

St Thomas of Canterbury Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105970
Local Authority	Salford
Inspection number	319278
Inspection dates	9–10 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Gina White HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Fr David Macfarlane
Headteacher	Mr David Deane
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2006
School address	Hadfield Street Higher Broughton Salford Manchester M7 4XG
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Thomas of Canterbury is a smaller than average Roman Catholic school in an inner city area of significant disadvantage in Salford. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is high: more than three times the national average. The school is ethnically diverse: just over half the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds including African, Polish and Czech heritage. Around 13% of pupils have recently arrived in this country and are at early stages of learning to speak English. Many pupils leave and start at the school at different points in their primary education. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the average nationally and the proportion with statements of special educational need is also below average. In May 2008 the school was awarded the quality mark for basic skills.

In July 2006, the school was judged to require special measures. Since then, HMI has inspected the school each term to evaluate its progress.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. The school now provides a good quality of education and has good capacity to improve further. Personal development and the care of pupils are good, they are well developed and support pupils' good achievement.

In 2007, results showed significant improvement in the standards pupils reached by the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. Pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 received intensive support and they made very good progress to reach challenging targets. Since then support has been spread more widely throughout the school to all year groups. Now, most pupils make good progress in all year groups. Improved use of data and consistent checking of pupils' progress enables class teachers to identify more precisely where pupils' learning slows and to take early action to improve it. The school has a good range of methods for providing additional support for those pupils who most need it and to tackle the weaker aspects of pupils writing that persist across the school. Standards continue to rise and are close to national averages. Teacher assessment indicates more Year 6 pupils have achieved their learning targets this year than in 2007 and have sustained the improvements in standards. Support for pupils recently arrived in the country and those at early stages of learning to speak English is securely in place and of high quality. Consequently, they, and pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make very good progress in their learning.

The school has turned around in two years and improvement is palpable. Pupils enjoy learning and say, 'St Thomas's is a happy and friendly school.' Their enjoyment is well demonstrated in their high attendance and this reflects the impressive work the school has done to improve attendance over the last two years. Pupils develop good relationships with staff and they feel safe and secure in school. Pupils' behaviour is good: their learning matters to them and they want to do well.

Teachers have made good use of opportunities to improve their practice, particularly in increasing the use of assessment to inform their planning. They have high expectations of pupils and a clear picture of how well they are doing and where they are heading. Consequently, pupils' learning has accelerated from a low base. Although there are many good features in the support of teaching assistants they are not always used as effectively as they could be: for example, as an extra pair of eyes in lessons to help assess the small steps pupils make in learning. Curriculum provision is satisfactory and the wider range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities introduced recently are enthusiastically supported by pupils. Good partnership links with statutory services enhance the schools work to support vulnerable pupils and their families.

Leadership and management are good. The new headteacher provides very good leadership and clear direction. Staff and governors share his vision and determination to continue to improve the school. Parents hold the headteacher in high regard. Under his leadership, staff are supported to continually develop their teaching skills and they are confident in analysing data, using assessment and checking pupils' progress. Staff work together well as a team and have increased expectations of what pupils can achieve. Core subject leaders include the Foundation Stage amongst their priorities in improving provision and raising standards. As a result of training they are very able in undertaking their roles. However, other subject leaders, many of whom are new to their roles and who are keen to improve, do not have the specialist skills and knowledge to confidently assess pupils' standards and progress. Governors' recently

developed rigour and ability to hold the school to account supports senior leaders effectively in developing the school. Senior leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and planning is firmly centred upon the priorities for improvement and a determination to be the best.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The Foundation Stage combines the Nursery and Reception classes. Leadership and provision are currently in a state of change. The school recognises that a combination of circumstances means that, although children have made some good progress over the past year in all areas of learning, their overall experience is satisfactory. Most children join the Nursery with skills that are well below those expected for their age, especially in their ability to form relationships and communicate. Staff provide them with a suitable range of activities both inside and outside and develop good relationships with them. This means that they quickly settle into the welcoming atmosphere and begin to develop the confidence to explore their surroundings and make friendships. Planning for lessons focuses more on which activities will be available than on the expected impact that they will have on children's learning. This means that adults do not always capitalise fully on the opportunities to develop, for example, children's speaking, listening and mathematical skills in whatever area they choose to play. Whilst staff record children's progress in adult-led activities such as writing, they seldom do the same for activities that children have chosen for themselves to ensure that each individual extends their skills in all areas, even those they find less easy. In the current year children's skills at the end of Reception are stronger in some aspects than those of the previous year group. However, the weaknesses in planning and assessment means children are not making as much progress as they might.

