

St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, Sevenoaks

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118778
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326890
Inspection date	26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Eileen Chadwick

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	219
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Frank Czarnowski
Headteacher	Elizabeth Baldock
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	South Park Sevenoaks TN13 1EH
Telephone number	01732 453921
Fax number	01732 460501

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the progress the pupils make in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and in writing throughout the school
- the consistency of good teaching and impact on the achievement of different groups, especially more capable children
- the impact of leadership and management on raising achievement, especially through monitoring, evaluation and target setting.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, discussions with pupils and staff, a review of the assessment data the school uses to track pupils' progress, and analysis of pupils' work. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included, where appropriate, in this report.

Description of the school

St Thomas' is of average size and serves a wide area that includes three Catholic parishes within Sevenoaks and in outlying areas. The majority of pupils are from Catholic families. Pupils are mainly White British, although an above average proportion of pupils are from other countries. Most of these speak English well. Pupils are generally drawn from relatively advantaged backgrounds and few are entitled to free school meals. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. These pupils mainly experience language and literacy or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The Early Years Foundation Stage children are in the Reception classes. The nursery on the school's premises is managed by a private company and was inspected separately.

The school has gained Activemark, Healthy Schools and Platinum Travel awards and Gold Standards Accreditation for Primary Languages.

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. It has some outstanding features. Pupils' personal development and behaviour are excellent as a result of the school's outstanding care and support. Pupils feel exceptionally safe in the school's caring ethos. Pupils achieve well and standards are exceptionally high in reading and mathematics by Year 6. The school gives pupils a well-rounded education which enables them to do well and they have some excellent learning opportunities in music and French. The school is still improving under the very good leadership of the headteacher who fosters an ethos where staff work closely together and are keen to try out new ideas and constantly improve. The great majority of parents justifiably hold the school in high regard. As one parent says, 'I am delighted with the school and the lovely learning experiences provided for my child'.

From starting points that are above those seen in most schools, children make good progress in Reception and their progress is excellent in writing. Standards on entry to Year 1 are well above average. Pupils continue to make good progress in Key Stage 1, with excellent progress in reading. Standards in Year 2 have risen considerably in the last few years and pupils now enter Year 3 with standards that are exceptionally high in reading and mathematics and well above average in writing. This gives pupils a strong start to their junior education. Pupils' progress has accelerated because previous performance has been reviewed rigorously and there have been improvements in the quality of teaching. The school recognises that a further rise in expectations is necessary as these pupils move through the school.

Good progress continues in Key Stage 2, although there is some variability between subjects. Whilst standards are exceptionally high in reading and mathematics and well above average in science, they are less good in writing, though still above average. Pupils' progress in writing is only satisfactory and considerably fewer pupils reach higher levels than do so in reading and mathematics. The school has wisely increased opportunities for pupils to write at length and for different purposes in other subjects and this is beginning to have a positive impact. However, the school acknowledges that, in both Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils' relatively weaker spelling and punctuation prevent higher standards being reached. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and demonstrate excellent progress in reading. The robust reading programmes for helping these pupils catch up are major reasons why very nearly all reach at least the expected standards in this subject by the time they leave the school. Pupils with English as an additional language are well supported and make progress in line with their peers.

Strong leadership by senior leaders is key to the improvements being made. Rigorous arrangements for self-evaluation, including very thorough assessment systems, have ensured the school has an honest and accurate view of its own performance. The headteacher has successfully sought to give staff opportunity to monitor and manage their areas of responsibility. Middle leaders are increasingly effective in helping school leaders evaluate the impact of provision on the progress different groups make towards their demanding targets. Governors are very supportive, have prudent financial management and hold the school to account well.

Teachers' skills in planning work and promoting good learning are rigorously evaluated. Their strengths are consolidated and developed and areas for improvement lead to performance targets and professional development. This is bringing about much good teaching. However, the school acknowledges that work still needs to be done in a few classes to ensure more

capable pupils are consistently challenged. The curriculum is lively and promotes pupils' love of learning. It is very strong in music and in French in Key Stage 2, where specialist teaching rigorously enhances pupils' skills and knowledge. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to enable learning in other subjects. Pupils have a wealth of opportunities for extra-curricular activities, sport and trips. They develop a very good understanding of how regular exercise and a healthy diet help their bodies grow strong. The extremely good partnerships with other schools enrich pupils' learning, including the extension activities for gifted and talented pupils. However, during class lessons, gifted and talented pupils are not always challenged. In both Key Stages 1 and 2, not enough time is devoted to teaching spelling and punctuation.

Excellent links with the church and an exceptionally well organised programme of personal, social and health education contribute to pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils' different cultures are celebrated and, whilst the ethos of the school is strongly Catholic, the school ensures pupils develop their understanding of different faiths well. Their understanding of other communities in Britain is good and pupils are developing good awareness of the global community, for example through very close links with a school in Tanzania and their charity work. Community cohesion is promoted well. The school strives to reach out to all different groups and is particularly effective with the local community and this helps the vulnerable and pupils from minority groups achieve well. Pupils' own contributions to the school and wider community are excellent. The thriving school council and regular enterprise activities are very good vehicles for enabling pupils to develop decision making and leadership skills.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children join Reception with understanding and skills that, overall, are above those typical for their age, although there is a range. Transition from home to school is very well managed and children readily settle. Standards of care and safety are of the highest quality and help children to feel secure, happy and really enjoy school. Children make good progress. By the time they transfer to Year 1, most have reached the expected levels and many exceed them. Their progress in writing and personal, social and emotional development is excellent. The quality of teaching and the curriculum is good. Adults provide a careful balance between purposeful play and adult-led tasks. Focused teaching groups for mathematics extend more able pupils well although, during independent learning, their tasks occasionally lack challenge. Children's decision making and independent learning skills are excellent and developed exceedingly well through 'Plan, Do and Review' sessions. Outdoor learning opportunities are good and have improved considerably since the previous inspection. The accommodation is also better and children now learn in a very good, purpose built, Early Years Unit. Role-play areas promote good learning across the curriculum, for example the 'Spaceship' enhances children's knowledge and understanding of the world and social skills well. There are good links with the pre-school situated on the same site as the school. Assessment systems are very good and thorough checks are made to judge the impact of provision on standards and achievement. Leadership and teamwork among staff are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in writing by paying closer attention to teaching basics such as spelling and punctuation.

- Ensure more consistently good teaching and progress by making sure there is always enough challenge for more capable 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

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?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
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?	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
The extent to which 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 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?	1

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	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**

26 February 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, Sevenoaks TN13 1EH

I am writing to say thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school recently. You certainly seem to enjoy school and it was good to hear about all the extra activities in which you are involved. Your views are important, as you are the school's customers.

You said your school is a good one and we agree. Here are some good things about your school:

- You make good progress and reach excellent standards in reading and mathematics by Year 6.
- Those of you in Reception make a good start and you make extremely good progress in writing.
- Your behaviour is excellent and you are a credit to your school. This helps to make your school a happy one.
- You enjoy taking responsibility and making decisions and have some great opportunities for developing your enterprise skills.
- You have extremely good opportunities for music, French and clubs.
- All adults take superb care of you and ensure that you are safe.
- Your headteacher leads you all very well and teachers and school governors are working hard to make the school even better.

This is what we are asking the school to improve:

- Make sure you have more chances to practise important skills such as spelling and punctuation.
- Make sure you are always given work that is hard enough, especially those of you who are capable of reaching the highest standards.

We hope you will continue to enjoy school and continue to work hard in all you do.

Yours faithfully

Eileen Chadwick Lead inspector