

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117454
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312620
Inspection date	9 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Geof Timms

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	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	92
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Breda Jackson
Headteacher	Mrs Judith Higgon
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2003
School address	High Street Puckeridge Ware Hertfordshire SG11 1RZ
Telephone number	01920 821450
Fax number	01920 822534

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the effectiveness of the Foundation Stage, the support given to boys and the higher attaining pupils, and the use of assessment in setting targets to help pupils improve their work. Evidence was gathered from observing lessons and the quality of work produced, discussions with pupils and with teachers who have specific responsibilities, and from the records of pupils' progress. 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 a Catholic school that is smaller than average and takes pupils from a wide area in and around the village of Puckeridge. The school has recently begun to admit children of nursery age. Attainment on entry varies from year to year but is often below that expected. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is broadly average but the school has a higher than average proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is significantly below average. The school has awards for being a Healthy School and for standards in Early Years. It also has Investor in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This outstanding, caring school offers an excellent education and outstanding opportunities for pupils' personal development. The school gives excellent value for money. High quality teaching ensures pupils achieve very high standards. The school is led very effectively. As one parent stated, 'There is a very good atmosphere between teachers, parents and children which enables my child to get the education she deserves'.

Achievement is outstanding, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics, building well on the foundations laid in the Nursery and the Reception class. By the end of Year 2, standards are consistently above average and standards in the basic skills continue to rise across Key Stage 2. In Year 6, standards in English are well above average, whilst in mathematics and science they are exceptionally high. The school works hard to ensure boys perform as well as girls, especially in reading and writing, and uses information and communication technology (ICT) very well to support them.

The school tracks individual pupils' progress very carefully, allowing any slight underachievement to be quickly identified and addressed. Higher attaining pupils are helped to extend their skills and knowledge well. Targets are appropriately challenging, well matched to pupils' needs and understood by them. Marking is precise and used both to celebrate success and to show pupils how they can improve. The curriculum has been reviewed to ensure it is meaningful to pupils, that it meets statutory requirements and that it offers high levels of enrichment, through, for example, extension activities with a secondary school and drama or dance events.

For their review, staff focused particularly on the planning for pupils' key basic skills. They have spent less time looking at the 'non-core' curriculum, its impact on pupils' learning, or on ways of making activities more meaningful to pupils through more explicit links between subjects.

The high level of care is a major reason for the school's success. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, take a full part in the activities provided. They understand how to keep themselves safe, both in and out of school and there is little bullying; should it occur, it is speedily dealt with.

Teaching is often outstanding and has a clear impact on learning. Teachers plan for the different ages and abilities of the pupils well, and the use of resources, including interactive whiteboards, has improved since the last inspection. Teaching assistants are effective and well deployed, providing excellent support for able pupils and those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Pupils clearly enjoy school. Behaviour is excellent, right from the Foundation Stage, as is attendance, which the school has worked hard to improve. Pupils on the school council form an articulate and thoughtful group, and all make an excellent contribution to the local and school community through their fund raising and readiness to take on responsibilities. The high level of basic skills, especially in literacy, numeracy and ICT, helps prepare pupils extremely well for the next stage in their education, and for the world of work.

The headteacher, well supported by her senior teacher and other staff, is committed to improvement. She offers high quality support and challenge to teachers and pupils alike. Her unrelenting focus on high standards has created an outstanding ethos throughout the school. Self-evaluation is accurate and well informed. Governors have an excellent understanding of the schools' strengths, and of the need to maintain them. They provide appropriate support

and challenge. All adults involved with the school reflect its Catholic and caring nature. The school has an outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The Foundation Stage provides an excellent start to school for the youngest children. The outstanding organisation, teaching and high quality support help all children, including those recently admitted of nursery age, to make excellent progress in all areas of learning. Children quickly settle at school and work and play together well.

By the end of the Reception year, all children are working at least within the expected learning goals and many have exceeded them. The teacher makes excellent use of resources taking advantage of the bright, interesting learning environment and high quality outdoor areas. Record keeping is detailed and accurate, and helps provide an appropriate level of challenge for individual children. A major strength is the attention given to children with learning difficulties and disabilities, an approach that enriches the experiences of the rest of the class too.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop ways to monitor the impact of the non-core curriculum on pupils' learning.
- Consider further ways to improve cross-curricular links to make the curriculum even more meaningful to pupils.

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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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
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?	2
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

10 October 2007

Dear Children,

Inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School, Puckeridge, SG11 1RZ

I am writing to thank you for the way in which you made me welcome when I visited your school, and for the help you gave me by showing me your work and telling me about the things you like about the school. I particularly want to thank the school council whom I met at lunchtime.

I think you are very lucky to be at such a good school. All of you I spoke to had a lot of very positive things to say about the school, as did your parents, and what I found certainly agrees with those feelings. I think St Thomas' is an outstanding school. There is very high quality teaching which helps you to learn, so that you achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics, and you reach very high standards by the time you leave the school.

You help your teachers because you have excellent attitudes towards school and your behaviour in lessons is so good. Mrs Higgon and the other staff are working very hard to make sure they provide work for you that is challenging and helps you make progress. They do this well, right from when you start school. They set excellent targets for you and these help you know what you need to do to get even better at your work.

The school helps you grow as people too, and this helps prepare you really well for secondary school and for your lives after school. I especially like the way you work and play with your friends who find learning difficult or who have other disabilities.

Because the school has worked so hard on the basic skills you need, such as reading, writing, numeracy and ICT, I think they now need to look at how well you learn in the other subjects, and to make more links between subjects so that you get more opportunities to use your skills in different ways.

Thank you again for your help. Enjoy your time at St Thomas' and keep working hard!

Yours sincerely,

Geof Timms

Lead inspector