

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101459
Local Authority	Bexley
Inspection number	307692
Inspection dates	19–20 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Peter McGregor

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	330
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Michael Jones
Headteacher	Mrs Nola van Dam
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2002
School address	Sheldon Road Bexleyheath DA7 4PH
Telephone number	020 8303 8322
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average. The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is below average, as are the proportions eligible for free school meals, with statements of special educational need or with learning difficulties and disabilities. Children's attainment on entry is broadly average. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds and are mainly baptised Catholics from the two parishes nearest to the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Thomas More is a satisfactory school with some good features.

Pupils progress well in Years 1 and 2, as a result of good teaching and an interesting curriculum, and attain above average standards by the end of Year 2. The most able achieve particularly well. Progress is satisfactory overall in Years 3 to 6, and better in English than in mathematics and science. Standards in Year 6 national tests in 2006 were above average overall and in English, and average in mathematics and science. A slight but discernible improvement in pupils' overall achievements has taken place over the past three years. In 2007, English and science results were similar to those of 2006. Mathematics results improved. The school sets challenging targets but those for the highest attainers are not met.

Pupils' personal development is good. Parents report that their children greatly enjoy school. One comment represents the views of many: 'they couldn't wait to get back to school after the holidays'. Pupils state how happy they are, that they feel safe and know the importance of a good diet and exercise in living healthy lives. Relationships are usually very good; as one girl explained 'We have friendship groups so no one has to play by themselves.' Attendance and punctuality are good. Behaviour is very good. Pupils are well prepared for their next schools, have appropriate literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills and make a satisfactory contribution to the local community. Staff take very good care of pupils and supervise non-lesson time well to ensure pupils are safe. Child protection training and safeguarding checks on staff are carried out as required.

Teaching is satisfactory but variable, particularly in Years 3 to 6. Lessons are often enthusiastically presented and behaviour is managed well, leading to very well motivated, co-operative pupils. Nevertheless, pupils' progress is restricted when work is repeated, not well explained or the pace is too slow. Work is marked regularly. Although pupils have targets to aim at in some subjects, they are not familiar with the National Curriculum levels at which they are working. The school's topic-based curriculum is interesting and enjoyable. Science work within this has not been well matched to pupils' needs or planned effectively, so discrete science has been reintroduced very recently. Sports clubs after school are popular with boys and girls.

Leadership by the two most senior managers, provides a clear direction, based on Christian principles and focuses on improving standards and achievement. Insufficient priority is given to following up identified weaknesses and monitoring what takes place to ensure consistency of good practice. Tasks are not well delegated, which results in some ineffectiveness in the work of middle managers. Staff work well together and with agencies from outside school, supporting pupils with additional educational needs. The school's resources, both staff and materials are well organised and used. Governance is satisfactory.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Parents say their children acquire great social skills in Reception and this is apparent in children's positive approach and confidence. Parents appreciate being involved. Leadership and management are good. The curriculum is flexible yet carefully structured, covering all expected areas. The calm, safe and stimulating environment, indoors and out, offers many opportunities for creative play and developing personal skills; healthy living is encouraged. Children use equipment sensibly and make good progress in physical development. Acquisition of language

through good opportunities for speaking and listening has a high priority. Mathematical understanding develops through many practical and oral activities. Children enjoy learning and make good progress, achieving broadly average standards by the start of Year 1. Occasionally the pace of work falls when tasks continue for too long. Teachers and teaching assistants respond quickly to the needs of children experiencing learning difficulties. Children develop good relationships with each other and adults because they are fully involved and clear routines are consistently applied. Early in the school year, for example, children have drawn up class rules and explain why putting litter in a bin helps them all. Assessment is ongoing and good, and used to decide what the next activity should be.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning in Years 3 to 6, to raise attainment in science and of high achievers generally.
- Delegate more effectively to middle managers and ensure that they use subject assessment data to evaluate pupils' progress.
- Monitor all aspects of school life more rigorously and systematically, ensuring consistent implementation of school policies.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievements are satisfactory and their standards are above average by the time they leave in Year 6. In Years 1 and 2, a strong focus on language development, in particular speaking and listening and knowledge of phonics, enables pupils to access the whole curriculum and do well. High attainers write with accuracy, building grammatically correct sentences such as 'The person that invented the cracker for Christmas was Tom Smith'. They solve word problems in mathematics using weight and money. Low attainers and those with learning difficulties and disabilities also do well. An ongoing emphasis on writing in topic work, as well as in literacy lessons, is helping pupils in Years 1 to 6 to enhance their language skills. Progress in Years 3 to 6 is often good in English. Most pupils can write at length, showing good comprehension, and present their work well. Understanding of mathematics is improving as teachers focus on number work in particular. In both subjects, the most capable do not achieve as highly as they could. Pupils' knowledge of science is weaker than other subjects because of inconsistent teaching and past curriculum issues. Overall, pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils actively look out for others, particularly younger ones in the playground. Spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. Pupils' understanding of other cultures is satisfactory but it does not reflect the diversity of the school population. Pupils are polite and well-mannered. They develop confidence because their views are heard and the school council is effective, for example providing water fountains in playgrounds. Pupils enjoy coming to school because work is fun and relationships and support are so good. Attendance is just above average and improving. Punctuality is good. In lessons, pupils are very well-behaved and show very good

