



Saint Thomas More Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117479
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280092
Inspection dates 19 January 2006 to 20 January 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Peter Lewis LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Greenway
School category	Voluntary aided		HP4 3LF
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01442 385060
Number on roll	228	Fax number	01442 385061
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs.Win Winston
Date of previous inspection	15 January 2001	Headteacher	Mrs. Lisa Barton

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average-sized primary school serving a socially advantaged area of Berkhamsted and which, because of its denominational nature, draws children from a broad area. Most pupils are of White British descent, with only a very small number from minority ethnic backgrounds. A few pupils do not have English as their home language and a below average number are entitled to free school meals. The number of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is low. The school has undergone a period of considerable uncertainty in its leadership and staffing over the last three years until the appointment of the current headteacher a year ago.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that knows itself well and is working successfully to provide its pupils with the best possible education. The inspection findings agree with the school's view of itself as effective, and concludes that pupils' achievement is good and standards are above average. Standards in English, mathematics and science are above average by the end of Year 6 and, because teaching and learning are good, pupils make good progress. Children in the Foundation Stage get a very good start in the Nursery and Reception classes and make great strides with their learning and personal development. The school is fully committed to involving all pupils, whatever their ability, gender or background, in the full range of its activities. Pupils are happy and confident and thoroughly enjoy contributing to the smooth running of the school. The great majority of parents are very pleased with the education provided for their children. The school has made many improvements since its last inspection and resolved the issues identified at that time. Improvements have been made in the use that teachers make of assessment in planning work. Targets are set for pupils, but there are inconsistencies in the way in which teachers use these to guide children in the next steps in their learning. A major factor in the school's success is the good quality leadership of the headteacher. Staff and governors share a common vision for the future of the school and work well as a team to turn that vision into reality. However, teachers with subject leadership responsibilities do not yet have a sufficiently clear view of how well children learn in their subjects to accurately identify development needs. None the less, because of the success of recent initiatives in improving pupils' progress, the school is well placed to continue improving. It provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that recent developments in teachers' use of assessment are consistently used in setting targets, and in making children aware of how well they are doing and how to improve their work. - Implement plans to further improve the subject leaders' understanding of how to raise pupils' achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress and achieve well. From an above average starting point when they join the school, the children in the Nursery and Reception year make good progress. Average and faster learners exceed the expected early learning goals by the end of their time in the Reception classes. Pupils who have learning difficulties and the few whose first language is not English also do well. The school's performance in the national tests for pupils in Year 2 and in Year 6 in 2005 was above average. This means that, at both key stages, children had only made satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points. However, the inspection findings show that pupils currently in Year 2 and Year 6 are performing at above average levels in all three subjects of English, mathematics and science, and are making good progress as a result of the

successful initiatives that the school has introduced. Pupils currently in Year 6 have a much better grounding in writing because of the improved teaching they have received through this year and, as a result, are making much better progress. The school has already begun to improve its use of assessment and work is now more closely matched to children's particular needs and abilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school. This is reflected in their very good attitudes within class, where they participate with enthusiasm and interest, and in overall attendance which is above the national average. Behaviour in and around the school is generally very good and, although pupils report some occasional instances of unkindness, they think that these are handled well by the school. All pupils consulted reported that there was at least one adult in the school to whom they could turn if they had a problem. They feel that a strong feature of the school is the degree to which their views and opinions are valued and sought by adults. For example, the school is awaiting delivery of play equipment, which will help provide interest to a somewhat arid playground, and was an issue raised through the school council. The school council's 'worry box' provides another means by which concerns can be brought to the school's attention. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. There has been good improvement since the last inspection in cultural provision. Raising pupils' self-esteem and stressing their uniqueness underpins the spiritual life of the school. Pupils are encouraged to develop a healthy lifestyle and to play a full part in the school community. They understand the importance of safety in their lessons and at play. Year 6 pupils are proud of looking after very young children and acting as their 'buddies'. Key numeracy, literacy, information and communication technology, and social skills, along with opportunities for taking initiatives in fund raising, contribute to a firm foundation for pupils' future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good and helps pupils to make good progress in their learning. Lessons are carefully planned and thoroughly prepared. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and help to promote positive attitudes towards learning. There are many examples of good practice and no teaching that is ineffective. This is a result of the school's good systems for monitoring and supporting teachers. In the best lessons, teachers make good use of discussion and questioning. Target-setting with individuals and groups, particularly in English, has already made a positive difference to the speed with which pupils learn throughout the school. Teachers and teaching assistants plan well together, and this ensures that the needs of different groups of pupils are met well. The school has worked hard to develop consistent, high quality planning and teachers use this well to provide activities that excite and challenge

