

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Dartmouth Avenue, Coalpool, Walsall WS3 1SP

Inspection dates 23–24 February 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leadership and management are outstanding. School leaders have high aspirations with a proven track record of improving teaching and outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders know the strengths and areas for development within the school and are taking informed action to improve the school further.
- The curriculum is rich and varied and learning in the classroom is supported by a range of extra-curricular activities.
- The promotion of fundamental British values and the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are strong.
- There is a great deal of high-quality teaching in the school and this has led to outstanding outcomes for a number of pupils.
- Pupils make rapid progress in Key Stage 2, particularly in mathematics and writing.
- Children settle into nursery provision well and make rapid progress in the Reception Year.
- Disadvantaged pupils make outstanding progress in the school. A greater proportion of these pupils than disadvantaged pupils nationally make expected and above expected progress in Key Stage 2.
- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They are considerate, kind and polite and behave extremely well both inside and outside of the classroom.
- School leaders promote outstanding personal development and welfare. Pupils are very safe and attendance has improved since the last inspection.
- Pupils are proud of their school and take responsibilities they are given seriously. They are well prepared for secondary school and life in modern Britain.
- Governance is strong. Governors have the range of skills and experience to ensure that the school has outstanding leadership.
- Staff work well with parents in order to improve outcomes for their children.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not consistently of the highest standard and outcomes in Key Stage 1 do not match those elsewhere in the school.
- Progress in reading is not yet as strong as that in mathematics and writing.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Take action to achieve outstanding outcomes for pupils in all year groups by ensuring that:
 - the quality of teaching is consistently of the highest standard
 - attainment in Key Stage 1 improves
 - interventions to promote reading are fully embedded and lead to outcomes which match those in mathematics and writing.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher, ably supported by the governors, the senior leadership team and all staff, has created an ambitious culture with high aspirations of staff and pupils. There is a clear focus on improving outcomes for pupils in the school.
- As a result of actions taken by leaders, all pupils make at least good progress during their time in the school and many make outstanding progress. For example, disadvantaged pupils make better progress than other pupils nationally during Key Stage 2.
- All leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and use this information to continue to improve the standard of education in the school. For example, the quality of writing is much better now than at the time of the last inspection, and interventions to promote pupils' even better reading skills are beginning to have a significant impact throughout the school. Strong leadership of mathematics has helped to maintain high standards in this subject area.
- Leadership is strong at all levels and staff monitor their areas of responsibility closely in order to inform action to drive improvements. As senior leaders identified outcomes in Key Stage 1 as a weakness in the school, the leadership within this key stage was changed in order to focus on addressing this. Consequently, leadership and provision have improved but this has not yet fully impacted upon pupils' outcomes.
- The management of teachers' performance is used well to reward high-quality teaching and secure improvement. Staff are set challenging targets linked to the school's priorities, the quality of teaching, pupils' progress and the teachers' standards. Progression through the pay scales is closely linked to the impact staff have on improving outcomes for pupils.
- Training and development are actively encouraged by school leaders. Teachers are given opportunities to observe examples of high-quality teaching in the school and staff feel both supported and challenged to improve their practice. New teachers speak highly of the support that they are given from leaders and other staff in the school. This is contributing to improvements in Key Stage 1.
- The broad and balanced curriculum helps pupils to learn effectively. There is a focus upon reading, writing and mathematics and pupils are also able to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in a wide range of subjects, including science, history, geography, religious education (RE), Spanish, technology, the arts, music and physical education. Learning in the classroom is complemented by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including choir, music, cookery, sports clubs, theatre and museum visits and residential opportunities.
- The promotion of fundamental British values and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a real strength of the school. Pupils have been taught about tolerance, respect, individual liberty, the rule of law and democracy, so they are able to talk about them confidently and give examples of how they impact on their lives and British society. They also have a secure understanding of different faiths and cultures and they know about all the world's major religions. Consequently, they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils are expected to conduct themselves extremely well and make the right decisions. They are overtly taught right from wrong, and pupils, staff and school leaders do not tolerate prejudiced behaviour. Leaders promote equality of opportunity and diversity exceptionally well.
- Additional funding is used effectively to improve the quality of education in the school. Each child for whom the school receives pupil premium funding has an individual action plan which includes targeted support. As disadvantaged pupils receive high-quality teaching, often in small groups, they make rapid progress in the school.
- Primary sports funding is used to hire high-quality sports coaches, purchase equipment and increase the range of activities offered at the school. Sports coaches work with staff from the school to deliver lessons and provide training to develop their confidence and skills in delivering physical education and sport. The profile of sport has risen in the school and pupils are becoming more proficient in a number of different activities. For example, as a result of regular swimming lessons in Year 4, pupils who could not swim before the school took them to the local baths can now swim, and others can swim for greater distances. In addition to this, both the boys' and girls' teams won a regional athletics competition for the first time last year.
- School leaders have worked effectively with parents to improve outcomes for their children. Parents have attended information sessions about literacy and numeracy and many listen to their children read. Those

who made their views known to inspectors were full of praise about communication with the school and all felt that the school was very well led and managed.

