

St. Thomas of Canterbury C of E Aided Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115179
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311867
Inspection date	28 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Roderick Passant

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	299
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Canon Robert White
Headteacher	Mr Andy Scott-Evans
Date of previous school inspection	18 June 2003
School address	Sawyers Hall Lane Brentwood Essex CM15 9BX
Telephone number	01277 223651
Fax number	01277 264098

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the school's overall effectiveness and investigated the following issues: current progress of pupils; personal development; and aspects of leadership and management, particularly the rigour of the school's self-evaluation system and its use in continuing school improvement.

Evidence was gathered from external assessment data, the information that the school has on tracking pupils' progress, the school's self-evaluation and its improvement plan, and lesson observations. Discussions were held with members of the senior leadership team, the chair of governors, the local authority (LA) link adviser and two groups of Year 6 pupils. Other aspects were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate within the report.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average. It is a popular school and often oversubscribed. It has strong links with the local church. Most pupils come from outside the immediate vicinity of the school but the majority attended the adjacent infant school. Whilst attainment on entry has been above average, it is now exceptionally high. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is low, as is the percentage of pupils with a minority ethnic background. The percentage of pupils who have learning difficulties and pupils with a statement of special educational need is below average. The school has a Healthy Schools accreditation and has also gained Activemark in recognition of its work in physical education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It has a tradition of high academic attainment whilst at the same time fostering excellent personal development. Pupils enjoy school a great deal, are highly motivated and avid to learn because the school provides a rich range of experiences within a warm, friendly ethos underpinned by core values such as caring, respect and responsibility. Within this secure, inclusive Christian ethos, pupils develop in confidence and maturity. They learn to show sensitivity towards others and to take responsibility for themselves and their actions.

The overwhelming majority of parents support this judgement. Parents stress the high standard of education and the outstanding care and support given to their children. 'Fantastic' and 'excellent' are commonly used adjectives and appear throughout the responses. Staff know the pupils very well, they listen to and value what pupils have to say and they are attentive to the individuals in their care. A parent wrote about the school's caring ethos in which, 'children are seen as individuals and are not put into boxes'.

The school has maintained very high standards since the last inspection. School data shows that pupils are currently making at least good progress across the school. Pupils with learning difficulties are making excellent progress in relation to their targets, a view supported by parents. The school employs additional teachers, supported by effective teaching assistants, to allow small support groups to operate within the setting arrangements with a high ratio of adults to pupils. The quality of self-review is very rigorous. The school has identified from its annual review of its work the need to change the way it teaches science and is giving more emphasis to experimental and investigative work to address the slight but discernible drop in science attainment.

The school fosters excellent attitudes to learning because, as pupils said, 'there's lots to do,' and 'lots of the lessons are exciting.' One pupil thought there was a good balance between 'sports and academic work'. The rich curriculum provides excellent opportunities for pupils to achieve wide-ranging success, be it maintaining a Samba rhythm, being in the Christmas production or playing in a team. The quality of relationships that pupils have with their teachers is a key element in the good learning. Pupils think that teachers are 'very helpful' and 'very caring.' This was evident from classroom observations. Pupils were relaxed and evidently gained an immense personal satisfaction from getting answers right - competitiveness is channelled effectively into the concept of achieving a 'personal best' - but pupils are not afraid of making mistakes or asking for help. Lessons balance rigorous expectations with warmth, humour and praise. Teaching is very strong and often outstanding in the school. Although in practice targets are not always refined for different abilities within the sets, planning is very detailed. This means that teachers are confident, lessons move along well and pupils are clear about what it is they are doing. Teachers are skilled, teach with great energy and enthusiasm and make very effective use of information and communication technology, particularly the interactive white boards, to move learning on. Teachers work extremely hard for the benefit of pupils and there is a professional climate of teamwork and mutual support. In order to respond effectively to the fact that pupils are entering the school with even higher levels of attainment the school aims to raise the good levels of learning even more. Given the current high quality of teaching, this additional improvement can be found by tapping into pupils' high levels of motivation and excellent attitudes to a greater extent than at present. Currently information to guide pupils

on how to improve is not shared with them consistently enough to enable all to demonstrate their initiative and take more responsibility for their learning.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is excellent. The school works hard to extend pupils' cultural experience within religious education and personal, social and health education. Pupils report no racism or bullying because 'most children are kind' and 'everyone gets on well together', although they did acknowledge that, very rarely there was some name calling, usually when what started as fun gets slightly out of hand. They feel safe in school and are clear that they all have an adult they would go to if they were upset about something. Pupils have an extremely good understanding of what makes a healthy lifestyle and are clearly taught to look after themselves physically and on the Internet. They make a good contribution to the school community. Year 6 pupils are excellent ambassadors of the school. The school prepares pupils extremely well for the next phase of their education, which is evident in their maturity, positive attitudes towards learning and each other and their academic skills.

The headteacher and the deputy headteacher have been in post a very short time, although the headteacher was the former deputy headteacher and involved in the school's leadership over a long period. He is well known to both pupils and parents, has their confidence and he knows the school extremely well. The very strong sense of teamwork noted in the last inspection report remains evident. The headteacher provides strong direction to build on the success of the school and has a record of accomplishment in the school's improvement. Working with the new deputy head's fresh view of the school, he is clear about the school's priorities and has set particularly challenging attainment targets, in order to raise even higher the expectations of what the pupils can achieve. These raised expectations have been absorbed into the school's culture, revitalising the school's aim of helping every child reach their 'full potential'. The refined assessment systems track pupils' progress very carefully and allow the school to pick up quickly on the need for additional individual support. The experienced senior leadership team provides the headteacher with very effective support. The school has very strong links with the adjacent infant school and other local schools. Governance is excellent but a more formalised self-review would be helpful at this time. Governors are very committed, undertake training, are highly involved strategically and provide the school with appropriate challenge. The school has an excellent capacity for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make pupils more aware of what they need to do in order to improve their 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?	1
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
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	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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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	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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	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

29 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Aided Junior School, Brentwood
CM15 9BX

Thank you for making me so welcome in your school. I am sorry that I could not attend your assembly because I was working in the school office but I enjoyed your singing very much. My particular thanks to the Year 6 pupils who gave up part of their lunch time to talk to me. I was very impressed by how grown up you were and your thoughtfulness. What you had to say was very helpful.

You help to make this an excellent school. You make good progress in your work, some of you even better, and you reach high standards. The school also helps you develop as young people exceptionally well. I thought that your behaviour in and around the school was excellent. You all get on so well together but you also have an adult you could go to if you have a problem. You told me that you feel safe in school. You and your parents said that you enjoy school a great deal, because you do a lot of exciting things in your lessons and there are lots of clubs. Your teachers are very helpful and very caring and they help you progress well. All adults in the school work very hard on your behalf. One thing I asked of Mr Scott-Evans is to find ways to help you learn to push yourselves to do even better by asking teachers to give you more information about how you might improve your work. You seem to be so keen and enthusiastic and clearly you want to do well.

Keep up the good work!

Sincere good wishes for your future school careers.

Roderick Passant

Lead inspector