

St Thomas Catholic Primary

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112903
Local Authority	DERBYSHIRE
Inspection number	289457
Inspection date	14 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Ian Nelson

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	254
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Maurice Ward
Headteacher	Mr Michael Geraghty
Date of previous school inspection	20 January 2003
School address	Church View Allendale Ilkeston Derbyshire DE7 4LF
Telephone number	0115 932 0550
Fax number	0115 932 0550

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector over one day.

Description of the school

This is an average sized Roman Catholic primary school serving the large parish of Our Lady and St Thomas of Hereford in Ilkeston. Nearly all the children are White British with very few from other backgrounds. Only a few children take free school meals. The number of children identified as needing extra support is below average but around a third of those have statements of special educational need. The headteacher has been in post since September 2006 and there is an acting deputy headteacher. When children start school in the Reception class they generally have the skills and knowledge expected of their age.

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 gives good value for money. This is how the school views itself and how the children and their parents see it. Nearly all the parents returned the inspection questionnaire confirming their overwhelmingly positive views of the school, and around 10% of them wrote positive comments such as, 'I am happy with every aspect of the school'.

One parent got to the heart of the school's success in saying, 'The most impressive aspect is the school's ethos'. This ensures that good care, guidance and support underpin all that the school does. As a result of excellent pastoral care children feel safe and well cared for so that their personal development is outstanding. Children relish the opportunities to take responsibility and contribute to the school's success. For example, there are plenty of jobs for older children, like helping to put out play equipment and supervise younger ones at break times. But even Reception children are proud to receive 'helping hands' stickers for tidying up at the end of lessons. School councillors proudly reel off an impressive list of their achievements including having toilets improved, water coolers installed and fruit at break times.

Good guidance on how well they are doing in their learning ensures that children know what levels they are working towards and what they need to do to succeed. They know what targets their teachers have set them and when they have reached them but they are not involved enough yet in evaluating their own progress and setting themselves targets. Because teachers keep a close check on how well children are doing they are able to provide extra support to anyone who looks like falling behind in their work, as well as encouragement to those who are doing particularly well. As a result, those who need extra help get effective support and achieve well. A good range of learning activities motivates children and, combined with good teaching, ensures that achievement is good. Children get off to a cracking start in Reception where they make excellent progress with most reaching, and many exceeding, the levels expected of their age by the time they enter Year 1. They continue to make good progress throughout the school so that standards are consistently well above average, and often exceptionally high by the end of Year 6. However, while standards in mathematics have been exceptionally high for the last five years, those in English have fluctuated at times because writing has not been as strong as reading. This is partly because teachers miss opportunities to extend writing creatively through other subjects.

The school's success comes down to good leadership and management that have established the strong caring ethos of high expectations. A parent wrote, 'The teachers and teaching assistants are committed, hardworking, cheerful and approachable'. Senior staff and governors know their school well. They have successfully addressed the issues from the last inspection as well as making other improvements, such as the introduction of interactive white boards, a wide range of after school clubs and the formation of an active school council. This is a successful school well placed to improve even further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop more opportunities for children to write creatively in a range of subjects.
- Give children more opportunities to evaluate how well they are doing and to set themselves targets for improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Children make outstanding progress in Reception because they have an excellent range of learning activities and adult support. By the end of Year 2 standards are exceptionally high in reading, writing and mathematics. This is due to the outstanding start children have in Reception, excellent teaching at Year 2 and the close collaboration between teachers in that part of the school. Standards by the end of Year 6 are never less than well above average and are often exceptionally high, but there have been differences between subjects. Mathematics and science have benefited from excellent links with the secondary school where specialist staff have taught at St Thomas. The school is currently working to develop similar links with the English department to help tackle the differences between children's achievement in reading and writing. The current Year 6 pupils are on track to reach exceptionally high standards in English and mathematics and above average standards in science this year and to reach the school's challenging targets. These good results give children an excellent preparation for adult life.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children's personal development, including their spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding. Their cultural development is good. While they learn about a range of religions in lessons, there are limited opportunities for them to experience the diversity of cultures represented within British society. Children's behaviour is exemplary. They are exceedingly polite and courteous. As a result no time is lost in maintaining discipline in lessons or around the school. The children say, 'There is no bullying. People have the odd fall out but it is never major'. They show a strong awareness of safety and the school council is proud of its involvement in the school travel plan that resulted in parking restrictions outside school. Children agree it is a healthy school. They have nutritious school lunches, including a salad bar, fruit for snacks, and water available all day. They also have plenty of physical education lessons and after school sports clubs which add to their great enjoyment of school. Very strong parish links ensure that children have a mature understanding of their place in, and responsibilities to, the wider community. This helps to promote harmony more widely than the school. As one parent put it, 'The children not only receive an excellent education but are also taught to be caring and respectful to others'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Children correctly say, 'Teaching is really good so children enjoy school'. At times teaching is outstanding but there is still some teaching that is only satisfactory, where the pace of lessons slows a little. Teachers know their subjects well and make effective use of interactive whiteboards to capture and hold children's attention. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to children's learning and help to ensure that those of different abilities get the support and encouragement they need to succeed. Practical activities such as the use of drama and role play bring enjoyment to learning as was seen in a literacy lesson with Year 2. Children say that

