

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas of Canterbury RC School

Eastbourne Grove, Heaton, Bolton, Lancashire BL1 5LH

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 October 2023

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Warm and positive relationships permeate this happy, thriving school. Visitors and new arrivals to the school are enthusiastically welcomed by pupils who are eager to make new friends. Staff expect pupils to succeed. To this end, they make sure that pupils achieve well and enjoy their learning.

Pupils behave well. They value the care and support that they receive from staff and each other. Pupils act as 'well-being warriors', using their training to support other pupils, including children in the early years. Many pupils told the inspector that staff, or Minnie the therapy dog, help them to feel better if they have any worries.

Pupils play an important role in promoting the culture of the school. For example, the school council recently helped to establish a house system to enhance pupils' sense of belonging. Pupils embrace responsibility. They volunteer to lead the school's worship and charitable activities, and to act as reading, sport and eco-ambassadors.

Pupils also benefit from a wide range of activities to develop their talents, including the opportunity to learn an additional language or instrument, as well as a wide range of sports clubs and teams.

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

The school is ambitious for the achievement of all pupils. Starting in the early years, the school has designed a broad curriculum which helps pupils to build their knowledge logically. The school swiftly identifies pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It ensures that these pupils are supported to successfully access the curriculum.

In most subjects, the school has thought carefully about the knowledge that pupils should learn, and when they should learn it. This enables most pupils to build a secure body of subject knowledge over time.

Teachers benefit from many opportunities to develop their expertise. This enables them to design learning that typically develops pupils' knowledge well. Teachers make careful checks on pupils' learning. They quickly identify and address any misconceptions so that these do not hamper pupils' learning in the future.

The school has an established programme to teach pupils to read well. Staff receive regular training and support to enable them to deliver the programme effectively. As a result, most pupils quickly develop their reading knowledge. However, some of the books that pupils use to practise their reading do not match the sounds that they have learned. From time to time this hinders some pupils, particularly those who find reading the most difficult, from developing fluency and accuracy in reading as quickly as they should.

Children in the early years develop familiarity with traditional rhymes and tales. This gets them off to a good start in developing their communication and language skills and interest in books. Pupils across the school are exposed to a wide variety of texts and authors. They are encouraged to read regularly. This helps to develop their enthusiasm for reading.

Teachers promote positive behaviour for learning in their classrooms. Pupils value the range of rewards that they receive for meeting teachers' high expectations. The school uses expertise from within, and from outside agencies, to support any pupils whose behaviour falls below the expected standard. This means that any disruption to pupils' learning is minimal.

The school fosters pupils' wider development well. Pupils' learning is enriched by a variety of trips and visiting speakers. The school has thought carefully about how these experiences develop over the years, from a visit to a nearby farm for pupils in the early years to a residential trip for pupils in Year 6. The school promotes pupils' understanding of diversity and human rights. This has helped to make the school a haven of tolerance and respect, where pupils of all backgrounds are welcomed.

Parents and carers value the range of opportunities that the school provides for them to participate in school life. For example, parents are regularly invited to attend assemblies and showcases where pupils can share their learning. Parents appreciate the frequent updates that they receive about how well their children are learning.

Governors have the necessary expertise to hold leaders to account successfully. They ensure that the actions of the school are effective and that decisions are made in the best interests of pupils.

Leaders and governors frequently check on staff's well-being. Staff are consulted about changes that might impact on their ways of working. As a result, staff feel valued and they enjoy working at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some of the books that pupils use to practise their reading are not well matched to the sounds that they know. From time to time, this hinders some pupils from embedding their reading knowledge as quickly as they should. The school should ensure that they provide pupils with reading books that closely match their phonics knowledge, so that pupils can swiftly develop their reading fluency.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in July 2014.

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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).'

School details

Unique reference number	105221
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10291386
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	416
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Dominic Holden
Headteacher	Marie Kwiatkowski
Website	www.stoc.bolton.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 June 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection a new headteacher has been appointed.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school is part of the Diocese of Salford. The school's last section 48 inspection took place in January 2020. The school's next section 48 inspection is due to take place in 2027.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with senior leaders, including the headteacher, and a range of staff. She also spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.

- The inspector spoke to a representative of the local authority and of the Diocese of Salford.
- The inspector reviewed a wide range of evidence, including leaders' self-evaluation documents, improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector spoke to pupils about their experiences of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. She observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and social times.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in art and design, early reading and science. For each deep dive, she discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some teachers and pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector discussed the curriculum in other subjects by meeting with curriculum leaders.
- The inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- The inspector considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Charlotte Oles, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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