

Inspection report
St Thomas Garnet's School
Independent school
DfES ref no: 837/6004

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 20 – 21 June 2006

Introduction

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 as part of pilot inspection arrangements in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

St Thomas Garnet's is a non-selective independent Catholic school for boys and girls with pre-school kindergarten provision. It is situated in Boscombe, a suburb of Bournemouth. There are 124 full time and 36 part time pupils on roll, aged between 3 months and 11 years. Around a fifth of these pupils have English as an additional language (EAL). Within the kindergarten, 46 pupils are funded under the nursery scheme. The education and care of children in the kindergarten was subject to a separate but simultaneous inspection. Around half the school's pupils are Catholic; the remainder are from other Christian denominations or other faiths. The school is maintained by a charitable trust.

Overall evaluation of the school

A parent noted: 'This school has brought out the best in our child, academically and personally.' This is indeed a good school which has some outstanding features; parents value it highly, and they are right to do so. Relationships between parents and staff, and pupils and staff are excellent. Pupils make good progress and attain high standards by the time they leave the school, although, in mathematics, higher attaining pupils could be stretched further. Provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school is generally well organised, but, in some classrooms, teachers do not make the very best use of resources and displays to stimulate pupils' interest in learning.

The work of this successful school is underpinned by its committed and hardworking headteacher. The school meets nearly all the regulations.

Quality of education

Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good. It is broad, balanced and follows the National Curriculum. Long, medium and short term plans, schemes of work and lesson plans are well-considered, relevant and thorough.

The Foundation Stage curriculum covers all areas of learning. Staff plan interesting and stimulating activities in line with current themes, for example 'Our senses'. Observations to assess pupils' development and progress are completed on a regular basis. The outcomes are used to plan the next steps necessary to ensure further progress.

Across the school, there is good provision for basic skills and all pupils, including those with EAL, make good progress and achieve well. Good provision is also made for pupils identified as having learning difficulties, and work is well-designed to meet their needs. Provision for music, drama and dance is very good, and individual pupils and whole-school groups achieve high standards in examinations and competitions, particularly in music.

A broader curriculum, which supports preparation for life outside and beyond school, is provided indirectly through lessons, assemblies and enrichment activities. For example, during the inspection, as part of the citizenship curriculum, the local community police officer visited the older pupils to talk to them about crime prevention. Pupils were very engaged by the discussion which followed on ways they can protect themselves and their property. However, there is no cohesive curriculum or scheme of work for personal, social and health education.

Teaching and assessment

Pupils enjoy the teaching they receive and are proud of the work they produce. Teaching is good throughout the school; this is the prime reason why pupils make good progress. From the moment they join the school, pupils' skills of independence are successfully developed by staff. Thus, in each classroom, there are very good learning protocols and time during each lesson is used wisely. Pupils are productive; their concentration is excellent. Teachers have good subject knowledge and they use this effectively to keep pupils interested and engaged in the matter in hand. They generally have high expectations of behaviour so pupils listen attentively and learn new concepts quickly. Teachers' skills of assessment in the classroom are good. In the best lessons, teachers targeted questions to groups or individuals to ensure that pupils of all abilities were stretched and motivated. In such lessons, teachers built on any misconceptions to ensure that pupils reached full understanding. In some classrooms there is insufficient consideration given to the effective use of resources and displays to stimulate and support pupils' learning.

Pupils' progress and achievement

Pupils make good progress as they move through the school and thus attain high standards by the time they are eleven. Standards in reading are very high. Pupils' creative writing is very strong, but the picture in other writing genres is less positive. The school acknowledges this, and, as a result, has started to broaden the range of writing genres it teaches. Throughout the school, the performance of higher attaining pupils in mathematics is not as strong as might be expected, because these pupils are not stretched as fully as they might be during lessons. Nevertheless, a large majority of pupils each year gain bursaries to independent schools or pass the eleven plus examination to secure a place at a local grammar school.