teachers tell them what their targets are and how well they have done in their work towards reaching them. They appreciate the high expectations teachers have of them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. The school provides a good range of activities to help children to learn and make good progress. Children in Reception get a particularly rich diet of activities and adult support to ensure they get an excellent start to their school life. The school council requested more educational trips and the school is extending the range on offer after seeking the views of parents. Children are particularly positive about the extensive range of after-school clubs that encourage them to take part in sporting and creative pursuits. Parents share their enthusiasm with one writing, 'The introduction of the after-school clubs has given my children new skills, great enjoyment and more confidence'. Although teachers are finding ways to link subjects there is still more that could be done to help children to practise skills from one subject through activities in others.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The school's Catholic ethos underpins all its work and ensures excellent pastoral care. Children are supported and given confidence. All the required checks to ensure children's safety and well-being are in place. Parents praise the way the staff go out of their way to help children to settle into Reception. The school ensures good achievement by checking regularly how well children are doing, setting them targets to aspire to and supporting them in reaching them. Those who find learning hard are identified early and given particularly good support. Although children are sometimes involved in evaluating each others' work there are too few opportunities for them to say how well they think they have done themselves and what their next targets might be.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. A strength is the shared commitment to continuous school improvement based upon rigorous systems for checking how well the school is doing. The governing body includes a core of experienced governors, who are fully conversant with the information on the school's performance and confident to ask challenging questions. There are also some new governors who are highly committed but who lack experience and are still learning the ropes. The headteacher has been in post for only a short time and is building effectively on the school's strengths. Senior staff have an accurate view of how well their areas of responsibility are performing but rely on the headteacher for the analysis of national test results and for the direct observations of lessons. They do gain a good view of how well their subjects are doing by looking at children's work and teaching other classes. Although two or three parents suggested in the inspection questionnaires that the school did not consult with them effectively enough, others were happy to be asked their views through school questionnaires.

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Annex A

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

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	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

15 March 2007

Dear Children

St Thomas Catholic Primary School, Church View, Allendale, Ilkeston, Derbyshire, DE7 4LF

You may remember that I came to visit your school a short while ago. I promised to write and tell you what I found out about your school. One thing I found is that you all know how to make visitors welcome so thank you for looking after me so well.

You are lucky to go to such a good school. That is what your parents and several of you told me and I agree with you. What makes your school particularly good is the way the staff care for you. This helps you to feel safe and happy in school. Lessons are good because teachers give you interesting things to do. They also arrange lots of clubs after school. As a result you work hard and do well in your learning.

Your behaviour is excellent. You take care of each other exceptionally well. Your school council does a great job of telling staff what you think about how the school could be even better. You know how to stay healthy and have lovely school dinners and do lots of physical education.

Although your school is good there are a couple of things that I have asked the teachers to do to make it even better. I have asked them to find more ways for you to practise writing in different subjects so that your writing becomes as good as your reading. I have also asked them to encourage you to say how well you think you have done in your work and to suggest what your next targets might be more often.

I did enjoy my day at your school. I am sure that with your excellent behaviour and hard work it will continue to get better and better.

Ian Nelson

Lead Inspector