

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125291
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	315224
Inspection dates	6–7 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Graham Stephens

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	390
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ben Marlow
Headteacher	Mr Kevin Gawley
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2004
School address	Horseshoe Lane West Merrow Guildford GU1 2SX
Telephone number	01483 888 388
Fax number	01483 888 385

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is larger than most primary schools. It serves a widespread community and pupils come from a variety of backgrounds. Far more pupils enter and leave the school at times other than the beginning of the school year than in most schools. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is above average. Fewer pupils than usual are eligible for free school meals. There are more pupils from ethnic minority groups and whose first language is not believed to be English than the national average. The school has received awards for Investors in People, Basic Skills Quality Mark, Bronze Eco Award, Silver Arts Mark and the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Thomas of Canterbury provides an outstanding education for all of its pupils. The headteacher and deputy head, the senior management team and governors provide excellent leadership that impacts on all aspects of school life. Driven by the school mission statement, part of which reads '...we will encourage everyone in our school family to do the best they can,' they have a clear focus on raising standards and improving achievement. They have created an excellent environment for learning and the headteacher stated that, 'we like learning to be fun and the school an exciting place to be in.' The school's leadership modestly underestimates its considerable success but the excellent monitoring and tracking procedures that have been developed shows that it has an outstanding capacity to continue improving. Regular monitoring of achievement and standards by governors demonstrate clearly to them how successful the school is. There are very strong links with the community, the local church and other schools, including one in Uganda, and parents are overwhelmingly supportive. One wrote, 'we find the school safe, hard working, caring and fun loving - brilliant!'

Pupils achieve very well throughout the school. They enter the Foundation Stage with skills and understanding that are broadly in line with national expectations. Very good links with local pre-school settings and excellent induction arrangements mean that children quickly settle and begin to make rapid progress. This continues and when pupils leave Year 2, they have reached standards that are well above national average. By the end of Year 6, standards remain well above average. A very high proportion of pupils leave and join the school at other than normal times. This high mobility, only half of the pupils currently in Year 6 started in Year 3, does not result in any diminution of standards. The school has developed great skills in ensuring that pupils settle quickly and make outstanding progress from their starting points. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and those with English as an additional language has also increased. School data and observations confirm that they too make outstanding progress.

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils feel very safe and secure and consequently are confident and out-going. Visitors are welcomed and assimilated into the ethos of the school by the warm response of the pupils. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The very close links with Busenya Primary School in Uganda and the display of gifts recently received from there help pupils understand the differences and similarities between cultures. Pupils all understand what they have to do to live a healthy life-style.

Throughout the school, teaching and learning are never less than good and often outstanding. Lessons are well planned and teachers are very skilled in enabling pupils to evaluate both their own work and that of others against clear success criteria. These success criteria form targets that are set and monitored daily as part of the learning process. A current priority in the school improvement plan is to encourage pupils to set their own success criteria and assume even more responsibility for their own learning. Progress for all pupils has accelerated because of the very positive impact these procedures have had on learning. Support for pupils who find aspects of English and mathematics challenging is outstanding. Under the excellent leadership of the special educational needs coordinator, the highly skilled and effective teaching assistants support these pupils very well and contribute much to their outstanding progress. Pupils with English as an additional language are inducted into the school very well. They receive

outstanding support from both teachers and teaching assistants and, consequently, they also make excellent progress.

The very rich and varied curriculum, enhanced by a range of outdoor activities, covers all subjects and is outstanding. Events such as the Tudor Feast, the culmination of a study of the Tudors, accompanied by a range of period music performed by the pupils, as well as dance, tumblers and readings from Shakespeare, demonstrate the outstanding impact of the curriculum on all aspects of learning.

The headteacher provides excellent leadership. He has a clear vision, shared with all staff and governors. Together they are driving forward further improvements to the building to provide even better facilities for drama and music with the over-riding aim of improving achievement and raising standards further still. The school is not complacent and senior managers have identified accurately priorities for further development in the school improvement plan.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The provision in the Foundation Stage is excellent. The colourful, stimulating and secure learning environment encourages all children, including the most vulnerable and less able, to take full advantage of the many experiences offered by the well-organised and stimulating curriculum. Teaching is good and often outstanding. Pupils are taught directly in small groups with similar needs, ensuring that they are either challenged or supported as required. Appropriate emphasis is given to speaking and listening and the teaching of letter sounds. Behaviour is outstanding. Any disputes are resolved sensitively encouraging children to talk and resolve their problems for themselves, which they do. Rigorous systems of assessment keep staff well informed of the progress children make. Children are encouraged to be independent and to think for themselves. Asked why she had chosen a fine paintbrush a child replied 'because I need to draw thin lines!' The well used outside learning area offers children an exciting range of learning opportunities. Links with parents and pre-school placements are very good and many parents and grandparents accept the invitation to attend and work with the children.

What the school should do to improve further

There are no major weaknesses in the school. The inspection team agree that the school should implement the priorities identified in the school improvement plan.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

From their starting points, pupils of all backgrounds, gender and ability make excellent progress and achieve outstandingly well in a range of subjects. Children get off to an excellent start in the Foundation Stage because of outstanding teaching and planning. Standards at the end of Year 2 are well above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards remain above average at the end of Year 6 with many pupils attaining the higher levels in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' current work and the school's own data show that the majority of pupils are working above or well above the standards for their age. Pupils with learning difficulties relating to aspects of English and mathematics make good and often outstanding progress because of the targeted support they receive from both teachers and very skilled teaching assistants. Pupils with English as an additional language also make excellent progress. Pupils do well in music and physical education because of the numerous opportunities provided to

develop their talents. As one parent wrote '...my child loves school, has grown in confidence and is passionate about learning.'

