. They explain clearly the new skills they have been taught. Excellent use of equipment in mathematics helps pupils visualise numbers and develop understanding. Pupils work confidently to solve problems and understand how to use their skills in different subjects.

- Pupils have many opportunities to read and to write across different subjects. Activities capture their interest and inspire them to write. They enthusiastically describe visits to the theatre to see plays such as 'The Accrington Pals,' which was linked to their World War 1 topic. Guided reading sessions are organised well and pupils have regular opportunities to read and extend their skills.
- Homework consolidates and extends learning very well including using the school's online resources.
- Year groups work exceptionally well together and pupils of different ages learn from each other. For example, the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1 set up a realistic alien spaceship landing on the playing field. This generated much enthusiasm and sparked outstanding opportunities for developing speaking and listening, reading and writing.
- Teaching is outstanding in the Early Years Foundation Stage because a wide range of stimulating activities, usually topic based, are carefully planned to help children develop. Parents comment that children learn their sounds and letters very quickly and have many exciting activities to practise reading and writing and have fun.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. In classrooms, and around the school, behaviour is often flawless because the positive strategies used to manage pupils behaviour work very well. There is a strong sense of partnership between teachers and pupils. Pupils are proud of their school and of their work. They arrive at school with a smile and even the youngest children have developed a real sense of ownership in their community and in their ability as learners. This has led to exceptionally mature attitudes to learning.
- Pupils develop strong friendships and learn to work alongside and support each other from an early age. They have developed a 'friendship corner' for anyone who is alone, a 'Bubble Time' provision to support pupils to manage their own behaviour and a peace garden and prayer room for reflection and calm.
- Older pupils are encouraged to become young leaders by leading play activities at lunchtime. The school is working with an outdoor play specialist to train lunchtime staff to promote play. All pupils are trusted and play happily on the field, in the school woods and in the play caravan.
- Pupils are well informed about all types of bullying and say this is extremely rare. The few occasions that pupils misbehave or upset others are dealt with very quickly and pupils are supported to develop good learning behaviours.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about behaviour in school and say their children are kept very safe in school. Pupils and staff agree with this. Almost 100% of parents would recommend the school to others.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Great attention is given to online safety and pupils know how to keep safe on the internet. They have visits from professionals who talk about road safety and acting responsibly. Pupils work in family groups and encourage each other to keep safe.
- Attendance was slightly below the national average in 2013 but has been above average since then and more recently well above. A small group of pupils who require very specialist support for their physical and medical needs are sometimes not well enough to come to school.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher is a gifted and reflective leader aiming for the school to become world class. Under his inspirational leadership, the drive to raise and maintain standards is helping pupils to develop into successful and happy young people. Since the school opened in October 2012, a

broad range of creative and highly effective developments have been put in place. This has resulted in impressive improvements in the quality of teaching and in the rapid progress of pupils. The school is very well placed to improve.

- The headteacher and staff are highly skilled in analysing information to find out what needs attention. They use this knowledge to decide whether provision is good enough. As a result, the evaluation of the school's performance is finely tuned and accurate. Priorities are clear and supported by prompt action to raise the quality of teaching and achievement.
- The headteacher, supported by a new deputy headteacher and other middle leaders, has put in place an extremely rigorous system to check the quality of teaching and learning. This provides crucial weekly information about teachers' planning, pupils' work and achievement, and any emerging difficulties. Work books show the rapid progress pupils have made since the school opened.
- Recent refinements to the management of teachers' performance have led to an extremely robust system that identifies success and supports individual teachers. Everyone understands what is expected of them because precise objectives are explicitly linked to progress, school development and salary rewards.
- The deputy headteacher works successfully alongside effective middle leaders to systematically support new teachers and to check the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. This strong leadership has led to sharing of outstanding practice and to quickly spotting any weaknesses or emerging gaps in pupils' learning. High quality training and support are promptly put in place where they are most needed. Teachers welcome this challenge and embrace the high demands placed on them.
- The headteacher is extremely successful in his partnership work with other schools in the diocese where he is seen as a huge asset. Expertise is shared and this supports other schools.
- Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the integrated resource provision are outstanding. Leaders are involved in self-evaluation and staff use their good understanding of data to plan for pupils including those who need very specialist support.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements.
- The innovative design of the curriculum enables pupils to acquire basic skills and also excites them to extend their knowledge through a very broad range of activities inside and outside of school hours. They are encouraged to become school journalists through the newspaper club for pupils in Years 5 and 6 and willingly participate in selling Fair Trade healthy food. Pupils appreciate daily opportunities to reflect on their feelings. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a deeply embedded strength of the school.
- The school makes good use of the primary school sport funding to develop skills amongst teachers and to increase the range of sporting activities and participation in competitions.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are passionate about the school and offer the necessary skills to hold leaders to account for what is happening in school. They have expertise in finances, appraisal, and teaching and learning. Frequent learning walks through school and visits to classes ensure an informed view of the quality of teaching. Governors check that salary rewards link to performance.
 - Data on achievement are scrutinised and questions asked if a concern is identified. Pupil premium funding is high on the agenda at governors' meetings. Leaders are constantly challenged to ensure that pupils eligible for this support benefit from the funding and that their progress and that of others is rapid.
 - The Director of Education for the diocese works closely with the school. He takes an important role in checking the effectiveness and performance of both the headteacher and the governing body. He recognises the strong relationships generated by the headteacher and values his skills and the calm authority he shares with other schools in the diocese.

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	138828
Local authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	440164

This inspection of the school 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	215
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Metcalfe
Headteacher	Andrew Truby
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0114 2745597
Fax number	0114 2745699
Email address	enquiries@st-tc.co.uk

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