

St Thomas More Roman Catholic Primary School, Middleton, Rochdale

Evesham Road, Alkrington, Middleton, Manchester M24 1PY

Inspection dates

3–4 April 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The swift and decisive actions that leaders and governors have taken since the last inspection have resulted in good outcomes for pupils across the school, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.
- The headteacher's relentless drive to raise pupils' achievement is shared by governors and staff alike. Everyone works together to achieve the school's mission statement, 'We love, we learn, we live with Christ'.
- Leaders and governors draw upon a wide range of information to help them to evaluate the school's effectiveness. This enables them to have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Teaching is effective and routinely meets the needs of almost all pupils, especially in reading, writing and mathematics. Sometimes, the most able pupils do not make the progress they could in other curriculum subjects because the work they are given is not challenging enough.
- Leaders have made important improvements to the quality of teaching in phonics for younger pupils. These changes are not sufficiently embedded to ensure that more pupils reach the expected standard by the end of Year 1.
- Leaders and governors have established a curriculum that prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. Pupils develop extremely well spiritually, morally, socially and culturally and benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- Governors are highly committed to improving their own effectiveness. They now ask leaders more challenging questions to hold them to account for the outcomes of pupils. However, they are less challenging about the spending of the pupil premium because they rely too heavily on information provided by the headteacher.
- Arrangements for pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are outstanding. Pupils feel safe and well cared for in school, and parents and carers agree with this view. Pupils are diligent, respectful and extremely well behaved in school.
- The school's provision for children in early years is outstanding. Children make excellent progress from their typical starting points because of the very high quality of teaching they receive.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management, by ensuring that governors play a bigger part in decisions about the needs of disadvantaged pupils so that they can ask more challenging questions about the spending of the pupil premium.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, by ensuring that:
 - the teaching of phonics is more consistent so that more pupils reach the expected standard for their age by the end of Year 1
 - teachers challenge the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, so that they make the progress of which they are capable in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the last inspection, the relatively new headteacher has successfully motivated governors and staff alike to share her vision for the school. This has resulted in a culture of high expectation in which adults expect no less of themselves than they do of pupils. Leaders and governors have worked with energy and determination to address the areas for improvement from the last inspection, and outcomes are now good and improving.
- Leaders and governors have evaluated accurately the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is because they have drawn upon a wide range of information, including from the school's assessments, observations of teaching, and information from pupils and parents. Their evaluations have enabled them to arrive at clear improvement plans that are focused sharply on improving outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders, including subject leaders, carry out a range of activities to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the curriculum. They check the work in pupils' books and provide clear feedback and guidance to teachers and support staff so that they can improve their teaching. As a result, the quality of teaching across the school is good.
- Leaders provide teachers and staff with opportunities to develop professionally through high-quality training. Teachers work closely with colleagues in other local schools to share and to learn from good practice. Teachers value these opportunities and say that these have helped them to improve their work.
- Leaders and teachers engage in activities to test out the accuracy of their assessments so that they can be sure that pupils are making enough progress over time and can take action to remedy any concerns. Consequently, most pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make strong progress from their starting points, especially in reading, writing and mathematics. In other subjects, the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do not receive enough work that challenges them to make the progress of which they are capable.
- The curriculum that leaders provide enables pupils to learn across a wide range of subjects, and which helps them to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. Pupils have opportunities to take part in a range of educational visits. For example, they go to museums and places of worship to extend their knowledge of other cultures and faiths. They practise their reading, writing and sometimes their mathematical skills across other curriculum subjects. Pupils who spoke to inspectors were particularly keen to explain how much learning about the same topic from the perspective of different subjects has improved their understanding.
- Leaders make effective use of the pupil premium funding to improve the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils, who generally make similar progress to other pupils nationally.
- Leaders and governors have also made good use of the physical education (PE) and sport premium to expand and develop the activities that pupils undertake. Professional

coaches have also worked with teachers to improve their PE subject knowledge. Pupils now participate more frequently in activity clubs such as those for football, multi-skills and netball.