What the school should do to improve further

- Bring coherence and rigour to the planning and provision of the Foundation Stage and ensure all staff know the purpose of activities and the difference they are to make to pupils learning.
- Ensure the skills of teaching assistants are consistently used to best effect in lessons.
- Raise standards further and improve pupils writing.
- Ensure all subject leaders receive the training they need to confidently assess pupils' standards and progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils enter the school with levels of skills significantly well below those typical for their age. From their starting points pupils make good progress and by the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 teacher assessments show that almost all pupils achieve their targets in mathematics. Many pupils achieve better than expected in reading. In these subjects many pupils reach the expectations for their age. However, pupils' writing, whilst improving, falls short of their targets and expectations for their age.

Pupils who are new to the school, including many who are at early stages of learning to speak English, make good progress in their learning as a result of good induction and support programmes. Improved tracking systems and frequent monitoring by teachers enable the school to accurately identify the small steps in pupils' progress and to tailor work to meet their needs. Pupils receive good, well targeted support in reading, writing and mathematics to help them

overcome the legacy of underachievement and gaps in their earlier learning. Pupils' progress accelerates as a result. Standards are rising overall but remain just below national averages.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They respond well to the strong emphasis on spiritual and social development: they thoughtfully reflect on the things they have learnt and act responsibly in and around school. Pupils accept and celebrate each others differences and are keen to learn about other cultures. They make a satisfactory contribution to the school community through the school council and are keen to accept positions of responsibility such as acting as classroom monitors. Pupils contribute to fund-raising to support those in need in other parts of the world and locally. Pupils recognise the importance of a healthy lifestyle and many participate in the increased range of sports activities and play safely and sensibly together. Pupils are developing sound skills to support their future learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good quality teaching is apparent throughout the school and underpins the good progress that pupils now make. Teachers' good relationships and expert behaviour management ensure that lessons run smoothly and pupils want to learn. Teachers plan activities that capture pupils' interest and usually explain them clearly so that pupils understand what is expected of them. Interactive whiteboards are used well to bring added vitality to pupils' learning, to sustain their concentration and to confirm important teaching points. Pupils enjoy the occasions when teachers use games to make learning challenging and fun, for example, a count down against the clock when calculating problems in mathematics. Opportunities to discuss their thoughts with partners are also popular. These effectively develop pupils' speaking, listening and thinking skills and are of particular benefit to those who are at an early stage of learning to speak English. Teachers effectively use the information gained from their regular assessment of pupils' progress to guide their planning so that activities are well adapted to each individuals' different abilities and needs. They also adapt their level of questioning well to probe pupils' understanding. The school is well resourced with teaching assistants but teachers do not always use their skills to best effect, for example, in the whole-class sessions at the beginning and end of lessons. Because of this, opportunities are sometimes missed to identify individuals' small steps in progress, or to provide the extra support that could help them participate fully.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum successfully promotes pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in a way that encourages their interest. The many extra activities to boost pupils' skills through small group or individual input successfully help those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who are at an early stage of learning to speak English to make good progress. This year's strong emphasis on the linking of letters and sounds and more advanced reading skills is underpinning pupils' ability to work successfully across other subjects. The promotion of their writing and information and communication technology skills throughout the curriculum is not as well developed. Subjects such as geography, history and design technology are just beginning to