pupils. Recent work to improve the quality and use of assessment has begun to make a difference, particularly in identifying the needs of individuals and groups in English and mathematics. Pupils with lower attainment and with learning difficulties are well supported. Teachers also cater well for the higher attaining pupils, and this reflects their high expectations and determination to continue to improve the quality of learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils' good progress and attitudes are supported by the school's good curriculum. It is broad, meets National Curriculum requirements and ensures that pupils' time at school is interesting. The school has carefully implemented changes to the curriculum for English and mathematics which have been successful in improving provision and pupils' progress. A good range of plans is in place to review the development of key skills across all subjects. The weekly timetable is supplemented by a range of occasional curriculum enrichment weeks and a range of after school activities that provide additional in-depth experiences for children. Young children in the school are given a good start. The school is very committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all and, as a result, pupils' individual needs are met well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care and guidance is good. Pupils of all ages feel safe, secure and valued. All pupils are known well by staff. Their needs, interests, and enjoyment, along with their safety, and development spiritual, personal, and academic lie at the heart of the school's work. The school has a strong commitment to supporting every child both personally and academically. However, teachers do not always give clear and precise guidance regarding how pupils could improve their work. Child-protection procedures are secure. Good teamwork between teachers and support staff contributes to the good rate of progress achieved by pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. They are considerably enhanced by the clear leadership of the headteacher, whose strong commitment to achieving the very best is a major factor in the school's significant improvement recently. A clear sense of purpose is fully shared by all staff, who work very well as a team. This is a school in which pupils and adults feel cared for and appreciated because of the success of the school's commitment to providing equal opportunities. Its capacity for further improvement is good. The effectiveness of the school's systems for checking how well it is doing is good. It is demonstrated in the strong links between the school's evaluation of its effectiveness and the priorities already initiated through the development planning. Recent initiatives have seen the introduction of a formal system to assist

teachers in setting targets for their children which, particularly at Years 2 and 6, has already made a positive difference to children's learning. The school recognises that, in order to involve staff more in the process of evaluation, teachers' require greater understanding of pupils' progress in the subjects for which they are responsible. It has made a good start towards implementing this. Partnerships with local pre-schools and with the partner secondary school are good. These links help to provide continuity in children's learning, and are being developed further. Governance is good. The governing body is actively involved in the school and, through the headteacher's clear and open reports, meetings and visits, governors are kept well informed. Financial management is good in the way in which resources are allocated to identified priorities. Value for money is good. Given the improvements made over the last year, the above average progress made by pupils and the commitment of all those who work at the school, it is well placed to continue improving.

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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?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. You told us that you go to a good school and we agree with you. Your teachers, teaching assistants and lunchtime staff look after you very well. You always have someone to go to if you are upset. The older children do a very good job of helping to look after the younger ones, and take very seriously the responsibilities that are given. We also agreed with you when you told us you have good teachers who help you with your learning. They help you to do well in lessons and in the tests you take, which helps you to enjoy your learning so much. We have asked your teachers to make sure that they always make clear to you what you need to do to make your work even better. Your behaviour is very good and we were very impressed by your politeness and your confidence. We also thoroughly enjoyed hearing about all the exciting things that you do at your school. We think that your headteacher does a good job of running the school. Your teachers also work extremely hard to make sure you enjoy your lessons and we have asked those with responsibility for subjects to help you even more by finding ways of making sure you always learn as much as you can. We know that they will continue to work hard to make your school even better. We wish you every success for the future.