

St Thomas' Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124365
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	328120
Inspection dates	18–19 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Angela Kirk

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)	213
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	Mark A Deaville
Headteacher	Anthony Wretham
Date of previous school inspection	4 July 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Parklands Road Tean Stoke-on-Trent ST10 4DS

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	18–19 June 2009
Inspection number	328120

Telephone number

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St Thomas' is an average sized primary school. Pupils are predominantly from White British backgrounds, with very few from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly lower than that found in most schools although the proportion varies between different year groups. These pupils mainly have moderate learning difficulties. Early Years Foundation Stage provision is made in one Reception class.

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. Children get off to a positive start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. From there on, effective teaching, a well-balanced curriculum and sound care, guidance and support result in pupils making good progress. The school has made sound progress since its previous inspection and has good capacity to improve. Parents are supportive of the school and many highlight the caring, moral ethos and the extensive range of the extra-curricular clubs that it provides. One parent wrote, 'Super school – both my children have been very happy and have made good progress. I always feel I can approach staff if there is a problem.' Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge typical for their age. Support from skilled staff who work as a cohesive team means that children's achievement is good in Reception and they reach above average standards by the time they start in Year 1. This good progress then continues throughout the school. By the time pupils leave at the end of Year 6, standards are above average, although lately boys at the end of Key Stage 2 have not made the progress in their writing that the girls have made. Much good teaching was observed across the school during the inspection, which met the learning needs of the pupils well. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress as a result of the effective additional support they receive. Teachers have good relationships with pupils, who are keen to learn.

Pupils' personal development is good as is their behaviour and attendance. Much work has been undertaken to encourage parents to keep children in school rather than take them on holiday in term-time. Pupils know how to stay healthy and understand about keeping themselves safe. The school's curriculum develops pupils' basic skills well, encourages good personal development and is interesting and varied. Music and sport are particularly strong in the school and high standards in music and significant enjoyment were evident when pupils were seen rehearsing for the school's forthcoming performance of Grease. Good provision for information and communication technology and effective links to visits and visitors help bring learning to life. The school works well with partners to promote pupils' personal development and its contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory. Links with other local schools and a number of churches are particularly effective.

All safeguarding requirements are met and the adults' thorough knowledge of individual pupils helps to facilitate a high standard of care. Pupils have individual targets to support their learning in English and mathematics, although these are not yet effectively linked to marking by all teachers.

Leadership and management are good and recent improvements in tracking pupils have enabled the school to have an accurate picture of attainment and progress, not only for each individual pupil but also for specific groups of pupils, for example those who have taken part in a specific learning initiative. Sometimes new initiatives recommended by the senior team have taken too long to introduce and to monitor. Governors are very supportive and work hard on behalf of the school. Equal opportunities are promoted effectively.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter Reception with levels of skills and knowledge in line with expectations for their age., although a significant number of boys enter school with skills below those levels expected in personal, social and emotional development and in writing. Pupils reach above average

standards at the end of Reception, with boys making particularly good progress in communication for language and literacy. Children feel safe, enjoy their activities and show good behaviour and attitudes to their work. They get on well together and share toys and resources well. There is an appropriate balance of adult-led activities and self-initiated tasks. The outside area is well developed and provides an effective learning environment, mirroring that in the classroom. Staff have a good understanding of how children learn, carry out accurate assessments and have high expectations. Leadership and management are good, with accurate self-evaluation. Children quickly settle in due to sound induction procedures.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate progress in boys' writing in Key Stage 2.
- Make more effect links between setting targets and marking, in order to ensure that pupils always know how to improve their work.
- Monitor and evaluate rigorously the impact of new initiatives.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

