

Inspection of St Thomas More's Catholic Primary School, Colchester

Priory Street, Colchester, Essex CO1 2QB

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 November 2023 and 23 January 2024

| Overall effectiveness | Outstanding |
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| The quality of education | Outstanding |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Outstanding |
| Personal development | Outstanding |
| Leadership and management | Outstanding |
| Early years provision | Outstanding |
| Previous inspection grade | Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 |

The headteacher of this school is Bridget Harris. This school is part of The Rosary Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Simon Fenning.

Ofsted has not previously inspected St Thomas More's Catholic Primary School under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged St Thomas More's Catholic Primary School to be outstanding, before it opened as an academy.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils attend a school where excellence is standard. Adults expect pupils to achieve the very best. Pupils leave the school at the end of Year 6 having achieved extremely well academically, while also being well rounded young people who are ready to face the world.

Pupils are polite and courteous. Classrooms are calm, yet they bubble and brim with excitement as pupils learn together. In lessons, pupils love contributing and sharing their ideas. They feel safe to do so, because they know it is okay to make a mistake and learn from it. Adults have created a climate where pupils feel safe to speak out.

The very youngest children in the early years benefit from the caring and nurturing environment. They understand what school is about, learn the routines and quickly set about laying strong foundations for their future time in school.

Pupils benefit strongly from the many and varied wider opportunities on offer. They sing joyfully and with gusto in the school choir, while others take on their extra responsibilities with diligence. Pupils benefit from being on the school council, becoming 'buddies' for younger pupils or working to reduce their carbon footprint. Pupils in these positions can confidently explain their part in improving the school for themselves and others.

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

The strong, shared vision weaves through all the school does. Over time, leaders including governors, have realised this vision. Pupils receive a top-class education. Staff are truly valued and are supported by school leaders to hone and refine their practice and to become experts in what they do. This high level of expertise means pupils learn from the best.

Pupils learn and achieve exceptionally well across the curriculum. They develop a broad and rich body of knowledge that builds as they move through the school. Pupils are skilfully guided to use what they know and can do to help them become ever more proficient. For example, in history, younger pupils develop an excellent understanding of chronology. As they get older, pupils use this knowledge to build a rich picture of the past. Similarly, older pupils are adept at designing scientific investigations to test their ideas because they have a strong understanding of how experiments work from their past learning. Teachers hold strong subject knowledge. They use this to check that pupils understand new information, and quickly step in to correct a pupil if they misunderstand.

Pupils with special educational need and/or disabilities and those pupils who speak English as an additional language are supported extremely well to access the curriculum. Effective plans are in place. Provision for these pupils is successfully

implemented in class. Their various needs are well considered and provided for. Adults make careful adaptations to lessons to ensure pupils access the full curriculum alongside their peers. As a result, these pupils achieve exceptionally well.

Reading sits at the heart of the curriculum. The school ensures that well-trained staff effectively deliver the phonics programme. The books that pupils read are carefully matched to the sounds they know. This means that in early years and key stage 1, the vast majority of pupils learn to read well. The school puts timely additional support in place for pupils who need it. As a result, pupils quickly become fluent and confident readers.

Children in the early years receive high-quality provision. They take part in activities with energy and excitement. They work and play well together, with kindness and smiles a plenty. Adults skilfully guide children to start activities, offering help and reassurance when it is necessary. Children develop high levels of concentration and independence, setting them up extremely well for Year 1.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They have very positive attitudes to learning in class. Lessons are very rarely disturbed.

The school provides an excellent range of opportunities that enhance pupils' personal development. Equally, the school responds to events in their community and beyond to ensure children understand these and can empathise with those involved. Pupils' fundraising efforts to help children in another country exemplifies this.

A well-designed and coherent personal, social and health education curriculum is taught. Pupils talk confidently about fundamental British values and are very respectful of different cultures and beliefs. Consequently, pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Trustees and the governing body work closely with the school. They have an accurate view of the many strengths of the provision. They do not take their foot off the pedal, continuing to challenge and support leaders to make the school even better.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

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| Unique reference number | 138164 |
| Local authority | Essex |
| Inspection number | 10242267 |
| 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 | 207 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Simon Fenning |
| Headteacher | Bridget Harris |
| Website | www.stthomasmores.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- St Thomas More's Catholic Primary School is part of The Rosary Trust, which consists of seven Catholic primary schools in Essex. The school converted to become an academy in June 2012.
- The school is part of the Diocese of Brentwood. The last section 48 of the school's religious character inspection took place in March 2022.
- There are no pupils attending alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

- 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. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors first visited the school on 7 and 8 November 2023. Ofsted deemed that further evidence was required to secure the inspection judgements. As a result, this inspection was deemed 'incomplete'. Two of His Majesty's Inspectors visited the school on 23 January 2024 to gather more evidence about the quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, early years and leadership and management.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, assistant headteachers, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders, staff, governors and trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, geography and music. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to pupils read with a familiar member of staff.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: 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.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including behaviour logs, attendance records, pupil records, records of trust and governor meetings, school development plans and school self-evaluation documents.
- Inspectors considered 97 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also spoke with parents as they arrived at school.
- The 70 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils were taken into account. Inspectors also spoke with pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views.
- Inspectors took into account the 22 responses to the Ofsted's questionnaire for staff. Inspectors also met with staff throughout the inspection to gather their views.

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|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Jonny Wallace, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Stephen Cloke | Ofsted Inspector |
| Nathan Lowe, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Dave Gibson | His Majesty's Inspector |

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