- The local authority has provided appropriate light touch support for the school. The link officer knows the school well and has provided support as required. At the request of the Archdiocese, the headteacher is soon to become the executive headteacher of another school in the local authority. This will be done on a part-time basis and she will remain as headteacher of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance of the school is very strong. Governors have a clear vision of what they want to achieve and they have the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding to hold leaders to close account.
 - Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and offer extremely effective support and challenge to school leaders. Governing body meetings cover relevant areas and ensure that statutory duties are met.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Up-to-date policies and procedures are in place and staff have received appropriate training and information. They know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil and make prompt referrals when required. These concerns are followed up appropriately by senior members of staff with responsibility for safeguarding and outside agencies are involved immediately when necessary. Records are well kept and stored securely. Pupils feel very safe as a result of this high-quality provision.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- There is some outstanding teaching, learning and assessment in the school. This is particularly evident with experienced staff in the Reception Year and Years 5 and 6.
- Teaching is good elsewhere in the school and, as a consequence of action taken by school leaders, it is improving. However, as a result of very low starting points of many pupils, including new arrivals, it is not yet securing above-average attainment in the school. Teaching has not had time to make up for lost ground in Key Stage 1.
- In the vast majority of lessons, teaching is well planned, it captures the interest of pupils and engages them so they make at least good progress. Activities usually consolidate learning and deepen knowledge and understanding.
- Teachers have secure subject knowledge and they use this, along with effective questioning, to challenge pupils to make good progress in all lessons and, where teaching is most effective, rapid progress.
- Time in lessons is used productively as there are clear routines and pupils are keen to start work as soon as they enter a classroom. Pupils have high levels of self-discipline and staff reinforce high expectations of conduct. Pupils work extremely well with staff and other pupils and enjoy learning.
- At times, pupils benefit from groupings which are based around what they need to learn rather than their age. For example, small mixed-age classes focus upon developing particular reading or writing skills in morning sessions. This promotes equality of opportunity and allows pupils to gain the required skills quickly to allow them to move on to more challenging work.
- All staff work well together to support the progress of individuals and groups. However, teachers do not always deploy teaching assistants effectively to maximise learning in their classes.
- A range of subjects are taught well in the school so pupils make at least good progress across the curriculum. Opportunities to develop writing, communication and mathematics are also taken in subjects other than English and mathematics. For example, pupils write at length in history, they are encouraged to explain their opinions in most lessons and mathematical skills are developed through physical education. However, teachers do not routinely insist on cursive handwriting.
- As outcomes in reading have not matched those in writing and mathematics, leaders are focusing on improving this. Teachers model good reading, effective interventions are now in place and pupils read books which match their ability. Confident readers are fluent and gain deeper understanding from their reading and all pupils are able to use the sounds that letters represent (phonics) to decipher words. However, although less-able readers can work out what words say, they do not always know what they mean.
- Marking and feedback reflect the school's policy and, as required by that policy, pupils usually respond to comments in order to improve their work. However, the quality of teachers' feedback is not consistently of the highest standard and a few pupils do not use it to make improvements.

- Teachers set meaningful homework, in line with the school's policy, to consolidate learning and prepare pupils for work to come.
- Staff know the pupils well and use assessment information effectively to establish what the pupils know and what they need to learn. Consequently, teachers know how well pupils are progressing and what they need to do to improve further. This informs planning and is also communicated to pupils and parents. Parents are given clear information of how their children are doing in relation to the standards expected of them.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are proud to be members of the school. They wear their uniform with pride, take care with the presentation of their work, look after equipment and respect the building and their surroundings.
- Pupils' self-awareness and self-confidence are promoted through responsibilities that they are given in school. Older pupils act as ambassadors for literacy, sports, RE and classes of younger pupils. This allows them to take opportunities to support pupils in early years and Key Stage 1 at playtime, on trips and during productions. They lead assemblies, read in mass, help to organise sports day and listen to other children read. This also helps to develop their understanding of how to be successful learners.
- Physical and emotional well-being are developed well through sporting activities, healthy eating and the strong Christian ethos of the school. Elements of the curriculum are specifically designed to build confidence and develop self-esteem, resilience and well-being. Some pupils are given targeted support through the school's nurture group.
- Unkindness is rare and bullying is infrequent. Pupils understand different forms of bullying and are confident that staff would deal with any concerns if they arose.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They are taught to stay safe through the curriculum and have a secure understanding of how to stay safe when using the internet.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They are considerate, kind and polite and behave extremely well both inside and outside of the classroom.
- In lessons, pupils listen carefully to staff and other pupils and work equally productively independently, in pairs, groups or as a whole class. Their high standards of behaviour are consistent with all adults in school.
- During social time, pupils play sensibly together and the behaviour observed in the dining hall was extremely calm and well mannered.
- Exclusions are rare and used appropriately, and pupils who have had problems with their behaviour in other schools respond positively to the high expectations of all staff at St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School. Consequently, almost all become successful learners in the school.
- Attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now above the national average. The vast majority of pupils attend regularly. This very good improvement in attendance is the result of the strong action of the school's leaders and their very positive partnership with parents.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- Almost all pupils make strong progress from their starting points in a range of subjects during their time in the school. Pupils who start the school in early years and finish in Year 6 make at least good progress and those who join and leave at other times match this progress when they are in the school.
- The most able, pupils from minority ethnic groups, those who speak English as an additional language and pupils who have special educational needs or disability make similar progress to others in the school.
- Almost all children start Nursery with skills well below the age-related expectations but they make good progress through the early years provision. Progress in the Reception Year is particularly rapid.
- The teaching of phonics is effective so a higher proportion than the national average reached the expected standard in the screening checks in 2014 and 2015.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 is below the national average but it is similar to the national average at Key Stage 2. Attainment in mathematics is the strongest in both key stages.
- Pupils make good progress, many from low starting points, in Key Stage 1. Some pupils have very little time in the school before they complete the assessments in Year 2.
- Most pupils make accelerated progress, particularly in writing and mathematics, during Key Stage 2. A greater proportion than found nationally make the progress expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics and a much higher proportion than nationally make rapid progress in all three areas. Although pupils' progress in reading is faster than that found nationally, it is not as rapid as that in writing and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils make outstanding progress in the school. A greater proportion than other pupils nationally make expected and above expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics between Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Pupils currently in the school continue to make at least good progress and many, particularly in upper Key Stage 2, make outstanding progress across a range of subjects.
- As a result of the high expectations of behaviour and work, the progress pupils make during their time in the school and the support that they are given to help with transition, pupils are well prepared for secondary education.

