

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Ward Avenue, Grays, Essex RM17 5RW

Inspection dates:

13 and 14 June 2023

Outcome

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a happy school where everyone is valued. There are strong, caring relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils are respectful to each other and understand difference, for example different types of ethnicities.

Pupils learn an ambitious and well-designed curriculum. This means they achieve well in all subjects. Pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), work hard and enjoy their lessons. Children in the early years are enthusiastic about the activities they do. They show independence and resilience. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Pupils behave well around the school, both in classrooms and on the playground. On the occasions when there are incidents of unkindness, staff take appropriate action to resolve these. As a result, bullying is rare.

Pupils have access to a wide set of experiences. For example, pupils enjoy learning music in the school's music studio. They praise their school trips that support the curriculum, for instance to Duxford and a local activity centre. Pupils enjoy the after-school clubs on offer, such as choir and athletics. These allow pupils to develop their interests, talents and character.

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

Leaders have developed an ambitious and broad curriculum. In most areas, they have identified the knowledge and skills that they want pupils to learn and remember over time. Leaders have reflected on what is working well and have made adaptations where needed. Pupils recall what has been taught, including learning from previous years.

Teachers mostly use assessment well to identify where pupils have developed misconceptions. In response, teachers adapt the delivery of the curriculum to revisit important knowledge. However, in a small number of subjects, leaders have not fully established exactly what knowledge teachers should teach. Consequently, teachers are

sometimes less certain about whether pupils have learned all the important information that they should have.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They use their expertise to devise lessons that enable pupils to learn well. Teachers ensure that pupils have plentiful opportunities to recall and revisit previous learning. Consequently, pupils develop the detailed knowledge they need to achieve successfully.

Leaders prioritise the teaching of reading across the school. Staff receive effective training and support. This enables them to deliver the phonics and early reading programme consistently and well. Children benefit from starting this programme as soon as they enter the Reception Year. Staff work closely with parents to support their child's early reading development. Children in early years make a strong start to their education.

In early years, a well-crafted curriculum prepares children for their learning in key stage 1. The curriculum builds on the ambition of the whole school. Leaders ensure that children experience plenty of high-quality interactions and conversations. Children behave with motivation and resilience when they are trying new activities. This positive attitude contributes towards early years children having a good attitude towards learning.

Leaders ensure that pupils with SEND are identified quickly. Leaders regularly involve parents in discussions about their children's needs. Teachers know how to make appropriate adaptations to the delivery of the curriculum to enable pupils with SEND to learn successfully alongside their peers. As a result, pupils with SEND learn the same curriculum as their peers and achieve well.

There are high expectations for behaviour. Pupils rise to these. They understand that their behaviour is underpinned by the values of the school. This results in a positive and calm environment, with very few disruptions, where pupils can learn.

Pupils take active roles in the school community. These roles include school councillors and reading mentors. Leaders ensure that pupils have the opportunity to explore diverse cultures and religions. This helps to ensure that the school is an inclusive and welcoming place where pupils' personal development is well considered.

Many parents speak highly of the school, leaders and staff. Most concerns are resolved effectively. However, some parents feel that the school does not always communicate well enough with them, particularly with regards to the changes being made.

Governors and the trust know what leaders do well and what they need to do to improve further. Governors ensure that staff are well supported to manage their workload and well-being. The overwhelming majority of staff are proud to work at the school. Governors are diligent in their duties to keep pupils safe.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that all adults in school are trained to spot any signs of pupils who are at risk or need support. Staff know how to report concerns and leaders follow these up carefully. Leaders engage appropriate external support for pupils and families where needed. They track the records for safeguarding and ensure checks are up to date and detailed.

Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe through the curriculum content. This includes when they are online. Pupils appreciate that rules and decisions made in school are for their safety and well-being. As a result, pupils feel safe and are safe in school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few areas, the knowledge that leaders intend teachers to assess is too broad and lacks clarity. Consequently, when checking pupils' understanding of the curriculum content, teachers' assessment of what pupils are learning and remembering is not as accurate as it should be. The school should ensure that for some subjects the learning to be checked is precisely identified so that assessment is more robust and shows teachers and subject leaders where there are gaps in pupils' understanding.
- Some parents feel that leaders do not always communicate well with parents. As a result, a significant minority of parents do not understand the reasons for the recent changes that have been introduced. This leads to some families feeling that their concerns have not always been listened to. Leaders must ensure that they continue to work with families to ensure that the positive changes being made have maximum impact for pupils. Leaders should also ensure that parents receive a full and detailed response to concerns raised.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School, to be good in July 2012.

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	146299
Local authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	10268792
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	618
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Bertrand Emecheta
Headteacher	Emilie Poulteney
Website	http://www.stthomasofcanterbury.thurrock.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The school joined the Christus Catholic Trust in 2019. The school's previous section 48 inspection, for schools of a religious character, was carried out in December 2017.
- St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School converted to become an academy school in February 2019. When its predecessor school, St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.

Information about this inspection

- 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 the assistant headteachers. Inspectors also met with other school leaders, staff and pupils.
- The lead inspector met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body, and spoke with representatives from the Christus Catholic Trust and the Diocese of

Brentwood.

- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, geography and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record of recruitment checks and talked to the designated safeguarding leads. The inspectors also talked to a range of staff and pupils.
- Inspectors considered the 43 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff and spoke to a range of staff and pupils about their views on the school. There were no responses to the pupil survey.
- The inspectors took account of the 109 responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire and the 104 free-text responses submitted by parents.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including the school improvement plan, the minutes of governing body meetings and trust reports.

Inspection team

Joseph Figg, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Jackie Mullan

Ofsted Inspector

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