

St Thomas of Canterbury RC School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105221
Local Authority	Bolton
Inspection number	336452
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Karen Ling

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	335
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul Lochery
Headteacher	Mrs Frances Lysyj
Date of previous school inspection	0 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 13 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and spoke with parents. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of evidence including: the school improvement plan, the tracking of pupils' progress, individual education plans and the work pupils were doing and questionnaires completed by 139 parents.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- standards in writing across the school
- the quality of teaching across the school now that staffing has stabilised
- achievement of more-able and the progress made by all groups of pupils
- provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in particular, how well children's communication, language and literacy skills are promoted.

Information about the school

This is an above average size primary school. It is situated in a residential area of Bolton. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also below average. The vast majority of pupils are from a White British heritage. A small number are from minority ethnic groups and very few are at the early stages of learning English. The school's provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage consists of one large open plan Reception classroom. Since the last inspection, there has been a large number of staffing changes. September 2009 was the first time in five years that the school has had a full complement of permanent teaching staff. The school has achieved Active mark, Eco Green Flag. Healthy School Status, Investors in People and basic Skills Quality Mark.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school which provides a warm, happy and caring environment for its pupils. The good leadership of the headteacher and the senior leadership team promotes a positive ethos underpinned by strong Christian values which permeates the school. Leaders set a very clear direction for the staff and pupils of the school, which has the welfare and safeguarding of all pupils at the heart of its work. Pupils receive good teaching, care, guidance and support.

Children start school with above average skills overall. However, their communication, language and literacy skills, are much lower than their mathematical skills. By the end of Year 6, pupils have become confident and articulate. However, although attainment is high it could be higher. This is because progress has been uneven across the school and attainment has slipped slightly at the end of both key stages. Progress remains uneven although greater stability in staffing is helping to reduce this inconsistency. Pupils' achievement is good from above average starting points. During the inspection, pupils behaved well and excellent relationships between pupils and adults throughout the school were evident. The school has effective strategies for behaviour management and those pupils who have more complex behavioural needs are well supported.

Most pupils make good progress in the majority of lessons because teachers are very well organised, and engage pupils by using a variety of learning styles. However, in some lessons progress is hindered where tasks are not suitably matched to the individual needs of pupils. Those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of the strategies in place and the effective support of teaching assistants. The progress of all groups of pupils is monitored closely.

The needs of pupils and their families are at the heart of this school. This is reflected in the highly positive relationships which exist with parents. They are involved effectively in decision making and kept well informed about their children's learning and progress. Pupils take part in a wide range of activities and the contribution they make is highly valued within the community. Leaders and managers rigorously monitor much of the school's work, through scrutinising pupils' work, lesson observations and seeking the views of pupils and their families. Leaders act on their findings and this is why pupils achieve well. Within the Early Years Foundation Stage, although staff work together as a team, there is a lack of clear leadership. While outcomes are good for children in Reception, provision is not monitored well enough to check that it is used to full effect to maximise children's learning and development.

Since the last inspection, the school has made good progress in improving the quality of pupils' writing and the use of marking practices. Standards in writing are continuing to

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rise and pupils' writing skills are being used more effectively across the curriculum. Pupils now have a very clear idea of what they need to do to improve their work further. This progress, together with rigorous self-evaluation, indicates the school's good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment further and ensure that pupils' progress is consistently good across the school by:
 - ensuring that teachers always provide work that matches pupils' individual learning needs.
- Improve the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - monitoring the provision regularly to make sure it is having full impact on children's learning and development
 - ensuring that early reading and writing skills are taught well and reinforced by all staff
 - developing the quality of adult interaction during activities to extend children's knowledge and skills further.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

'I love it here' is one of many of the positive comments received and echoed by many of the pupils. They really enjoy their time at school and achieve well. In the majority of lessons observed pupils made good progress. They try hard and work with real enthusiasm particularly when work is challenging and fully meets their needs.