Personal development

Personal development is good overall. Provision for pupils' spiritual and moral development is outstanding. Social development is good and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils have very good opportunities to be reflective during religious education lessons, assemblies and prayer. Staff act as excellent role models for pupils' moral development, not only through the examples they set, but also by encouraging pupils to make appropriate choices and take responsibility for their actions. As a consequence, pupils develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence effectively while they are at the school.

Relationships between staff and pupils are outstandingly good. Pupils behave very well, with a maturity that often belies their ages. They show politeness and courtesy to staff, visitors and each other. The pupils' positive attitudes and behaviour are a direct result of the high expectations of the staff. However, more opportunities could be offered whereby pupils are encouraged to become more involved in decision making in the school, for example through the establishment of a school council.

The range of activities offered both within and outside school makes a positive contribution to pupils' social and cultural development. They participate in fund-raising activities for a variety of charities, including supporting school-children in Ghana. Opportunities for pupils' cultural development are satisfactory overall and relevant to the subjects of the curriculum. For example, pupils experience life as it was in a Victorian school during a visit to a local 'living history' museum and there are good links for sporting activities with local colleges and the university. However there is less emphasis on pupils' preparation for life in a diverse community.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is outstanding. Staff safeguard and protect the pupils very effectively. Health and safety risks to pupils are minimised. The school has carried out an exemplary audit of the premises as required by the Disability Discrimination Act, and drawn up a thorough action plan.

All staff undertake their responsibilities thoroughly in relation to pupils' welfare, health and safety. Policies are comprehensive and include procedures for child protection, anti-bullying strategies, health and safety issues, fire safety, and educational visits. Fire safety precautions are carried out regularly, and systematically recorded. Arrangements for the registration of admissions and attendance are excellent.

The school makes a good contribution to pupils' well-being. There is a healthy-eating programme and staff take steps to encourage pupils to consider what they eat and make healthy choices. The school has recently removed its snack vending machine.

Organisation of the school

The school is well organised. Meticulous checks are carried out on staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with children, including checks with the Criminal Records Bureau. The school premises, although a little old-fashioned looking in places, are suitable for purpose. The school is clean, well-lit and properly ventilated. Hot water runs only intermittently to some washbasins, and does not run at all to others. This needs urgent attention.

A very good level of information is provided to parents, both in the school prospectus and on request. The parents' association also produce 'Garnet's Gazette' each term, a high quality, interesting and informative newsletter. Reports to parents are produced twice a year. The summer report includes for parents the national curriculum levels attained by their child in English and mathematics, as well as giving parents a clear picture of their child's achievements in other curriculum subjects. The school complaints procedure is very thorough and is well understood by the great majority of parents.

What the school must do to comply with regulations

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- provide personal, social and health education which reflects its aims and ethos (paragraph 1(2)(f))
- provide hot water not exceeding 43 degrees centigrade to all handbasins (paragraph 5(a))
- publish details of the school's policy on and arrangements for discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e))
- publish particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements and for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2) (f)).

What the school could do to improve further

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- further stretch higher attaining pupils in mathematics
- improve the use of resources and displays in some areas so these make a greater impact on pupils' learning.

School details

Name of school:	St Thomas Garnet's School
DfES Number:	837/6004
Type of school:	Primary with pre-school provision
Status:	Independent
Date school opened:	1 September 1979
Age range of pupils:	0 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll :	Boys: 84 Girls: 76 Total: 160
Annual fees (day pupils):	£4,050 - £5,160
Address of school:	28 Parkwood Road Boscombe Bournemouth Dorset BH5 2BH
Telephone number:	01202 420172
Fax number:	01202 773060
Email address:	GARNET_S_EDU@msn.com
Headteacher:	Mr Paul Gillings
Proprietor:	St Thomas Garnet's School Association Ltd
Reporting Inspector:	Bradley Simmons HMI
Dates of inspection:	20 - 21 June 2006

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