

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133774
Local Authority	Merton
Inspection number	328762
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Clive Lewis

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	458
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	Mr Ken Butt
Headteacher	Mr David Feasey
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Commonside East Mitcham CR4 1YG
Telephone number	020 8648 0869
Fax number	020 8640 7056

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary is a large inner-city school. It was established in September 2002 following reorganization. The school has grown rapidly since then, from a very small school of 90 pupils to the current 458 pupils. It continues to grow and has recently been designated a three-form-entry school to cope with the influx of pupils. Pupils have a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and cultural experiences. A very high proportion of pupils come from minority ethnic groups and over half speak English as an additional language. More pupils than average are entitled to free school meals. The number of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above the national average and varies considerably between cohorts. The majority of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. The number of pupils entering and leaving the school at other than the normal times is very high. The school has recently been designated a Children's Centre. The school has been awarded the Activemark and Healthy School Status. There is a privately operated day care nursery on site, which also provides a breakfast club and an after-school club for older pupils from the school. This organisation was the subject of a separate inspection and the report will be available on the Ofsted website.

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 and improving school. It has a number of outstanding features, including the exceptional personal development of pupils and the care and guidance provided by the school. Pupils are valued and their views really matter, and parents are totally supportive. One parent wrote, 'I am very happy and my children are very happy and really enjoy coming to school.' Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher provides a sense of purpose and direction which is clearly linked to school improvement. Areas requiring development are acted upon effectively. For example, the improvement of writing and mathematics skills are priorities which have been tackled successfully. Governors are clear about their roles and responsibilities and have a good level of awareness about the school's agenda for improvement. The headteacher has reorganised the management structure of the school but has identified that more needs to be done to ensure shared leadership across the school as it continues to grow.

Because of the extraordinary growth in the school's roll from a one-form-entry school to a three-form-entry school in a few short years, only a small minority of the pupils in the current Year 5 and Year 6 classes started their education at the school. The pupils who have been in the school from Reception have progressed well as they moved up through the year groups. Provision for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage classes is good and, as a result, children achieve well. The quality of education in Years 1 to 6 is good and pupils achieve well. As a result, by the time pupils leave at age 11, standards are average, despite their low starting points. Teaching is good overall although, in a few lessons, teachers do not plan a variety of work suitable for the range of abilities in the class. The curriculum ensures that pupils enjoy a good variety of exciting activities and experiences through visits, residential stays and visitors to the school. These activities, in turn, give pupils a lot to talk, think and write about. The school is aware, however, that information and communication technology (ICT) is not used sufficiently to help pupils' learning across the curriculum.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding and all pupils behave exceptionally well. They learn how to be safe and healthy, and to take responsibility for themselves and others. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They are confident, polite and respectful. As a result of the school's rigorous systems, attendance is steadily improving and attendance levels for the vast majority of pupils are now above average. The care of the pupils is exemplary. Staff care for them very well and there is a very strong ethos of inclusion. The school has rigorous systems for assessing and tracking individual pupils' progress. The school makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion through excellent links with its own local community, good links with the national community, and good and growing links with schools in Canada and Ghana. The weaknesses noted in the last report have all been tackled with energy and enthusiasm. The school is going from strength to strength, on the basis of a clear understanding of how well it is performing and what needs to be done next. It has a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school and the Early Years leader have made substantial improvement to the provision since the last inspection. The staff work well together as a team to offer a caring and exciting learning environment where

