

St Thomas of Canterbury RC School

Eastbourne Grove, Bolton, Lancashire, BL1 5LH

Inspection dates 3–4 July 2014

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.

- Over time, pupils make good progress from their broadly average starting points and usually reach above average standards in writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6. Standards in reading are even higher.
- Teaching is good because it is built on strong subject knowledge. Pupils engage in interesting learning activities, which inspire them to value education.
- Because of the range of engaging activities offered, children leave the Early Years Foundation Stage having made good progress towards developing early reading, writing and mathematics skills.
- Behaviour is typically good. Pupils are keen to do well, have excellent relationships with their teachers and feel safe in school. Attendance is above average. There are remarkably few pupils who are persistently absent.
- The exceptionally rich and varied curriculum makes full use of sport and high-quality art and music provision to promote pupils' enjoyment of learning.
- Strong leadership of teaching means that pupils' achievement is good. Teamwork between all staff, including the many additional adults, is highly effective.
- The headteacher and senior staff, have the confidence of staff, parents and pupils alike. The school's own evaluation of its performance is accurate and is based on a rigorous evaluation of pupils' achievement, which in turn identifies how the school can improve further.
- Governors provide a high level of support and challenge to the school. The governing body has an extremely clear understanding of the school's strengths, including teaching and pupils' achievement, and the few areas where improvement is needed.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching to help pupils to make excellent progress.
- Marking does not consistently give pupils sufficient guidance on how to improve their work.
- The work set is sometimes too easy and does not stretch the most able pupils.
- Not all middle leaders have the necessary skills to rigorously check the quality of teaching and ensure school policies are implemented consistently.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 18 lessons taught by 12 teachers, as well as making several shorter visits to classrooms and checking pupils’ work. Some of these activities were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors talked with pupils at break and lunch times, and heard others in Year 1, Year 4 and Year 5 read.
- The views of 44 parents who responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and two letters received during the inspection were taken into account. Inspectors also talked with parents informally at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors met with senior and middle leaders, teachers, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- The school’s improvement plan and records of pupils’ achievement, records of the quality of teaching, pupils’ behaviour and safeguarding were examined.
- Thirty-seven staff submitted their views via a questionnaire and inspectors took these into account.
- Pupils in Year 6 were not in school during the inspection.

Inspection team

David Cox, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Pamela Hemphill

Additional Inspector

Doreen Davenport

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average size primary school.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. There is a small proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is below average.
- The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress at the end of Year 6.
- Since the previous inspection, St Thomas of Canterbury School has been part of a major expansion project at the request of the local authority and Salford Diocese. It is now a two-form entry school with facilities to meet the needs of 420 pupils. The expansion project (2010) brought with it an increase of 'in year' admissions due to places becoming available in Key Stage 2. One-fifth of the pupils in Years 5 and 6 joined the school at times other than the normal September admission time.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is outstanding and thus improve pupils' progress further by:
 - ensuring the most able pupils are always given work that is hard enough and challenges them to do their best
 - ensuring pupils are always given the precise written guidance they need to improve their work
 - ensuring teachers always check pupils' understanding before moving on to the next activity.
- Ensure all middle leaders have the necessary skills to be able to rigorously evaluate the quality of teaching and learning for which they are responsible and ensure school policies are implemented consistently.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Most children start in the Reception class with knowledge and skills that are typical for their age. The good progress that they make during their first year in school means that the vast majority are well prepared for their start in Year 1.
- Children are developing good early reading skills. This is because staff make full use of a wide range of stories, information books and practising the sounds that words and letters make. There is also a good range of library books to take home.
- Progress in Key Stage 1 is good and standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2 are above average. In 2013, the Year 1 phonic (letters and the sounds they make) screening check scores were above the national figure.
- Standards in Year 6 dipped from above average to average in 2013. This dip in standards was partly due to a large influx of pupils into Years 5 and 6, with a higher than usual number of potentially vulnerable pupils joining during the year, many of whom joined with standards of attainment that were average. Some of these pupils were only at the school for a few months during Key Stage 2.
- Inspection evidence and the school's own records show that this decline has been arrested. School leaders and teachers have been quick to push standards back up this year. By the end of Year 6, standards in mathematics and writing are now back to being above average, and in reading, standards are even higher. Pupils make good progress overall during Key Stage 2.
- By Year 6, the large majority of pupils read exceptionally well. Pupils read avidly for pleasure. Quite a few pupils are working at Level 6. Their writing shows a good grasp of English grammar, punctuation and spelling. Weekly spelling tests and a sharp focus on the correct use of grammar, pushes pupils to achieve at a good level.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics is good. Pupils are provided with many opportunities to develop their mental arithmetic skills and they love being tested on their times-tables.
- Although at times the work set for the most able is not hard enough, by the time they leave Year 6, they make good progress overall and successfully extend their knowledge and understanding.
- In 2013, pupils who were in receipt of the pupil premium funding, including those pupils who were known to be eligible for free school meals, made the progress expected of them. However, too few of them did better than this. Senior leaders quickly identified this issue and have introduced effective strategies to improve the learning of this group of pupils. As a result, eligible pupils currently make similarly good progress overall as other pupils in school. This ensures that any gaps in attainment between those pupils and other pupils in the school are now narrowing by Year 6, although some pupils are still over two terms behind.
- Pupils from minority ethnic groups make similarly good progress to others. The school values the heritage and language of every family, and staff ensure that pupils are helped to get on well with one another.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disabilities make good progress. This is because staff get to know their needs well, and use this when providing activities.
- Around the building, many examples of high quality art work shine out, including sculptures created by the pupils themselves.
- The school is very clearly focused on identifying any pupils who are at risk of falling behind and concentrates on ensuring that all pupils make at least good progress. All pupils have equal opportunity to benefit from all that the school has to offer.

