

St Thomas More Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111704
Local Authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	331266
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Eric Jackson

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)	135
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 T J Cane
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Apolloni
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2008
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Erith Grove Easterside Middlesbrough TS4 3QH
Telephone number	01642 317350

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2009
Inspection number	331266

Fax number

01642 300597

Age group	3-11
Inspection dates	19-20 May 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an additional inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average primary school serving an area of significant socio-economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above average. Most of the pupils are from White British backgrounds, and there is a small but growing proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, mainly of Black British heritage. The percentage of pupils identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. There is provision for 13 Nursery children part-time in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school offers extended services including a breakfast club, family learning programmes, study support and childcare in partnership with other local schools.

There is full day care and an out of school club on site, which is run by a private provider and did not form part of this inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

The school has improved well since its 2008 inspection, showing continued improvement since an Ofsted monitoring visit in November 2008. The weaknesses identified in the provision for some older pupils have been tackled with energy and great resolve so that the education provided is now satisfactory with good features. This is a good achievement for everyone involved in the school, staff, pupils, parents, governors and officers of the local authority. The headteacher and new senior leadership team have put in place effective and robust measures to monitor and evaluate regularly pupils' progress and achievement. These procedures are backed by changes in staffing, improved planning for pupils' learning, and a strong determination to continue to raise standards and further improve the quality of education for all pupils. The school's capacity to improve is now good. Most of the parents or carers who wrote in feel that the school has progressed well in a short time, summarised by one who wrote, 'There has been a big difference in the school and my child is now being set challenges.'

Building on good provision in the Nursery and Reception classes, pupils' progress is at least satisfactory and often good in English and mathematics across the school, including for the small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. This is because teaching has improved considerably for pupils in Key Stage 2. Teaching overall is now satisfactory with some good features. The curriculum remains satisfactory, a recognised issue for further development including opportunities for continuous outdoor learning for Nursery and Reception children. All required safeguarding and child protection measures are in place.

Pupils' learning and progress have been enhanced through intensive staff training and a shared commitment to raise standards across the school. There has been a strong and successful focus on English and mathematics, a key issue for improvement, but handwriting and presentation are still too variable. Standards in reading and writing and practical mathematics have risen, although further challenge for potential higher attainers has been correctly identified as a next step. A renewed concentration on developing pupils' discussion skills has helped them to be more confident in their own abilities, especially boys. Progress for those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good because there is targeted support to match learning directly to their needs. The school's care, guidance and support are good, although for a minority of pupils learning targets are still only satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being are maintained strengths. Pupils behave well, clearly enjoy their learning, and get on well together. They understand how to keep themselves and others safe, and actively follow guidance on living healthily. Their spiritual and moral development is very good, modelled by the staff and based strongly in the school's Catholic mission. The children's joyous and active singing led by the staff in an infant assembly typified this. Social and cultural development is good, as is the contribution to community cohesion. The school promotes equality of opportunity well and the pupils' good social development and improving progress in basic skills prepares them satisfactorily for their future lives.

Leadership and management have improved significantly to be satisfactory with good features: this is the key to the school's progress. The headteacher has worked tirelessly and effectively with other senior leaders to drive the school forward. The partnership between the school, the local authority and other local agencies and schools is good. Governors and 'parent champions'

have also played a strong role. The whole staff, including newly appointed teachers, have worked together effectively to help raise pupils' standards. They recognise that there is still further work to do but are now well placed through rigorous monitoring and evaluation followed by swift and effective action to continue the school's improvement. There is a new and shared vision for the future, and high expectations that pupils will achieve to the best of their capabilities.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children join the Nursery with a wide range of skills and abilities, but for many their development is below or well below expected levels. They make good progress in both Nursery and Reception classes to enter Year 1 at broadly average levels in all six areas of learning, with some children reaching high levels for their age. The setting is safe and secure and children are well cared for. The recently introduced national guidance for the early years has been adapted effectively to the children's needs. There is a good concentration on children's personal, social and emotional development and on their developing language skills. There are many opportunities for talk and discussion, where girls in particular often reach good levels. Many older children write well for their age, although letter formation is often weak. Good planning leads to good learning through a wide choice of play activities, skilfully extended by the staff to stretch children's development. The children really enjoy their learning and their progress is well monitored through close observations that are carefully recorded in assessment files and folders. Older children are skilled in role-play, and there was a convincing end to the playing out of the story of the 'Three Little Pigs' when the 'wolf' ran away as though his trousers really were on fire! The setting is well led, and there are plans to extend the outdoor learning area and make it more accessible. This is timely as it is the only aspect of the curriculum that does not have continuous provision. For Nursery children, volunteers help to ensure that children play outside as often as possible.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards further in English and mathematics, including handwriting and presentation, especially for potential high attaining pupils.
- Use information from the improved assessment procedures to tailor teachers' planning for learning more sharply to all pupils' specific needs.
- Widen the scope of the curriculum to embrace recent national guidance on providing creative opportunities for linking learning between subjects.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before the next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' progress is satisfactory overall, as is their achievement. It is good for most pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Standards are currently in line with the national average and rising across the school in English and mathematics. The extended use of 'talk partner' sessions, and a greater involvement of pupils in understanding their own learning, is having a positive impact. Writing in particular has been a focus, and this has raised pupils' skills and achievement, although handwriting is too variable. Results in 2008 Year 6 national tests improved

