

St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, Canterbury

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118777
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313085
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Derek Watts

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	188
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marion Nash
Headteacher	Dominic McBride
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2004
School address	Old Ruttington Lane Canterbury CT1 1NY
Telephone number	01227 462539
Fax number	01227 459655

Age group	4-11
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2008
Inspection number	313085

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Thomas' Catholic Primary is smaller than average. About two thirds of the pupils are from a White British background. The remainder are from a range of other ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language has increased during the past few years and is above average. A significant number of pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is above average. The nature of these includes moderate learning difficulties and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. A higher than usual proportion of pupils leave or join the school partway through the school year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Thomas' Catholic Primary is a satisfactory and improving school. There are good features to its work. The headteacher provides good educational direction and has gained the confidence and respect of pupils, parents and staff. Effective pastoral care and support and a positive school atmosphere lead to good personal development and well-being for pupils. Pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching are satisfactory but there are clear signs that these are improving. Parents have favourable views about the school and the vast majority are pleased with the care and education provided for their children. The headteacher, the school atmosphere and the improvements being made receive particular praise. Typical comments from the parents' questionnaires were, 'Great improvements to the school over the past few years', 'Strong feeling of community', 'Very friendly atmosphere' and 'Inspiring headteacher'. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school. Under his leadership, the school's performance is systematically reviewed. The leadership roles of other staff, particularly their monitoring and evaluation skills, are developing well. Teamwork among the staff is good and there is a strong commitment to making improvements. Positive action has been taken to strengthen teaching and there is now a higher proportion of good teaching in the school. This is having a positive impact on achievement and standards. The school is not complacent and there are good plans to improve teaching and to raise achievement further, particularly in mathematics. Across the school, teachers have good relationships with their pupils. Teachers' instructions, questioning and explanations promote learning well. Pupils make good progress when they are suitably challenged and tasks are well matched to their abilities. However, this good practice is not consistent across the school. In some lessons, the pace of learning declines because of overlong introductions and pupils not being involved enough in their learning. They enjoy the good range of additional activities that enrich the curriculum. There have been considerable improvements over the last few years to the accommodation, both inside and out. Standards in Year 2 have improved and are now average. The 2007 national test results for Year 6 were below average. Pupils made satisfactory overall progress but performed less well in mathematics. The school has clear plans to improve the mathematics curriculum. At present, pupils have insufficient opportunities to apply and develop numeracy skills in other subjects. The school has taken positive steps to raise achievement in writing by extending the range of writing opportunities provided. It is responding well to the needs of an increasing number of pupils with English as an additional language and a mobile pupil population. Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their keen participation in activities. They are courteous, friendly and helpful. They work collaboratively in lessons and play together well in the playground. Clear expectations by staff and good relationships lead to good pupil behaviour. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and know how to keep themselves safe. They make good contributions to the school and wider community.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Most years groups enter Reception with knowledge and skills below those expected for their age. They settle into routines and make good gains in their personal development. Progress in other areas of learning is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. A wide range of activities are provided but these are not always well matched to the needs of the children. Some tasks are not sufficiently challenging or relevant to the main topic being studied. Children enjoy their learning and relate well to adults and their peers. The school has improved the outdoor equipment and facilities although the range of vehicles to promote physical development

is limited. By the end of Reception, standards are below those expected, particularly in elements of literacy and mathematical development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in Years 3 to 6, particularly in mathematics, by implementing planned changes to the mathematics curriculum and increasing opportunities for pupils to apply numeracy skills in other subjects.
- Improve the overall quality of teaching, ensuring that all lessons suitably challenging, pupils are fully involved in their learning and lessons maintain a brisk pace.
- Improve the provision in the Foundation Stage so children make good progress in all areas of learning. A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children in Reception get off to a sound start. Standards in Year 2 have improved from below average to average in reading, writing and mathematics. Improvements to teaching in Years 1 and 2 mean that pupils are now making good progress. National test results for Year 6 in 2007 were below average in English, mathematics and science, but these results were better than those of the previous two years. National data and the school's assessments show that pupils' rate of progress through Years 3 to 6 is satisfactory and improving, particularly in Years 5 and 6. However, pupils perform less well in mathematics. The school has taken positive action to increase progress in this subject, with further improvements planned. Pupils with English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties are making satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are enthusiastic about school and have positive attitudes to learning. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, although their knowledge and understanding of non-western cultures is only satisfactory. Attendance is satisfactory. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and possess a good understanding of the importance of healthy diets and taking regular exercise. They thrive on additional responsibilities. Those on the school council have contributed to improvements to school meals and to playground equipment and facilities. They contribute well to the wider community by raising funds for well-known charities. At St Thomas', pupils are adequately prepared for the next stage of their education and later life. By the time they leave, they have well-developed personal and social skills and possess sound literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory overall, with an increasing proportion of teaching that is good. Teachers have established good relationships with their class. They make the purpose of the lesson clear so pupils know what they are expected to learn. Pupils are attentive and respond well to their teachers' clear instructions and effective questioning. Pupils are developing their speaking and

