

INSPECTION REPORT

**THOMAS PERCY ROMAN CATHOLIC
VOLUNTARY AIDED MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Alnwick

LEA area: Northumberland

Unique reference number: 122372

Headteacher: Mrs Dorothy Brett

Reporting inspector: Mr Roger Holmes
2632

Dates of inspection: 16 – 18 October 2000

Inspection number: 223887

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Middle deemed Secondary

School category: Voluntary Aided

Age range of pupils: 9 - 13

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Blakelaw Road
Alnwick
Northumberland
Postcode: NE66 1AZ

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Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs Joan Brown

Date of previous inspection: 11 September 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Thomas Percy is much smaller than most other middle schools, with 95 pupils on roll, 60 of whom are boys and only 35 girls. Pupils join the school in Year 5, when most of them are nine years old, and leave at the end of Year 8, when most are thirteen years old. The school serves a wide area, stretching out from the market town of Alnwick into the surrounding villages. A significant number of the children come from service families at RAF Boulmer, and this accounts for the relatively high proportion of pupils who leave or join the school each year. Pupils join the school with the wide range of attainment normal for their age. Thirty-one pupils are on the school's register for special educational needs, which is above average for the size of the school; two of these have statements for their special needs, which is about average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Thomas Percy is a good and effective school. Standards are good in most subjects and rising. Pupils are taught well, they are keen to succeed, and try hard in lessons. Behaviour is very good and pupils grow in maturity. There is a strong sense of purpose in the school as a result of very effective leadership, reflecting its Christian nature. As a small school, it is relatively expensive to run; nevertheless, it provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils achieve good standards in science, English, and most other subjects.
- Teaching is good and pupils respond well by working hard in lessons.
- The school looks after the pupils very carefully and helps them grow up well.
- The headteacher's leadership has taken the school forward rapidly.

What could be improved

- Pupils do not do well enough in mathematics, particularly in the older classes, and standards are also too low in French, and in design and technology.
- The role and responsibilities of the deputy headteacher do not reflect the seniority of the post.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very rapid progress in the last two years and, overall, progress since the last inspection in 1995 has been good. The three key issues identified in the report have been addressed thoroughly and successfully: there is now an effective school improvement plan; lessons are planned well and are challenging; there is a well planned and very effective programme for the pupils' personal development and the provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is strong.

The quality of teaching is much better than at the time of the last inspection, assessment is being used to help pupils make progress, and attendance figures are much improved. As a result of all of this, standards are rising.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11 year olds based on National Curriculum test results.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
English	A	D	B	A
Mathematics	C	D	C	C
Science	A	B	A	A

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Over the last few years, results have been consistently high in science and generally good in English. Results in mathematics have risen, but pupils do not do as well in mathematics as in the other two core subjects. By the time they leave the school, pupils have maintained their good standards in English and science, but slipped further behind in mathematics.

In other subjects, standards are sound in music and in art. They are not high enough in French and in design and technology. Standards are good across the school in geography, history, information technology, physical education, and in personal and social education with pupils reaching higher standards in all these subjects than they do in most subjects.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have very positive attitudes to school. They try hard, take a pride in their work and are keen to succeed.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is generally very good throughout the school.
Personal development and relationships	This is a strength of the school. Pupils develop confidence and maturity. They look after each other sensitively, and take responsibility willingly.
Attendance	Good and improving.

The school places great importance on this area of work and has a very well planned and coherent approach to it, resulting in the considerable strengths outlined above.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 9 - 11 years	aged 11 - 13 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

No unsatisfactory lessons were seen; 27 per cent of the lessons were very good or excellent, 34 per cent good, and the remaining 38 per cent satisfactory. Most subjects are taught well, particularly science, personal and social education, geography and history, physical education, music, and English. Literacy is taught effectively across a range of subjects, and numeracy teaching is generally sound. Lessons are well-planned and often lively and stimulating.

Pupils respond well in lessons, concentrate hard, and take a pride in their work. They support each other well, and pupils of all abilities make good progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced throughout the school. The younger classes are taught French two years earlier than in most schools. Work is often linked together across several subjects to make it more relevant.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision is well managed and effective. Pupils' individual education plans are good and teachers use them well.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good provision, particularly for pupils' moral, social and cultural development. This aspect is supported well across the whole curriculum, not just in personal and social education lessons.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school takes very good care of the pupils. Procedures are well thought out and understood by everyone. The ethos of pastoral care permeates the work of the school.

There is a range of extra activities for pupils to follow, particularly in sport.

