



St Thomas' Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124365
LEA Staffordshire
Inspection number 281704
Inspection dates 4 July 2006 to 5 July 2006
Reporting inspector Jacqueline Marshall AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Parklands Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Tean
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST10 4DS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01538 722378
Number on roll	214	Fax number	01538 722378
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Father A. Sandy Brown
Date of previous inspection	4 December 2000	Headteacher	Mr A Wretham

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
4 to 11	4 July 2006 - 5 July 2006	281704

© 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' is an average-sized Catholic primary school. The school is popular and currently oversubscribed. Attainment on entry to the school is below the expected levels for pupils of the same age. A below-average proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below the national average overall. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.

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' is a good, caring school that provides an effective education for its pupils. The school and the parents agree. Pupils enjoy coming to school, their behaviour is good and at times exemplary, and these aspects of personal development, along with their caring attitudes to one another, contribute significantly to their achievements. Outstanding links with the secondary school and a strong partnership with parents are key factors in developing pupils' positive attitudes towards life-long learning.

Provision in the Reception class is good and means children get off to a solid start in their learning from below-average starting points. By the time they reach Year 1 they are reaching the expected levels for their age. When they leave school at eleven they reach above-average standards overall and well above average in English. All groups of pupils make good progress because teaching overall is good. Assessment is increasingly used by all teachers to plan work that is well matched to all children's needs, though occasionally this could be used more effectively to provide greater challenge. Whilst teachers generally give good support and guidance to help pupils know what to do next to improve, this is not always consistent.

Leadership and management of the school are good. As a result of the strong leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher, all leaders, as well as governors, have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result the school has made good progress since the last inspection and has a good capacity to improve further. The school gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to raise standards by using assessment more consistently to check how well pupils are doing and to plan lessons that challenge all pupils.
- Continue to raise achievement through a more consistent approach to marking so that pupils always know exactly what they need to do next in their learning to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All pupils achieve well during their time at the school. Children's skills and knowledge as they enter school are below the levels expected for their age, particularly so in their language skills. They make good progress in the Reception class so that most are in line with national expectations by the start of Year 1. Overall, as a result of good teaching and increasingly effective checks on pupils' progress, all groups, regardless of their background or learning difficulties and disabilities, achieve well during their time in the school. This demonstrates a good improvement in the progress made by pupils since the last inspection. Pupils are currently on track to meet the school's challenging targets.

Good teaching in Year 1 and particularly Year 2 ensures that pupils achieve well and reached standards above average by the end of Year 2 in 2005. Standards in writing by the end of Year 2, and the progress pupils make to reach these, are being maintained at well-above-expected levels nationally as a result of the school's focus on writing in particular. By the time pupils leave the school at eleven they have continued to make good progress to reach above-average standards in mathematics and science and well-above-average standards in English.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. This is reflected in pupils' enjoyment of the school, their positive attitudes, their politeness and their good and sometimes exemplary behaviour. Right from the start in the reception class they quickly learn to share, take turns and help one another because of the school's focus on developing these skills. Pupils enjoy taking responsibility such as being 'playground buddies' and are proud to have an impact on the life of the school by being members of their school council.

Pupils behave safely, for example, by protecting themselves from the heatwave experienced during the inspection. They have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle, with many involved in a wide range of after-school activities, including sports. They gain a sound economic understanding through the development of their basic skills and involvement in fundraising for local and national charities. Attendance is no better than the national average as it is adversely affected by the significant minority of families who take term-time holidays.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Pupils enjoy lessons and behaviour is good and sometimes better because they have excellent relationships with adults and find the work interesting. Where teaching and learning are best, teachers regularly share with pupils what they need to do next to improve and activities are carefully planned to motivate and engage them. Pupils say learning in these lessons is 'really fun', such as making learning about fractions practical using coloured Smarties.

