

St Thomas a Becket Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100177
Local Authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	307319
Inspection date	18 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Barry Jones

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	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	260
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr P Morris
Headteacher	Mrs M Manley
Date of previous school inspection	22 September 2003
School address	Mottisfont Road Abbey Wood London SE2 9LY
Telephone number	020 8310 5394
Fax number	020 8310 4449

Age group	3-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Thomas a Beckett is an oversubscribed, Roman Catholic school which serves an area of high social deprivation. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and who do not have English as their home language is much higher than in most schools. The school's population is changing with more families arriving from Nigeria, for instance. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is higher than in most schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Thomas a Becket is an outstanding school. This is largely because of the excellent leadership of the headteacher and the support she receives from the whole school community. She has high expectations for pupils and staff and these are invariably met. As a result, the personal development, well-being and achievement of the pupils are excellent. Relationships in the school are also excellent and reflect well its Catholic ethos. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for moving on to secondary school and for later life.

The school successfully places a high priority on its contribution to community cohesion. Parents play an important part in the school and are overwhelmingly very appreciative of the school's efforts. One parent summed this up and wrote, 'The best thing I ever did was to get my boy into this school. He is getting on really well'. The school is not complacent. The changing nature of the school's intake means that the school recognises it needs to adapt too in order to continue to meet pupils' different needs. It makes every effort to help new families to settle into the community and for them to be involved in the life of the school.

Most children enter the school with low social and communication skills. Children's speech and language difficulties are identified quickly because of early screening and additional support provided. This, together with the good teaching, contributes to the good progress made by the children in the Foundation Stage. By the end of Year 6 standards are well above average and are exceptionally high in mathematics. Given pupils' starting points this means that achievement overall is outstanding. The quality of teaching is maintained at a good level through staff expertise, vigilant monitoring and thorough tracking of pupils' progress which means that dips in performance are identified and tackled. For instance, analysis of the 2005 Year 6 test results showed that the progress made by pupils in Years 3 to 6 was average in English and mathematics. The school allocated extra resources, provided additional training and evaluated impact very carefully. Consequently, the progress of pupils has been accelerated and they now make excellent progress in these subjects by the end of Year 6. It is the quality of the additional support and excellent monitoring procedures that underpins the step change from good to outstanding. As is the case nationally, writing standards are below those for reading throughout the school. The school is now seeking to raise standards in these aspects of learning to the excellent standards found elsewhere.

Care, guidance and support are excellent. Staff are constantly seeking new ways to provide pupils with a very rounded education. Consequently, pupils feel safe and enjoy school very much. Their positive attitudes are reflected in their good attendance and behaviour. There are excellent links with other agencies to support pupils at risk of underachieving or with other problems. The school goes to great lengths to ensure that families are involved in this work and this is a significant strength of the school. As a result, all pupils participate in the life of the school and those with learning difficulties and disabilities make excellent progress. The exciting curriculum also contributes significantly to increasing pupils' self-esteem and to their enjoyment of school.

Leadership and management are excellent. Though the systems and the procedures continue to evolve, the unerring dedication and drive of the headteacher shines through. She is ably supported by her governors and her senior leadership team. She has moulded an effective team that is committed wholeheartedly to the interests of the pupils and is determined that each

individual will succeed as well as they can. The school is modest about its achievements. Given its track record, the capacity to improve is excellent.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quality of all teaching to that of the best.
- Raise standards in writing to those in reading and mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Children enter the school with skills that are well below expectations for their age. Hence, although they make good progress in the Foundation Stage, they are still below average when they start in Year 1. The school works hard on ensuring that pupils have a sound grasp of the basics in literacy and numeracy. This strong foundation stands them in good stead for later years. By the end of Year 2 standards are broadly average. Most pupils are attaining the expected level but relatively few gain the higher level 3 in writing. Such is the rapid progress in Key Stage 2 that over half the pupils gained the higher level 5 in 2006 in the end of Year 6 tests in English, mathematics and science. This is much higher than the average nationally and represents excellent achievement. Consequently, the school exceeds its targets. The school checks meticulously that all groups make similar progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils learn about their feelings and how to manage them. Pupils come with significant cultural differences. However, this is a racially harmonious community and the staff work hard to ensure that it remains so. Pupils develop very good understanding of right and wrong and respect for different cultures and beliefs. They make an outstanding contribution to school life and to the wider community. Older pupils help younger ones and they speak well of the supportive ethos in the school. The school council is very proactive, influential and a real strength. It has helped to make improvements in the playground and contributed to revising the anti-bullying policy. The governors have also consulted the school council as part of its monitoring role. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy living issues. The school was awarded Healthy Schools status in 2006.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and make effective use of resources to enhance learning. For instance, they use interactive whiteboards to make lessons interesting and to explain things more clearly. They share learning objectives with the class so that the pupils know what they are expected to achieve. They manage their classes well and consequently there is minimal disruption to lessons. A strength is the way that teachers plan opportunities for pupils to speak and to explain and refine their ideas. Marking is good and usually gives constructive feedback to pupils that enables them to improve further. The school is endeavouring to provide pupils with the skills to assess their own and their classmates work. There is considerable additional support available to pupils both in and outside the

