

St Thomas More Roman Catholic Primary School, Middleton, Rochdale

Evesham Road, Alkington, Middleton, Manchester M24 1PY

Inspection dates

7–8 December 2016

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The school's effectiveness has declined since the last inspection. Leaders and governors have been too slow to recognise and tackle a year-on-year drop in standards.
- The school was slow to take on board the challenges of the new national curriculum, and to update its assessment procedures so that they provided teachers with accurate and useful information. Consequently, teaching does not consistently meet pupils' different learning needs.
- For a number of years pupils have made weak progress in writing because teachers' expectations have been too low.
- Teachers do not give pupils sufficient opportunities to develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills in mathematics.
- The most able pupils do not achieve as well as they should. This is because teachers do not consistently set them work that is challenging enough. Often teachers expect the most able pupils to complete work that is too easy.
- Middle leaders do not play a strong enough role in school improvement. They lack some of the skills and knowledge needed to check on the effectiveness of their work.
- The recently revised marking policy is not used consistently well. In some classes, teachers' feedback does not make it clear how pupils can improve their work, and so their progress is not accelerated.
- Changes made in order to increase the effectiveness of the governing body are only just beginning to bring about the necessary improvements.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's position, and the actions they are taking to improve matters are having a positive impact. There are positive signs that a recovery is underway.
- Results in 2016 show some improvements in pupils' attainment and progress at the ends of key stages 1 and 2.
- Effective provision in the early years ensures that children to get off to a good start.
- The school provides effective support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and to those who need to catch up.
- Pupils behave well in school, and say that they are happy and feel safe. Attendance rates are consistently good.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of teaching in order to accelerate pupils' progress, particularly for the most able pupils, by:
 - ensuring that teachers use information about pupils' attainment to plan lessons that more accurately meet pupils' different learning needs
 - ensuring that teachers consistently move pupils on to more challenging work as soon as they are ready, so as not to waste valuable learning time
 - ensuring that teachers give pupils more opportunities to develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills in mathematics
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly in writing, so that they consistently aim for the highest standards.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing the skills and knowledge of middle leaders so that they can be more effective in driving improvements in their areas of responsibility
 - refining the schools' assessment systems so that the information gathered is more consistently used to raise attainment and accelerate progress for all pupils
 - ensuring that teachers consistently apply the recently reviewed marking policy so that marking and feedback have greater impact on the pace of pupils' learning
 - improving governors' skills and their understanding of information about the school's performance, so that they more rigorously hold school leaders to account.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and governors were slow to recognise and tackle a clear decline in standards since the previous inspection, despite the fact that published data clearly indicated significant weaknesses in pupils' attainment and progress throughout the school. They were slow to make the necessary changes to assessment procedures and curricular expectations. As a result, teachers did not have the information that they needed to plan work that would adequately challenge pupils and accelerate their learning.
- The headteacher, appointed on a long-term secondment, and her predecessor who led the school in the spring and summer terms 2016, have brought a sharp dose of reality in recognising the scale of the decline in the school's fortunes. Leaders are now not shying away from tackling the school's weak performance and their work is already having a positive impact.
- Assessment procedures have been put in place that allow leaders and teachers to check accurately on how well pupils are doing. This information is being used effectively to look at the attainment and progress of some of the key groups in the school, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and to put additional support in place. However, the school is not meeting the needs of the most able pupils consistently and so their attainment is not as high as it could be.
- The role of middle leaders responsible for particular subjects, including English and mathematics, has not been strong and so their impact on raising standards has been limited. They are developing their knowledge and skills in checking and improving the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. Their actions are now beginning to have a positive impact on the effectiveness of teaching. In mathematics, the subject leader's support is increasing teachers' awareness of the need to provide opportunities for pupils to use and apply their calculation skills.
- The school provides pupils with a broad and well-balanced curriculum that they say they find interesting. Trips to local places of interest, such as Dunham Massey, help to bring the curriculum to life and add to pupils' enjoyment. Work in pupils' books shows that teachers provide pupils with plenty of opportunities to develop their writing skills in other subjects, such as by writing diary entries in history.
- Pupil premium funding is being used with increasing effectiveness to diminish the differences in achievement for disadvantaged pupils compared with other pupils nationally. Leaders are now using information about pupils' attainment and progress to identify areas where disadvantaged pupils would benefit from additional support, such as in focused small-group teaching sessions held regularly before the start of school. As a result of this sharper focus and effective provision, disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are making faster progress than previously.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well and ensures that they develop an appreciation of fundamental British values. This is evident in the mutual respect that pupils display around school and in their understanding of different religions and cultures. Pupils show a good awareness of difficult moral issues, such as trading in fur, and are keen to play their part through fund-raising for charities such as Macmillan Cancer Support.