Teachers are good at asking questions that encourage pupils to think about their learning and give reasons for their answers. Whilst they effectively plan activities for pupils' differing needs, lessons occasionally lack some of the pace and good progress that characterise the best practice. This is because some teachers do not always make enough use of assessment and pupil targets to consistently plan lessons that are challenging enough. The quality of marking is mostly good, though sometimes it is not clear to pupils how they can improve their work. Staff are increasingly using

information and communication technology (ICT) effectively to enhance learning and motivate pupils further.

Teaching assistants effectively support learning of individuals or groups because they know the needs of pupils and adapt their approaches accordingly. Parents are actively encouraged to become involved and support their children's learning through schemes such as the Family Learning Project and other workshops. They especially appreciate these opportunities and have great fun alongside their children making wheeled vehicles and 'Story Sacks' for different classes to use.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good, well-planned curriculum that is enriched exceptionally well. Pupils benefit from an extremely wide range of out-of-school activities, many of them sporting and musical. Exciting opportunities to perform in concerts, such as 'Oliver', together with a wealth of visitors and visits, including the annual residential visit, bring the curriculum alive and add to pupils' enjoyment of the school. Personal, social and health education very effectively supports pupils' overall development.

There is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Provision for ICT is satisfactory and the school recognises the need to further develop pupils' ICT skills. Specialist teaching in music, physical education and modern foreign languages enhances pupils' learning well, and in physical education it helps to overcome some of the limitations caused by the cramped hall. Children in the Reception class benefit from a lively and well-planned curriculum, though the current development of the outdoor play area is rightly seen as a potentially rich resource to further children's achievement across all areas of learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. This is a caring school which welcomes all children, whatever their needs. This is a view held by the overwhelming majority of pupils and parents, one parent writing that 'all the staff do a wonderful job caring for our children'. Child protection and health and safety procedures are well understood and any pupils who are at risk are quickly identified and supported well. Pupils say that relationships within the school are good, that they know who to turn to if necessary and are clear that any incident will be dealt with promptly and effectively. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is well planned and outside agencies and parents are involved effectively. An outstanding programme of activities for pupils in Year 6 is extremely helpful in making their move to their secondary school a smooth one.

The school has introduced effective procedures to track pupils' progress more carefully through each year. Though information gained is used well by some teachers in order to provide pupils with challenging targets and when planning further work this is not yet consistent practise across the school. Whilst marking is good overall, some teachers' marking is less effective than others'. The school is aware of the need to develop more

opportunities to involve pupils in checking how well they are doing and knowing the next steps in their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management at all levels are good and have successfully maintained and built upon the school's overall effectiveness since the last inspection. All leaders, staff, pupils and parents share the head's clear vision of a school that is constantly striving to improve and where every child is important. The headteacher encourages a strong ethos of teamwork within the school and as a result there is a clear, shared understanding of the school's overall effectiveness. The leaders know what is needed to take the school forward because they have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses through good self-evaluation. They have clearly demonstrated a good capacity to help the school improve further, for example, the improvement in younger pupils' standards and achievement since the last inspection. Through regular checks leaders have maintained and improved the quality of teaching, though they need to sharpen their focus to ensure greater consistency across the school.

The governing body is also contributing effectively to this success. Governors are caring, supportive and active in school. They are fully involved in all major decisions and fulfil their responsibilities well. The school regularly seeks and takes into account the views of parents and other stakeholders.

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?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	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 talking to us and showing us your work when we visited your school. We would have liked to have had more chance to talk to the Year 6 children but are glad you really enjoyed the days at your secondary school. We can see how much you are looking forward to starting in September. We are pleased to hear that you really like school and that the grown-ups are very kind and look after you well. We think that they are good at helping you to know just what you have to do to keep safe and healthy. We were happy to hear that there are plenty of things for you to enjoy at playtimes and extremely exciting things to take part in, such as the large number of visits and visitors, a wide range of clubs and the many different musical performances and opportunities you have to perform yourselves. We think you are very polite to adults and behave well in and around your school!

In order to make your learning even better, we have asked the adults at your school to:

- make sure you are always given lots of opportunities that stretch you to do your very best
- make sure that teachers are consistently helping you to know what you need to do to improve your work.

Thank you again for helping us with our work.