

St Thomas a Becket Catholic Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114577
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	289979
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Barron

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	180
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John McManus
Headteacher	Ruth Jones
Date of previous school inspection	17 June 2002
School address	3 Tutts Barn Lane Eastbourne BN22 8XT
Telephone number	01323 726004
Fax number	01323 733634

Age group	4-7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Thomas à Becket is a smaller than average Catholic infant school. The number of pupils who have a first language other than English has increased in recent years. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. The present acting headteacher took up her duties at Easter 2006.

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 with a welcoming and inclusive Catholic ethos. It provides a good education for its pupils and prepares them well for the next stage of their education.

Standards and achievement are good. Children often enter the school at the age of four with skills below those expected for their age, especially in terms of their social and language development. They make rapid progress during their first year because provision in the Foundation Stage is outstanding and lays a firm basis for their future development. Good teaching throughout the rest of the school ensures pupils make good progress so that by Year 2, standards are above average. However, more able pupils do not make the progress they are capable of in developing their writing skills and, as a result, standards in writing lag behind the standards they attain in reading and mathematics.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils are keen and eager to learn and describe the school as a happy and friendly place. As one pupil put it, 'I like everything about school.' Pupils try hard to do well and their enjoyment of school is outstanding. They have good attitudes and make sensible and healthy choices. They have a good community spirit and say they feel safe and secure. Whilst their spiritual development is good, their moral and social development is outstanding and is reflected in their excellent behaviour and the way they respect others. Pupils have a developing appreciation of their own culture but their understanding of the cultural diversity of modern British society is lacking.

The quality of teaching and learning is good and teachers and teaching assistants work well together to ensure pupils requiring extra help are supported well. The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced and enhanced by a range of activities that further develop pupils' skills and their enjoyment of learning. Procedures for care, guidance and support are good and contribute well to pupils' sense of well-being. The school has developed good systems to check how well individual pupils are doing and uses these effectively to raise achievement. However, although the quality of teachers' marking is often good there are occasions when marking does not always provide pupils with ideas about how to improve their work.

Leadership and management are good and the school has a good capacity to improve. The acting headteacher and staff have displayed the drive and determination to ensure the school has increased its effectiveness by continually evaluating its performance and implementing successful strategies aimed at raising achievement. Whilst a small number of governors are involved effectively in the life of the school, the governing body is still in the process of developing its role of monitoring the curriculum and is only just beginning to offer challenge and support to the school.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children achieve outstandingly during their first year because of the outstanding quality of education provided for them in the Foundation Stage. Adults ensure that activities provided for children contain an excellent balance of more formal work and learning through play. Parents are very pleased with the progress their children make. 'I couldn't wish for a better standard of teaching' being a typical comment. Classrooms are colourful, vibrant places and teachers work effectively with teaching assistants to ensure that learning is fun and that it meets the needs of individual children very well, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. Children

make rapid progress in developing their language and numeracy skills because learning is planned very carefully. Their awareness of the wider world is enhanced through a range of interesting visits and visitors to the school. Children are provided with good opportunities to develop their social and personal skills and quickly learn to share things and take turns when playing with others. By the time they enter Year 1, nearly all reach the expected standards for their age in all areas of learning and several often exceed the nationally agreed learning goals.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure more able pupils are consistently provided with work which enables them to make the gains they are capable of in developing their writing skills.
- Strengthen the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that the governing body consistently offers a realistic level of challenge and support to the school.
- Improve pupils' understanding of the customs and traditions of people living in this country who are from different cultural backgrounds than their own.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

After the rapid progress in the Foundation Stage, pupils then make good progress in all other year groups because of good teaching and a curriculum that meets their needs well. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and also the increasing number of pupils whose first language is not English, make the same good progress as other pupils because of the targeted support they consistently receive, especially from dedicated and effective teaching assistants.

