

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118199
Local Authority	Isle of Wight
Inspection number	312844
Inspection dates	30 September –1 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Brian Evans

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	79
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	14
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Christine Behan
Headteacher	Mrs Jo Anderson
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	High Street Carisbrooke Newport PO30 1NR
Telephone number	01983 522747

Age group	4–9
Inspection dates	30 September –1 October 2008
Inspection number	312844

Fax number

01983 521050

Age group 4-9

Inspection dates 30 September -1 October 2008

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary is a small voluntary aided school. The school roll has fallen since the last inspection and the general picture is one of falling rolls in the local area. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) attend the Reception class. There is a privately managed on-site provision for pre-school children. The vast majority of pupils are of White British Heritage; there are a few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or who have English as an additional language. The number of pupils with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) is very low. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. In April 2006 the school was federated with St Mary's Catholic Primary School under one governing body and one executive headteacher supported by two school leaders.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Thomas is a good school. It is particularly successful in the way it encourages pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are many opportunities for spiritual and cultural development. Pupils talk confidently and respectfully about the similarities and differences between faiths. A good range of extra activities, including visits and after-school clubs, enriches pupils' experiences. Parents are warm in their praise of the school's positive ethos. Several parents refer specifically to the relatively new leadership of the executive headteacher of the federated schools and the school leader. One parent commented, 'I am very pleased - the school has come a long way already in the year'. Parents rightly judge that the new leadership has raised pupils' performance this year and improved the quality of teaching and the motivation of school staff.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils behave well, are attentive to their teachers and are responsive and confident in class. Robust measures are taken to ensure their safety and welfare. Pupils are happy and enjoy each others' company. They make a good contribution to the school and wider community. The positive qualities that pupils display result from their good enjoyment of school and the very good relationships with teaching and support staff. Parents and pupils are very aware of the importance of an active lifestyle. Standards are above average. When Reception children enter the EYFS class, their knowledge and skills are just below those expected for their age, although this varies from year-to-year. They make good progress in their academic and personal development so that they are well prepared for entry to Year 1, though their skills in writing are less well developed than in other areas. At the end of Year 2, overall standards are just above average and improving and pupils make good progress. Standards are lower in writing than in other subjects. At the end of Year 4, the standards that pupils reach in English, mathematics and science are above those expected for this age range. The majority of pupils in Year 2 and in the mixed Year 3 and 4 class make better than expected progress, and in all years almost all pupils make at least the expected rate of progress in all subjects.

Pupils' good overall progress and achievement are a result of good teaching and learning. A good balance is struck between whole-class activities and tasks that are undertaken individually or in groups. Pupils and teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) well, such as interactive white boards to support effective learning. The quality of the feedback to pupils from teachers' marking of their work is generally helpful but not wholly consistent between classes. Assessment data provide teachers with sound information for setting pupils challenging targets. However, teachers recognise the need for a more creative curriculum approach in which pupils make clear links between subjects and areas of learning. This is rightly a key priority in the school development plan. Leadership and management are good. The executive headteacher, with the full support of the school, has a clear vision for the school and shows great skill in making all adults feel valued. Governance is satisfactory. The strong emphasis on developing pupils' personal qualities has been crucial in the school's continued success. The school has a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the Reception class from a number of pre-school settings. Overall, their skills on entry are below expected levels but nearly all make good progress in most areas, particularly

in their personal development. By the time the children leave Reception, their skills and knowledge are broadly in line with what is expected for their age. Parents are very supportive. One commented, 'My daughter looks forward to school and really enjoys it.' Another stated that, 'I would not hesitate to send my second child to the school.'

Children are happy and take part enthusiastically in the activities planned for them. The school's federation with another primary school in Ryde extends their learning experiences as, for example, when Reception children visit their partner school's pond and the conservation area. Children enjoy good relationships with teaching and support staff because all adults respond well to their individual needs. Children's behaviour is good, and they display a good level of confidence. They work well independently and cooperate well in groups. Children express themselves clearly in class but the quality of their work in writing is variable although improving. There are imaginative aspects to the EYFS curriculum. For example, children enjoy immensely their fun specialist music and French sessions. The newly refurbished outdoor area provides children with attractive opportunities for their good physical and creative development. The leadership and management are good and fully meet the requirements of the EYFS. The Early Years leader has been well supported through access to specialist advice in the partner school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards of writing throughout the school.
- Implement a curriculum that has more creative links between different subjects and areas of learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards by the end of Year 4 are above average and pupils make good progress. Writing skills are not as strong as their other basic skills because there are weaknesses in phonics (how letters in words relate to sounds), sentence construction and grammar. However, all groups of pupils, including those who are at an early stage of acquiring English, make good progress in listening and speaking and in reading. Overall, the improving trends in mathematics and science standards confirm good teaching and a practical approach to learning. Pupils acquire skills in information and communication technology that are in line with those expected for their age and they make good progress. Pupils with learning difficulties achieve well because of the effective support and deployment of teaching assistants in each class and their partnership with teachers. Overall, the school meets its targets and recognises that there is scope to raise standards to even more challenging levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Cultural awareness is emphasised effectively through display, in the topics studied and in assemblies. Adults show great concern for the personal development and welfare of each pupil.