- The primary physical education and sport funding is used effectively to ensure that pupils have access to a wide range of sporting activities, both in school and through extra-curricular clubs. Participation levels in clubs are high. The subject leader for physical education uses her subject knowledge to ensure that teachers are well supported in delivering the physical education curriculum.
- The local authority and diocese have provided effective support for the school during a challenging period. They have helped to ensure that the school has had strong leadership and have also made sure that staff have had access to a wide range of professional development opportunities through training courses and contact with local schools. This support has helped to get the school back on track.

Governance of the school

- Until recently, the governing body has not been fully effective in holding school leaders to account for the quality of education in the school. Where governors have raised questions or concerns they have not then been followed up with sufficient rigour. As a consequence, the governing body has not tackled the decline in the school's performance effectively.
- The chair of governors has overseen considerable changes in the composition and organisation of the governing body. New governors have been recruited to ensure that the governing body now has the skills and expertise needed to robustly challenge school leaders. A change to the structure of committees has led to an increased focus on pupils' attainment and progress, while arrangements for managing teachers' performance have been strengthened. The role of 'link governor' provides a number of governors with the chance to work directly with leaders to gain a better understanding of their work.
- Governors show great commitment to the school and are frequent visitors. While governors' skills and knowledge are not as strong as they should be, improvements made to date show that the effectiveness of governance is increasing.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding is given a high priority by the school. Staff and governors all receive regular training to ensure that their knowledge is up to date. Staff have a clear understanding of what to do if they are worried about a child's well-being. The school has established good partnerships with external agencies to ensure that pupils and their families get the help that they need.
- Thorough checks are made on staff, governors and volunteers to ensure that they are suitable people to work with children.
- The governing body has been diligent in ensuring that the school provides a safe environment for its pupils. For example, a new fence has been installed around some of the school grounds and this has made sure that the site is enclosed and secure.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teachers are not consistently ensuring that they challenge the most able pupils in their classes effectively to reach the highest standards. Assessment information is not used well enough to identify the next steps in the most able pupils' learning, and teachers' expectations of what these pupils should be achieving have been too low. The most able pupils often waste valuable learning time completing tasks that are too easy for them, or that are unnecessarily repetitive. As a result, too few of these pupils fully achieve the high standards of which they are capable.
- Weaknesses in the teaching of writing have led to pupils typically making less than the expected amount of progress. Teachers have not had high enough expectations of the complexity of writing that should be the norm for pupils in each year group. Work is now underway to improve pupils' writing skills, but there is still more to be done. The impact of teachers' marking, though detailed, is limited. This is because it does not consistently, as the school's own policy demands, make clear to pupils what the strengths and weaknesses in their writing are.
- In mathematics, calculation skills are taught effectively and pupils quickly become comfortable working on addition, subtraction, multiplication and division tasks that are appropriate for their age. Until recently, however, teachers have not given pupils enough opportunities to use and apply these skills to solve problems, or to explain their reasoning when answering questions. This has led to a slowing of pupils' progress in mathematics in key stage 2. This issue is now being tackled and teachers are beginning to incorporate more problem-solving activities into their teaching, although it is too soon to judge the full impact that this is having on pupils' learning.
- The teaching of reading has typically been stronger throughout the school, and it continues to be a strength. In key stage 1, pupils learn to use phonics confidently and accurately to help them to tackle unfamiliar words. They have positive attitudes to reading and are keen to read at home, as well as in school. By the time they reach Years 5 and 6, pupils are confident readers who see reading both as something to be enjoyed and also a great skill for helping them to find out more about a specific topic.
- Strategies to provide additional support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, or who need help to catch up, are having an increasingly positive impact. Teachers provide additional group support to 'kick start' pupils with new topics, so that they have some knowledge of the new topics or strategies that they then encounter in class. Teaching assistants provide thoughtful and effective individual support where it is required, maximising pupils' chances of success.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in different situations. They know not to divulge personal information over the internet, and a visit from the police taught them important home safety rules such as to lock doors to deter intruders.

- Pupils have a clear understanding of different types of bullying, including homophobic and racist bullying, and know that all forms of bullying are wrong. They said that bullying in their school was rare, and that they were confident that staff would deal quickly with any problems that might arise. One pupil's comment that 'our school is a safe place because the teachers are always looking after us', was typical of pupils' views.
- School leaders promote pupils' health and well-being effectively, particularly through opportunities to get involved in sports and other physical activities. A wide range of active clubs is available, including street dance, swimming and football. The school also has a tradition of sporting success, and pupils are proud to have had the opportunity to represent their school in various teams.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The school is a happy and harmonious place. Pupils are friendly and welcoming to visitors, and display excellent manners. Their sensible conduct in school helps to create a calm environment. Where the school has identified that pupils may need additional support to help them to manage their own behaviour, effective provision has been put in place.
- Almost all of the parents spoken with by inspectors, or who completed the Parent View survey, said that their children were happy at the school. This view is backed up by rates of attendance that are consistently above the national average.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of the school's new behaviour policy, and are determined not to end up with a 'red card' for poor behaviour. As a result, they encourage each other to 'do what is expected' and are confident that behaviour at St Thomas More is good.
- Pupils display positive attitudes to learning. They listen well and settle quickly to the work that teachers set them. Occasionally, when their teacher is working with a different group in class, some of the younger pupils will drift off task, but they quickly re-focus when reminded to.