By the time pupils leave the school, they reach standards that are above average from entry levels typical for their age. At the end of Key Stage 1, writing is a strength for both boys and girls, but recently boys' standards in writing at the end of Key Stage 2 have been relatively weaker. The school has sought to address this, initiating a curriculum and teaching styles aimed to interest boys more effectively. However, this work has not yet had the necessary impact in raising boys' achievement in writing for the older pupils. More able pupils achieve well. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar good progress to their peers due to effective support. The achievements of pupils with different ethnic backgrounds are similarly good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils have a good understanding of how to develop healthy lifestyles; they enjoy sport, participate keenly and most make sensible choices about healthy eating. They feel safe and well cared for, have a good understanding of the dangers that may affect them and consider effective ways of avoiding them. Pupils enjoy their lessons and the many optional activities on offer, saying that teachers make lessons fun and help them to achieve, 'They help us grow in confidence,' one pupil explained. Behaviour is good and pupils feel secure because staff deal with any problems. Pupils are very clear about the sanctions that follow any inappropriate behaviour and enjoy receiving awards for good work and effort. Links with churches and support for charities, both local and world-wide help pupils to make a positive contribution to their school and the wider community. Key roles taken in school, such as play leaders and school council membership, promote a sense of responsibility. Attendance is above average and the strong moral ethos in the school underpins provision for pupils' good spiritual, social and moral education. Pupils' cultural awareness is less well developed and although pupils have a secure view of religions other than their own, they have few opportunities to work and play with more culturally diverse groups.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers have good subject knowledge and they use this to support pupils' learning well, for example in their effective use of probing questions. Classrooms are attractive and displays used well to support and promote learning, especially the 'working walls' which display information from both pupils and teachers on current learning. Interesting activities are planned that engage pupils' interest, promoting enjoyment of their work. The more able are suitably challenged to achieve high standards and teachers display good classroom management resulting in pupils being well behaved and able to work cooperatively in small groups. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities succeed in lessons because good support is in place. Occasionally, lessons are not sufficiently well planned and result in pupils listening for too long with no specific activity to target their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad, well balanced and meets requirements. It provides soundly for learning basic skills which in turn support good achievement. Opportunities for enrichment are good and pupils are enthusiastic about the recent visits, for example to Twycross Zoo in the Early Year Foundation Stage and to a Tudor Hall in Year 4. Effective links have been made with the local high school to support the teaching of French. Music, religious education, physical education and information and communication technology (at Key Stage 2) are also taught by specialists. Pupils are able to access a range of clubs, especially in sport and music. This is appreciated by both parents and children. The curriculum is well adjusted to the needs of those who find learning difficult and it also includes a good focus on developing pupils' ecological awareness, helping them to look after the environment effectively. The programme to develop social and emotional aspects of learning contributes well to pupils' good personal development. Cultural development is less well represented in the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The strong family atmosphere and caring ethos make a significant contribution to pupils' good personal development and good academic achievement. Staff know the children well and relationships are very good. Pupils are confident to speak to adults about any problems. Safeguarding procedures are in place and vulnerable pupils are well supported, helped by the good links that the school has with external agencies. Although pastoral care is of a high quality, academic guidance is only satisfactory. While pupils receive good guidance in lessons, the quality of marking and the use of academic targets are inconsistent. They are best in Key Stage 1 where they are starting to have a positive impact. Although older pupils are aware of their targets, target setting is not consistently linked to marking and pupils are not always told clearly how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Self-evaluation is good and appropriate plans are in place to achieve improvements. Tracking pupils' progress is detailed and the school has an accurate picture of attainment which enables a focus on raising standards and achievement within an inclusive environment to be maintained. The headteacher sets a clear direction for the school and there is a sense of common purpose amongst staff. The senior team provides the school with good information from effective monitoring and evaluation. However, a few initiatives have taken too long to put into place and they have not been monitored early enough. Governance is good and governors have a clear overall grasp of the strengths and areas for improvement of the school. They have taken a lead role on key elements of the school's work such as the current building project, admissions and personnel. Community cohesion is satisfactory and is an area that the governors and staff have already highlighted as a priority to improve.

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

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?	3
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**

22 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST10 4DS

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed talking to you and watching you at work. You told us that St Thomas' is a good school and we agree. We were particularly impressed by how well you all get on together and your good behaviour. This is helping you to make good progress and achieve high standards in your work. Your headteacher, staff and governors ensure that your school is a successful and very caring place. We think there is an excellent range of extra-curricular clubs in which you take part and we really enjoyed listening to the rehearsal of your forthcoming musical, Grease.

All the staff want you to do as well as possible and we have been talking together about ways of helping you to do this. There are three things that we have agreed with your school to make it an even better place to learn. We have asked the school to help the boys in Key Stage 2 to achieve an even better standard of writing. Also, we asked that the senior teachers in the school put their new ideas into place more quickly and then check how well they are working. Finally, we have asked your teachers to include information about your progress towards your targets in their marking, so that you have regular feedback about how to improve your work. You can help by thinking about your targets when you do a piece of work and deciding if you have achieved a particular target when you check through your work at the end of a lesson. Some of the pupils in your school are already able to do this.

Thank you once again for a very enjoyable two days and best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Angela Kirk Lead inspector