Pupils are known as individuals, the school is developing effective systems to measure their development and the standards of work they produce, setting targets for what they will achieve next.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides very effective leadership. There is a clear vision for the school's development, which everyone understands. Thinking is joined up, so that all initiatives support the overall aim of school development. All management tasks are carried out effectively, but those delegated to the deputy headteacher do not match the seniority of the post.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors take their role seriously and support the school well. They handle the budget prudently and focus spending on the main areas of the school's development, taking account of the need to achieve good value for money.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Monitoring is very good. Areas for development are identified clearly and acted on. The school improvement plan is coherent and realistic.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are used very effectively. Resources in subjects are adequate, and very good developments, such as the IT suite, have been made.

The strengths in management have moved the school forward rapidly in the last two years. Important roles, such as curriculum co-ordination and special needs provision, are delegated to classroom teachers and carried out very effectively. The deputy headteacher's role is more administrative and has been far less significant in moving the school forwards.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils make good progress. • Behaviour is good. • Teaching is good. • Pupils work hard. • Pupils' personal development is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More extra activities for pupils. • The school's management. • Easier to approach the school.

Parents at the meeting held before the inspection were very positive about all aspects of the school's work. Inspectors agree with these positive comments. Parents' concerns may not have taken full account of the school's recent improvements: there is a reasonable range of extra activities, particularly considering the small size of the staff; management is well focussed and effective; parents seem to be encouraged to contact the school and are made welcome when they visit.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils achieve good standards in science, English and most other subjects

1 In science, pupils achieve well above average results in their National Curriculum test at the end of Key Stage 2, when most of them are eleven years old. Almost all pupils reach the expected level 4, and a large proportion go on to reach the higher level 5. In the 2000 tests, over half of the pupils achieved level 5. This high level of attainment is maintained through the two years of Key Stage 3 that the pupils complete at the school, and they are working at good levels for their age when they move on to their next school.

2 This high level of attainment is spread across all aspects of the subject. Pupils learn factual information and develop a thorough understanding of concepts such as force and energy. They relate their understanding well to major issues such as pollution and the environment, for example recognising how the reduction in numbers of one species can affect many others through its impact on the food web. Attainment in investigative work is also good. Pupils appreciate that science needs to be based on evidence, they understand the need for fair testing, carry out practical work safely, and make accurate observations. A particular feature of science is the pupils' willingness and ability to talk about their work. They explore ideas readily and are able to use their scientific knowledge to predict what will happen in new situations. They are confident in what they know and keen to find out more.

3 In English, almost all pupils reach the expected level 4 in the tests at the end of Key Stage 2, with many going on to the higher level 5. In 2000, almost a third of pupils reached level 5. This is well above average for schools with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. This high level of attainment is maintained in the last two years at the school, with most pupils working at levels above those expected for their age.

4 Pupils read well. By Year 6, the majority read confidently and expressively, and by Year 8, they appreciate the deeper meaning behind some writing and tackle different texts well. Writing is also good. Pupils appreciate the need to write in different ways for different purposes. They can describe events succinctly when necessary and also write extended imaginative pieces. Grammar and spelling is generally accurate and many of the older pupils are beginning to enliven their work with well-matched, figurative language. Pupils speak confidently and express themselves reasonably clearly, although they sometimes have to be prompted to say more when answering questions.

5 In other parts of the curriculum, pupils also achieve well in information technology (IT), history and geography, music, physical education (PE), and in personal and social education (PSE).

6 In IT, they use the computers confidently, although some are rather slow on the keyboard. They use word-processing programs and desktop publishing to produce well-designed posters, and handle data effectively in spreadsheets. IT is well integrated into the curriculum and pupils appreciate its role and limitations in society.

7 In geography, older pupils respond maturely to issues such as the moral and social decisions involved in siting a new factory. They also have a good understanding of how historical evidence can be biased.

8 Pupils respond very well in PE lessons, and reach good standards of performance. A particular feature is their ability to think about what they are doing and respond positively to suggestions for improvement. In this way, the Year 6 pupils produced a moving dance sequence based on the Olympics, and Year 8 choreographed imaginative and polished dances in response to a poem.

9 The high standards in PSE are closely linked to the school's Christian ethos. Pupils have a firm understanding of how relationships are affected by feelings such as jealousy, what fairness means, and of the power of love and forgiveness as virtues.

Teaching is good and pupils respond well by working hard in lessons

10 All of the twenty-nine lessons were at least satisfactory, and eighteen were good, very good or excellent. Teaching is most consistently good in Year 5, because of the high quality class teaching in that year. Lessons seen in Year 8 were also predominantly well taught, with forty per cent of them being very good or excellent as a result of successful, specialist teaching.

11 The school has adopted a consistent approach to planning, which involves identifying the main purpose of the lesson, explaining this to the pupils at the start of the lesson, and returning to it at the end to review the progress that has been made. This consistency lets the pupils know what they are expected to learn and helps to establish a shared sense of purpose with teacher.