Outcomes for pupils

Require improvement

- For some time after the previous inspection, pupils were not making enough progress and their attainment declined throughout the school. Pupils who needed to catch up quickly were not doing so, and the most able pupils were not making the progress of which they were capable. The notable exception was in pupils' attainment in phonics, which has been consistently above the national average.
- Results in 2016 showed some improvements on this previously weak overall performance, and evidence in pupils' work confirms that they are making faster progress and their attainment is improving.
- At the end of key stage 1 in 2016, the proportions of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average. However, far fewer pupils than expected achieved 'greater depth' in their learning, indicating that achievement for the most able pupils in key stage 1 was not as good as for other classmates.

- There was a similar picture at the end of key stage 2 in 2016, where the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading and writing was above the national average, but the numbers achieving the higher standard in these subjects was below average. Work in pupils' books confirms that standards are continuing to improve, but that the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are still not achieving as highly as they could.
- School leaders were disappointed with results in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2016, but quickly identified that pupils had struggled to apply their calculation skills to questions that tested their reasoning and problem solving. The leader responsible for mathematics has determinedly set out to overcome this problem this year so that pupils develop a more rounded set of mathematical skills.
- Small cohort sizes make it difficult to judge the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils from year to year, although data does suggest some inconsistencies. Effective work led by the assistant headteacher has ensured that the achievement of vulnerable groups of pupils is now tracked more systematically and additional support allocated as needed. As a result, the progress being made by disadvantaged pupils is accelerating.
- The school ensures that the small numbers of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported. They have detailed, individualised learning plans that identify clear steps of progress. Good support from teaching assistants and teachers ensures that they make good progress from their different starting points.

Early years provision

Good

- The Nursery and Reception classes provide children with a good start to their time in school. Well-resourced indoor and outdoor provision provides children with a wealth of opportunities to explore different areas of learning, effectively supported by the early years staff.
- Children start in the Nursery with skills and knowledge that are typical for their age. They make good progress during their time in the Nursery, benefiting from teaching that is purposeful and engaging. Staff work well together to support and extend children's learning. In one session, children were observed enthusiastically joining in with a game of skittles; the teacher skilfully encouraged the children to play and take turns while also developing their counting skills.
- This effective provision is maintained in the Reception class. Typically half of the children who come into the Reception class have attended pre-school settings other than the school's Nursery. The vast majority of these children enter the Reception Year with skills and knowledge that are typical for their age. They settle in quickly because of the effective care and support provided by staff, and because partnerships between the school, parents and other providers are becoming increasingly effective. Once they are in Reception class, children go on to make good progress.
- Children's behaviour in the early years is good and they get on, learn and play well with each other. Relationships between adults and children are warm and positive. Staff ensure that children's safety and well-being are given a high priority and all statutory welfare requirements are met.

- The early years leader and staff team have ensured that the effectiveness of the early years is increasing. In 2016, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year was 79%. This represents good progress from children's starting points, and confirms that standards in the early years are rising year on year. The school makes effective use of extra funding for the small number of disadvantaged children in the early years and they make similarly good progress from their starting points.
- The early years leader is keen to improve further, and recognises that there is scope for improvement in the use of assessment in order to raise achievement, particularly for the most able children.

School details

Unique reference number	105820
Local authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	10006387

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	336
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Gifford
Headteacher	Joanne Butterworth
Telephone number	0161 643 7132
Website	www.stthomasmorerc.co.uk/
Email address	office@stthomasmorerc.rochdale.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	22 February 2012

Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from different minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Children in the early years provision attend the Nursery part-time and Reception class on a full-time basis.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- There have been recent and significant changes in school leadership. For the spring and summer terms, 2016, the school was led by an executive headteacher on a temporary basis. The current headteacher joined the school in September through a long-term secondment arrangement with another school in the diocese.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of lessons, year groups and subjects. This included shorter visits made jointly with the headteacher to observe the work of classes from the Nursery to Year 6.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and held discussions with two groups of pupils. Inspectors also talked informally with pupils around the school and on the playground.
- Pupils' work in books, records of children's learning in the early years and other information about pupils' attainment and progress were scrutinised with senior leaders.
- Inspectors considered the 20 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also talked briefly with some parents both before and during the course of the school day.
- Meetings were held with 11 governors, including the chair of the governing body. Meetings were also held with leaders responsible for mathematics and English, curriculum development, provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and for children in the early years.
- Meetings took place with two representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents. These included information about pupils' attainment and progress, the school's reviews of its own performance, checks on the quality of teaching and development plans. Inspectors also examined safeguarding documentation and various records of pupils' attendance and behaviour.

Inspection team

Neil Dixon, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Stephen Rigby	Ofsted Inspector
Yvonne Mills-Clare	Ofsted Inspector
John Daley	Ofsted Inspector

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