

# St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	104236
<b>Local Authority</b>	Walsall
<b>Inspection number</b>	308550
<b>Inspection dates</b>	20–21 June 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Ceri Morgan HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	159
<b>School</b>	
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Michael McGrail
<b>Headteacher</b>	Patrick Joseph O' Toole
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	7 June 2004
<b>School address</b>	Dartmouth Avenue Coalpool Walsall WS3 1SP
<b>Telephone number</b>	01922 720712
<b>Fax number</b>	01922 720712

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School is an average size school, although numbers have declined significantly recently. It serves an area with very high levels of deprivation. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well above average. The school population is predominately of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities is above the national average.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

St Thomas is a school currently in difficulty. Achievement and standards, despite recent improvement, remain inadequate overall. Serious failings in the most basic of leadership and management roles and responsibilities have prevented more rapid improvement in recent months. There is a high degree of inconsistency in practice and a lack of clear leadership, leading to disharmony amongst staff and an almost total absence of any effective planning for the future. This situation was captured by one pupil who, when describing her education to inspectors, recalled a list of cancelled after-school clubs, a lack of excitement in lessons and frequent changes of teachers and ended by saying, 'it isn't fair'.

The current headteacher has failed to secure the confidence of many parents and staff and this has led to a decline of morale in school amongst adults and a significant decline in pupil numbers. However, the failings in management are not the responsibility of one individual but are collective. A lack of rigorous monitoring, inadequate day-to-day organisation and a failure to accept responsibility for pupils' progress by some teachers characterise the current position. There is no overall school improvement plan, and no action plans for some subjects, such as history and geography. Although the frequency with which teaching is monitored has increased recently, the outcomes of these observations are not used to improve overall quality. Significant statutory requirements remain unfulfilled. Inadequate governance has allowed this position to continue for too long.

There are some positive indicators but the school has an over-generous view of its own performance. The progress made by the youngest pupils is good, giving them an encouraging start to their education. The pupils' progress in other year groups is showing signs of improvement because of the better use of targets, sharper lesson objectives and an increasing range of teaching methods. The school is confident that results in the 2007 national tests will be better than those of previous years. Following good intervention by Education Walsall, those staff who are acting on the advice of consultants are improving the quality of their teaching but not all staff follow this advice consistently. As a consequence teaching is inadequate.

There is no doubt that many in school try to care for the welfare of their pupils and there is a strong emphasis on spiritual and moral development. Personal development is satisfactory and behaviour is good. However, the school has been made aware of some significant safeguarding concerns and care, guidance and welfare overall are inadequate. The curriculum is also inadequate. Although improved, with additional music and physical activity, it is not well matched to pupils' needs, especially for the more able and for some pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make by using more effectively the assessment information available to teachers.

- Improve the quality of leadership by more consistent, systematic and rigorous evaluation of the school's performance and by completing school plans that have realistic and ambitious targets for future development.
- Ensure the curriculum is fit for purpose by matching it more closely to pupils' needs, including enriching it with the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and developing links between subjects more effectively.
- Improve the care of pupils by ensuring that all statutory requirements are met, in particular regarding pupils' safety.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 4**

The attainment of pupils when they start at St Thomas is well below the expected level, especially in reading and writing. The youngest children make good progress in the Foundation Stage but this is not built on securely. By the end of Year 2, pupils are performing below national averages, a position which continues throughout the school. The pupils make inadequate progress from Years 2 to 6. Indeed the progress made by pupils in Year 6 in 2005 and 2006 was amongst the lowest 5% of all schools nationally in English, mathematics and science. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make inadequate progress.

There has been some improvement in standards throughout the school very recently, especially in reading, but the school acknowledges that they remain low in many classes and the number of pupils reaching the higher levels is low. The school expects standards in English to improve but does not anticipate this in mathematics. Standards in some other subjects, such as science, are restricted by pupils' poor grasp of basic literacy skills, especially in writing. The recent improvements, although welcome, should not disguise the fact that the pupils throughout the school also have a fragile grasp of basic number and writing skills.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Behaviour is good overall, especially in lessons, and pupils mature into caring, thoughtful individuals. Good links with the church help pupils to develop spiritually and morally and to consider the needs of others. Pupils' social and cultural development is satisfactory overall, but pupils have limited understanding of the wider cultural diversity in their area. Pupils' attendance is unsatisfactory with no significant improvement since the last inspection. Some pupils are late for school each day and sometimes lessons start after their scheduled time.

Pupils understand the importance of healthy eating despite choosing unhealthy snacks at playtime. They know how to stay safe, and many opt for clubs promoting fitness, for example Gaelic football and cricket. Pupils have few opportunities to take on extra responsibilities. There is no school council and Year 6 pupils who trained as play leaders show real disappointment because they have not been able to take up their roles. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to community activities, especially church events. Underachievement in literacy and numeracy skills means that pupils are not sufficiently well prepared for their future learning.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 4

The quality of teaching has improved recently but is inadequate because pupils' progress in many lessons is too slow. Teachers are starting to share targets and lesson objectives more clearly with pupils but these are often in adult language so pupils do not always know what is required and why. Some pupils are increasingly involved in assessing their own progress. A thoughtful use of timings and paired talking is helping to increase the pace of sessions. The level of challenge and expectation remains low in some classes, however, and this restricts progress for more able pupils.

