

St Thomas More's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115205
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311877
Inspection date	15 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Godfrey Bancroft

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	214
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Simon Fenning
Headteacher	Mrs Bridget Harris
Date of previous school inspection	13 June 2005
School address	Priory Street Colchester Essex CO1 2QB
Telephone number	01206 865722
Fax number	01206868745

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector

The Inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the ability of the school to sustain the current pattern of improvements in standards and in pupils' progress
- the impact of recently introduced measures to enhance the curriculum and make pupils' learning more meaningful
- the role of governors in evaluating the quality of the school's work and in holding it to account.

Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons, sampling of pupils' work, the analysis of school documentation and discussions with pupils, staff and governors. Other aspects of the school's work 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 in this report.

Description of the school

This is an average sized primary school. It caters for pupils who are mainly from Catholic families across a relatively wide area around Colchester. Children's attainment on entry to the Reception class is close to that expected for their age. The percentage of pupils eligible for a free school meal is well below that found nationally. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups and the percentage who speak English as an additional language are broadly average. The percentage of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average.

The school has gained the following awards: Activemark, Artsmark, Basic Skills, Healthy Schools, Inclusion Mark and Investors in People.

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 is popular, over-subscribed and highly regarded by the community it serves. One parent, summing up the overwhelmingly positive views of many, commented 'I cannot praise the school enough. It has high standards and my children say learning is fun'.

Pupils achieve exceptionally well. Over recent years, the results of national tests reveal a picture of rising standards and pupils who make excellent progress. Pupils, who for a variety of reasons, sometimes find learning difficult, also make exceptional progress. The same applies to those who are learning English as a second language. This is because the school is vigilant at recognising any pupil who might be at risk of falling behind and staff intervene promptly to ensure that progress is maintained. Teachers are also exceedingly good at challenging those pupils who learn quickly. Consequently, at the end of Year 2, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above average. Standards, by the end of Year 6, in English, mathematics and science are consistently well above average, and exceptionally high in some years. The school sets very challenging, but realistic, targets for attainment, showing the current trend of rising standards is on course to be maintained. Pupils' academic success and their exceptional personal development are based on the outstanding care, guidance and support the school provides. Procedures to ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for are robust. In turn, the outstanding leadership of the headteacher, who provides the school with a very clear sense of direction and purpose and has brought together a hard working and extremely effective team of staff, underpin the school's success.

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Attendance is broadly average. Whilst a few parents continue to take their children on holiday during term time, the school is doing all it can to improve attendance. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary. Pupils flourish both academically and socially. As one pupil, who was typical of many said, 'I just love everything about my school'. Pupils' spiritual development is enhanced by close links with the Catholic Church and by excellent opportunities to participate in the creative arts, including dance and musical activities. Pupils know how to stay safe and are knowledgeable about the importance of taking regular exercise and the need to eat healthily. The high standards they attain in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) mean pupils are prepared exceptionally well for the next stage of their education and to face future challenges.

Teaching and learning are outstanding and the school provides a base for training teachers who are new to the profession. A significant amount of exemplary teaching was seen during the inspection. Lessons are planned with great care to meet the needs of the full range of abilities in each class. The promotion of pupils' speaking and listening skills, often through the superb use of drama, is a very positive feature of many lessons. Relationships between pupils and adults are exemplary. Pupils clearly enjoy their lessons and are very eager learners. They appreciate the ways in which teachers make lessons interesting. Pupils' progress is assessed accurately and marking provides them with helpful information about how to improve their work. Whilst marking is good, it does not always link advice for improvement closely enough to pupils' targets. Arrangements to track pupils' progress over longer periods and to keep them and their parents and carers informed about the progress they are making are excellent.

The curriculum is outstanding and an exceptional range of additional activities and after-school clubs enhances pupils' learning. Even so, the school has introduced a series of initiatives to link pupils' learning and promote their understanding across different subjects through topics and themes. It has done this with great success. Music, sport and performances have a high profile in the life of the school and give great pleasure to pupils and their families.

Leadership and management, including the work of governors, are outstanding. Governors are involved fully in monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision and are very knowledgeable about the work of the school. Procedures to analyse the performance of the school and to identify any areas in need of improvement are accurate and robust. Senior and middle managers also contribute very well to these procedures and the school is further developing the role of recently appointed subject leaders. Even so, the evaluation of initiatives in the development plan is not linked closely enough to the school's targets to raise attainment and further improve pupils' progress. Arrangements to consult with pupils and with parents and carers about the quality of provision and to respond to their views are good.

The school has addressed the issues identified at the time of the last inspection very successfully, to the extent that the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance pupils' learning in all subjects is outstanding. The school is not in any way complacent about the quality of education it provides. Given the pattern of improving standards and the impact of the work of the headteacher and senior managers, the school's capacity for continued improvement is outstanding.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children in the Reception class make outstanding progress in all areas of their learning. They are eager and independent learners, who behave very well, and benefit greatly from exceptional teaching and a very effective curriculum. The recently introduced scheme to help children speak correctly and develop their writing skills is building very effectively on their early language skills. Consequently, children's progress in language and literacy is excellent. By the time they leave the Reception class, children's attainment, in all areas of their learning, exceeds that expected for their age. Learning activities are carefully tailored to meet children's individual needs. This is because the progress of each child is assessed accurately and frequently. Consequently, teachers are able to modify what they teach in the light of assessment outcomes. Teachers and their assistants also provide a very effective balance for children between activities that are directed by adults and others in which children can make choices about what they wish to do. The school is currently exploring ways of making even more use of the outdoor environment to enhance children's learning, particularly in terms of their physical development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Relate the advice that marking provides for pupils about how to improve their work more closely to their targets.
- Create stronger links between the evaluation of initiatives in the school development plan and the data available for measuring standards and pupil's progress.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	1
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	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

16 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More's Catholic Primary School, Colchester, Essex, CO1 2QB

You may recall I recently visited your school to check if it was working effectively. Many of you and your parents and carers told me you think your school is excellent. I agree, it is a superb school. I was very impressed by your willingness to explain about your work and to tell me how much you enjoy lessons and the many other activities available to you.

Your teachers and the other staff all do an outstanding job, which helps you to make rapid progress and do very well in all subjects. The excellent help provided for those of you who sometimes find learning hard means that you too can always do your best. Your behaviour is exceptionally good and your willingness to work hard is most impressive. What comes over is that being a pupil at St Thomas More's is great fun. I thought your eagerness to answer questions and to participate in the drama activities was brilliant.

Mrs Harris, the staff and governors all work very hard and very successfully, to make sure everything at school works as well as it should. Even so, they are always looking for ways of making things even better. With this in mind, I have asked them to consider:

- making sure that when they mark your work, they include advice about how to meet your targets
- when they plan school improvements, they evaluate their success by looking closely at how they have helped you to make progress.

I am confident that with your love of learning you will continue to do well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Godfrey Bancroft

Lead inspector