be adapted to better meet pupils' interests and needs. Provision to promote pupils' personal, health and physical development is effective. Pupils appreciate the added interest brought to the curriculum in the last two terms through extra-curricular activities, visits to places of interest and many visitors to school, for example, their work with resident artists on the theme of relationships. The recent science week was also very popular and sparked an interest in many pupils to join the Key Stage 2 after school science club.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The strong emphasis on caring for pupils has been maintained. Guidance and support of pupils has improved so that those who are new or arrive at different times through the year are able to settle and can concentrate on learning. Pupils are confident that if they go to staff for help, it will be provided. The learning mentor provides a valuable bridge between the school, parents, pupils and outside agencies. The increasing involvement of families in their children's learning is well supported with additional resources such as books, puzzles and games. This is proving beneficial to support learning as parents are beginning to make use of opportunities to borrow resources to use at home with their children. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those at an early stage of learning to speak English is carefully tailored to their specific needs and its impact is rigorously monitored. Pupils know their targets in English, mathematics and science, and the school's marking system identifies to them what they have done well and areas for improvement. However, teachers' comments vary considerably in highlighting precisely how to achieve the improvement. Where some teachers have made this clear, pupils do not always follow through the advice into the next piece of work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Senior leadership is strong and the new headteacher has driven improvement firmly. A shared sense of accountability amongst staff and governors now characterises the school. Staffing change has been well managed: new appointments have strengthened teaching and learning.

Staff have worked hard to raise standards and have done this well, but they are not complacent. Systems to check pupils' progress and to assure the quality of teaching and learning, attendance and behaviour are securely embedded. Subject leaders play a strong role in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in literacy, numeracy and science. The emphasis in regular checking has shifted from what teachers are doing to focus more firmly upon what pupils are learning. Self-evaluation has deepened and extended to include all aspects of its work. Steps to share the emerging best practice in the work of subject leaders are bringing consistency to monitoring and evaluation. Curriculum audit has enabled new subject leaders to identify the lack of resources that act as barriers to improvement in foundation subjects. The school has moved quickly to tackle this deficit. However, the school has yet to ensure that all subject leaders have the specialist skills they need to confidently evaluate pupils progress and standards in the areas for which they are responsible.

The leadership team meets its responsibility to safeguard children and procedures meet current requirements. The governors' monitoring committee meets regularly to review the schools progress and governors display a rigorous and searching approach to challenge and holding staff to account. Governors have a secure understanding of current performance and where

improvements are needed. Most recently they are beginning to drive improvements and suggest actions to support evaluation. Resources are well deployed to support and improve the quality of learning and value for money is good.

Local authority support has helped the school to move forward quickly but the school is securely and ably setting its own agenda for improvement. School plans are clearly focussed on priorities to further improve pupils' achievement and to raise standards. Actions to bring this about are integrated well with professional development.

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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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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?	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	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	2
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?	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	3
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	2
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**

Thank you for taking part in the inspection and for your enthusiastic and friendly welcome on this and the four previous visits when I have visited your school to see how well you are learning. This was my last visit to St Thomas's because the school now provides you with a good quality of education and no longer needs 'special measures'. The headteacher and staff have worked hard to make sure you are well taught and supported in your learning. You have worked hard too. Some of you told me about the many things that you had learnt since my last visit. I could see from the lessons and the work in your books that many of you are making good progress in reading, mathematics and science. All of you are achieving very well since you started at the school. Staff take good care of you and provide lots of interesting things for you to do and puzzles and games to help you learn. It was good to hear about the new sports activities and the science club. My colleague and I enjoyed listening to your lovely singing on Thursday afternoon.

The school has come a long way since my first visit in December 2006. There is still some work to do to become even better and I have asked the governors, the headteacher and the staff to do the following things.

- Help you to improve your writing so that more of you can write clearly and spell words and use punctuation accurately.
- Help you to become even better readers, mathematicians and scientists.
- Improve the Foundation Stage so that all staff know how to help the younger children to learn more from the activities.
- Make sure the skilled staff that support you in lessons are always used well.
- Make sure that teachers who are responsible for subjects receive the training they need to check how well you achieve and know how to support and advise you to make fast progress in your work.