children are happy and settled. Staff make careful and detailed observations which are then used to plan activities that children enjoy. Children enter the Nursery classes with knowledge and skills that are well below those expected of their age in most areas of learning. They have particularly low-level skills in communication, language and literacy, mathematical development and certain aspects of personal, social and emotional development. They make good progress in all areas of learning so that, by the time they leave the Reception classes, most are working within the early learning goals in most areas. However, standards in some aspects of early mathematics and literacy skills are still below those expected of their age. There is a good balance between adult-led activities and activities chosen by children to enhance their own interests. Accommodation, including the spacious secure outdoor areas, is utilised well, although neither the Nursery nor the Reception classes have a covered area to allow free-flow outdoor activities to continue in inclement weather.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers provide a range of work suitable for pupils of different abilities in each lesson.
- Ensure more effective use of information and communication technology across the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well as they move through the school. When children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, their skills are well below what is typical for their age. Due to the good progress made, standards are much closer to the national average on entry to Year 1, although literacy and numeracy skills remain low. Pupils make good progress in Years 1 to 6 and, by the time they leave the school at age 11, standards are in line with national averages. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those with English as an additional language, make good progress thanks to the help they receive from their friends in class, their teachers and support staff.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils are extremely happy, greatly enjoy learning and develop very high levels of confidence and self-esteem. Across the school, pupils' attitudes to work and their behaviour in lessons are exceptionally positive. Relationships between different groups of pupils are very harmonious, and pupils enjoy the cultural diversity greatly. They praise the way newcomers are included, saying, 'We make friends with everyone.' The school council's role is developing well. Members are proud of their work and readily make suggestions to improve the school. The school's work towards Healthy School Status ensures that pupils embrace a healthy lifestyle enthusiastically and are fully aware of the benefits of healthy eating and of taking regular exercise. Their current progress, coupled with pupils' excellent collaborative and independent learning skills and their extremely positive attitudes to their work, makes a strong contribution to their future well-being. The school has worked hard and successfully to bring attendance up to a good level and the great majority of pupils attend well. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent overall. Pupils are involved in a range of fund-raising activities, including collecting practical resources for use by children in Ghana.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers use imaginative methods to capture pupils' interest and engage them in learning. They provide good opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively and to discuss their work, and this helps pupils to make good progress. There is good use of practical activity and investigations so that pupils can develop independent learning habits. Teachers make good links between lessons so that pupils understand what they are expected to learn. Planning is thorough, with clear learning intentions, which are usually shared with pupils at the start of the lesson. However, teachers do not always plan a broad enough range of activities to meet the learning needs of all pupils. Teaching assistants are highly skilled and make a considerable contribution to lessons by supporting individual pupils as well as groups of learners who need additional help. Relationships between adults and pupils are excellent. Pupils are well behaved and have very positive attitudes to learning because teachers make learning fun.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is matched well to the needs and interests of the pupils. The school environment is rich with stimulating and highly informative displays that celebrate achievement and promote further learning. The outstanding relationships that pupils have with their teachers give them confidence to have a go at the challenges provided. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of visits, visitors and links with the community. Links with other external providers help the school meet the needs of those pupils with specific difficulties very effectively. There are very strong links with local businesses and sporting organisations, which enrich pupils' learning. There is good range of clubs in which many pupils participate and these have a positive impact on pupils' enjoyment of school. Provision for music is very good. The quality of singing across the school, particularly, is outstanding and the school choir performs annually at the Royal Albert Hall. However, although the skills of the pupils are developing well, the use of ICT across different subjects is underdeveloped.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school cares for all pupils extremely well and strongly values all individuals for the unique contribution each of them makes to the school. The strong Catholic ethos permeates all aspects of the school, and procedures to ensure that pupils are well cared for are outstanding. The school has excellent systems to safeguard pupils, and child protection and risk assessment arrangements are secure. Pupils of all backgrounds get on outstandingly well together. Racial harmony is a major strength of the school. Academic guidance is good. All teachers mark pupils' work diligently and show them what they have done well, and some provide useful additional guidance for pupils about how they can improve their work and encourage them to respond to these comments. Pupils have individual targets for literacy and numeracy and these targets are reviewed regularly so that pupils know what they are expected to learn.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and governors are clearly focused on raising standards. All staff are strongly motivated and the school has a clear sense of direction. The headteacher delegates responsibility wisely and the senior leadership team fulfils its role well. However, the headteacher is well aware that leadership roles across the school are not yet sufficient to cope with the growing roll. Provision for the youngest children and for the large proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is managed well. The governors are hard-working and use their good understanding of the school effectively to hold it to account. Methods for evaluating the work of the school and the effectiveness of decisions are good. The evaluation of lessons, conducted by the headteacher and subject leaders, gives a good view of the quality of teaching. The priorities in the current short-term improvement plan are relevant and managed well and the strategies employed to raise achievement and standards further in mathematics and writing have had the desired effect. The school is very inclusive, so that all children have their welfare needs met and achieve well regardless of their background. The school makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion through its excellent local links and its good links with schools and organisations in the UK and overseas. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive and one wrote, 'Teachers in this school should be commended - their friendly attitude towards parents and their readiness to help where need be at any point in time are really appreciated'.

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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?	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	3
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	1

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	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	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

24 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School, Mitcham, CR4 1YG

I would like to thank you for your help during the recent inspection of your school. My colleagues and I very much enjoyed our visit.

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary is a good and improving school. You all make good progress in your learning. Your headteacher and staff help you to learn well and to enjoy your lessons. They make sure you understand how to look after yourselves and keep safe, and you do this very well. You told us that you really like coming to school and there are lots of things for you to enjoy. Your behaviour is excellent and we know you work hard and try to succeed in all that you do.

We have asked your school to do two things that we feel would make it even better:

- make sure teachers plan appropriate work for pupils with different abilities in each lesson
- make sure you have opportunities to do more work with computers in subjects other than mathematics and English.

We are confident that, with your help and hard work, the school will achieve this and will improve further.

I wish you all well in your future education.

Yours faithfully

Clive Lewis

Lead Inspector