Standards in Year 2 are above average and this represents good achievement for this group of pupils who are on course to reach the challenging targets set for them in the national assessments. However, the school recognises the need to improve the achievement of more able pupils in writing and has developed a range of improvement strategies focusing on this area.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils really enjoy school although this is not reflected in their average rates of attendance because of the lower attendance rates of a small minority of pupils. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with outstanding features in moral and social development. This is reflected in pupils' outstanding behaviour and good attitudes to learning. However, their awareness of life in Britain as a multicultural society is not as well developed. Pupils are very friendly and polite and display a great deal of care for each other's welfare. They feel their teachers are very kind and pupils know there is always someone to turn to if they have a problem. Pupils say they feel safe and that adults deal quickly with any rare instances of unkind behaviour. They talk enthusiastically about the school's good links with the community, especially the local Catholic church, and about their fund raising for different charities. They display a growing awareness of the importance of keeping fit and making healthy choices, especially about what they eat. Pupils make good progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills in preparation for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching throughout the school is at its best in the Foundation Stage. It is good overall and caters well for the needs of pupils in both Year 1 and Year 2. Teachers use a variety of approaches to make learning interesting and enjoyable and to make sure pupils work hard. Lessons are well structured and teachers ensure that the activities pupils are set are usually appropriate to their learning needs. Teachers work effectively with other adults to ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and also pupils whose first language is not English, are well supported and make good progress as a result. However, there are occasions when more able pupils do not make the progress they are capable of, especially in developing their writing, because they are not consistently provided with sufficiently challenging work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage curriculum is outstanding. The curriculum throughout the rest of the school is well balanced and meets the needs and interests of pupils effectively. The school's topic-based approach to learning links subjects together well and enables pupils to make good progress in building up skills in literacy, numeracy, science and ICT. Good planning and provision for personal, social and health education ensure that pupils are aware of the importance of fitness and well-being. Pupils are encouraged to feel valued as individuals and show respect towards adults and towards each other. They talk enthusiastically about the wide range of interesting visitors to the school and their visits to places of interest, for example the local fire station, which help bring learning alive and provide pupils with an increasing understanding of life in the local community. The school also provides pupils with a range of extra-curricular activities, including choir and clay modelling clubs. However, pupils do not have regular opportunities to develop their appreciation and understanding of the multicultural nature of modern British society.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is a pleasant extended family atmosphere within the school which contributes well to pupils' sense of well-being and their outstanding enjoyment of learning. Parents appreciate the way the school cares for their children and pupils comment that they feel safe and well looked after. Good induction and transfer arrangements help pupils settle quickly into new routines and the growing number of pupils who have a first language other than English, as well as other pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are well supported. Pupils' health and well-being are securely safeguarded and child protection procedures meet requirements. The school has developed good procedures to track pupils' progress and set targets for improvement. These are used well in most classes and this is having a positive effect on raising standards and achievement. However, the quality of teachers' marking is variable and does not always provide pupils with effective guidance about how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The acting headteacher is a very effective leader with a clear vision for improving standards. She has created a common sense of purpose in her staff and ensured that they are committed to placing pupils' needs and equal opportunities at the heart of school life. Working well in partnership with her senior leadership team, she has ensured that the school has been realistic and thorough in analysing its performance and in implementing strategies aimed at successfully raising pupils' achievement.

There have been several changes to the membership of the governing body since the last inspection. However, the governing body is beginning to improve the way it monitors the curriculum but is only now beginning to offer a realistic level of challenge and support to the school.

The school works closely with parents and regularly seeks their views. Links with external agencies are good and support pupils' learning well, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Resources are good and used well to enhance learning.

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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

17 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas à Becket Voluntary Aided Catholic Infant School, Eastbourne, BN22 8XT

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. Everyone was really friendly and we soon realised why you like coming to school so much. We enjoyed talking to some of you about what you like the most about school and seeing you work hard in lessons.

- Here are some of the things we particularly like about your school:
- St Thomas à Becket Voluntary Aided Catholic Infant School is a good school which cares for its pupils well and makes sure that everyone is treated with equal respect.
- The standards you reach in Year 2 are above those in many infant schools. They show that you are taught well and that you make good progress.
- Your personal development is good and your enjoyment of school is outstanding.
- Your behaviour is also outstanding and you have a growing awareness of how to live healthily and safely.
- Children in the Reception classes get off to an excellent start and make outstanding progress.
- Your headteacher and her staff know how to make sure your school continues to improve in the future.

- We believe your headteacher and teachers can do something to make your school even better and we have asked them to:
 - Help the more able pupils make better progress and improve their writing skills.
 - Make sure that the governors become more involved in ensuring the school is doing the best it can for pupils.
 - Help you to gain a better understanding about the customs and traditions of people living in this country who are from different cultural backgrounds. You can help your school to get even better by continuing to work hard.

We wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Barron Lead inspector

17 January 2008

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Eastbourne, BN22 8XT**

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Yours sincerely

Michael Barron
Lead inspector