



St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115180
Local Authority THURROCK
Inspection number 290157
Inspection dates 28 February –1 March 2007
Reporting inspector Godfrey Bancroft

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Ward Avenue
School category	Voluntary aided		Grays
Age range of pupils	4–11		Essex RM17 5RW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01375375826
Number on roll (school)	624	Fax number	01375390572
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Father J McKeon
		Headteacher	Mr Christopher Birtles
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

The school is much larger than most other primary schools and is popular and over-subscribed. Pupils come from a diverse range of economic and social backgrounds. Overall, pupils' attainment on entry is lower than that expected for their age, although it often covers a wide range of abilities. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and the percentage who speak English as an additional language are above average and have risen significantly in recent years. The percentage of pupils who have additional learning needs or disabilities is broadly average. The school has been awarded the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school rightly evaluates its own performance as good. It is a school in which pupils feel safe, cared for well and enabled to do their best. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. As one pupil said, 'People here are friendly and kind'. The Reception classes provide children with a good start to their education. Pupils in Years 1 to 6 continue to make good progress and, by the time they leave, standards are broadly average. However, progress in English is very good and standards are above average. This is because teaching and learning are good. Teachers are particularly effective at promoting improvements in pupils' speaking and listening and in their reading. Standards in mathematics lag behind those in English and fewer pupils attain the higher levels in this subject. This is because some essential mathematical strategies are not consolidated at an early enough stage.

The curriculum is good. It provides pupils with an interesting range of learning opportunities and is part of the reason why their enjoyment of their learning is outstanding. Pupils' personal development and well-being are good, as is the care, guidance and support that they receive. As one pupil commented, 'If you don't understand, you ask and the teachers do something about it'. Pupils know it is important to eat healthily and to take regular exercise. Their behaviour is good and they are caring and supportive towards one another. Even so, in lessons some younger pupils are easily distracted and do not always concentrate as well as they should.

Leadership and management are good. The outstanding work of the headteacher sets the tone for the school and is the key feature in bringing about improvements, including the good improvement evident since the last inspection. The work of the school also benefits greatly from the leadership and skills of senior managers and of those who have subject responsibilities. Governors are very supportive. They manage the school's finances well, ensuring that the available resources are used wisely. However, while the school's self-evaluation systems are good overall, the governors' role in evaluating the quality of provision and holding the school to account is not developed fully. The school's capacity for further improvement is good and it provides good value for money. Whilst some parents and carers are concerned about pupils' behaviour, the vast majority hold the school in high regard and feel it provides a good education. One parent wrote, 'We are very fortunate that both our daughters have had a high quality education at St Thomas that has drawn the best out of them'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the focus on mental skills and on problem solving activities in mathematics at an earlier stage in order to increase the number of pupils attaining at higher levels.
- Find ways of ensuring that younger pupils who are easily distracted maintain their concentration and become fully focused on their work.
- Fully develop the part played by governors in evaluating the quality of provision and in holding the school to account.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well and standards have improved steadily over the last three years. On starting school, children show a wide range of abilities, but overall attainment is below that expected for this age group, particularly in their emotional and social development and in language and communication. During their time in the Reception classes they make good progress and they join Year 1 with standards that are close to those expected for their age. In Years 1 and 2, pupils continue to achieve well and make good progress. By the end of Year 2, standards in reading and writing are broadly average, although standards in mathematics are slightly below average. At the end of Year 6, standards in mathematics and science are broadly average. However, standards in English are above average. Pupils' very good progress in English is due to the good teaching of reading and the good development of pupils' speaking and listening. Fewer pupils attain the higher levels in mathematics than in English, mainly because problem solving skills in the subject are not consolidated at an early enough stage.

