



St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110476
LEA Milton Keynes LEA
Inspection number 278442
Inspection dates 6 March 2006 to 7 March 2006
Reporting inspector Vanessa Ward AI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary	School address	St Mary's Avenue
School category	Voluntary aided		Bletchley
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Milton Keynes MK3 5DT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01908 373977
Number on roll	291	Fax number	01908 649222
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr John Mulligan
Date of previous inspection	27 November 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Monica Basham

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School is larger than the average primary school. It changed from being a combined school to a primary school in September 2005. Its pupils mainly live within the parish of Bletchley, with a few coming from further afield. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is below average. Very few pupils have statements of special educational need. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above average. A few pupils are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. There has been a high turnover of staff in the past two years.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The inspection findings support the school's view that its effectiveness is outstanding. Under the highly successful leadership of the headteacher and her deputy, the school is very well placed to improve further. It is especially effective in promoting pupils' academic performance. The outstanding provision in the Foundation Stage gives the children an excellent start. This is built upon very effectively and, by the end of Year 6, standards in English, mathematics and science are exceptionally high. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers inspire pupils with an enthusiasm for learning and involve them well in understanding their own progress. They are now well placed to increase the ways in which pupils can take responsibility for their own learning. The outstanding care, guidance and support that the school provides enrich pupils' academic, spiritual and personal development. As a result, pupils enjoy learning, are polite and behave very well. The curriculum is outstanding and provides pupils with a very interesting and exciting range of learning experiences. Leadership and management are outstanding. There is strong teamwork among all who work in the school and a shared determination to provide the very best for the pupils. The school is supported by a highly effective governing body. The leadership at all levels is very strong and contributes very significantly to the pupils' outstanding achievement. Subject leaders are now very influential in improving achievement and raising standards. Issues raised at the previous inspection have been dealt with successfully and standards have risen. The school provides outstanding value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