Governance of the school

- The highly committed and reflective governing body has developed a much better understanding of the school's work since the last inspection. Governors have welcomed the timely support provided by the local authority and the diocese to arrive at an accurate evaluation of their effectiveness. This has enabled them to put in place clear plans for their ongoing improvement and development, which are having a positive impact on the way in which they provide school leaders with support and challenge.
- Evidence from governors' activities shows that they now make sure they get the right information from school leaders, to enable them to hold leaders to account for their progress towards meeting their improvement priorities. Although governors ask a range of questions about pupils' outcomes, they are not fully involved with decisions about the use of the pupil premium funding. They rely too heavily on the information provided by the headteacher and this prevents them from asking questions and being more involved with the spending of the pupil premium.
- Governors are fully involved in the life of the school and are proud of the pupils' achievements. They are fully supportive of the headteacher's vision for improving pupils' outcomes and participate enthusiastically in a range of activities to monitor in order to check the school's effectiveness.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Governors and leaders have established a very strong culture of safeguarding in the school. There are robust systems for checking and recording the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children. Governors and leaders have established clear practices for protecting pupils from extremism and radicalisation, and for keeping pupils safe from harm.
- Staff are vigilant and understand how to report any concerns they may have about the welfare of pupils. They appreciate the new procedures that leaders have put in place to help them collate a range of information about pupils' safety and welfare. Systems for working with a range of children's services are effective in making sure that children get the support they need. The actions leaders take are timely and appropriate.
- Governors have made a number of improvements to the overall security of the school site. Pupils say that they feel safe at school, and their parents agree with this view.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Pupils across the school benefit from teaching that is consistently good. Teachers set high expectations for pupils' behaviour in class, and for pupils' attitudes to their learning, which are excellent. Pupils settle quickly to work because they know what

they have to do, and they stay focused and engaged in their learning.

- The strong relationships that teachers build with their pupils contribute to the progress that pupils make. Pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they know that their teachers will always help them to understand things better.
- As a result of effective training, teachers have good subject knowledge across a range of subjects. Teachers use this to plan carefully for the different learning needs of pupils, especially in reading, writing and mathematics. Teaching almost always builds well upon what pupils already know and can do and helps them to apply their knowledge to new situations. This is particularly effective in the teaching of mathematics, for example when learning how to use their understanding of times tables to calculate the areas of shapes in Years 3 and 4. This helps pupils to feel confident when they are learning something new and they make progress as a result.
- Teachers use questions skilfully to check the understanding of pupils during lessons. This helps them to identify pupils' misunderstandings and to provide extra support where pupils are at risk of falling behind. Teaching assistants work effectively because teachers ensure they have the information they need in order to provide pupils with the right support.
- Leaders and teachers make sure that pupils have opportunities to practise their reading, writing and mathematical skills in wider curriculum subjects such as science, history and geography. For example, pupils in key stage 2 typically try out their persuasive writing skills when learning about how deforestation is damaging the habitat of orangutans. These activities contribute to the good progress pupils make in English and mathematics.
- Teachers provide work for almost all pupils that is challenging and helps them to make strong progress, especially in reading, writing and mathematics. On occasions, the teaching that the most able pupils receive in wider curriculum subjects, such as science, history and geography, does not challenge them enough to enable them to make the strong progress of which they are capable.
- The teaching of reading is effective. Teachers instil enjoyment in reading and ensure that pupils check their reading to develop their understanding. Improvements that leaders have made to the quality of teaching in phonics are having a positive impact on the progress that younger pupils are making. Teachers' generally effective use of the school's agreed approach means that pupils remember new letters and sounds as they are introduced and practise their skills in reading and writing. These changes are not fully embedded to secure consistency in the quality of teaching in phonics and to ensure that all groups of pupils make progress that is consistently strong.
- Teachers provide feedback to pupils in line with the school's policies. Pupils know what this feedback means. They told inspectors that it helps them to correct their mistakes and to improve their work.
- The vast majority of parents are firmly of the view that the school provides the right amount of homework for their children. Parents value the information they receive about the progress their children make and the curriculum that the school provides.
- Teachers take every opportunity to challenge derogatory language and stereotypes, through well-planned learning that promotes pupils' awareness of diversity and