Pupils make good progress overall, but although standards are high at the end of Year 6, they could be even higher. While the progress pupils make is good overall, it is uneven across the school. Staffing instability over the last few years has led to a slight fall in standards at the end of both key stages. Although progress remains uneven, greater stability in staffing is helping to make it more consistent, especially in Years 1 to 4. Progress accelerates in upper Key Stage 2, but is more uneven among those pupils working within the higher National Curriculum levels. The school is aware of this and is working to ensure that assessment data is used to best effect by all staff to secure good and better progress for all pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and make good strides in their learning, as do the few pupils at the early stages of learning English as an additional language.

On the playground and around the school pupils are courteous and consider one another well. They say they feel very safe and older ones watch out for younger ones to make sure they are happy. Pupils follow a good moral code and get on well together. They adhere to the high expectations of behaviour set by the school and as a result, behaviour is good. Any incidents of inappropriate behaviour are dealt with effectively; those pupils who present behavioural difficulties are well supported by staff through the use of effective intervention strategies. Pupils follow a healthy lifestyle and enjoy a

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range of physical and social activities which develop their confidence and sense of well-being.

Pupils learn about the importance of fresh produce, healthy eating and how to have a varied diet through initiatives such as 'Let's Get Cooking'. The school listens to pupils well. The letters they can write to 'Tatty Teddy' are an effective way of ensuring their views and opinions are listened to and acted on. The school council and eco-warrior group also play an important part in contributing pupils' ideas to the school's development. The pupils are well prepared for their future lives. Projects such as the recent 'Dragon's Den' in which all pupils took part provided a very good opportunity for them to use key skills to plan, design, market and sell products. They have learnt in very meaningful ways how to use their knowledge and have the responsibility of deciding how any profits will be spent. Some pupils say they would like to give it to a charity. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. It is promoted effectively through assemblies, the good curriculum, links with the church and other local schools. Pupils reflect and discuss the diversity of beliefs and cultures and what life is like for others in the local area and beyond.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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How effective is the provision?

Teachers are well-organised and know how to help pupils enjoy their learning. This ensures that all pupils, including the very small number joining the school with little spoken English, quickly settle into the school's routines. The quality of teaching is variable, but mainly good. In most lessons, teachers present interesting activities and engage pupils well. Where teaching is good or better, teachers move learning on at a good pace, have high expectations and challenge all pupils appropriately. Where teaching is less effective the tasks set are not always appropriate to individual pupils' needs or abilities and, therefore, pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. Teachers' marking and the use of target setting are now much more consistent and help pupils know how they can improve their work. This is particularly noticeable in the standard of pupils' writing which is steadily improving and is practised well in other subjects.

The curriculum is developing well. It makes good links between subjects and is enhanced by a range of visits and visitors. The school has developed many links with organisations who work with pupils both during and beyond the school day. Crown green bowling is one of the many activities pupils have had the opportunity to learn. The residential week in the Lake District is popular and pupils experience a very different learning environment as they spend time in a small rural school. Staff's awareness of the needs of more-able pupils has been raised and the curriculum offers a variety of activities to suit particular gifts and talents. The 'Mad Scientist Club' and Latin workshops are just two of many from which pupils have benefited.

Those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive carefully tailored support that allows them to benefit from lessons in mainstream classes and play a full part in all aspects of the school. Parents appreciate the care and community spirit of the school. One comment reflects the views of many, 'I am delighted with the teaching, care, love, and support of the school.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have established a strong and enthusiastic leadership team. Their vision for the school can be clearly seen in the work they do. The leaders are knowledgeable, up-to-date with current thinking and have clear action plans

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for monitoring and improving pupils' attainment. They have a clear idea of what is working and what still needs to be improved. The recently introduced pupils' progress meetings are enabling all staff to have a better understanding of pupils' attainment and progress within their classes. However, within this strong picture of leadership, the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage is currently no better than satisfactory.

Self-evaluation shows that rigorous analysis of data and the school improvement plan are well focused on the continuous development of literacy and numeracy and ensuring that all groups of learners succeed. The well established governing body are very committed and supportive of the school. They carry out their statutory duties well, attending training courses, visiting the school and working alongside staff. Their understanding of safeguarding and commitment to community cohesion is comprehensive and these aspects are given high priority within the school. At the time of the inspection, safeguarding was rigorous and procedures were effective. All required systems and procedures are in place and meet requirements. The school's promotion of community cohesion is good overall. Meaningful topics and visits are planned to raise pupils' awareness of their immediate and local community. Good links have been established with schools in Bolton which reflect a very different socio-economic background. Relationships are positive throughout the school and equality and diversity is promoted well. This is reflected in the writing of one pupil which stated 'Even though I belong to a different faith, we all respect each other.'

