

Inspection of St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, Canterbury

99 Military Road, Canterbury, Kent CT1 1NE

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 April 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
------------------------------	-------------

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The school was last inspected seven years ago and was judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders have high expectations for pupils at this school. They are determined that pupils achieve highly and are well prepared for the next stage of their lives. Pupils behave extremely well. They are polite, respectful and considerate of each other. Pupils rise to the challenges set by their teachers and show very positive attitudes to their learning. They relish the many enrichment opportunities provided. For example, all pupils learn to play a musical instrument.

Pupils are proud to belong to their welcoming and friendly school. The school's faith values are lived out in daily life. Pupils have strong relationships with staff whom they describe as kind and caring. Pupils feel safe here. They know staff will help them if they have any worries.

Pupils greatly value the wide range of cultures and languages within their school community. They describe St Thomas' as a very inclusive school. Pupils have firm beliefs about equality, saying that everyone here is accepted for who they are.

Almost all parents and carers would recommend the school to other families. One parent's comment summed up the views of many, 'The school has allowed my child to grow and blossom.'

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

Leaders have prioritised the development of the school curriculum. They have considered carefully and thoughtfully which subjects need to be strengthened. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), study a wide range of subjects. Topics are interesting, well ordered and build on what pupils already know. Pupils are keen and confident mathematicians. In early years, children become secure with numbers and counting because their teachers provide them with lots of practice. Pupils achieve well across the range of subjects and particularly in English and mathematics.

A small number of foundation subjects, however, are not as strong as the best. Here, the curriculum is not yet planned with enough precision. This means that pupils' recall of important knowledge is not as secure as in other subjects. Assessment in these subjects does not provide helpful information for teachers to know how well pupils are doing. Leaders are aware of this and have realistic and ambitious plans in place.

There is very well-planned approach to teaching reading. Leaders have introduced a new phonics programme that is working well. They have trained staff thoroughly. This means that both teachers and support staff are skilled in teaching early reading. Children learn to read as soon as they start in Reception. Adults quickly spot if any children are struggling and provide extra help.

Staff give high-quality support to those pupils who have English as an additional language. This strengthens pupils' comprehension well, both in English and across other subjects.

Leaders provide a range of opportunities for pupils' personal development. They prioritise pupils' well-being. Pupils enjoy tasty yet healthy school lunches and opportunities to try activities such as yoga and mindfulness. Leaders seek out enrichment opportunities in the local area. They take advantage of the rich history and art in Canterbury to make learning come alive for pupils. Pupils enjoy clubs that the school offers free of charge. However, the extra-curricular clubs on offer are currently quite limited. The offer does not allow pupils to fully develop their talents and interests, including different sports. This is something that some pupils and their parents also identify. There are opportunities for pupils to take on leadership roles, such as house captains and reading buddies. While pupils think these roles make a difference in school, they could be developed further.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are exceptionally strong. Around the school, pupils show real kindness to each other. They play together harmoniously and independently, making sure everyone is included. Leaders have created a culture where nurture, compassion and respect are intrinsic to school life. Attendance is very high for almost all pupils. Instances of discrimination or derogatory language are extremely rare. If they occur, leaders take swift and effective action. Pupils are clear that this is not how we behave at St Thomas'.

Governors understand the school well and give good support to leaders. Staff are proud to work here. They are dedicated and committed to the pupils. Leaders provide a range of helpful professional development for teachers and support staff. While leaders are mindful of reducing staff's workload, they also want to further develop their expertise. Staff appreciate the successful balance struck by leaders. Currently, the system by which staff report behavioural incidents or changes in a pupil's behaviour is not strong enough. It does not give leaders a clear enough oversight of pupils who may be vulnerable. Leaders are aware of this and are working to strengthen it.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils are taught how to recognise risks, including online, and how to keep themselves safe. They are confident to raise concerns with adults if they are worried.

Leaders ensure that staff receive regular training about safeguarding. Staff know how to identify pupils who may be at risk. While there is a clear system to report concerns, very occasionally some staff do not use this appropriately. This means that leaders do not have timely information about a pupil.

Leaders engage well with external agencies to get support for pupils and their families when they need to. Recruitment checks are appropriate.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A small minority of staff do not always log their welfare concerns about pupils in accordance with the agreed school system. This includes concerns about changes in a pupil's behaviour. As a result, leaders may not have timely or comprehensive information about a pupil who may be vulnerable. Leaders should provide additional training for staff to ensure that all staff use the agreed systems when reporting concerns, including concerns about patterns in a pupil's behaviour.
- In a small number of foundation subjects, the curriculum is not organised with the same degree of precision as in the strongest. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could. Leaders should continue to refine and strengthen the curriculum so that all pupils learn well across all subjects.

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

Unique reference number	118777
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10240552
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Gillian Milroy
Headteacher	Lisa D'Agostini
Website	www.st-thomas-canterbury.kent.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	14 and 15 September 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher was in post during the previous inspection.
- The school's last inspection under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 was in March 2017.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other school leaders and six members of the governing body.
- The lead inspector spoke with the school's local authority adviser.
- The inspectors undertook deep dives in reading, mathematics, history and music. They met with subject leaders, teachers and groups of pupils. The inspectors visited lessons and looked at pupils' work.

- The inspectors spoke to leaders about curriculum development in personal, social and health education, and wider personal development.
- To inspect safeguarding, the inspectors checked the single central record, reviewed safeguarding records and spoke to leaders, staff and pupils. The inspector considered how well the school manages safer recruitment and how it manages allegations against adults.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including the school development plan and governing body meeting minutes. They also reviewed external reports.
- The inspectors talked to pupils about their learning, what behaviour is like in the school and whether they feel safe.
- The inspectors considered the 42 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including free-text comments. They also considered responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Maria Roberts, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Mary McKeeman

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023