



St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103441
Local Authority Birmingham
Inspection number 286661
Inspection dates 23–24 January 2007
Reporting inspector John Eadie

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Horse Shoes Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Sheldon
Age range of pupils	4–11		Birmingham B26 3HU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 7433289
Number on roll (school)	290	Fax number	0121 7222179
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Jim Harris
		Headteacher	Susan Collins
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves the local parish and community. The area is mixed and there is no significant deprivation. Most pupils are White British, the majority of the remainder being of Irish heritage. There are a few pupils from a range of other ethnic backgrounds. A small and increasing number do not speak English at home. The school is very involved in the local community, for example hosting a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) course for adults. There have been a number of changes to staffing in the last couple of years. The headteacher took up her post in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils and is improving. Parents recognise that the school is developing and comment, for example, that, 'New systems have improved things enormously.' Pupils also appreciate the changes, particularly that behaviour has recently got better. This has happened because of very effective initiatives, such as the merit system introduced since September 2006. These rewards for pupils are also much appreciated by parents, with comments such as, 'The merit system works really well and motivates children.'

The leadership team is very successfully building on developments already started. For example, improvements made in mathematics in the national tests in 2006 in Year 2 are now being carried through to Years 3 to 6. Even though standards and progress in mathematics are not as strong as those in English and science, standards are above average overall by the time pupils leave. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and they are making sound progress through the school. A notable exception to this is in the Reception classes, where children are making good progress due to the good range of activities planned for them. Standards by the end of the Reception Year are above the level expected.

One of the major strengths of the school is the standard of pupils' personal development and well-being. This is outstanding and the result of excellent pastoral care provided by all adults. Pupils are unfailingly cheerful, charming and considerate, following the admirable example set by staff, and the school's Catholic ethos is very much in evidence. Care, guidance and support are good overall; academic care and guidance are satisfactory. Systems are in place to measure the progress pupils make. However, these are not used consistently to set clear targets for pupils to enable them to know what they need to work on to improve their performance.

Pupils really enjoy coming to school and particularly appreciate the way that teachers make their lessons interesting. 'Lessons are fun' is a typical comment. Teaching is satisfactory overall and pupils' learning is satisfactory. This is because teachers do not always provide a wide enough range of work to challenge the breadth of abilities in their classes. One of the reasons for lessons being enjoyable is that the curriculum is good. A great deal of thought has been put into adapting the curriculum, for example to cope with mixed age classes. Good links have been established with other providers that offer further support for pupils' learning. A notable feature is the NVQ course. This results in adult students gaining placements in the school. Parents note that this extra support is enabling pupils to make better progress in their reading, for example.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The recent pace of progress is rapid. The headteacher, very ably supported by the deputy headteacher, has made a really good start at improving provision and pupils' progress. The impact is now beginning to be seen, however other managers are not fully involved. For example, subject co-ordinators are only just beginning to be engaged in checking on standards and pupils' progress in their subjects. Despite this, there is a very obvious shared desire to take the school forward and the school is well placed to continue on its upward path.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' progress and standards in mathematics.
- Ensure that teachers provide a wide enough range of work to challenge pupils of all abilities in their classes.
- Use the recently introduced systems for measuring pupils' progress to set clear targets to help pupils to improve their performance.
- Strengthen the role of middle managers in monitoring and evaluating standards and pupils' progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and they reach above average standards by the end of Year 6. Standards and progress are better in English and science than in mathematics.

Children start in the Reception classes with levels of skills and knowledge a little below those expected for their age, particularly in their language development. They make good progress in all areas of learning, reaching standards above those expected by the time they start in Year 1. However, their standards in some aspects of literacy are not quite as good as in other areas. In Years 1 and 2, progress is satisfactory and standards are above average at the end of Year 2. Progress in Years 3 to 6 has been affected by the staffing difficulties, but is now satisfactory and improving, particularly in Years 5 and 6.

Progress in mathematics has been unsatisfactory through the school in recent years. However, the school analysed its provision, identified weaknesses and put in place effective strategies which have improved the outcomes for pupils. These strategies have led to improved standards at the end of Year 2. They have also improved progress in Years 3 to 6, bringing it up to a satisfactory level.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, though pupils' awareness of their role in a multicultural society is not as strong as their knowledge of other world cultures. The school's strong moral code is enforced by all adults and pupils' behaviour is excellent as a result.

