

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120226
Local Authority	Leicester City
Inspection number	327234
Inspection date	30 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Frances Gillam

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)	273
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	J C M Howard
Headteacher	Patricia Mason
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Newstead Road Leicester LE2 3TA
Telephone number	01162 706365

Age group	4–11
Inspection date	30 October 2008
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Fax number

01162 706365

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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 effectiveness of strategies to improve pupils' progress in mathematics, especially the more able

the progress that more able pupils make in writing in Key Stage 1

the impact of leadership and management on driving improvement, especially in mathematics and in writing.

Evidence was gathered from:

discussions with the headteacher, governors, pupils, staff and parents

visits to classes

scrutiny of pupils' work

observation of other aspects of the school day such as assembly, break and lunchtime

analysis of parents' questionnaires and school documentation, in particular data on pupils' progress and school development planning.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector 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

Just over a third of pupils in this larger-than-average school are from minority ethnic groups, the largest group being of Indian background. A few pupils who speak Polish are at the early stages of acquiring English. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is below the national average. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are organised in two Reception classes. In addition, a small number are taught with older pupils in Year 1.

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 More provides its pupils with an outstanding standard of education. Within the school's warm and caring environment, pupils flourish and do extremely well, both academically and personally. These features, as well as the challenging targets the school sets, are key reasons why pupils' achievements are excellent and why standards are exceptionally and consistently high by Year 6. It is not surprising that parents have high levels of confidence in the outstanding leadership and management of the school. The headteacher's leadership is inspirational and teamwork is strong. Leadership focuses very clearly on raising standards and improving pupils' achievements. This school knows where it is and what it needs to do to improve because processes for evaluating its work are very rigorous. Leaders at all levels check very carefully the implementation and effectiveness of strategies for improvement. This is highly successful in identifying quickly any problems, and it ensures consistency in what the school provides for its pupils. These features demonstrate the school's excellent capacity to improve.

Children get off to a flying start in the EYFS because staff devote their attention successfully to meeting children's individual needs. Excellent teaching here, and throughout the school, builds extremely well on what pupils have done before. Pupils say their lessons are fun and exciting, and that this is why they enjoy school so much and why their attendance is so very good. Pupils particularly enjoy activities that enable them to investigate, explore and solve problems. This is because they enjoy the independence they have to organise and record their work, and the opportunities to work with and learn from each other. These are powerful characteristics in a range of subjects, including science and English. However, they do not feature as strongly in mathematics, and this hampers somewhat the progress more able pupils make in this subject. Although these pupils make good progress in mathematics, it is relatively weaker compared to their outstanding progress in English and science. Within the EYFS, children's progress in problem solving, reasoning and number is good, but also relatively weaker than their progress in the other areas of learning. Throughout the school, and within the EYFS, the emphasis on promoting language and literacy skills has sometimes been at the expense of mathematics. Consequently, pupils sometimes miss the chance to apply their well-developed numeracy skills to support their learning in other subjects. It also means teachers sometimes miss the opportunity to develop further pupils' understanding of the relevance of mathematics in everyday life.

English has been a key priority for the school and work in this subject has been highly successful, particularly in developing pupils' writing skills. Targets for improvement and teachers' marking spur pupils on to do their very best, including the more able pupils in Key Stage 1. Comments and targets provide very clear guidance that help pupils to do better in their work. Talking partners and 'Wow Writing' are great hits with the pupils. They enjoy discussing their ideas with each other and making their own choices about what they write. These kinds of activities, along with the strong focus on promoting writing skills across other subjects, has increased the level of pupils' enjoyment and achievement in literacy. Together with the pupils' good skills in mathematics and their outstanding personal development and well-being, they provide a powerful springboard for pupils' future learning.

Exciting activities, 'focus weeks' and clubs during and after school enrich further the outstanding curriculum. 'Focus weeks' feature highly in pupils' enjoyment of school because of the high level of practical work they undertake. They also appreciate the wide range of visitors, including

staff from the local secondary school, who share their expertise with them and help them to do even better, for example in dance.

The school's Catholic values underpin successfully the outstanding care, guidance and support pupils receive. The comment made by one parent sums up the views held by many, that 'This is an excellent school, it provides a safe and happy environment for all children.' Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and pupils soon build strong and trusting relationships. Pupils say they are very sure that adults will listen to them and respond quickly to their needs. Pupils show high levels of respect for each other, they act very safely and their behaviour is exemplary. Pupils make sensible choices about what they eat and talk knowledgeably about the ill effects of a poor diet because of their very good understanding of healthy lifestyles. Pupils make particularly good use of the sporting activities the school offers. They are keen to participate because they recognise that exercise plays an important part in keeping fit.

Pupils from minority ethnic groups and those at the early stages of acquiring English are fully involved in school life. This is because the school promotes and celebrates religious and cultural diversity very successfully. Pupils have a strong sense of what it means to belong to the global community. Their excellent contribution to local events and environmental projects helps to make their school and locality better places to be. Their keen interest and involvement in energy-saving projects show their high level of awareness of the impact of their actions on the wider environment. Pupils have empathy, concern and compassion for others less fortunate than they are. They very willingly raise charitable funds and often the school council is a driving force in this work.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children's skills on entry to the Reception Year are broadly as expected for children of their age. From this starting point, children do very well. The children soon become confident, independent learners. Teachers support the children's learning very well and build successfully on their experiences prior to starting school. Working in partnership with parents, staff manage children's transition into school very well. Children are happy and settled and, because staff treat them fairly and value their efforts, children are eager to please and keen to work hard. Children develop warm, friendly and respectful relationships because staff pay close attention to their welfare needs. Consequently, children feel safe and free from harm. Staff offer a lively and stimulating range of activities, in and out of doors. These activities spark the children's interest and encourage them to probe and discover things for themselves. Staff acknowledge that there is scope to promote further problem solving, reasoning and number across the areas of learning in order to help children make more rapid progress. Excellent leadership and coordination of the EYFS has enabled staff to implement new requirements successfully. Policies, assessment procedures and record keeping comply fully with statutory requirements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils throughout the school have better opportunities to develop their mathematical skills across the curriculum, and that teachers provide greater opportunity for pupils to work together to investigate and explore their learning in mathematics.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
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?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	1

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	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 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

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

31 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Leicester, LE2 3TA

Thank you for making the inspection team so welcome when it visited your school recently. We really enjoyed meeting you, visiting some of your lessons and seeing all the exciting things you do.

You have an outstanding school, and the people in charge and your teachers do an extremely good job. This helps you to reach very high standards by Year 6 and to make outstanding progress in your work.

Here are some of the things we thought were excellent about your school:

- you do extremely well in your work and this is helping to prepare you very well for your future
- you are very good at keeping yourselves healthy and safe from harm
- you have a great deal of respect for other people's views and beliefs
- you really like school and you love to learn because your lessons are exciting
- your behaviour is extremely good and you are keen to help those less fortunate than you are
- with the school council, you work very hard to make your school a better place to be and you care very much for the environment
- you are very well cared for and you say you feel safe and happy in school
- you take part in many exciting activities at lunchtime and after school.

I have asked the people in charge and your teachers to work together on one thing:

- make sure that your teachers give you better chances in mathematics to investigate and explore what you are learning to help you improve and do even better in your work.

You can all help by keeping up the very good work!

Yours faithfully

Fran Gillam Lead inspector