

# Inspection of an outstanding school: St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, Canterbury

99 Military Road, Canterbury, Kent CT1 1NE

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Inspection dates:

14 and 15 September 2021

## Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are very happy to come to St Thomas' school. They enjoy learning without fear of bullying or discrimination. There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere. Pupils are kind and caring individuals who are well-behaved and polite. Pupils work and play well together and develop close friendships which they value.

Pupils are very well looked after in school and feel safe. They learn how to keep themselves safe in and out of school. Like the staff, the older pupils are vigilant about safety when crossing the road to get to their play area. Pupils know that staff care about them and want them to be happy. They are confident to talk to adults in a mature and considered way. There is an atmosphere of respect and kindness. Older pupils are good role models for younger pupils.

Pupils said they like learning as teachers make lessons fun and want them to do their best. All of the national curriculum subjects are taught. This term, teachers have started to teach a new, revised curriculum. It is designed to make pupils' learning more relevant and meaningful. Senior leaders have plans to keep a close check on this to make sure the curriculum is meeting the needs of all pupils.

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

The school teaches all of the national curriculum subjects. Leaders have invested a considerable amount of time in revising the curriculum. Curriculum leaders have strong subject knowledge. They are developing their roles, including checking what impact the curriculum has on pupils' learning in their subject areas. They have used their skills and expertise well to outline the key knowledge pupils should learn and the order in which it should be taught.

However, these new plans only cover the first two terms of this school year. It is not clear precisely what leaders want pupils to know by the end of the academic year. This is important because while pupils' progress through the curriculum is strong, it is not exceptional. They do not always remember what they have learned well enough. In particular, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are not achieving the best possible outcomes that they could.

The teaching of phonics is well organised and begins as soon as children start in Reception Year. Pupils are given the right books to read, which help them practise the sounds they are learning. Teachers quickly identify any pupils who are not keeping up or who are falling behind. Effective support helps pupils to catch up. Pupils use their phonics knowledge well for reading and writing.

Teachers foster a love of reading and stories among pupils. Teachers read on a daily basis to pupils of all ages. This helps introduce pupils to a range of authors, styles of writing and texts. Year 6 pupils, for example, thoroughly enjoy reading the class novel 'Darwin's Dragons'. Pupils expand their own reading choices as a result. They become confident and fluent readers. There is a strong focus on extending and enriching pupils' vocabulary.

Teachers make sure that children develop early mathematical skills. Most of the children who had only just started in the Reception Year were confidently counting and ordering numbers to at least 10 and were completing tasks and games independently.

Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school and live up to teachers' high expectations. Children in Reception Year settle very well. They learn the routines and have a happy, smooth start to school. Pupils manage themselves well. They organise games in the playground at lunchtime. In discussion groups, they make sure that everyone gets a turn to speak. They build confidence and social skills and enjoy taking on responsibilities.

The school values are at the heart of all that the school does. Pupils' behaviour and their positive attitudes show their deep understanding of fundamental British values. They develop respect and tolerance for others with different faiths, beliefs or backgrounds. There are positive, trusting relationships between pupils and staff. Pupils are confident to turn to staff if they have any problems.

Parents appreciated the care and attention given to pupils' well-being and learning when pupils were not able to attend school over the last 18 months due to COVID-19 restrictions. Staff worked hard and continued to support pupils and their families effectively during this time.

Staff are proud of the school and are happy to work at St Thomas'. They feel valued and well supported. Teachers say that senior leaders are always mindful of their well-being and workload.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that pupils' safety and well-being have high priority. Staff have had appropriate training. They know the pupils very well and swiftly identify anyone who is having problems or is at risk of harm. They know the procedures to follow if they have concerns about a pupil. There are good links with external agencies to help secure support if needed. The appropriate checks are carried out on adults who work in the school.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including online. Pupils and their parents agree that pupils feel safe in school.

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

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

- Pupils do not always remember the knowledge they have been taught well enough, either on a day-to-day basis or over a period of time. This means that they do not make exceptional progress through the curriculum, including those pupils with SEND. Leaders should identify and clarify ambitious end points that they want pupils to achieve, supporting teachers to implement the curriculum fully and effectively.

## **Background**

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in January 2016.

## 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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 the school and 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>	118777
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10199494
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	204
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Gillian Milroy
<b>Headteacher</b>	Lisa D'Agostini
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.st-thomas-canterbury.kent.sch.uk">www.st-thomas-canterbury.kent.sch.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	13 and 14 January 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- St Thomas' is a voluntary-aided, one-form entry primary school with 204 pupils on roll.
- The school's last inspection under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 was in March 2017. It was judged to be outstanding. The next section 48 inspection will be within eight years of the last one.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher and senior and curriculum leaders.
- A meeting was held with nine members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. The inspector also held a telephone conversation with a previous local authority school improvement adviser.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector also looked at other subject plans, observed some pupils reading to teaching assistants, observed pupils at lunch and in the playground and spoke informally to different groups of pupils.
- To inspect safeguarding, the inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and two deputy safeguarding leads, looked at the single central record of recruitment checks and safeguarding records and talked informally to staff and pupils.
- The inspector considered 37 responses to Ofsted's confidential questionnaire Parent View, including 25 free-text comments. She also took account of 15 responses to the confidential staff questionnaire and 19 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

### **Inspection team**

Margaret Coussins, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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