A high proportion of pupils participate in extra-curricular activities. These extend pupils' enjoyment of learning outside the classroom. Pupils enjoy and develop good communication skills when attending music and French and Spanish language classes during and after school. Good school procedures to counter bullying or name-calling are followed closely. Pupils confirm that they tell a teacher or the headteacher straightaway should they occur and that such

incidents are dealt with very quickly and effectively. Behaviour is good. The behaviour support assistant and teaching assistants provide sensitive support for pupils who find it difficult to behave well or who have emotional difficulties. There have been no exclusions in the past two years. Attendance has improved significantly over the past year and is now close to the national average. This is because the school's new and more rigorous procedures have been effective in discouraging occasional absence. The school council representatives carry out their roles in a mature and responsible way for such young pupils. Members proudly announced that they had persuaded the headteacher and classteachers to contribute 10 pence for each child who walked to school on the fund-raising day for charity.

Parents and pupils are very aware of what constitute healthy foods and the importance of an active lifestyle. Music is a significant strength and this small school has been remarkably successful in music festivals across the island. They contribute greatly to developing pupils' self-confidence and relationships, and enable pupils to participate fully in the life of the school and wider community. A focus on the development of pupils' basic skills helps to support their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. In spite of some inconsistency, most lessons are characterised by positive working relationships and eager participation by pupils who are keen to do their best. There is no inadequate teaching. High quality paired discussion and good speaking and listening activities challenge pupils in their thinking and enable them to 'bounce ideas off each other'. Teachers sustain a positive working atmosphere. Pupils appreciate their friendly good-humoured approach. New resources such as interactive whiteboards help to enliven teaching. Teachers give good opportunities for pupils to use these whiteboards interactively. Teaching assistants make an important contribution to learning. They effectively support all pupils including those with learning difficulties and those at an early stage of learning English. Teachers sometimes miss opportunities to make links between subjects or areas of learning. This issue has been identified by the school; it is being addressed as part of a new creative approach to the curriculum in the development plan.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well planned and resourced with appropriate emphases on progress in the teaching of basic skills and on promoting healthy lifestyles. Teachers plan very carefully to ensure continuity in learning in shared or mixed age classes. Displays and pupils' work around the school illustrate well the work of pupils in the varied topics and subjects. Clubs provide good lunchtime and after school activities. Good liaison with its federated partner school and its cluster of schools helps to widen the resources available to teachers and encourages the sharing of good practice. Residential stays and local visits to areas of interest on the island contribute well to pupils' enjoyment of learning and to their social skills. Curriculum planning caters well for those with learning difficulties or specific gifts and talents. The school development plan includes a strong focus on providing a more creative curriculum. This focus aims to enhance pupils' understanding of the relationships between different areas of learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support that pupils receive are good. Pupils feel safe. They are confident that there is someone who will help if they have a problem or need support. As one pupil put it, 'Teachers and other adults listen to us'. Further support is provided through the good relationships the school has developed with outside agencies. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities receive good support, as do those who speak English as an additional language. Systems for assessment and target setting are increasingly effective in informing pupils on how to improve their work. Most pupils know how to improve their work. Good links with the local secondary school ensure a smooth transition to the next stage of pupils' education. The school makes good use of external agencies to provide extra support for pupils whenever necessary. Child protection arrangements are effective, and pupils are secure in a clean and carefully maintained environment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership over the past year of the newly appointed executive headteacher of the federation, ably supported by the school leader, has been a major strength. It focuses effectively on improving the provision to promote pupils' progress in learning, enjoyment and the standards they attain. Self-evaluation and analysis are good because senior staff have correctly identified the school's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, leaders and managers are increasingly providing evidence of the impact of their initiatives upon pupils' learning. The development plan is based on thorough analyses of outcomes that identify areas of strength and improvement. Close monitoring of teaching has enabled leaders to take appropriate action to improve their lessons, including effective professional development and training for both teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils and parents support the school well. A clear policy and action plan on good community cohesion is exemplified by both the Catholic Global activities and the school's involvement in local community events such as the annual flower show. Administrative support and financial controls are good. Governance is satisfactory. A number of the governors are newly appointed and there is a very new chair of governors.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	2
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
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	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
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?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

14 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School, Newport, PO30 1NR

Thank you very much for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school. It was good to hear so many of you say how much you enjoy coming to school. I am not surprised as St Thomas is a good school. I found a lot of things about the school that I really liked. Here are the most important.

- You are developing excellent attitudes to each other and are keen to learn about other cultures.
- You are all learning well and reaching standards above those expected by the end of Year 4. You told me you enjoy your lessons very much. Congratulations on your musical successes!
- Your teachers really know how well you are doing so that they can plan for you to improve.
- You have some good ideas on how to improve the school even more.

The challenge now is to achieve even higher standards in your work. So that it can be even better, I have asked the school to:

- improve your writing to raise standards
- make more links between the lessons you are studying so that you know how different subjects and areas of learning connect to one another.

You can help by reading what your teachers write in your books and taking their advice.

Once again, thank you for being so friendly and helpful.

Yours sincerely

Brian Evans

Lead Inspector