Partnerships with parents and carers are excellent and those with other outside agencies are very strong. The school seeks parents' opinions and takes account of these when reviewing policies and practice. A range of strategies are in place to ensure that they are very well informed about their children's progress and learning and the work of the school. This is evidenced well in the many positive comments from parents. As one parent said 'St Thomas of Canterbury is not just a school but a community.'

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2

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The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children settle well into the caring and busy atmosphere of the Reception class. There is a good range of activities which children access independently. Welfare arrangements are secure and staff work well together as a team. By the end of Reception, most children exceed many of the early learning goals. Staff know the children well. They diligently plan an interesting range of familiar and new experiences both inside and outdoors. Children show good levels of concentration and are eager to learn. They take turns and cooperate well, for example, sharing construction bricks and glue and glitter when decorating Christmas trees. Staff sensitively help children relate to each other and take time to talk with them and join in their play. However, they do not always maximise opportunities to extend children's skills and learning sufficiently. Staff teach children about sounds and letters in fun ways and regularly read stories to them. However, activities do not always ensure that tasks are accurately matched to individual children's ability or that their early reading and writing skills are correctly practised and reinforced in other activities. Children enjoy healthy snacks, follow suitable hygiene routines and need little reminder to wash their hands. Parents are effectively involved in their child's learning and this enhances the quality of outcomes.

Currently, no-one has specific responsibility for leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Since the move to the new accommodation and remodelling of the environment in September 2009, the effectiveness of the new provision has not been evaluated sufficiently. As a result, staff are not fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of provision or what impact it is having on learning and development. The school has plans to appoint an Early Years Foundation Stage leader from September 2010.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers who returned questionnaires and who spoke to the inspection team overwhelmingly supported the school's work. All agree that pupils enjoy school and feel

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safe. The vast majority agree that pupils make good progress. A small minority expressed their concerns regarding the behaviour of a few pupils, which is being dealt with successfully by the school. Parents strongly agree that the school provides a good standard of education and is welcoming to pupils and families. Inspectors fully endorse the positive views expressed by parents.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas of Canterbury RC School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 138 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 335 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	104	75	34	25	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	99	72	39	28	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	79	57	56	41	2	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	81	59	50	36	5	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	94	68	42	30	2	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	83	60	49	36	3	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	78	57	52	38	5	4	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	77	56	51	37	2	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	77	56	56	41	3	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	54	39	68	49	8	6	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	67	49	56	41	6	4	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	84	61	50	36	1	1	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	92	67	44	32	2	1	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



11 December 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury RC School, Bolton, BL1 5LH

Thank you for the warm and friendly welcome you gave to the inspectors when we visited your school recently to see how well you were doing in your work. We enjoyed talking to many of you and were very impressed with how keen you were to tell us all the lovely things about your school and your learning. We were really pleased to see how well you get on together and how well you work and behave in lessons most of the time.

We agree with you that yours is a good school. Your teachers work very hard and make your lessons interesting and you enjoy many wonderful experiences during your time at school. Much of the teaching you receive is good, but sometimes activities do not encourage all of you to make enough progress. We were very impressed with your Christmas performances; there's no wonder your parents are very proud of you. You do a lot of things to help in the community and show that you care about others through raising money for charities. We also admire your contribution to helping yours to be an eco-friendly school. Keep it up. The adults who look after you make sure that you are well looked after and some of you were able to tell us how you feel really safe in school. You are encouraged to think about your learning and behaviour as you progress through the school and are developing your skills and knowledge very well.

We have asked your teachers to make some improvements so that you can all reach even higher standards in your work. Therefore, we have asked the school to help all of you achieve even more by:

- making sure that work set by teachers always matches your individual needs so that you all make good progress and reach even higher standards
- making sure that leaders regularly check how well activities and adults in the Early Years Foundation Stage challenge and develop each one of you.

Continue to enjoy your school as much as you do now. We wish you all the very best for your future.

Yours sincerely,

Karen Ling

Lead inspector

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