

# Inspection of a good school: St Thomas More Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary

Thorndale Road, Belmont, St Thomas More RC Primary School, Belmont DH1 2AQ

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Inspection dates:

1 October 2019

## Outcome

St Thomas More Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary continues to be a good school. However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at St Thomas More are friendly, polite and respectful. They behave well and welcome visitors to their school. Pupils enjoy learning outdoors, especially in the forest. They take on leadership roles with enthusiasm.

Pupils know what bullying is. They say it is not tolerated at their school. Pupils feel safe, secure and well looked after. Their parents agree. Parents appreciate the adults who work with their children. One parent said that the school is 'wonderful, with caring, passionate, dedicated teachers who are always friendly and approachable'.

Children settle into the Reception class well when they start school. They ask lots of questions and are eager to learn. However, some pupils do not become confident readers quickly or get off to a good enough start with their mathematics.

Pupils enjoy the range of subjects they experience. Leaders are currently reviewing what is taught and when it is taught in subjects such as history and geography. They want to make sure that pupils benefit from the full national curriculum and achieve well in all subjects.

The curriculum for reading, writing and mathematics is taught well across key stage 2. Pupils excel in these areas by the time they leave the school.

## What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have high expectations of the pupils who attend St Thomas More. Year 6 pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), reach very high standards in English and mathematics by the time

they leave school.

The teachers in key stage 2 ignite pupils' love of reading. They encourage pupils to read the 100 fiction books that they feel all children should read before leaving primary school. Pupils enjoy reading their class novels. Emma Carroll's modern classic, 'Letters from the Lighthouse', is one example. Teachers ensure that pupils know these texts inside out. Pupils use the skills and knowledge they have learned to answer challenging questions well.

Reading is not developed well in the early years and key stage 1. Some pupils do not make enough progress in phonics. The words in pupils' reading books do not match the sounds they know. Phonics is not taught often enough in Years 1 and 2. Pupils do not get the right support when they fall behind. Some pupils get extra phonics sessions at the end of the school day. This means they miss out on story time with their teachers.

Leaders have organised the mathematics curriculum well in key stages 1 and 2. Teachers have developed strong subject knowledge through training with a local mathematics hub. Teachers make the right decisions about what to teach and when. They base this on their knowledge of pupils' prior learning. The curriculum for mathematics in the early years is not as strong. Teachers do not check children's prior knowledge and understanding quickly enough when they start school. Leaders have not given enough thought to what they want children to learn in mathematics across the Reception year.

Leaders have started to review the curriculums for subjects other than English and mathematics. This work is at an early stage. In history, for example, topics have been reorganised. Pupils now study them in an order that helps them to understand the sequence of events in the past. However, the specific historical content that pupils need to know and remember in each topic has not been considered. Leaders have not ensured that pupils cover the content set out in the national curriculum. They are not clear about how the curriculum content will help pupils to understand important historical themes. Teachers have not had recent training in subjects other than English and mathematics.

Pupils like school. They attend regularly and behave well. Pupils enjoy a wide range of after-school, extra-curricular activities, including boxing and sewing clubs. Older pupils organise games for the younger pupils to play at lunchtime. Leaders provide many opportunities for pupils to learn and play outdoors. During the inspection, pupils explored the school's forest in the rain. They were joyful, enthusiastic and safe. Pupils know that bullying is repeated poor behaviour. They say, and the school's records confirm, that bullying is rare in school.

Pupils have a deep moral compass. They know right from wrong. Pupils strive to help others less fortunate than themselves. They raise money for charities, including St Cuthbert's Care in Newcastle. They collect foodstuffs and toiletries for Durham Foodbank. Pupils appreciate their families, friends and teachers. The Catholic life of the school shines through all that pupils do.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school's safer recruitment procedures and records are compliant with the government's requirements. All staff and governors attend safeguarding and child protection training regularly. They know about issues that put pupils at risk, such as 'county lines'. Adults understand how to keep children safe. The designated leader for safeguarding keeps detailed records of the actions taken to support vulnerable pupils. The school works cooperatively with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that pupils are safe and protected. Teachers make sure pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when working online.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Not enough pupils are confident readers by the end of Year 1. Pupils who fall behind do not catch up as quickly as they should, because staff do not plan a programme to address the gaps in their knowledge effectively. The books that pupils read do not match the sounds they have been taught. Staff in the early years and Year 1 are not confident about what should be taught in phonics sessions. Leaders should ensure that teachers and teaching assistants have thorough knowledge of the school's phonics scheme so that they can deliver it well. Leaders should ensure that pupils who fall behind receive a programme of support that helps them to catch up rapidly. Teachers should ensure that the books pupils are given to read match their phonics knowledge.
- Children do not gain mathematics skills and knowledge well enough in the early years. Teachers should establish what children know and can do as soon as they start school. Leaders should make sure that curriculum plans outline precisely which aspects of mathematics are taught and in what order across the Reception year.
- The curriculums for the foundation subjects are not well planned. Leaders and teachers have not thought carefully enough about the most important subject content that pupils should learn in the topics they study. Leaders should ensure that they identify the specific content that they want pupils to know and remember in each subject. Teachers have not attended training in the foundation subjects recently. Leaders should make sure that teachers have the knowledge and skills to teach the foundation subjects well.

## Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 5–6 October 2010.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	114275
<b>Local authority</b>	Durham
<b>Inspection number</b>	10110775
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	86
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Dan Murray
<b>Headteacher</b>	Peter Norman
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stthomasmorebelmont.sch.uk">www.stthomasmorebelmont.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	2 February 2016

## Information about this school

- The school is designated as having a Catholic character. It is part of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.
- The school is one of two schools in the St Joseph and St Thomas More Catholic Primary Federation.
- The acting executive headteacher of the federation took up post on 1 September 2019. He was previously the deputy headteacher of the federation. The acting deputy headteacher of the federation took up post at the same time.
- The chair of the governing body was elected to the position in June 2019.
- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well below average.
- The overwhelming majority of pupils are of White British heritage.

## Information about this inspection

- Members of the inspection team carried out curriculum deep dives into reading, mathematics and history. The deep dives consisted of visits to lessons, review of documents, scrutiny of pupils' work, and discussions with senior leaders, curriculum

leaders, teachers and pupils.

- An inspector reviewed SEN support plans chosen by the school, scrutinised pupils' work, saw the pupils at work in the school and talked to the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo).
- The inspectors held discussions with the chair of the governing body and two governors, the executive headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team, the SENCo and curriculum leaders.
- An inspector looked at the school's record of staff recruitment checks and pupils' safeguarding records. Discussions about safety were held with senior leaders, teachers, support staff, pupils and parents. The inspector also checked on pupils' attendance, punctuality and exclusions.

### **Inspection team**

Belita Scott, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Claire Brown

Senior Her Majesty's Inspector

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