classroom. In the best lessons, this is managed well by the teacher and boosts the progress made by pupils to excellent. Use of parental expertise, booster classes and specific programmes for individual pupils also contribute to pupils making outstanding progress overall.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. In the Foundation Stage there is a good range of activities. There is an appropriate outside play area for the Nursery but it is more restricted for the Reception class. The school make best use of the accommodation, however. Throughout the school, provision for personal and social and health education is excellent. Pupils are taught very well about healthy living. There is a strong and successful emphasis on promoting pupils' basic skills. The school employs a drama specialist as part of its strategy to improve pupils' writing. As a result, pupils have more opportunities to explore contexts which stimulate creative and factual writing and writing for different audiences. Information and communication technology is used very effectively to promote learning in other subjects. The school works energetically and enthusiastically at promoting cultural harmony through focussed whole-school activities such as Black history month and cultural days where the pupils wear their traditional clothes to school. The school affords a high priority to residential trips to provide experiences for pupils that are not routinely available in their everyday lives. There are many visitors to the school including artists, poets and writers. There is a satisfactory range of after-school clubs and the choice was increased at the request of the school council.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The very high quality of care and support underpins the positive ethos and the pupils' feeling of pride in their school. The close partnership with parents is forged from the Nursery onwards. At every stage, parents are involved in decisions about their children and invited to share in their success. The learning mentor does valuable work in helping to address underachievement and involving parents. The school has effective strategies for managing pupils' behaviour and makes good use of external agencies to help it. All staff have received training and this underpins the consistent implementation of agreed policies by them and the good response by pupils. One-to-one counselling is available to pupils who need extra support. There is a high commitment to develop skills in the staff and to use these well. Consequently, teaching assistants are well trained and give very effective support in the classroom which helps pupils to overcome their learning difficulties and make very rapid progress. Even though numbers are small in some minority ethnic groups, the school frequently checks its data to ensure that all pupils are making good progress. Pupils are set challenging targets and know what they have to do to improve further.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The Foundation Stage is led well. This has led to improvements since the previous inspection in the quality of teaching and the curriculum. The headteacher and the governors set a clear vision for the school that is supported by all the staff. The systems for monitoring performance are excellent and have led to improvements in teaching and raised the standards attained by pupils. The school experiences difficulties in recruiting staff but the excellent systems for

supporting new teachers ensure that they settle quickly. New 'learning teams' oversee the curriculum and this makes good use of staffing resources. They have made a good start and each team has a good blend of experience and new blood. They were instrumental in ensuring the successful introduction of the teaching of French by all staff. They are at an early stage in monitoring and evaluating their areas fully. This is mainly done by senior managers currently. The school places a very high priority to involving parents and it is very responsive to their concerns. The school has a range of strategies that is working with most parents. Most importantly it is a friendly, reflective, caring school with a constantly open door. The governors provide excellent support and challenge for all the school's work. The governors responded to the changing needs in the Foundation Stage by employing a teaching assistant with skills in speech and language development. This is paying dividends.

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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
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	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

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	2
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	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	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?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

3 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas a Becket Roman Catholic Primary School, London, SE2 9LY

Thank you for your help and cooperation when I inspected your school. You told me that St Thomas is an excellent school and I agree. You told me that you very much enjoy coming to school and that the teachers make the lessons fun and interesting. Your school council members spoke with pride about what they have been able to accomplish. For instance, they have contributed to devising the anti-bullying policy and their ideas for the playground have been accepted.

There are many things that I liked about your school.

- You all get on very well together.
- You do exceptionally well in the SATs but speak highly of your work in subjects such as art and PE.
- You receive good teaching.
- The staff take excellent care of you.
- The headteacher and governors are excellent leaders.
- It is a really welcoming and friendly school.

The school is always striving to be even better. I have asked them to continue their efforts to improve your writing and to make sure you all get the very best teaching.

Keep up the good work. It was a privilege to visit your school. I wish you continuing success in the future.

Barry Jones Lead inspector