Pupils who have additional learning needs, the rising number who come from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language all achieve well. The school is usually successful in meeting the targets that it sets for pupils' attainment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy school, as shown by their good attendance, and parents are especially pleased with their children's love of their school. Relationships at every level are positive and pupils behave very well. They are sensible and show respect and consideration for others. Some younger children occasionally become a little restless and lose concentration. However, the majority show outstanding enthusiasm for their work. There is a strong focus on keeping healthy, with good opportunities for physical education. Older pupils are good role models and carry out a range of duties with pride and care. Pupils have a sincere sense of responsibility and very good involvement in their school community, as shown by the work of the school council. They have a good understanding of their own culture and enjoy learning about other cultures around the world. A strong Catholic ethos unites the school and flows through all aspects of pupils' spiritual, social and moral development, which are outstanding. These strengths combine with pupils' academic skills to equip them well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Pupils make good progress because lessons are well taught and managed effectively. Common strengths of the teaching are clearly planned lessons and good subject knowledge. Where teaching is outstanding this is because pupils have a very clear idea of what they should learn and are highly motivated by exciting lessons that use a wide range of learning styles. In the majority of lessons, effective use of well trained teaching assistants means that pupils are well supported. Relationships in class are very positive and school routines are clear. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to support the learning. However, there is insufficient focus on the teaching of mental skills and problem solving in mathematics. Teachers are very good at encouraging children to think about how well they are doing and about what they could do better.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides pupils with a good range of activities and additional learning experiences. It is well planned and organised so that there is good coverage of all subjects, although sometimes links between subjects are not made clear to pupils. The provision for French, music and sport is especially good. Visitors to the school support the curriculum in a wide range of areas including drama, health education and science. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the programme of after school clubs and really value them, though the current programme is focused predominantly on sports and music. Personal, social and health education has a high profile within the school. This can be seen through the children's' developing confidence, and the improvement in their speaking and listening skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Teachers and other staff know the pupils well. Thorough induction systems ensure that pupils settle quickly when they join. Much is also done to prepare older pupils for their move to secondary school, so they look forward with confidence.

Procedures to protect pupils and care for the vulnerable are very good. The health, safety and welfare of pupils are considered paramount. Adults are checked and the school is a safe place. Pupils know what to do if they ever feel bullied and are confident staff will resolve issues. There is good support for pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities and their individual learning needs are accurately identified. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are equally well supported.

Procedures for monitoring academic progress are good, but recent, and are becoming embedded throughout the school. Thorough and systematic assessment is used well to identify the next steps in pupils' learning and enable tasks to be better matched to the needs of each pupil. Targets to measure progress and achievement are shared beneficially with parents and pupils. Homework is good and pupils are set relevant tasks to do.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

This outstanding headteacher shares responsibilities with a highly effective deputy and dedicated senior management team. They have established a clear direction for the school and are committed to raising standards. The school seeks parents' views on a regular basis and values their opinions. Practical support is given to families as well as pupils themselves, ensuring pupils are happy and ready to learn. There is a strong and effective commitment to including all pupils in the school's activities. Teachers' professional development is successfully linked to their roles and responsibilities. Teaching is closely monitored. New members of staff and graduate trainees are well supported. Effective use is now being made of assessment data, particularly, in Years 5 and 6, as a tool to raise standards and improve achievement. This is having a positive impact on pupils' learning especially in English and science but has not yet had a significant impact in mathematics where progress is not as rapid. The governors are committed to do their best for the school and its pupils. They ensure effective financial planning and oversight. The secure committee structure ensures efficient and speedy decision making and resources are well managed. Governors are clear about the areas of the school's work which require improvement but are still developing the skills and expertise to question and probe. Their monitoring role too is still evolving. However, during a period of change for the school they have successfully maintained a focus on raising standards.

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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?	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	2
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	3
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	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	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.

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

1 March 2007

Dear Pupils

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School, Ward Avenue, Grays, Essex RM17 5RW

You may remember our recent visit to your school. I am writing to thank you for making it such an enjoyable experience. It was really good to talk to you about your education and to see how much you enjoy your lessons. We think your school is good. We know that many of you and your parents and carers think so too. This is why we think your school is good.

- The school takes good care of you. The staff make sure you feel safe and that you enjoy your lessons and other activities.
- Your teachers and teaching assistants are very good at giving you all the help you need and making sure you do as well as you can.
- You behave well and are kind and helpful towards each other.
- Your headteacher and the teachers who help him to organise the school are good at making sure that you have everything you need to help your learning.

To make your learning even better we have asked the headteacher and the staff to help more of you to reach higher levels in mathematics by giving you more assistance with your work on quick calculation and problem solving. Some of you occasionally become distracted in lessons and we are asking your teachers to help you to become more focused on your work and we want you to help them as much as you can in this. We have also asked your school governors to improve the ways in which they measure and ask questions about how well the school is doing.

I am sure you will continue to enjoy your learning and to do as well as you can.

Best Wishes,

Godfrey Bancroft

Lead Inspector, on behalf of the inspection team