well in English but fell in mathematics, a legacy of past underperformance. Results of assessments in Year 2 fell, but results overall were broadly average. As year groups are small, results can fluctuate widely year-on-year. Many of the improvements in teaching and learning instituted since the last inspection had not had time to impact fully on these year groups in 2008. The improving effect is most marked in the current Year 5 and younger classes, although the current Year 6 have improved well. Higher attaining pupils have been accurately identified by the school as requiring greater challenge in some aspects of their learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils say that they are safe and enjoy school, and this is underlined by their good behaviour, full involvement in lessons, and satisfactory attendance. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Pupils make a good contribution to the life of the school as councillors, playground 'pals' or as class helpers. They also add to the parish and local community through their generous raising of charitable funds, and their involvement in local activities. Through the curriculum they learn about the different cultures and faiths in British society, and in the wider world. Pupils are tolerant and accepting of each others' cultures and beliefs. The well attended early morning 'Wake up and Shake up', led enthusiastically by a member of staff, is testimony to their adoption of the school's healthy living messages. Pupils' average basic skills and their good social development prepare them satisfactorily for the next stage of their lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory and is developing many good features. The impact of improved teaching has not yet had time to impact on raising standards. The observations made during the inspection were mainly judged good, and this points towards a continued rise in standards as children's good progress becomes embedded. There is a sense of purposeful rigour in the staff's encouragement of pupils' involvement. This is transmitted to the pupils, who are energised and engaged, and say that they really enjoy their tasks and activities now. Assessment of pupils' progress is now much sharper, and is used more effectively to plan new learning, especially for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For example, two older pupils took real pleasure in sharing a mystery story they were preparing for someone younger. They read it out with developing confidence because they had been supported well to make significant progress through this project. There are occasions, however, when new learning is not planned as sharply as it could be and progress is then slower, but still satisfactory. Teaching assistants are well deployed to make a good contribution to pupils' learning in the main. The good working relationships between staff and between them and pupils are an important feature of the developing success in learning and progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements. There has been a deep and necessary focus on raising standards in the core subjects of English and mathematics since the last inspection. The school is now working hard to introduce more exciting and creative elements

into the curriculum to enhance enjoyment and accelerate achievement. Learning is well supported by a strong curriculum for pupils' personal development, including their spiritual and emotional well-being. This provides a good basis for development in other areas as pupils are keen to learn. Information and communication technology is promoted effectively, and pupils can access the school's learning platform from home. There is effective provision for physical education and sport, and good opportunities for enrichment through well attended clubs, visits to places of interest locally and residential visits.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good, supported by improved links with parents and carers. The staff work hard to create a learning atmosphere that is both enjoyable and challenging. They ensure that pupils know how to keep safe and understand how to live healthy lifestyles. All required safeguarding, risk assessment and child protection procedures are in place, and regularly checked by governors. Recent changes have led to improved systems for checking how well learners are progressing, and these are shared in detail with pupils at an appropriate level across the school. They know their learning targets, and these are particularly helpful in promoting good progress for vulnerable pupils, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These developing systems are not yet sharp enough to direct all pupils, especially potential high attainers, to make continuously accelerated progress. Good links with other agencies, such as the nearby special school, are effective in providing support for identified pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management have improved well to be satisfactory with some good features. There is an energy evident in the school to lift the school's performance to continually higher levels, driven effectively by the senior leadership team. Working closely with officers of the local authority, the staff and governors have begun to monitor and evaluate the pupils' progress and the impact teaching has on learning more rigorously. School leaders have a good understanding of strengths and what needs to be improved. Well directed staff training has begun to empower teachers and support staff to be confident in their planning for learning and their assessment of pupils' progress. New staff have been inducted well and are beginning to have significant impact across the school. The school has maintained and enhanced pupils' personal development, recognised as good at the last inspection. The inclusion of all learners in what the school offers is central to its mission, typified by the welcoming integration of pupils from minority ethnic groups. Community cohesion is carefully considered. Following an evaluation of the provision, the school is rightly confident that all three strands of faith, ethnic and cultural and socio-economic factors are taken into account to meet its learners' needs. Pupils are involved effectively in the locality and the parish, and in the wider life of the borough. The school also has links with a community in Lesotho, and is considering further links as part of its continuous improvement. Governance is satisfactory. The governors have played a key part in helping the school to improve. The school runs smoothly day-to-day and has good capacity to continue to improve, evidenced by the acceleration of progress against key development issues over the year.

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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?	3
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?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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	3
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
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	3
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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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**

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More Roman Catholic Primary School, Middlesbrough, TS4 3QH

It was good to meet you when I inspected your school. Thank you for looking after me so well and telling me what you think about the things you do there. Please also thank your parents for sending me their views. Your school is improving well and now provides you with an overall satisfactory education with some good features. You told me that you feel safe and really enjoy your time in school. I could see that by the smiles on your faces!

It is clear to me that the staff have worked hard to help you make better progress in your learning, especially the older pupils in literacy and numeracy. You have helped them by trying hard to learn. Those of you in the Nursery and Reception classes have a good time playing with all the different toys and games that help you learn. I was impressed by how well all of you across the school behave and get on with your work. You also work well together as 'talk partners' or in working groups. It was great to join Years 1 and 2 in your joyful assembly, and those of you 'earlybirds' who 'Wake up and Shake up'. You certainly know about healthy living by also cleaning your teeth and eating healthy meals.

Your teachers and headteacher have made many changes to how they find out how well you are getting on in your work. You are much more involved in knowing how well you have done: thumbs up or thumbs down is part of this. I have also asked staff to use assessment more sharply so that tasks and activities are just the right ones to help you build well on what you have learned. They are also going to develop the curriculum to challenge all of you to do the best you can and find exciting ways to make your learning even more interesting.

You can help by striving to do the best you can and setting your sights high in all you do, including in your handwriting and the neatness of your work.

Yours sincerely

Eric Jackson

Lead inspector