learning skills. Occasionally, when teaching does not match class needs or interests, a few pupils are silly. Pupils' good personal development and problem-solving skills mean that they are prepared well for the next stage in their lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers follow school behaviour management systems consistently, generating a good working environment where disruption is minimal. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively. In Reception and Years 1 and 2, teachers challenge pupils through demanding questioning, expecting extended answers. For example, 'Why should you read back your sentence?' led to a discussion which reinforced prior learning. Lessons are well structured with clear learning intentions shared with pupils. In Years 3 to 6, the pace of work is slow at times and learning suffers when teachers are not well enough prepared to meet the wide range of needs. This applies in mathematics sets as well as mixed ability classes for science and other subjects. Marking is regular and helpful, often including constructive advice on how to improve further. In several lessons, interactive whiteboards are used effectively. Video sequences are particularly successful in capturing pupils' attention. Regular homework is helping to improve achievement. Parents and pupils consider teaching to be good but evidence indicates that some teaching weaknesses in older classes are a key cause of lower achievement for high attainers and in science.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Since the last inspection, when the school was criticised for lack of curriculum balance, a good scheme has been introduced covering several subjects. This 'Creative Learning Journey', covers the skills, knowledge and understanding required by the National Curriculum and is taught through integrated topics such as 'Myself'. Pupils find this work exciting and a good complement to specific lessons in subjects such as English and mathematics. The coverage of science through this scheme has not been thorough enough for pupils to make the progress they should. New arrangements are starting to have a positive impact. Pupils benefit from French and Spanish lessons and wide-ranging Friday afternoon activities. With the exception of some aspects of science, the curriculum meets the needs of pupils in single age and mixed age classes. Setting arrangements for mathematics are good in principle though their success is dependent upon teachers' skills in challenging and meeting pupils' needs. The curriculum is enriched by frequent visitors and many visits, for example to local farms. The range of after-school clubs and activities is sound.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Teachers are very approachable and relationships between the school, parents and children are excellent, a point made strongly by parents. Good support is provided for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with statements. The school is quick to involve external specialists to help provide the best support available. Assemblies, lessons and visits, for example from the emergency services, reinforce effective teaching about health and safety. What little bullying there is, is dealt with speedily and compassionately. The school has improved attendance

through rigorous following up of absences and parental support over avoiding term-time holidays. Academic guidance is not as well developed as pastoral care, and some parents do not feel sufficiently well informed about their children's achievements. Pupils only have targets for improvement in English and mathematics, and many are unclear about what is required to reach a higher standard. Tracking pupils' achievement and progress has been introduced in English and mathematics, but not yet in science or ICT. In some classes, insufficient use is made of the previous year's data on individual pupils when planning future work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership team has built up a real community spirit and strong Christian ethos, which are very popular with parents and a significant cause of pupils' positive attitudes. Leaders have vision but do not check sufficiently that initiatives and policies are being implemented. Available data is not yet being used well enough to bring about improvements in pupils' achievements. Too little delegation to middle managers has resulted in underdevelopment of their skills, for example in lesson observation. Subject leaders monitor pupils' progress through planning and work reviews, but do not follow through to ensure problems are resolved. Governors are supportive and value the contribution of staff, but are not challenging enough. They give insufficient focus to discussing pupils' achievements and the reasons for them. Senior managers are aware of the issues that confront the school and have a good development plan. Resources are generally good and used efficiently; the budget is prudently managed. The school benefits from good links with external agencies, for example the family learning programme for parents. Office administration has weaknesses which result in wasted senior management time. Issues from the last inspection have been resolved, but new weaknesses have emerged. The school's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

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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?	3
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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?	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	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	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

2 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Bexleyheath, DA7 4PH

Thank you for your help during our time at St Thomas More. We enjoyed meeting you and hearing your views. We were very pleased to hear that you really enjoy coming to school and that you get on so well with the staff.

We found that your school is satisfactory. You do well and make good progress in Reception and Years 1 and 2, and by the time you join Year 3 you are doing better than many children in other schools. You seem to like all the subjects you are taught. In Years 3 to 6 you make satisfactory progress and your standards in the national tests you take in Year 6 are above those of lots of other schools. Those of you who find work quite easy do not do as well as you could and we have asked teachers to make sure you do better in future. In the past, many of you have got better results in English than in mathematics and science, but your mathematics standards have now improved. You have not been doing enough science to enable you to do well in this subject, but the school has now changed this so you can do well.

You told us you are proud of your school council and what it has done for you, that you feel safe and know how to live healthily. You like the responsibilities you are given, such as helping those in the playground who may not have many friends, the after-school sports clubs and the interesting topic lessons. You behave very well, attend school regularly and are punctual. Teachers look after you very well.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory but there are quite big differences between lessons. We have asked the headteacher to check that you are doing well in all your lessons, particularly in science. The school has lots of information about how well you are doing. We think it would be a good idea if you and your parents knew your National Curriculum levels so you could aim to do even better.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and plans for the future are clear. We have asked the headteacher, with the help of her deputy, to make sure that all staff know what they have to do next to help you be more successful.

Best wishes,

Peter McGregor Lead inspector