

# St Thomas More RC Primary School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	111704
<b>Local Authority</b>	Middlesbrough
<b>Inspection number</b>	310668
<b>Inspection dates</b>	6–7 March 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Gianna Ulyatt

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>	
School	147
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr T J Cane
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs J Apolloni
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 March 2004
<b>School address</b>	Erith Grove Easterside Middlesbrough TS4 3QH
<b>Telephone number</b>	01642 317350
<b>Fax number</b>	01642 300597

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

The school is smaller than most primary schools and is situated in an urban community. The majority of pupils come from areas of significant deprivation. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is twice the national average. The majority of pupils are from White British families. The number of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school, in partnership with other nearby schools, offers extended services including a breakfast club, family learning programmes, study support and childcare.

## 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, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to leadership and management, and to achievement, standards and teaching in Key Stage 2.

The overall effectiveness of the school is inadequate, although there are some features of the school that are satisfactory and better. Provision in the Foundation Stage is good. Teaching in Key Stage 1 is also good and pupils make good progress and achieve well. However, pupils in Key Stage 2 do not achieve as quickly as they should despite the effective catch up work in Year 6. Too much teaching earlier in this key stage fails to provide for the different learning needs of pupils, and as a result standards in Key Stage 2 have declined over the past two years and are below average. English is particularly weak. Teaching and learning are therefore inadequate overall. Leadership and management are inadequate because the school's actions have been too slow to improve the rates of progress for some classes in Key Stage 2. Fluctuations in staffing have contributed to this. However, recent improvements to the way the senior management team works have been made to accelerate the pace of change. Other improvements, such as additional teaching support in Year 6 are already having an impact on standards. Staff are working closely as a team and share a common sense of purpose. Recent support from the local authority has helped to strengthen the way that the senior management team works together. For example, the introduction of closer monitoring has led to a sharper focus on what needs to improve and why. Likewise, governors are clearer about the school's strengths and weaknesses and are therefore better able to monitor progress. These factors indicate that the school now has satisfactory capacity for improvement. Although the standards have declined, the school has improved the specific issues raised at the last inspection. Parents are more involved in the life of the school and clearly support its work. This is reflected in the positive comments in questionnaires returned by parents. Pupils have increasing access to computer technology to support their learning and the curriculum includes opportunities for pupils to improve their understanding of other cultures. The school has good community links with other schools, the church and local services including the library.

Pupils' personal development is good because the school is successful in creating a safe and welcoming environment. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They are well behaved and confident in their relationships with adults. At the request of the school council there have been improvements to play facilities, including a keep fit assault course. At lunchtime pupils enjoy choosing healthy food, and sporting and creative clubs after school are popular. The curriculum is satisfactory. The school uses national strategies to promote learning and is currently seeking ways to enliven provision. Care, guidance and support of pupils are satisfactory. Systems are in place to ensure pupils' health and safety. The school has recently developed systems to check their rates of learning over time and these are beginning to support progress, especially in Key Stage 2. However, pupils are not always clear about what they need to do next in order to improve their work.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage ensures that children get off to a good start in a caring and stimulating environment. When children enter the school, their attainment is well below that which is typical of three year olds. They have limited social and communication skills and little understanding of literacy and early mathematical concepts. By the end of the Reception class children reach the learning goals in all six areas and exceed them in their personal, social and emotional development. Good induction, including home visits, and the high levels of care ensure children are at ease and settle well into the school. The curriculum is inspiring and children have a wealth of activities from which to choose. Careful planning gives good emphasis to basic skills of early reading, writing and mathematics. Children achieve well because adult-directed activity, such as cooking sessions, and worthwhile play opportunities, encourage children to concentrate and actively participate in their learning. High quality teaching and sensitive interaction results in children being excited about learning. They develop confidence, takes turns and share fairly. Behaviour is very good and children clearly understand the difference between right and wrong. Adults know children very well because assessment procedures are centred on direct observations. The information gathered is used well to challenge and support children in their learning. Leadership is good. The strengths of the provision are well recognised and appropriate areas for development, including the need to improve the outdoor curriculum, have been identified.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the speed and effectiveness of senior managers and subject leaders in taking action to improve areas of weakness.
- Raise standards at Key Stage 2, particularly in English.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stage 2 to ensure that rates of progress improve for pupils of all abilities.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 4

Standards are below average overall. Achievement is good in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 but inadequate in Key Stage 2 where a significant number of pupils are not making enough progress. When pupils enter Year 1, standards are broadly average for their age group and they make good progress throughout the key stage. The school's results in the national assessments in 2007 show that pupils by the age of seven years reach standards that are above average in reading and mathematics and well above average in writing. This is because teaching is well focused on the needs of individual pupils. Girls tend to achieve better than boys in reading and writing and boys achieve better than girls in mathematics. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve particularly well.

However, this good progress is not maintained in Key Stage 2. This is mainly due to weak teaching in some year groups. Results at the end of Year 6 in the 2007 tests were below average in mathematics and significantly below average in English. Despite more pupils attaining average levels in science too few attained the higher level 5 so that average point scores were lower than the national figure.