During the inspection no inadequate lessons were seen but, over time, teaching does not improve pupils' progress enough. Teachers tend to dominate discussion for too long and play safe with lesson content rather than attempt anything ambitious or exciting. The pupils say that they could cope with harder work and are very keen to have more sparkle in lessons. They also say that they have few opportunities to use computers. Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally good and the pupils appreciate this. The quality of marking is variable between classes but improving. It is now more closely linked to lesson objectives but there are still too many examples of quick ticks with little guidance on how to improve.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 4

The curriculum is inadequate as it does not cater for pupils of differing abilities.

The school has yet to explore the use of cross-curricular links to provide more opportunities for pupils to improve their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects and this has resulted in a lack of curriculum balance. Physical education and ICT lessons have been cancelled, reducing pupils' enjoyment. The frequent use of temporary teachers has not been well managed so pupils have often worked on repetitive, inappropriate tasks. Across the curriculum, ICT is used inadequately to support pupils' work.

Younger children in the Foundation Stage make a good start to their education because teachers provide an interesting curriculum that places much importance on developing children's personal and social skills alongside academic progress. Hence, young children learn to behave well and sit and listen appropriately as well as developing skills in literacy and numeracy.

A good range of extra-curricular clubs, for example chess, complements provision but pupils often feel let down when clubs are cancelled. The curriculum is suitably enriched by an appropriate range of visits to interesting places, such as the Leather Museum, and effective teaching from a visiting music teacher lifts the quality of music making. These opportunities are greatly enjoyed by pupils.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 4

The school's arrangements are unsatisfactory overall despite the fact that staff care about the pupils' welfare. Whilst pupils receive satisfactory care in classrooms, school systems to ensure this is the case beyond that are not systematically carried out. For example, the school does not carry out the statutory health and safety audit, and teachers receive insufficient guidance

about undertaking risk assessments prior to leading visits. Child protection arrangements are satisfactory. Although endorsed by the governing body, sex education lessons for Years 5 and 6 pupils are currently not taking place.

Pupils sometimes feel vulnerable and unsafe when incidents of bullying or racism are not dealt with effectively. The school works satisfactorily with outside agencies to support vulnerable pupils. There are satisfactory arrangements for settling new pupils into Nursery and the school. Pupils transferring to secondary school are adequately supported. Recent good involvement from Education Walsall advisers has successfully enabled teachers to provide pupils with individual targets to improve their work.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 4**

Leadership and management are inadequate. The senior managers in school meet but do not record minutes or agree actions and as a result key tasks are left undone. This includes the drafting of a school improvement plan. The current document has been put together under the direction of the deputy headteacher and is a collection of some subject action plans. It is a useful start but contains no specific pupil performance targets in many instances and lacks detail in dates, deadlines and how evaluation is to take place.

Subject leaders are not always given the opportunity to monitor standards in their subjects. Where monitoring does take place it lacks clear judgements and the information gained is not put to good use for future planning. Progress is inadequate on remedying the areas of weakness identified in the last inspection.

The headteacher does not have an accurate or detailed view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and organisation on a day-to-day basis is fragile. Meetings are conducted too informally and records neglected. He has not managed to secure a shared vision and the ethos in school is too closely focused on teachers and not enough on the pupils' experiences. A sizeable proportion of parents expressed concerns about the quality of the current leadership in school.

Governors have recently become more aware of the seriousness of the failings and have acted to support the school by drafting a recent action plan. However, they have allowed the situation to deteriorate over time, barely begun to implement their action plan and have not ensured statutory requirements relating to performance management have been met. As a result, governance is currently inadequate.

In recent months some senior staff have made attempts, under the direction of the deputy headteacher, to improve this situation. They are to be commended on this initiative but they recognise there is much to be done to build a cohesive staff team.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	4
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	4
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	4

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	4
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	4
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	4

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

22 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School, Walsall, WS3 1SP

As you know, we recently visited your school to see how well it is doing. We would like to thank you for making us so welcome and talking to us about your views. We were very impressed with your behaviour and honesty. You told us exactly what you liked about school and which things you would like to see changed.

We found that, although things have improved recently, there are a number of important areas where your school needs to do much better.

We have asked those adults who are in charge to do four things. These are:

- Help all pupils make better progress by making sure lessons are matched to your needs more closely.
- Improve the way they run the school by checking up much more closely on what is going well and making changes where they need to.
- Make sure that what they ask you to do is more lively and exciting and help you to improve your literacy and numeracy in all subjects by, for example, using computers more.
- Make sure they do all they can to keep you safe and secure whilst in school and out on trips.

It will be important for the school to make these improvements as speedily as possible. We have asked other inspectors to check up on progress each term from now on. This is called special measures.

We were also impressed by things that have worked well. We were especially pleased to see how well you behave and how polite and friendly you are with each other. Your singing in assemblies was delightful and most of you work hard to achieve your targets. We would like to wish you well in the future.

Best wishes

Ceri Morgan Her Majesty's Inspector