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding and reflected in pupils' enjoyment, enthusiasm, very positive attitudes and excellent attendance. They could think of very little they would change. There is a very strong sense of community and pupils are very proud of their school. Behaviour, attitudes and relationships are excellent. Neither parents nor pupils have any concerns about bullying. When asked about it, older pupils had to try to explain the concept to younger ones.

Pupils are articulate, thoughtful, confident, friendly and helpful. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have many excellent opportunities to reflect on ideas, actions and consequences. In a Year 2 assembly, pupils performed lengthy scenes confidently and thoughtfully and the rest of the school listened with total concentration. Over time, all pupils have the opportunity to serve on the school council. Many act as playground buddies. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and staying safe. Links are very good with the secondary school and the community. Pupils' very good levels of basic skills and their outstanding personal development prepare them very well for later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is outstanding. Lessons observed were at least good and many were excellent. Common strengths include high expectations for what pupils can achieve, on-going self-evaluation and improvement, demanding questioning and very effective classroom management. Teachers have excellent relationships with pupils and this has a positive effect on their learning. In the best lessons seen, teachers demonstrated excellent subject knowledge and planned lively, interesting and varied activities. This ensured that pupils behaved very well, enjoyed learning and took pride in their work. Teachers set clear learning objectives and carefully match work to pupils' abilities. Information and communication technology supports learning very well.

Assessment is thorough and tracking rigorous. Pupils are skilled in evaluating their own work and this contributes much to their excellent achievement. Marking helps pupils know what they have to do in order to improve. Teaching assistants give excellent support to learning because they are very skilled, well managed and work very well with teachers to plan work. Pupils who find aspects of English and mathematics challenging, pupils with English as an additional language and those that are gifted and talented are given excellent support.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is interesting and exciting, enabling all pupils to achieve outstandingly well. Very close attention to the social and emotional aspects of learning has a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and personal development. A good range of extra-curricular activities, educational visits to places of interest and knowledgeable visitors who bring their expertise to

school, all contribute to pupils' enjoyment and the quality of their learning. Those with musical and sporting gifts are provided for very well through the stimulating curriculum. The emphasis placed on cross-curricular links enables pupils to capitalise on their experiences, for example, the Tudor Feast covered history, drama, art, fencing, gymnastics and a variety of musical performances. Throughout the school, both work for pupils who find aspects of English and mathematics challenging and provision for those with disabilities, are planned well ensuring their good progress. Very good induction for pupils with English as an additional language ensures rapid access to the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care and guidance provided by the school for pupils are outstanding. Pupils feel very safe and secure and know to whom they can turn for help. Parents are confident that their children will be cared for well. All health and safety requirements are fulfilled. The school has excellent procedures for pupils' medical and personal needs. Child Protection procedures are very clear and widely understood. Bullying occurs very rarely and is dealt with effectively. The school regularly seeks pupils' views and has very good procedures to ensure that these play a real part in the school's decision-making.

The school has excellent systems for tracking the progress of pupils, including those with English as an Additional Language and learning difficulties. The information gained is used very effectively to provide pupils with challenging targets and clear success criteria against learning objectives. A current priority in the school improvement plan is to hone pupils' skills to enable them to become more involved in the setting of success criteria. This would develop, even further, their ability to evaluate their own work and indicate how it might be improved. They are very well supported in this by the on-going focussed support and encouragement of all staff. Pupils who join the school at unusual times, are assessed quickly and very well supported in all that they do. Consequently, they settle quickly and make rapid progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher is rigorous in his determination to raise standards still further and improve the overall provision and facilities. He is very well supported in his outstanding leadership and management by the deputy headteacher and together they have established a harmonious and hard working team. As one parent wrote, '...we have always found the headteacher and his teaching staff to be professional, approachable, thoughtful and extremely caring.' The ethos of care and support is reflected by all staff and pervades throughout the school. The very effective senior management team establishes priorities for action and plays its part in holding staff to account for the standards attained. Senior managers have an excellent overview of standards and the progress of both individuals and groups is monitored regularly. The school improvement plan shows a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas that need to be developed further such as extending the building to further improve provision for drama, music and dance and developing opportunities for extended schools provision. Governors bring a range of skills to their role and they hold the school to account very effectively by challenging decisions and requesting explanations for actions taken and results gained in national assessments.

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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?	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

19 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School, Guildford, GU1 2SX

Thank you for being so polite, friendly and welcoming when we came to visit your school recently. We really enjoyed meeting you, talking to you and looking at all the work that you do.

We think you go to an outstanding school. This is a list of some of the things we liked best.

- You do very well in your work.
- You are very polite and caring of each other.
- Your behaviour is excellent.
- You are very good at evaluating and improving your work against success criteria set by the teachers.
- Your teachers are very good at planning and are always looking for more interesting things to teach you.
- All the adults in your school make sure that you are really well looked after.
- Your headteacher and the other people who help run your school are doing an excellent job.

Every school, even one as good as yours, has things that could be improved and these are noted in the school improvement plan. Your teachers want you to become even more skilled at evaluating your work against 'I can...' statements that you have set for yourself. The headteacher, governors and all the staff have arranged for the school building to be developed to improve facilities for, dance, music and drama.

With best wishes for your future success

Graham Stephens

Lead Inspector