

Thomas A Becket Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125955
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	315369
Inspection dates	28–29 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Eira Gill

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

Type of school	Middle deemed primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	8–12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	760
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	A R Cohen
Headteacher	Chris Bugden
Date of previous school inspection	2 June 2003
School address	Glebeside Avenue Worthing BN14 7PR
Telephone number	01903 202268
Fax number	01903 215041

Age group	8–12
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large school. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has increased since the last inspection and is now above average. Most pupils are White British, with an average number of pupils from other ethnic heritages. A very small minority speak English as an additional language.

The school has a number of awards, including Investors in People status and Activemark Gold. It is a Centre of Excellence recognised by the Football Association.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with outstanding features. It is at the heart of its community. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds thrive. The headteacher has been highly successful in creating a very calm but busy, exciting and industrious community. The school consults widely with parents and pupils and acts upon their suggestions. Parents are strongly appreciative. A typical comment is, 'Our child's progress has markedly improved. She loves the school. Teachers are inspiring. The headteacher commands respect yet is friendly and approachable to kids and parents alike.'

By the time pupils leave school in Year 7, standards are above average and achievement is good for all groups of pupils. Achievement has improved this year in mathematics because a more focused teaching approach has ensured that pupils of all abilities and backgrounds make better progress. Teaching is good and there is evidence of some outstanding teaching in writing and mathematics lessons in Years 5 and 6. Relationships are strong and pupils say, 'The teachers can never do too much for you'. Sometimes, teachers' introductions at the beginning of lessons are too long and the pupils lose their concentration.

As a result of the school's excellent provision, pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils really enjoy being at school. Older pupils show great maturity and say, 'We definitely feel different in Year 7. We are given far more responsibility and more is expected.' The pupils in the 'Eco Schools' group play a vital role in energy conservation and recycling. Individual pupils have each planted a tree – 800 little saplings – in the Tree Nursery. This has truly inspired the pupils and staff.

The curriculum is outstanding, with a very wide range of opportunities for pupils to make good progress in all subjects. Exciting links are made between subjects to break down artificial barriers with many community-related visits and visitors. There are numerous sporting, creative and musical activities, including the school orchestra, three choirs and three gym clubs. Pupils are very successful in their inter-school sports matches as well as in music festivals locally. Talented children are given every opportunity to succeed. Pupils have an exceptional understanding of a healthy lifestyle, with total regard for the safety of themselves and others.

Care of pupils is excellent. The very well-organised additional provision for pupils with significant needs ensures good and, sometimes, excellent progress, particularly in the daily phonics teaching groups. Pupils appreciate the help they receive. One said, 'My teacher is really nice to me. She has helped me get much better at reading.' Academic guidance and support are good, although there are different systems throughout the school for organising pupils' day-to-day targets for learning. Not all pupils are clear about what they should be focusing on to improve.

Leadership and management are good, with a headteacher who is passionate about giving his pupils every opportunity to take part in activities that will develop their confidence and self-esteem. The governors are extremely effective and quite prepared to challenge the school. They are very supportive and have used their professional skills and knowledge to help the school secure substantial awards to improve resources and accommodation. Based on the quality of self-evaluation and recent improvements, the school has good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teachers give more attention to planning a short, more focused introduction to lessons so that pupils do not lose their concentration.

- Sharpen the school's procedures for pupils' day-to-day targets in English, mathematics and science so that all teachers are following a recognised school system that gives pupils clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good. Standards in English, mathematics and science are above average by the time pupils leave school at the end of Year 7. Given their average starting points, pupils make good progress in all year groups. In national tests taken at the end of Year 6, standards were above average overall. In mathematics, standards have improved from 2007 when results in the tests fell short of the school's targets. This year, targets in mathematics are likely to be exceeded as a result of more efficient systems for grouping pupils and improved teaching and learning. The school's innovative strategies for teaching writing have had a considerable impact on maintaining boys' standards at above national levels. Pupils receiving additional literacy support in Year 5 make exceptionally good progress in their phonic skills. All pupils are developing good literacy and numeracy skills to prepare them well for the world of work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Their mature, thoughtful behaviour is a factor in their successful learning and creates an extremely positive school ethos. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is exemplary and they give each other excellent support. Pupils feel very valued, safe and secure. Their unusually well-developed emotional maturity is a direct outcome of the strong relationships between staff and pupils. It also reflects the excellent range of opportunities provided for them to take part in many group activities such as the choirs, the orchestra and team sports. Pupils' personal and social skills are very well developed. Pupils are encouraged to make independent choices and decisions about, for instance, a specific aspect of design they want to explore and make. Attendance is above average and is a natural result of pupils' great enjoyment of school. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school and to the wider community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is generally good across the school, with pockets of outstanding practice. Lessons are well organised so that pupils waste no time and are eager to get on with their work. Pupils say, 'Teachers are firm but fair.' Lessons are mostly lively and interesting, although at the beginning of a few lessons teachers' introductions are too long. Pupils begin to lose interest and their concentration wavers.