Early years provision

is good

- Early years is well led. As a result of rigorous monitoring of provision and outcomes, the leader has an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for development and uses this to make improvements. For example, the curriculum has been changed since the last inspection to ensure that it provides a range of interesting experiences to help children make at least good progress.
- Learning is planned explicitly around the children's interests and activities build upon what individuals know and can do in order to allow them to progress well.
- Almost all children enter Nursery with skills which are well below those typical for their age. However, high expectations and strategies to help them settle in quickly allow them to begin to develop the skills that they need to become successful learners.
- Individuals and groups of children make good progress through the early years provision. The most-able children, those with special educational needs, children from minority ethnic groups, those with English as an additional language and disadvantaged children make similar progress from their starting points.
- Most children make rapid progress in the Reception class and more children reached a good level of development in 2015 than in 2014. The school's current information indicates that the gap between attainment in the school and the proportion of children nationally who reach a good level of development will continue to close. Consequently, more children are well prepared to access the curriculum in Year 1 and effective interventions are in place to help those who need to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding further.
- As a result of very low starting points, speaking and listening and boys' writing remain areas for development. However, the early years leader is aware of this and is taking action to secure further improvements. She is also aware that the outdoor area needs to be improved in order to enhance the learning environment.
- Assessment is accurate and staff meet regularly to moderate judgements. Staff know what the children can do and what they need to do next in order to improve.
- Teaching is at least consistently good across the early years provision and it is particularly strong in the Reception class. As a result, children develop a pride in learning and enjoy education. They are able to maintain their concentration and they are confident about making decisions about what they are studying.
- Children are highly motivated and eager to share their thoughts. They are well behaved, cooperate well with each other and they are polite. This is the result of the high expectations of staff.
- Communication with parents is of a high quality. Home visits take place before the children start school and parents are invited into school to observe the learning which takes place. Relationships between staff and parents are very positive and parents are fully involved in the assessment process.
- Established routines and daily risk assessments are in place to ensure that the children are safe. Safeguarding is effective in early years and statutory requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	104236
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10000928

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	277
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Quinn
Headteacher	Jean Richmond
Telephone number	01922 720712
Website	www.st-thomas.walsall.sch.uk
Email address	postbox@st-thomas.walsall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10–11 October 2011

Information about this school

- St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School is an average-sized primary school.
- Almost half of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups and the proportion who speak English as an additional language is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is well above average.
- A high proportion of pupils join the school at other than the usual times when pupils start school. Eight pupils joined part way through last year's Year 2 and more than a quarter of pupils in last year's Year 6 joined after the start of Key Stage 2.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Until recently, the headteacher was the executive headteacher of another school outside the local authority but within the Archdiocese of Birmingham. The deputy headteacher led the school when the headteacher was not on site.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 29 parts of lessons. Ten of these observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- Members of the inspection team met with pupils and heard a small number of pupils read. They looked at examples of pupils' work in their books and spoke to some pupils informally.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other members of staff.
- Meetings were also held with two governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority.
- The opinions of parents were considered through seven written responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, a parental survey conducted by the school and conversations held with parents during the course of the inspection.
- Various school documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, minutes of meetings of the governing body and information about pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. Safeguarding procedures were also examined.

Inspection team

Simon Mosley, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sarah Ashley	Ofsted Inspector
John Bates	Ofsted Inspector
Louise Minter	Ofsted Inspector

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