

# Inspection of St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School

St Mary's Avenue, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK3 5DT

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Inspection dates: 7 and 8 March 2023

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Good**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Outstanding**

Personal development

**Outstanding**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Early years provision

**Good**

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

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

Pupils benefit from attending this inclusive school. They are dedicated learners who want to achieve the best possible outcomes. They value the high ambitions that their teachers have for them. All pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language, have their needs met well. Pupils are well prepared for future learning because of the high-quality support they receive from adults in the school.

Pupils show support for and respect towards each other. They take pride in the various leadership roles they have. Whether as playground leaders, 'mini Vinnies' or part of the 'Legion of Mary', pupils make valuable contributions to promoting reflection, compassion and kindness across the school.

Pupils have high standards for how they and others will behave. They constantly strive to meet the expectations that adults have for them. They are clear that bullying is extremely rare in the school, but they know that adults will be quick to help them if it does happen. Pupils have warm and trusting relationships with adults in the school, which helps them to feel safe. However, leaders do not consistently show a robust approach in the timeliness and recording of their actions relating to safeguarding concerns.

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

Leaders have created an ambitious curriculum which helps pupils be ready for the next stages of their learning. They have thought about the knowledge and skills pupils need to know and have broken these down into well-sequenced curriculum plans. In Reception, children learn key mathematical concepts and develop phonic knowledge, which they build on as they progress through the school.

While most lessons meet the high ambitions of leaders, a small number of activity choices are not as effective in helping pupils to retain knowledge. This means that some pupils are not learning as well as they could in some subjects. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong. Teachers are clear about what they want pupils to achieve and how they will support them do it. They use vocabulary and resources skilfully, which helps all pupils to achieve well.

The provision for pupils with SEND is a strength in this school. Leaders have ensured that teachers have a secure knowledge of a wide range of additional needs. Teachers make effective changes to lessons, which helps pupils access learning in all subjects. As a result, all pupils, including pupils with SEND, progress well through the school's curriculum.

Teachers use assessment to spot when pupils have fallen behind in their learning and to help them keep up. This is clear to see in the expert teaching of early reading, where teachers quickly put in place extra activities to close any knowledge

gaps. Leaders prioritise ensuring that all pupils develop a love of reading. Pupils read a wide range of books often, which helps them to learn a rich set of vocabulary.

Leaders have embedded an approach which encourages pupils to be positive about their learning. Due to this, pupils show resilience when faced with new challenges. Teachers are consistent in the way they apply the schools' positive behaviour management approach. As a result, low-level disruption in lessons is extremely rare and learning environments are calm and highly productive. Pupils are determined to be the best they can be and support each other very well to achieve this. They set the tone for behaviour in the consistent way they follow and promote the high expectations of the school. This begins in Reception, where children learn very well the rules and routines they need to be ready for Year 1.

Leaders have created a programme of rich and engaging wider opportunities. They ensure that the most disadvantaged pupils benefit highly from this approach. Leaders actively seek the views of pupils so that clubs truly nurture their broad talents and interests. Pupils have a secure knowledge of equalities and diversity. They celebrate difference and show inclusivity in how they welcome all to the school. Leaders have adeptly created a provision which develops pupils' cultural and social understanding. Pupils show strong moral purpose and are ready for life in modern Britain.

Leaders, including governors, are driven to make sure the school provides the best possible education for all pupils. The vision of leaders inspires those who work at the school. Staff feel well supported and value the ways in which leaders prioritise their well-being and development. Leaders actively involve staff in decisions to make sure their workload is appropriate and beneficial to pupils. Governors know the school well and provide robust support and challenge for leaders to help them make improvements.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured staff have the knowledge to spot when a pupil or their family may need help. Staff are quick to share any concerns with leaders. Pupils have a secure knowledge of how to keep themselves safe both online and in the community. Pupils feel safe and have trusted adults in school they can go to if they have any worries.

Leaders work with external agencies to get help for pupils and their families. However, while the culture of safeguarding is effective, leaders do not always respond to safeguarding concerns as quickly as they should. Additionally, they do not consistently record their actions and decisions following a safeguarding concern being raised.

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

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

- Leaders do not consistently follow their agreed safeguarding procedures. Due to this, leaders do not have the clear oversight of safeguarding concerns that they should. Leaders should ensure that they precisely follow safeguarding procedures, as set out in statutory guidance, to ensure that actions are taken promptly and that record-keeping is detailed and robust.
- In a small number of subjects, activity choices do not consistently match leaders' intentions for how their subject will be implemented. As a result, pupils are not always learning as well as they could across the curriculum. Leaders should ensure that staff receive training that will give them the knowledge needed to implement lesson activities that help pupils build knowledge over time.

## 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>	110476
<b>Local authority</b>	Milton Keynes
<b>Inspection number</b>	10242339
<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>	268
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Catherine Stormonth
<b>Headteacher</b>	Robert Mundy
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.st-thomasaquinas.co.uk">www.st-thomasaquinas.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	24 March 2009, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Both the headteacher and the chair of governors have taken up their posts since the last inspection.
- The school is a voluntary-aided Catholic school in the Diocese of Northampton. It was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, for schools of a religious character, in July 2019.
- The school is part of The Bletchley Catholic Schools' Federation.
- The school does not currently use any 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 executive headteacher and other members of the leadership team. The lead inspector met with the chair of governors and four other members of the governing body.
- The lead inspector also met with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics, art, history and music. 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 observed pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons. They also spoke to pupils in lessons and during playtimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors considered a range of documents, including leaders' evaluations of the school, their school improvement plan and minutes from governors' meetings.
- Inspectors spoke to parents and carers and also took into account their responses to Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors took account of the views of staff through conversations and the responses to the online staff survey.
- Inspectors evaluated the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements in the school by speaking with leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding leads to discuss the arrangements for safeguarding. During these meetings, the lead inspector scrutinised records and sampled case files to explore how the school identifies and supports pupils at risk of harm. A team inspector examined the school's work in recruiting and checking on the suitability of staff. Inspectors also checked the knowledge of staff about their responsibilities.

## **Inspection team**

Nina Marabese, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ian Elkington

Ofsted Inspector

Ally Aldridge-Gibbons

His Majesty's Inspector

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