listening skills well because of the good opportunities provided for discussion. When teachers use assessment information effectively, tasks are well matched to pupils' needs. As a result, pupils are challenged well and they make good gains in their learning. In a few lessons, pupils are not suitably challenged and find the work either too hard or too easy. Introductions to lessons are sometimes too long and this results in a slow pace and a lack of pupil involvement. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed and contribute well to learning, particularly for pupils who find learning difficult or are at an early stage of learning English. Marking provides praise and encouragement for good work. However, clear comments to help pupils improve are less consistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum promotes pupils' personal development well and enables them to make satisfactory academic progress. Pupils are being provided with more opportunities to write in different styles and for different purposes. Mathematics and science leaders have introduced more investigative and problem-solving work in their subjects but this is not consistent in all classes. Opportunities for pupils to apply and develop numeracy skills in other subjects are being missed. The teaching of French adds new a dimension to pupils' learning and contributes well to their cultural development. A good range of additional activities contribute to pupils' enjoyment and interests. For example, a successful residential visit for Year 6 to an outdoor centre in Surrey provides new and interesting activities and builds pupils' team skills. Healthy lifestyles and personal safety education are promoted well across the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Effective pastoral care and support contribute well to pupils' personal development. Good induction arrangements and the school's welcoming ethos enable new pupils who join during the school year to settle quickly. Procedures to ensure pupils' protection and safety are effective. The school works hard to monitor and promote good attendance but a significant number of parents do not support the school's efforts and take their children on holidays in term time. The school has responded well to the increasing numbers of pupils with English as an additional language. Pupils with behavioural difficulties are well managed and supported. Assessment information is usually used well to plan teaching. Pupils of similar ability have group targets for writing and mathematics. Most pupils know what they are working at to improve but not all teachers are reviewing targets often enough or incorporating them into day-to-day work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Under the headteacher's good leadership, other leaders and staff are more focused on raising pupils' achievement and improving the quality of provision. Through coaching and professional development, leaders are particularly improving their skills in monitoring performance and action planning. Accurate self-evaluation has led to effective action to raise achievement and standards in Years 1 and 2 and to increase pupils' progress in Years 3 to 6 by improving teaching. However, the school's leaders and managers are not complacent and know that there is more to do before teaching and pupils' achievement are consistently good. The school has

demonstrated a good capacity to improve. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's performance. They are supportive and are beginning to provide constructive challenge.

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
---	----------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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?	3
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

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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	3
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**

- 19 June 2008 Dear Pupils Inspection of St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, Canterbury CT1 1NY Thank you so much for welcoming us into your school and showing us your work. We enjoyed our visit and would like to tell you what we found. Yours is a satisfactory and improving school. It has good features. These are the strengths of the school.
- You thoroughly enjoy school.
- Your school is a friendly, caring and pleasant place to be.
- Pupils in Year 1 and 2 are making good progress.
- Your behaviour is good in lessons and around the school.
- You enjoy the good range of additional learning activities.
- You show a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and keeping safe.
- Staff take good care of you and give you good support.
- Your headteacher provides good leadership and, together with the staff, has made good improvements to the school.
- Your parents give the school good support and are pleased with the care and education provided. There are three things that we have asked the school to do to make it even better.
- Some of you could make more progress in Years 3 to 6, particularly in mathematics, and the school has clear plans to make this happen.
- Sometimes your teachers could challenge you more, involve you more in your learning and ensure that lessons move on at a quick pace.
- Some of the learning activities in Reception could be improved so that children make good progress in all areas. You can help by continuing to behave well and working hard, particularly in mathematics lessons and numeracy activities. Finally, thank you once again for all your help. We wish you all the best for the future. Yours sincerely Derek Watts Lead Inspector



19 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, Canterbury CT1 1NY

Thank you so much for welcoming us into your school and showing us your work. We enjoyed our visit and would like to tell you what we found. Yours is a satisfactory and improving school. It has good features.

These are the strengths of the school.

- You thoroughly enjoy school.
- Your school is a friendly, caring and pleasant place to be.
- Pupils in Year 1 and 2 are making good progress.
- Your behaviour is good in lessons and around the school.
- You enjoy the good range of additional learning activities.
- You show a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and keeping safe.
- Staff take good care of you and give you good support.
- Your headteacher provides good leadership and, together with the staff, has made good improvements to the school.
- Your parents give the school good support and are pleased with the care and education provided.

There are three things that we have asked the school to do to make it even better.

- Some of you could make more progress in Years 3 to 6, particularly in mathematics, and the school has clear plans to make this happen.
- Sometimes your teachers could challenge you more, involve you more in your learning and ensure that lessons move on at a quick pace.
- Some of the learning activities in Reception could be improved so that children make good progress in all areas.

You can help by continuing to behave well and working hard, particularly in mathematics lessons and numeracy activities. Finally, thank you once again for all your help. We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Derek Watts
Lead Inspector