12 Lessons are well planned. Teachers know their subject well and select material that they are able to make interesting to the pupils and adapt to their individual needs. Most of the teachers are experienced and are very skilful at managing the behaviour of the pupils. Lessons are consequently very purposeful and often lively and exciting, with teachers having the confidence to encourage pupils to discuss and explore ideas, knowing that they can regain the class's full attention whenever necessary.

13 The most successful teaching, unsurprisingly, is in the subjects where standards are highest. Science is consistently very well taught, with an approach that demands a lot of thought from the pupils. They respond very well to the excitement of exploring ideas and testing their theories through practical investigations. English is taught successfully by several teachers. All have a good understanding of the subject and convey enthusiasm to the pupils. Work has been strongly influenced by the literacy programme, and the literacy hour has been adapted successfully for older pupils. Humanities and PSE are also taught by more than one teacher. They have a shared understanding of the subjects and how they are to be taught. Lessons deal with factual content effectively and are particularly impressive for the way they extend into deeper considerations such as moral and social implications of decisions. PE and IT are each taught by specialists with extensive knowledge of their subjects. In the case of PE, for example, this results in pupils meeting specialised ideas such as Laban notation for choreographing dance movements earlier than usual. As in the case in all of this successful teaching, they respond particularly well to being encouraged to think about their work, discuss ideas, and comment on how successful they are being.

The school looks after the pupils very carefully and helps them grow up well

14 The school takes its responsibility for the care of its pupils very seriously. Staff know the pupils well and take a close interest in their development. There is a clear code of conduct based on simple rules. Relationships are good amongst the pupils, and between adults and pupils. There is mutual respect, and behaviour is very good in almost all classes

and around the school.

15 The PSE programme is effective in providing opportunities to consider issues such as bullying, friendship and jealousy. Pupils discuss these issues very sensibly and show considerable understanding for the feelings of others. In this way, the quality of their behaviour is based on their own sense of right and wrong, rather than a fear of externally imposed sanctions.

16 Pupils' attainment in tests is recorded and used by the school to set targets for the future. This has already been successful in helping pupils to achieve good standards in English and science, and is being developed to include a wider range of information about pupils' performance and also involve more subjects.

17 Appropriate sanctions are used when necessary, but there is much more emphasis on rewarding good work and behaviour. Pupils respond well to this system. They value the good opinion of staff and enjoy receiving house points. The school's emphasis on being outward looking is helping them broaden their horizons. Feeling secure in the small society of the school, they are able to see themselves in a wider context, taking an interest in what happens elsewhere in the world and developing an understanding of different points of view.

The headteacher's leadership has taken the school forward rapidly

18 The headteacher has been in post for two years, taking over after a period of temporary management following the retirement through ill health of the previous head. At that time, little had been done to address the issues raised in the previous inspection. Since then, development has been rapid.

19 There is a clear vision for the development of the school, which includes achieving good results and expanding pupils' views of what is possible. This is being conveyed successfully to staff and pupils so that there is a strong sense of purpose in the school.

20 Developments have been planned and implemented carefully to support this overall aim. For example, the PSE programme has been developed to emphasise an outward looking approach and teaching styles have been refined to encourage pupils' participation in lessons, and their independence. Financial resources have been limited, but used effectively, for example in establishing the IT suite.

21 Difficult decisions about staff changes have been made resolutely, supported well by the governing body. Senior staff have taken on important roles, including co-ordination of the curriculum and of special needs provision. These are carried out very effectively and have contributed well to the school's progress.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Pupils do not do well enough in mathematics, particularly the older classes, and standards are also too low in French and in design and technology

22 Pupils do not do as well in mathematics in the National Curriculum tests as they do in science or English. As many pupils reach the higher level 5 as in English, but not as many achieve the expected level 4, gaining level 3 instead. A similar pattern is evident with older pupils as well. Quite a few have a good understanding of the subject and can handle calculations quickly and accurately, better than average for their age, but too many struggle with calculations and lack confidence in their own ability in the subject.

23 This points to a system that successfully encourages pupils who are good at mathematics, but does not support the average pupils adequately. In Year 5, where mathematics is part of the class teaching approach, pupils are working at the expected level. Teaching is good and the numeracy strategy is being used effectively, so that pupils are developing confidence and speed in handling numbers. Lessons with older classes do not have such good pace and purpose.

24 The specialist teacher, who normally teaches the older classes, was absent during the inspection, so it was not possible to see her at work. Parents and pupils report that pupils are sometimes reluctant to ask her to explain things when they have not understood. Clearly, this would slow down their progress and be likely to affect average pupils more than those who are already good at mathematics.