difference. This learning has a very positive impact on pupils' personal development.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils have high expectations of themselves in terms of their work and personal presentation because they know their teachers will accept nothing less. Pupils are ambitious for their future lives. They speak confidently of the careers they would like to pursue. Pupils in Year 6 know how their teachers are providing them with the skills they will need at secondary school.
- Leaders and teachers are preparing pupils extremely well for the world of work. Pupils have opportunities to undertake roles of responsibility, for example by serving on the school council. Some pupils become 'gift chaplains', and lead assemblies and other initiatives to persuade their peers to support their charitable works. Pupils take very seriously the need to demonstrate to their teachers that they have the skills and qualities needed for their various posts of responsibility, for example by writing formal applications and being interviewed. This provides pupils with important skills for the next stage in their education and for their future working lives.
- Pupils benefit from a wide range of after-school clubs and activities which enable them to develop interests beyond the school day. Pupils have opportunities to take part in activities such as singing in the school choir and representing their school in sports competitions, as well as clubs for activities such as using construction kits, or which focus on mental well-being.
- Pupils develop excellent speaking skills through discussions in class. They learn to listen to and take account of each other's views. They strive to find words which make their descriptions lively and interesting, because they know that this is what their teachers expect from them. This has an impact on the good progress that they make in their reading and writing.
- Pupils are extremely well prepared for life in modern Britain. Leaders ensure that pupils learn about a range of cultures, beliefs and religions. Pupils demonstrate an excellent understanding of diversity and issues relating to equality of opportunity. For example, pupils who spoke to inspectors were able to explain what they had learned about inequalities in pay, about the growth of women's rights, and about differences related to gender and family structures. Pupils show care and concern for each other. They understand that sometimes pupils need extra help to enable them to succeed in school.
- The school's excellent arrangements for supporting pupils' welfare are a further strength of the school. Teachers value the systems that leaders have introduced to enable them to collate a wide range of information that helps them to support pupils' welfare and personal development. The school's inclusive approach has earned the respect of professionals within the local authority. Parents who responded to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire and the free-text service appreciate the support they and their families have received, and the positive difference this support has made.

- Leaders ensure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe online. The learning that teachers plan helps pupils to understand how to be watchful about material they encounter on the internet, and about the importance of not sharing personal information.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and rarely miss a day. Attendance overall is consistently above the national average, and rates of persistent absence are lower than average. Information about the attendance of current pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, suggests this is set to continue.
- Pupils' behaviour in class and around school is impeccable. Classrooms are busy, purposeful places where pupils enjoy learning. Those who spoke to inspectors had strong views about anyone who disturbs their learning by talking in class! They are polite and courteous to their teachers and to visitors, and older pupils provide an excellent role model for younger ones.
- Pupils are self-assured and demonstrate high levels of self-discipline. They say bullying at school is very rare, but that if it does occur, teachers always deal with it very quickly and effectively.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes for pupils by the time they leave school at the end of key stage 2 have been improving steadily each year as a result of the actions that leaders have taken. Published information from the key stage 2 national tests in 2018 shows that a higher proportion of pupils than the national average reached at least the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. The key stage 2 national tests in 2018 showed that pupils in Year 6 had not only attained well, but had also made strong progress from their starting points at the end of key stage 1.
- Evidence from the work of pupils currently in key stage 2 shows that they continue to make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils are enthusiastic about reading and were keen to tell inspectors about their favourite authors. They select challenging texts to read for themselves both in and out of school and read with fluency and enjoyment. Pupils' writing shows that they practise their skills in a range of ways and write to a similar standard across a range of subjects.
- Leaders' actions since the last inspection have brought about an improvement in the way that pupils develop and practise problem solving and reasoning in mathematics. This is contributing to the good progress that current pupils make.
- The most able pupils had also made strong progress by the time they left Year 6 in 2018, especially in reading and mathematics. A higher proportion of pupils reached the higher standards in the reading and mathematics national key stage 2 tests than the national average. Although higher ability pupils currently in school continue to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics, in other subjects, pupils do not

routinely receive work that challenges them sufficiently. Consequently, in these subjects, the most able do not consistently make strong progress.

