



St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124319
LEA Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number 281689
Inspection dates 5 June 2006 to 6 June 2006
Reporting inspector David Biltcliffe AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	North Street
School category	Voluntary aided		Stoke-on-Trent
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		Staffordshire ST4 7DG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01782 234919
Number on roll	231	Fax number	023 4919
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Celia Teague
Date of previous inspection	22 November 2000	Headteacher	Miss Bernadette Sims

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3 to 11	5 June 2006 - 6 June 2006	281689

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Thomas Aquinas is an average-sized primary school. It has slightly more girls than boys. Pupils' attainment on entry to the nursery is slightly below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is well below the national average. Pupils' social and economic backgrounds are typical of the country as a whole. About three-quarters of pupils are of White British origin; the majority of other pupils are of Asian heritage. About four per cent of pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The headteacher has been in post for just over four terms.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Thomas Aquinas is a delightful school. It provides a good standard of education for its pupils. It has many strengths and very few weaknesses. It is a calm, friendly and happy place that is strongly guided by its Catholic beliefs and values. Parents have a very high regard for the school. This is a good school, because pupils make significant progress during their time here, raising their standard of work from slightly below that normally found when they start in the nursery to above average when they leave Year 6. This good level of achievement stems from well planned teaching and the value placed on hard work and enjoyment in learning. Teaching and learning are good. There are particular strengths in the way that teachers encourage children to succeed and ensure that lessons are calm, interesting and purposeful. Occasionally, teaching does not require pupils to think deeply enough. As a result, pupils of high ability in particular are not always stretched as much as they should be. Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils pay very careful attention, are keen to learn and very much enjoy school. They are very well behaved and courteous. The quality of care for every pupil is outstanding. Leadership and management are good, with some outstanding features. The school's leaders have an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. The new headteacher provides very good leadership in moving the school forward. Staff morale is high, because all feel part of a team. Subject leaders take their roles seriously, but are still at the early stage of leading improvements across the school in the subjects for which they are responsible. Management tasks are undertaken effectively and smoothly. The school's solid progress since the last inspection and its current good level of performance indicate that it has both the capacity and the will to become even better. The school gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teaching requires pupils, especially those of high ability, to think and probe deeply enough in their investigations.
- Enhance the evaluation skills of subject leaders and the opportunities they have to improve their subjects across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress from entry into the nursery through to the end of Year 6. In Nursery and Reception, children achieve well. As a result, by the end of Reception, standards in literacy, mathematics and children's all-round development are average. Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 1 and 2, where most aspects of their work are slightly above average. By the end of Year 6, standards are above average. Pupils do particularly well in English and mathematics. Pupils with learning difficulties and those learning English as an additional language make good progress. Overall, pupils of high ability also make good progress, although they could sometimes achieve more by undertaking more probing and analytical investigations. In the Year 6 national tests in 2005, the school exceeded the challenging targets it had set itself in English