25 Pupils in Year 8 know fewer French words than expected for their age, and struggle to write phrases and sentences accurately. Higher attainers can answer questions accurately orally. When faced with new words in text, pupils are weak at using the context to find the meaning, and do not readily use dictionaries.

26 This weakness in the subject exists despite the pupils having been taught French since Year 5, whereas, in most schools, pupils do not meet French until Year 7. It reflects an unsuccessful programme that has existed for some years, where uninspiring teaching and a poorly planned curriculum have combined to turn pupils off French.

27 The current teacher of French only started at the school in September and has inherited these problems. Her lessons are imaginative and carefully planned. She is keen to teach as much of the lesson as possible in French, but is being frustrated by the pupils' lack of vocabulary, and in some cases, their negative views of the subject. It is important that she maintains and adapts this French language approach, finding ways to make the vocabulary relevant and accessible, rather than reverting to giving instructions in English.

28 Standards are lower than expected in design and technology. Pupils are reasonably imaginative in their design work, but their ideas are limited by the range of experience they have had with materials and techniques. They use tools incorrectly and are not used to choosing the right one for the job.

29 As with French, the current teacher of the subject started at the school in September and has inherited these problems. There is a need to establish a scheme of work for the subject, which ensures that pupils meet a range of different materials and techniques for working them. They need to be taught how to use tools correctly, so that their skills develop progressively as they move through the school. Lessons need to be balanced between developing skills and knowledge, and supporting pupils in their designing.

30 Considerable work has already been done to improve the room used for design and technology, but more development is required, including storing tools properly, so that they are not damaged and pupils can select them for use.

The roles and responsibility of the deputy headteacher do not reflect the seniority of the post

31 Senior management responsibilities in the school are divided amongst the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, and two teachers. The two teachers are responsible for the co-ordination of the curriculum, assessment, and special educational needs provision.

These are important aspects of the work of the school, and developments in assessment and in special needs have played a significant part in moving the school forwards. The role of the deputy headteacher includes staff development, arranging cover for absent staff, and duty rotas. This is more limited and has been less central to the school's development than the responsibilities carried by the two less senior members of staff.

32 The deputy headteacher was absent due to illness during the inspection, so it was not possible to gather all the information desirable on this issue. Overall, the management of the school is very effective, as described above, and the headteacher is supported effectively by the two teachers. However, governors need to consider carefully the equity and efficiency of the current distribution of management responsibilities.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

33 In order to improve the quality of education even further, staff and governors should:

- (1) raise standards in mathematics, French, and in design and technology. For mathematics, this is likely to involve analysing the reasons for individual pupils doing worse in mathematics than in science or English, refining teaching styles to help pupils develop confidence, and extending successful numeracy strategies upwards through the school. In French, and design and technology, schemes of work are needed that develop pupils' skills and knowledge from Year 5. While these are working through, there need to be interim arrangements to develop older pupils from where they are now.
- (2) review the roles and responsibility of the deputy headteacher to make sure that they reflect the seniority of the post. This will involve comparing the current roles with those undertaken by similar post holders in other schools.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	29
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	15

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3	24	34	38	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils on the school's roll	95
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	16

Special educational needs	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	31
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	2

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	94.3
National comparative data	93.6

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	0.4

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	2000	13	11	24

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	9	9	11
	Girls	11	7	11
	Total	20	16	22
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	83 (590)	67 (66)	92 (88)
	National	75 (70)	72 (69)	85 (78)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	9	10	10
	Girls	11	9	8
	Total	20	19	8
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	83 (66)	79 (69)	75 (75)
	National	n/a (68)	n/a (69)	n/a (75)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

National figures for tender assessments in 2000 are not yet available.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	95
Any other minority ethnic group	

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	2	
Other minority ethnic groups		

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y5 – Y8

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	6.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	13.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y5 – Y8

Total number of education support staff	2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	16.5

Deployment of teachers: Y5 – Y8

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.0
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Average teaching group size: Y5 – Y8

Key Stage 2	19
Key Stage 3	18.9

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	293,298
Total expenditure	288,975
Expenditure per pupil	2889.8
Balance brought forward from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to next year	4,323

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	97
Number of questionnaires returned	62

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	31	55	10	5	0
My child is making good progress in school.	32	60	2	0	6
Behaviour in the school is good.	35	53	3	0	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	23	53	11	3	10
The teaching is good.	35	55	3	2	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	52	5	5	11
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	44	40	10	5	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	56	40	0	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	26	53	10	3	8
The school is well led and managed.	40	31	16	5	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	40	47	6	0	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	16	42	16	10	16

Other issues raised by parents

Parents who attended the meeting on 28 September 2000 expressed very positive views about all aspects of the school.