- By the end of key stage 2 in 2018, disadvantaged pupils made progress that was at least as strong as that of other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. Work in pupils' books shows that this continues to be the case for disadvantaged pupils currently in school. The good support that the school provides for pupils with SEND enables them to make strong progress from their various starting points.
- At the end of key stage 1 in 2018, pupils attained better at the expected standard in reading and mathematics than other pupils nationally. The proportions attaining greater depth in reading and writing were similar to the national averages. Fewer pupils than average reached at least the expected standard in writing. However, work in their books and information from the school's assessments show that pupils currently in key stage 1 are making strong progress in writing as well as in reading and mathematics.
- Despite consistently strong outcomes for children at the end of early years in recent years, fewer pupils than average have gone on to reach the expected standard in the national phonics screening check at the end of Year 1. Leaders have rightly made improving the quality of teaching in phonics a priority for the school. These improvements are having a positive impact and more pupils currently in Year 1 are now on track to reach the expected standard in the phonics screening check. However, the changes are not fully embedded and there remain inconsistencies in the quality of phonics teaching that hamper pupils' progress.
- The improvements in the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics together with pupils' excellent attitudes to learning mean they are fully prepared for the next stage of their education.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Children at St Thomas More make an excellent start to their education. From their broadly typical starting points when they join the school either in the Nursery or Reception classes, children make substantial and sustained progress over time. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the time they leave the Reception class is consistently above the average nationally and continues to rise.
- Leadership is effective and the analytical evaluation of a wide range of information, for example from assessments, from observations and from parents' feedback, enables leaders to have an accurate understanding of the many strengths of the early years. However, leaders are not complacent and strive continuously to make things even better for children.
- The quality of the environment in which children learn is inspirational. Teaching is superb. Children develop strong characteristics of effective learning because the opportunities that teachers and leaders provide enable them to learn through a wide range of experiences indoors and outdoors. Children are curious, confident and focused learners, eager to 'have a go' and to try things out for themselves.
- Adults use questioning skilfully to find out more about what children have understood.

They allow enough time for children to formulate their thoughts before speaking and encourage them to develop and extend their ideas and thoughts further. As a result, children are keen to contribute in discussions, and know that what they have to say is valued.

- The high-quality training that leaders provide has ensured that managers and staff have strong professional knowledge and expertise about the ways in which very young children learn and develop. Consequently, adults have the skills they need to make accurate assessments about what children already know and can do, and to plan effectively for their various learning needs.
- Children develop their early literacy and numeracy skills exceptionally well. Through the excellent teaching they receive, even the youngest children develop a strong awareness of sounds, letters and numbers which is evident in their early attempts at writing. By the time they leave the Reception class, children are very well prepared for Year 1.
- Leaders and staff establish excellent working relationships with parents. Parents of children in early years who responded to Ofsted's Parent View and free-text questionnaires were unanimous in their praise of the early years provision. They are highly appreciative of the information they receive about their children's progress.
- Safeguarding in early years is effective. Children learn how to keep themselves safe and follow the simple rules and routines that adults have established. Leaders and staff follow the school's rigorous policies for keeping children safe and carry out extra checks which reflect the particular health and safety needs of very young children. There are no breaches of the statutory welfare requirements.
- Children, including the very youngest, manage their own behaviour extremely well. Children learn to take care of their own needs, for example by getting their coats to go outside or by washing their hands after using the toilet. They share resources, play cooperatively and listen carefully to adults' instructions. These excellent learning behaviours prepare them very effectively for future learning.

School details

Unique reference number	105820
Local authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	10087822

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	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	335
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	7–8 December 2016

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND 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.
- The school's Nursery provides part-time places, and also offers places for 30 hours a week for children whose parents meet the government's criteria.
- The school offers a breakfast club and an after-school club.
- Since the last inspection, the seconded headteacher has been appointed to the post on a permanent basis.

- This is a Roman Catholic voluntary-aided school. The school was inspected under section 48 of the Education Act in June 2017.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors made visits to classrooms to observe learning in all year groups.
- The inspectors scrutinised pupils' work, reviewed the school's assessment information and listened to some pupils read.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation and policies, including behaviour and attendance information, minutes of governing body meetings and safeguarding information.
- Inspectors met with a group of pupils, including from the school council, and spoke with pupils in lessons and at breaktimes.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, members of the governing body and support staff. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke with some parents at the beginning of the school day and took account of 70 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.
- Inspectors also took account of 29 responses to the pupil survey and 16 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Mavis Smith, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Clare Nash	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Rigby	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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