Teachers usually organise excellent resources and their skilled use of the interactive whiteboards (IWBs) ensures that pupils are able to gain good understanding of complex problems. Pupils often participate in the use of the IWBs. This leads to instant assessment of pupils' learning in a few moments, quickly ensuring better understanding and accelerated progress. Strategies for teaching writing in Year 6 are very well organised and pupils made excellent progress in the few lessons observed. Pupils are not afraid to take risks when answering questions and this reflects their outstanding personal development. Excellent teaching in Year 5 for groups of

pupils receiving daily additional literacy support leads to outstanding progress. The specialist teaching in Year 7 is good and pupils are prepared well for the next stage of their education. Trained learning assistants ensure that pupils who have weaker literacy and numeracy skills make good progress throughout the school. Assessment of learning, including marking, is often good, although not all teachers give pupils a clear understanding of what they need to do next to improve their recorded work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Strategies to improve learning by linking subjects have enriched and enlivened the curriculum by teaching literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills through French, drama, art, food technology and design and technology. The artwork displayed around the school is outstanding. Successful recruitment of specialist teachers as well as skilled learning assistants has further improved the delivery of the curriculum. Pupils have very good opportunities to learn effectively in small groups in the laboratories and ICT suites.

Pupils' cultural understanding and considerable sporting prowess are being widened and developed by the unusually broad range and number of after-school clubs. These hugely enrich both the arts and physical education curriculum. Provision is clearly having an impact on the pupils' excellent personal development as well as their good academic progress. They are very appreciative and say, 'Teachers are very friendly, lessons are fun, the music department is great!' The school ensures that talented singers and instrumentalists perform in the community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care of all pupils and the guidance and support given to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are outstanding. Because of the school's very well organised and effective tracking systems, pupils with difficulties are identified early and supported well both in classrooms and small groups. Excellent links with the community, a wide range of external agencies and parents ensure pupils make good and, sometimes, outstanding progress. Pastoral care is exemplary and evident in the emphasis the school places on making every child feel safe. Pupils say, 'It's nice to know you have someone to go to if you have a problem.' Child protection and risk assessment procedures are securely in place. The work of trained learning assistants to help pupils develop better skills at controlling their feelings makes a big difference to the attitudes and behaviour of some of the most vulnerable children.

Procedures for pupils' academic guidance and support are good. Effective steps are taken to inform parents and carers about their children's progress and to involve them in their education, such as sharing long-term targets during the year. There is evidence of good day-to-day target setting for pupils in both English and mathematics but this is not consistent in all classes. Not all pupils can remember their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's leadership of the care of pupils and their personal development is outstanding. He has sustained above-average standards and an excellent ethos over several years. His dedicated leadership has created a culture where other leaders and managers are confident

and trusted to take initiatives to promote school improvement. The headteacher empowers his team and they work well together. Most key leaders have led important developments linked to improving achievement in mathematics and writing, in assessment and curriculum initiatives. Challenging but realistic long-term targets are in place for pupils, based on reliable analysis of their performance.

Monitoring of teaching and learning is fully in place, with a wide range of observations that involve middle managers. Self-evaluation is accurate. The school knows mostly what needs improving and is doing something about it. This is evident in the good improvement in achievement made in mathematics. However, school leaders do not use the good information held through monitoring of teaching and learning to check how consistently teachers set day-to-day targets for pupils throughout the school. The contribution governors make to the school is outstanding. All governors are supportive and willing to give a great deal of their time to develop further the school's resources, for example, in ICT and accommodation for pupils with significant needs and disabilities. These improvements have a knock-on effect on improving achievement for all 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?	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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	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 disabilities make progress	2

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	2
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	2

The quality of provision

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

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?	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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	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

1 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thomas A Becket Middle School, Worthing, BN14 7PR

Thank you for welcoming us so happily to your school. We really enjoyed talking to you. You were very sensible and friendly in the way you answered our questions and spoke to us about your school. Yours is a good school and you are rightly proud to belong to it.

What works well in your school:

- Your headteacher, senior leaders and the governors take great care of you and make sure teaching is good.
- Your behaviour is exemplary and you have excellent attitudes to your work.
- You really enjoy school and attend very regularly.
- You all have an exceptionally good understanding of a healthy lifestyle and how to keep safe.
- You make good progress in English, mathematics and science.
- Those of who find it a little bit more difficult to read and do maths are making good progress with the help of your teachers and all the assistants.
- You have a huge choice of clubs to go to after school and incredibly good opportunities to do well in sport and music.
- You have many opportunities to take responsibility, for example, those of you in the School Council and the 'Eco Schools' group have been working very hard to improve the school in many different ways.

I have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to do the following things to help you make better progress:

- Make sure that the teachers keep their lesson introductions shorter so that you can get on with your work quickly.
- Make sure that all your teachers give you a better understanding of what you need to learn next in English, mathematics and science.

You can help, too, by asking your teachers to tell you how you can improve your work. Thank you once again for your help during the inspection. Best wishes for the future!

Yours sincerely

Eira Gill Lead Inspector

Annex B



1 February 2008

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Yours sincerely

Eira Gill ☺
Lead Inspector