Attendance has steadily improved and is now in line with national averages. Pupils get on very well with one another and they report that teachers are caring and helpful. They play safely and heed safety precautions very carefully. Pupils are well aware of the benefits of healthy food and taking regular exercise. The salad bar at lunchtime and the wide range of sporting activities are very popular.

Pupils make a strong contribution to the community. This is especially so in their fund raising to support children in other parts of the world and in their care for each other. Older pupils thoroughly enjoy taking responsibility for younger children, for instance

at lunchtime. Pupils develop good financial habits, particularly through use of the school bank. However, their development of basic skills, such as in numeracy, is satisfactory, resulting in preparation for their future lives being good overall rather than outstanding.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Although teachers meet most pupils' needs most of the time, they do not always plan sufficiently for the differing abilities, particularly in mathematics. This limits the progress pupils make, preventing it from being better than satisfactory. Children's good attitudes to learning are very well promoted in the Reception class and throughout the school relationships are excellent. Teachers' behaviour management skills are very good. Hence, there is a purposeful working atmosphere in classrooms. Teaching assistants aid pupils' progress very effectively.

Teachers make sure that pupils understand the aims of learning, and that they are clear about what they have achieved in lessons. However, introductions to lessons are often too long. This can result in pupils becoming restless and reduces the time for them to complete their tasks. The worksheets given to pupils are sometimes too complicated and confusing for pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is planned well to provide a broad range of interesting learning opportunities that capture pupils' attention. The initiative to spend longer periods on subjects is successful, enabling pupils to make links between subjects and to apply literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. The curriculum is carefully planned to meet the needs of mixed age classes.

Through the varied focus weeks, creativity and enjoyment are high on the agenda and add much to pupils' enthusiasm for school. The curriculum is enriched by many worthwhile visits to interesting places and visitors, for example a children's author. This broadens the scope of pupils' learning. Parents have good opportunities to be involved in their children's education, for example working in classrooms with their children on 'Inspire Days'.

The arrangements for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are effective in building up their skills and confidence, enabling them to achieve in line with their peers. Good support is also provided for the small number of pupils who do not speak English at home. Whilst much has been done to ensure that pupils' work is closely tailored to their needs, still more work is necessary. For example, initiatives to support gifted and talented pupils are at an early stage of development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The strengths in the personal care and support for pupils are substantial and contribute significantly to their excellent personal development. The school provides a very happy and safe environment in which to work and play. Thorough procedures for child protection and health and safety are in place. All pupils are well known to staff who provide excellent personal support where it is needed.. Pupils' work and progress are regularly assessed, but the data gained is not always used well enough. Pupils are not given really clear targets to guide them in improving their performance. Marking of pupils' work is regular, but rarely gives pupils advice about how they can improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and deputy headteachers' rigorous evaluation of the work of the school is a particular strength. It leads to carefully planned training for staff to address weaknesses. Senior leaders have accurately pinpointed the right priorities, and provide clear vision for improvement. There is a strong sense of the school moving forwards. The work on improving rewards and sanctions, for example, has resulted in pupils' outstanding behaviour in lessons. Much has been done to enhance the internal decoration and displays, giving real value to pupils' work and promoting their self-esteem. Staff share the new direction and purpose, set by senior leaders, for improving pupils' progress, particularly in mathematics.

Subject leadership is satisfactory. Subject leaders' involvement in monitoring teaching, learning and standards in their subjects is recognised by the school as needing further improvement. The school actively seeks the views of parents and pupils and takes these into account, for example, recently reviewing school uniform. Governors are enthusiastic, committed and carry out their responsibilities satisfactorily. Their role in finding out about the curriculum and pupils' progress is not sufficiently developed.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you so much for welcoming us so warmly when we visited your school this week. We really enjoyed meeting and talking with many of you. Thank you for telling us how proud you are of your school and how much you enjoy it. You told us that it is improving quickly and we agree. Your school is providing a satisfactory education for you.

Here are the things that are best about your school:

- You behave exceptionally well and you are very polite and welcoming to visitors.
- You really enjoy your lessons because teachers make them fun and lots of thought has gone into planning interesting things, such as visits.
- All adults take great care to make sure that you are kept safe and happy.
- Lots of important things are improving. This is because your headteacher, deputy headteacher and other staff have made good plans to make this happen.

These are the things that your school needs to improve:

- The standards you reach and the progress you make in mathematics so that they are as good as your standards and progress in English and science.
- How well work you are given in lessons is matched to your particular abilities.
- The targets set to help you to know how you can improve your work.
- How well the teachers are involved in checking on standards and the progress you are making.

Keep up the good work and best wishes.