

# Inspection of St Thomas More Roman Catholic Primary School

Highfield, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire SG6 3QB

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Inspection dates: 18 and 19 January 2023

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils are enthusiastic about learning. They speak knowledgeably about the broad range of subjects that they study. Pupils become confident, resilient learners. They achieve well and are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Pupils value the wide range of opportunities they have to develop their interests in music, drama and sport. They are proud of the contribution they make to the life of the school. Pupils take their responsibilities seriously as members of the eco-council and as playground buddies and role models for the younger children. Pupils learn to be sensitive to each other's feelings. They know how to help others who may be anxious or upset.

Pupils respond positively to the high expectations staff have of their learning and their behaviour. They are respectful to each other and to adults. Pupils listen carefully in lessons and think thoughtfully about what others have to say. They know that staff care for their well-being as well as their achievement. Bullying is rare. Pupils are confident that adults listen to their concerns and will help them to resolve any worries they may have.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They appreciate the school's caring ethos, in which their children thrive.

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

Leaders have put in place a well-considered and ambitious curriculum. The curriculum is equally ambitious for all pupils across a broad range of subjects. Leaders have identified the knowledge and understanding that pupils should gain from the early years to Year 6. Teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects that they teach. They plan lessons to help pupils build on what they have learned before. Teachers routinely check pupils' understanding before they move on to new learning. Pupils develop detailed subject knowledge. They use this knowledge to make connections in their learning and to explore new ideas. Leaders ensure that teachers make suitable adaptations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to access the full curriculum. This ensures that all pupils achieve well across the range of subjects that they study.

Reading is celebrated across the school. Pupils enjoy reading and being read to. They speak enthusiastically about the books they read. Pupils read widely and often. Leaders have adopted a systematic programme to teach phonics and early reading. Children in the early years and in key stage 1 make a positive start to learning to read. In the Nursery, children learn to listen carefully to the sounds that letters make. Through games and stories, they learn to recognise patterns and rhymes. In the Reception and key stage 1 classes, pupils secure their phonic knowledge through daily practice. Children who are learning to read are given books to read that are closely matched to the sounds they know. This helps them to become confident and

fluent readers at an early stage. Pupils in key stage 1 who need additional help to keep up with the programme are identified promptly and given the support they need. A small number of pupils in key stage 2 also receive additional reading support. However, not all staff have had the training they need to support these pupils well. This means that, for some pupils, this support is not having as much impact on their reading fluency as it could.

Leaders have planned the curriculum carefully to provide children in the Nursery and Reception classes with the breadth of knowledge and understanding to prepare them well for learning in key stage 1. Leaders ensure there is a strong focus on developing children's language and their mathematical understanding. Children play positively with each other. They develop their confidence and independence through well-established routines and clear expectations. However, not all staff are as confident as they could be in helping children to extend their learning through play.

The curriculum promotes pupils' personal development well. Pupils learn the importance of tolerance and respect. They discuss, debate and consider different points of view. Pupils learn about healthy relationships and how to develop a healthy lifestyle. They know what it means to become active and responsible citizens.

Governors and the trust assure themselves, through regular visits and by talking with staff and pupils, that leaders' work is making a positive difference for all pupils. Staff value leaders' support. Leaders are mindful of staff's workload and their well-being.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that safeguarding is at the forefront of everybody's mind. All staff receive regular safeguarding training. Staff are alert to the potential signs of abuse. They know how to recognise when a child may be at risk from harm. Staff are confident in using the systems for recording and reporting concerns. Leaders act promptly. They work closely with other agencies to ensure that vulnerable children and families can access the support they need. All necessary checks are carried out before staff are appointed to work at the school. Pupils learn how to keep themselves and others safe, including online.

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

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

- Not all staff have received the training they need to support less-confident readers in key stage 2 to develop their reading fluency. This means that some pupils who receive additional support are not gaining the fluency and confidence in their reading as quickly as they should. Leaders should ensure that all staff have the training they need to enable older pupils to practise and apply their

phonic knowledge so the pace at which these pupils develop their confidence, fluency and independence as readers is accelerated.

- Some aspects of the early years curriculum are not implemented consistently well across the early years foundation stage. This means that a small number of children do not learn as well as they could, particularly through play. Leaders should provide guidance and support to ensure that all staff are confident to interact skilfully with children so that all children are supported effectively to extend their thinking and deepen their understanding through purposeful play.

## 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.

## 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>	138354
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10255027
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	224
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Patrick Leeson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jane Perry
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.strcjmi.herts.sch.uk">www.strcjmi.herts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- St Thomas More Roman Catholic Primary School converted to become an academy in July 2012. The school is part of the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust, which contains five primary schools and six secondary schools.
- The headteacher was appointed to the role in April 2013.
- There is a Nursery class for children from the age of three years.
- There is a local governing body. The chair of governors was appointed to the role in August 2013.
- The school runs a breakfast club. An independent after-school club operates on the school premises under a separate registration.
- The most recent section 48 inspection took place in November 2019.
- No pupils attend alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and assistant headteachers.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the trust and the director of primary improvement. The lead inspector spoke with the school improvement partner on the telephone.
- The lead inspector met with the chair and vice-chair of governors and with four members of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, history and languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning, and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with the special educational needs coordinator and the early years leader.
- Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead to discuss the arrangements that are in place to report, record and follow up safeguarding concerns. Inspectors spoke with staff about the training they have received and looked at training records. Inspectors gathered evidence about leaders' work with other agencies to support the safeguarding of vulnerable children and families. The lead inspector reviewed the single central record of pre-employment checks and spoke with office staff about their work to support the safeguarding of pupils and families.
- Inspectors reviewed leaders' records of incidents of behaviour, including bullying. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and during playtimes.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils to gather their views on the school.
- Inspectors considered a letter submitted during the inspection outlining the school's work with the wider community.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey, including the free-text comments. Inspectors considered the responses to the staff and pupil surveys.

## **Inspection team**

Katherine Douglas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ann Bowen-Breslin

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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