The quality of teaching is good

- Pupils do well because teaching is good.
- The team of staff in Reception work well together and play a vital role in developing children's learning. There is a great emphasis upon teaching children to write, read and know the sounds that letters make. This helps children to be ready for their move to Year 1.
- Excellent relationships between adults and pupils and well-established systems for managing behaviour mean that management of behaviour is usually unobtrusive. Sometimes, where activities are less well structured, some off-task chatter or fidgeting creeps in and progress slows.
- Teaching assistants are very well briefed and organised effectively to support pupils of all ability. This helps pupils to learn more effectively.
- The teaching of mathematics is good. The workbooks of Year 6 pupils are particularly impressive and showed pupils' good development of mathematical skills and their ability to solve real-life problems. The same is true about the teaching of writing skills. Many opportunities are provided for pupils to practise and extend their writing skills across a range of subjects.
- The school focuses heavily on teaching reading skills. From a very young age, pupils are encouraged to read for pleasure and all will have experienced 'unmissable texts' (a group of children's classic stories that all pupils will have read or had read to them) by the time they leave the school.
- Assessment of pupils' progress is accurate but the information is not always used effectively. Occasionally, pupils are set inappropriately the same work regardless of their ability. This often means that the most able pupils are not challenged sufficiently and the work is too easy for them.
- Pupils' work is mostly marked diligently. However, the new marking policy is not adhered to fully and it is not always clear to pupils how they can improve their work. As a result, marking does not always help to drive improvements in pupils' learning.
- Typically, questioning is very perceptive and work is adjusted as the activity progresses so pupils' learning moves on quickly. The pace of learning is slower when questioning does not check that all pupils have understood the topic before moving on.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. This is particularly evident in the highly sensible way they move around the school, in corridors, in the dining hall and between classrooms. Pupils wear their school uniform with pride.
- Pupils are kind and caring towards one another and enjoy having visitors such as the Fire Brigade and artists in residence.
- Pupils' relationships with staff are excellent. This was evident when the choir, members of which are both pupils and staff, rehearsed for an upcoming performance.
- Although the vast majority of pupils are keen and eager to learn and show highly positive attitudes to their work, very occasionally, when teaching does not entirely capture pupils' full attention, concentration wanes and progress slows.
- Pupils say that bullying, in any form, is a very rare occurrence and they are confident that, if it did happen, it would be stopped. Records show that tailored support has led to improvements in behaviour and in attitudes to learning for potentially more vulnerable pupils who have particular behavioural needs.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Any misdemeanours by pupils are usually quite minor and accidents are responded to promptly.
- Pupils say they feel safe. They are aware of different types of bullying and name calling and know how to keep themselves safe, for example, on the internet, although they are less aware of what might constitute cyber-bullying. The vast majority of parents are confident the school keeps their children safe. Those spoken with at the school gate said their children love coming to

school.

- Attendance is above average. There are remarkably few instances of persistent absenteeism as the school has clear systems to check attendance and encourage pupils and parents to see the importance of coming to school.

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders, governors and staff share the highest aspirations for all pupils' achievement and personal development, and this underpins all that they do every day. The headteacher, together with the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders, are excellent role models for staff and pupils.
- Improvement planning is focused on the right priorities. Areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection have been tackled in full. For example, provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is now good.
- Senior leaders regularly check the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. This means that they have a very accurate knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and know how well individual teachers are performing. This information is well used to check how well staff are performing and link it to salary progression and promotion.
- Some middle leaders are at the early stages of developing the necessary skills to rigorously check the quality of teaching and learning and this is leading to the inconsistent application of school policies. For instance, the recently introduced marking policy is not embedded fully and its impact is variable.
- While the school focuses on developing pupils' basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics, it also provides many exciting opportunities for pupils to broaden their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. For example, there are many high quality opportunities for pupils to participate in musical performances and a range of educational visits.
- Physical education and sports tuition is a huge strength. The primary sport funding has enabled the school to employ a specialist sports company. Pupils have the opportunity to receive expert teaching. Participation in sporting activities has increased and pupils have access to a much wider range of sports, such as bowling.
- The school welcomes the support and helpful advice it receives from the local authority and from its education partners.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors offer highly effective support and robust challenge to the school. Members of the governing body know what is happening in the school because they visit regularly and ask questions of leaders and staff about teaching and about pupils' progress. Consequently, they know that teaching is good and that the progress of the most able pupils is an area for increased attention.
 - Governors keep a close eye upon finance, including rewarding teachers through pay and are informed when action is needed, including when staff are not as effective as they should be. They receive clear information about how the pupil premium funding and the primary school sports funding are allocated and are very knowledgeable about their impact.
 - The governing body ensures that the school fulfils its statutory responsibilities for safeguarding.

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	105221
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	444190

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	418
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Lochery
Headteacher	Frances Lysyj
Date of previous school inspection	9 December 2009
Telephone number	01204 333131
Email address	head@st-thomas-of-canterbury.bolton.sch.uk

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