Over the last two years, the trend of improvement has been downward. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not make enough progress and girls achieve much better than

boys in all three subjects. Pupils of above average ability do not achieve as well as they should and very few reach the higher levels in national assessments. During their final year in school, pupils receive extra teacher support in lessons and booster classes outside the school day. Consequently, learning is being accelerated for the current cohort of Year 6 pupils and the school's tracking data indicates that these pupils are likely to attain better test results than in the previous year.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The school is successful in creating a happy, safe and harmonious environment and pupils enjoy coming to school. Pupils are polite and friendly. They behave well in and around the school and follow the 'Golden Rules'. Pupils have a clear understanding about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and talk knowledgeably about the importance of regular physical activity and a good diet. They enjoy school lunches which include a salad bar that pupils themselves requested through the school council. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This is evident in the confidence they display when talking with adults and each other. Pupils welcome newcomers to the school and help them settle into new surroundings. The school is providing increasing opportunities for pupils to learn about other cultures and different ways of life. For example, the recent theme week on India was thoroughly enjoyed. Pupils know that the school listens to their concerns and respects their views through the school council. Pupils are well aware of the needs of others and are successful in raising money for a range of charities. Good links have been established with local primary schools and with secondary schools to prepare pupils for the next phase in their education. Attendance is satisfactory and is improving due to the additional input of the attendance support officer who works with families to ensure pupils come to school regularly.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 4**

Teaching and learning are inadequate overall because of the inconsistent quality of provision. Teaching is good in Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 but in some Key Stage 2 classes it is not focused sufficiently on the needs of pupils to ensure their continued good progress. Children's work and the school's own data show clearly that progress is poor in some Key Stage 2 classes. Recent staff training and regular monitoring are starting to have a positive impact. For example, in most lessons teachers now explain what pupils are going to learn and what is expected of them. A consistent strength is the support provided by teaching assistants. Relationships are good so pupils behave well in lessons and try hard with their work. There is variation in the quality of planning. Lessons are most effective when learning is firmly based on accurate assessments of what pupils need to learn next. In these lessons pupils are given opportunities to take part in a range of practical activities which allow them to practise basic skills. In weaker lessons, teaching is not based sharply enough on the needs of different groups of pupils in the class and the level of challenge is often wrongly pitched. Teachers' knowledge is limited and where pupils sit for too long they lose interest in what they are learning. When the work is too easy for some pupils and too hard for others this leads to slow progress and some underachievement.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum is satisfactory although there are weaknesses due to inadequate subject leadership. Teachers follow national guidelines in their planning in mathematics, English and science. However, the needs of all pupils are not met through the curriculum when they move into Key Stage 2. The school is aware of the need to adapt and enliven the curriculum to make learning more meaningful for pupils and has recently begun to pilot different approaches to learning. The recent involvement in a mathematics internet day and various events during World Book Day were enjoyable learning experiences. Pupils in Key Stage 2 classes have the opportunity to learn French. Pupils take part in a good range of extra curricular activities which focus on sport and creative activities. Visits and visitors enhance the curriculum and support learning across various subject areas.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 3**

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Regular checks are carried out to identify and respond to any risks that might exist on the school's premises. Risk assessments are undertaken and health and safeguarding procedures for ensuring that children are protected are in place. The school provides good pastoral care. Teaching support assistants effectively help children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities during lessons. There are good links with external agencies to make sure that pupils who have the greatest need are cared for well. The recent introduction of a system to track pupils' progress is being used to identify gaps in learning. In some classes this information is being used well to identify pupils who need additional support. However, some pupils in Key Stage 2 are still unclear about their individual learning targets. The quality of feedback teachers give pupils through marking, as a way to improve their work, is inconsistent.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 4**

The headteacher has worked hard to bring about improvements during her two years in post. However, while the specific issues identified at the last inspection have been addressed, the school's overall improvement has been too slow. Significant fluctuations in staffing have been a contributing factor to this. Standards by the end of Year 6 have declined because the good progress made in Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is not sustained throughout Key Stage 2. As a result, leadership and management are inadequate overall. Recent initiatives are starting to make a difference. Subject leaders are beginning to evaluate assessments and monitor provision in order to have a better understanding of what needs to be improved. However, this has not yet had time to halt the decline in standards. The school has begun to systematically track pupils' progress more accurately and targeted support is now being provided for some groups of pupils. This is clearly having a positive effect on learning in Year 6. However, many of these initiatives are recent and there is an air of fragility about their long-term impact due to the lack of rigour in other Key Stage 2 classes. Self-evaluation procedures are now helping the school to identify key weaknesses but the information gathered has not been analysed quickly enough so that swift and appropriate action can be taken. As a result, improvement has been slow and pupils have not been provided with the additional support they need to

make up lost ground. Governors are clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are very loyal and supportive of its work.



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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
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?	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

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	3
The behaviour of learners	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	3

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
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

<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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
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	4
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?	Yes

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

7 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More RC Primary School, Middlesbrough, TS4 3QH

I enjoyed my visit and thank you so much for making me welcome. I found some good things about your school which I want to share with you. The youngest children in the Nursery and Reception classes are enjoying school very much and are learning well. Children in Key Stage 1 are making good progress and Year 6 are doing lots of extra work to help them improve. However, in some classes, I think you could achieve even more. I have placed your school into a special category so that the teachers can help you to reach higher levels in your work each year. Another inspector will be coming again to check on how this is going.

You behave well in lessons and play happily together outside. You are very kind in the way you raise money for charities. I enjoyed seeing you dressed up as book characters. Your parents made a great effort to help you with your costumes. The staff take good care of you and this helps you to feel safe and happy. It was also good to see how well you enjoyed your lunches. The salad bar is tremendous.

The school has been working hard recently to improve how well you are taught and this is beginning to help improve your work. I have asked the teachers to make sure that your lessons are good in every class and in all subjects. I would especially like to see improvements in English. You, in turn, need to work really hard on reading, writing, mathematics and science.

I thoroughly enjoyed talking with you about your work and watching you learn, and wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Gianna Ulyatt

(Lead inspector)