and mathematics. Pupils are well on track to at least meet the raised targets set for tests in summer 2006. This good level of progress is the result of committed, well organised teaching and pupils' hard work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school, and this is shown, for example, by their good attendance. Their excellent attitudes, behaviour and relationships contribute substantially to their good rate of learning and achievement. Pupils eat healthily and adopt safe practices. They eagerly engage in physical activities and contribute well to the school and community through their own enterprise. They make good progress in developing the skills they will need in their future lives. The school council has an articulate voice in the running of the school. Pupils feel that their ideas are valued and acted upon. They take an active part in school clubs, community events and the initiation of fund-raising activities. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Spiritual development is fostered very well through strong church links, worship and reflection. Pupils have a very good understanding of right and wrong. Their social development is enhanced through visits and community links. They are very well prepared for life in a culturally diverse society through their everyday work, special events and visitors from a range of cultural backgrounds.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. They are sometimes outstanding, but occasionally just satisfactory. Much of the teaching has strong features. Lessons are well planned and classes are extremely well managed. Most lessons engage pupils' interest very well. Pupils learn with calm enthusiasm. In the best cases, as in a Year 5 lesson on onomatopoeia where the teacher and children explored the subtleties of language with relish and sensitivity, pupils work briskly and very thoughtfully. Such lessons have both pace and depth. Pupils often expand the reasons for their answers by explaining 'because...'. Occasionally, pupils of high ability are insufficiently stretched. This occurs when learning aims are imprecise and the subsequent investigational work is rather shallow or sketchily reported. Pupils' very good behaviour and their positive attitudes to learning make a considerable contribution to their solid achievements. Trained teaching assistants give effective, encouraging support to pupils with learning difficulties or those in the early stages of learning English. The school's procedures for assessing how well pupils are doing are good and marking is usually constructive and precise. The headteacher's monitoring of lessons provides clear information which is being used effectively to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The school's climate for learning is very good.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. Well planned activities provide pupils with a broad range of experiences and cultures. These underpin pupils' good achievement and enable them to enhance their linguistic and numerical skills across all subjects. Pupils' understanding of how to keep safe and healthy is carefully promoted both in lessons and in the many additional sporting activities. The curriculum is enriched through many clubs, visits and themed events. There is good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and firm plans to increase the provision for able and gifted pupils. The school is substantially raising the impact of the creative arts by, for example, the use of trained learning assistants. The considerable support given by the local authority, church and external agencies makes a significant contribution to pupils' good achievement.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support provided for pupils are outstanding. Well established routines create a very orderly community in which pupils feel safe. Pupils feel that they are well cared for and that there is always someone to whom they can turn, if they experience difficulties. Procedures for child protection are robust. Risk assessment and health and safety routines are fully in place. Carefully planned induction procedures help children to settle happily into new routines. Year 6 pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. There are very good links with a range of external agencies that support pupils' health, safety and welfare. The school offers an outstanding level of personal guidance and support that enhances pupils' academic progress. Suitable additional support is provided for those who need it.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. They very successfully focus on raising standards and promoting the personal development and well-being of pupils. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. She has created a clear vision and a common sense of purpose and teamwork, setting high expectations for both pupils and staff. She is very well supported by the deputy headteacher, the senior management team and governors in her determination to make St Thomas's into an outstanding school. The school examines its performance thoroughly through a systematic programme of self-review. There is a clear, accurate understanding of what needs to be done to improve. The headteacher has refocused the role of middle managers and subject leaders so that all are now responsible for promoting academic achievement, a widely welcomed move. Staff now require the time to evaluate and improve their subjects across the school. The governing body, very ably led by a highly experienced chair, is both supportive and challenging. It is prepared to take difficult decisions, where necessary. It takes great care over the recruitment of staff and has robust vetting procedures for all staff who work with children. There is a strong commitment to the wellbeing and progress

of every child. Approaches to financial management are carefully targeted on appropriate educational priorities, such as the upgrading of some obsolete computers. Accommodation is good. Resources are used well to improve pupils' learning – as shown, for example, by the skilful use of interactive whiteboards. Good links exist with a variety of partners and outside agencies to support the work of the school.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
--	-----------------------	--------------

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?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	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	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?	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?	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

7 June 2006 Dear Pupils During our recent visit, we very much enjoyed talking with you and seeing your work. You told us how much you like your school. St Thomas Aquinas is a good school. Some things are outstanding. We hope that you enjoy reading what we especially like about your school:

- You make good progress during your time in school.
- You achieve well, because you work hard, want to do well and enjoy school.
- Teaching is good and you have interesting lessons.
- Staff make sure that your school is a very safe, happy and friendly place.
- You are very pleasant and polite. You behave very well and attend regularly.
- You are proud to be pupils here.

There are very few things that can be better:

- Sometimes you, and especially the most able amongst you, are not asked to think and investigate especially the most able amongst you to think or investigate deeply enough in lessons.
- Some teachers need a little more time and practice at leading subjects.

We hope that you continue to work hard and to enjoy your time in school. Yours sincerely

Dr David Biltcliffe Lead Inspector

Alexandra House 33 Kingsway London WC2B 6SE T 0207 421 6800 F 0207 421 6707
www.ofsted.gov.uk