* Give pupils even more opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement and standards are outstanding because of the excellent teaching, curriculum and provision that the school offers to each pupil. The school has achieved high standards for several years. For the past three years standards at the end of Year 6 have been exceptionally high. Children enter the Foundation Stage with skills that are typical of 4 year olds. They achieve very well and, by the end of the of the reception year, a large majority exceed the expected goals. This excellent achievement is built upon very effectively through Years 1 to 6 and leads to very high standards in English, maths and science. Staff set very challenging targets and pupils meet them. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities, including pupils with statements of special educational need, make very good progress and all achieve the expected standard in at least one subject by the end of Year 6. Boys and girls meet with similar success. Pupils who are gifted and talented, and those from minority ethnic groups, achieve very well. Pupils learning English as an additional language make very good and, sometimes, exceptional progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. They are immensely proud of their school, which they feel they are fortunate to attend. As a result, they show extremely positive attitudes to their learning, and attendance levels are well above average. Pupils behave very well and are confident that bullying is not tolerated. As one pupil commented, 'I think we are unique, as soon as there is any bullying, we stop it'. They develop a strong sense of right and wrong. The high priority the school places on valuing and developing all pupils as individuals means that they are sensitive to each other's talents, needs and abilities. They are just as understanding of pupils who need extra help as they are proud of those who do exceptionally well. Their cultural understanding develops very well through subjects such as art, music and literature, and through educational visits and visitors to the school. Pupils understand that it is important to stay safe and adopt a healthy lifestyle and they participate enthusiastically in a wide range of physical activities. They enjoy taking on extra responsibilities in the school and welcome the opportunity to help others. The elected school council makes a thoughtful contribution to the running of the school, and involves pupils in making 'real life' economic decisions. For example, the school council recently used their small budget to buy more play equipment which they purchased locally in order to support local business.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding, enabling pupils to achieve high standards. In most lessons there is a buzz of excitement as teachers capture pupils' interest with lively introductions and infectious enthusiasm. As one pupil commented, 'Instead of going on and on, teachers ask questions or add a bit of fun'. This helps all learners to enjoy their lessons and to make very good progress. Lessons are very well planned and purposeful and cater extremely well for pupils' differing abilities and interests. A highly-skilled team of teaching assistants supports those pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. They work closely with the teachers to pinpoint exactly how their extra help or support can enable these pupils to achieve their best in each lesson. As a result, these pupils make very good progress. Teachers make excellent links between what pupils learn in different subjects. For example, in one outstanding lesson, pupils used what they had been learning about island life in geography to produce some excellent creative writing. The teachers already successfully involve pupils in understanding how well they are doing, and they could usefully extend this guidance by providing more opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding and provides much to interest and motivate the pupils. Links between subjects are planned very well and greatly enrich pupils' learning. For example, good quality writing is stimulated by work in history and geography. Creative work, such as art and music, is brought into other subjects, encouraging imaginative development and firing pupils' enthusiasm. The stimulating curriculum in the Foundation Stage gives children an excellent start. Regular reviews of the curriculum ensure that it is broad and balanced. Pupils of all abilities are enabled to enjoy a full curriculum. There is an impressive range of well-attended extra curricular activities, including after school care. Ambitious plans to extend and enrich this provision are in hand, but are currently limited by available space. Pupils' personal development is enhanced through teaching about relationships, and the potentially damaging effects of some drugs. An early morning breakfast club for pupils also promotes pupils' personal development very effectively.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support provided for pupils are all outstanding and are at the heart of the work of the school. The adults in the school are sensitive to each child's personal, academic and spiritual needs. There is an excellent partnership between home and school, and with the local community. Parents wholeheartedly support the care which the school provides for pupils. As one parent commented, 'The school respects each child as an individual.' The school works closely with specialist agencies to support pupils' needs. It takes excellent care to protect children who may be more vulnerable. For example, the Rainbow Club is open to any child who is experiencing particular social or emotional difficulties. As one boy commented, 'I thought it was just me, but when I went to the Rainbow Club I found out I wasn't alone.' Good arrangements for the protection of children and the promotion of their health and safety are in place, and these are understood by all members of staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding because of the excellent guidance provided by the headteacher. She has developed a very strong and effective leadership team that is supported by well-motivated staff. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and well founded. It leads to effective action to remedy identified weaknesses and raise standards. A recent example is the intensive use of a programme to teach letter sounds, which had a positive impact on reading standards in Year 2. All of the staff and governors are suitably involved in planning for school improvement. Parental views are sought and acted upon. Governors have a thorough understanding of the strategic development of the school and carry out their duties very effectively. The professional development of both teachers and teaching assistants is given high

priority. There is a robust system of performance management that is successfully linked to improving pupils' academic success. Regular monitoring and evaluation of teaching are effective in improving learning and raising standards. The development and sharing of specialist expertise among the staff contribute to the outstanding provision and achievement. The exemplary leadership of the deputy headteacher, in improving teaching in English, has contributed substantially to better standards. Leaders of all subjects are empowered and make significant contributions to improving standards and achievement in their subjects. Since the previous inspection, the school has tackled the development issues that were identified then and has raised standards. It has strong capacity to build further upon its current success.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	1	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, we inspected your school recently for two days. I am writing to tell you what we found out. We spoke to some of you, and we would like to thank you for making us feel welcome and for talking to us about your school. It was very useful to listen to what you had to say about what you enjoy doing.

You attend an excellent school. It is a very happy place and your parents and carers speak very highly of it. Your teachers give you really interesting things to do and this helps you to learn very well. As a result, your standards of work are much higher than those we see in most schools. Your headteacher and teachers are very good at finding ways to improve your school and this means that it keeps getting better. Your teachers set you learning targets and help you to understand how well you are doing in reaching them. We have asked them to teach you more ways in which you can take responsibility for your own learning.

You told us that you enjoy being in your school, feel safe there and know that the grown ups will always help you if you are upset or worried. You show that you care for each other and this helps all of you to enjoy learning. You behave very well and are polite and well mannered. We hope you will carry on enjoying school and helping your teachers as much as you can.