

St Thomas Catholic Primary

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112903
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	338045
Inspection dates	10–11 November 2009
Reporting inspector	John Paddick

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	252
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kate Hamilton
Headteacher	Michael Geraghty
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. They visited 16 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at lesson plans, the school improvement plan, governors' minutes and a full range of written work produced by the pupils. Inspectors also analysed questionnaires from parents, pupils and staff.

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

- progress being made by pupils in all year groups and particularly in mathematics between Years 1 and 4
- progress being made by different groups of pupils
- the setting of targets and the quality of assessment procedures
- opportunities that the school provides for creative writing.

Information about the school

The school is an average sized Roman Catholic primary serving the parish of Our Lady and St. Thomas of Hereford in Ilkeston. The pupils are mainly from White British backgrounds. There are small numbers of pupils from minority ethnic groups and very few of these are at an early stage of learning to speak English. Of the pupils on roll, around 7% qualify for free school meals, which is less than in most schools. Around 10% of the school's pupils have special educational needs, which is a below average proportion. The school has the Activemark and the ECO and Healthy Schools' awards.

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

St Thomas Catholic Primary School provides its pupils with a good standard of education. The effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels, including governors, are central to the school's success. A constant drive for improvement in all aspects of the school's work means that any weak performance is challenged robustly and effectively. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision is outstanding in every respect. During their time in school, all groups of pupils, including those from minority ethnic groups and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress. Achievement is good because overall standards rise to above average by the end of Year 6 from average starting levels in Reception. National test results and assessments have been maintained at an above average level since the time of the previous inspection. The slippage to broadly average standards in mathematics in Years 3 and 4 last year is in the process of being rectified. These pupils, who are now in Years 4 and 5, are making good progress in all subjects and they are rapidly closing on the above average standards that the school seeks.

Pupils enjoy their education and cooperate extremely well with their teachers and classroom assistants. Their behaviour is excellent in lessons and this contributes well to the harmonious atmosphere in school. Observations of pupils responding impeccably at the end of playtime and whilst eating their lunch leave a lasting impression. Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities. For example, they experience the joy of giving both money and their time by raising considerable sums for charity and acting as reading helpers. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Year 5 pupils are movingly proud of the photographs they have of their links with a school in Gambia where they communicate with the children and provide them with writing equipment and books.

A key feature of the school's good quality of teaching is the energy and enthusiasm of the teachers and their assistants. They make work interesting for pupils by using a wide variety of approaches and ensure that time is used fully. Pupils say that they enjoy their lessons because they recognise that they are learning quickly and relate extremely well to their teachers. Pupils all have National Curriculum targets but many of them are unsure what they are because teachers are not referring to them sufficiently during lessons. Outstanding care, guidance and support provide a very warm and stimulating atmosphere which is highly motivating for pupils. They say that they feel perfectly safe and secure in school.

Improvements since the previous inspection have been good, particularly in relation to setting targets for pupils and the introduction of assessment procedures that show

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managers clearly the rate at which pupils are making progress. Above average standards have been maintained. The school has effective procedures for self-evaluation and is moving forward quickly. Consequently its capacity for further improvement is good and it provides good value for money.

One parent said, 'I am amazed at this school every time I arrive. The staff are fantastic, the pupils' behaviour is outstanding and it is a thoroughly happy place'.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve standards in mathematics in Years 4 and 5 to above average by:
 - ensuring that the current rate of progress in these classes is consolidated and built upon
 - monitoring mathematics lessons frequently to ensure that all pupils are making good progress
 - assessing pupils' knowledge and understanding very regularly and dealing effectively with any slippage.
- Make a clearer link for pupils between their National Curriculum targets and the work that they are doing in class by:
 - sharing with pupils the National Curriculum level of the work they are doing
 - showing them what they need to do to move to the next level
 - indicating through the marking of work what level pupils are reaching.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils respond extremely well to the high level of support that they receive from teachers and classroom assistants. They display excellent attitudes in class where they are attentive, co-operative and keen to do well. Their outstanding behaviour strongly supports their learning and means that breaks and meal times offer precious periods of positive socialising and the enjoyment of leisure activities.

All groups of pupils make good progress in their learning as they move through the school. Pupils of all abilities do well. Those who are capable of reaching well above average standards do so and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities reach their targets too. Although some pupils in Years 4 and 5 are currently below where the school expects them to be in mathematics, standards are improving rapidly in response to good teaching. Similarly, across the school, progress rates are accelerating in response to good quality teaching as the school seeks to improve.

Pupils say that they feel extremely safe in school and that they really enjoy their education. This is reflected in their above average attendance. They develop exceptionally well socially because of the way that they are encouraged to relate to each other and to adults. In this respect the adults who work with them are excellent role models and do a fantastic job. Pupils have an excellent understanding of healthy food and the importance of exercise. They are eating more fruit and vegetables than

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previously and choose healthier options at meal times. Participation in physical education is enthusiastic and obviously enjoyable. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

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	2
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	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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	1

How effective is the provision?

Teaching has improved recently because the school has been successful in making several effective new appointments. These have helped to promote an infectious enthusiasm and vigour which are now strong features of many lessons. Teaching is usually good or better and never less than satisfactory. The atmosphere for learning is excellent because teachers and classroom assistants present work to their pupils in an interesting and often compelling manner, using plenty of visual stimuli. Teachers plan a rich variety of activities to interest and engage pupils and to build securely on what they understand and can do at all stages. Pupils say that they enjoy their lessons because they learn quickly and teachers often make learning fun. Teachers and their assistants work extremely well together providing effective extra support for pupils who find the work difficult. Marking indicates clearly how pupils can improve their work and the

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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school's tracking system provides managers with a clear view of the actual amounts of progress that they are making. However, although pupils have National Curriculum targets, they are often not sure what they are. This is partly because teachers don't make it clear enough how the work being done in class relates to them.

The curriculum has an effective emphasis on the development of pupils' literacy skills. This is clearly reflected in pupils' good achievement in speaking, listening, reading and writing. In mathematics, recent improvements have resulted in a quickening of the pace of learning, which is now good. Since the previous inspection, there have been improvements in the range of opportunities provided for creative writing. These have helped to improve standards. The school ensures that pupils benefit from a very wide range of quality experiences. For example, provision in music and physical education is particularly good, and work in drama enhances language skills. The curriculum is enriched by a good range of extra-curricular activities, clubs, visits and visitors. These are greatly enjoyed by the pupils and strongly support their personal development.

An excellent programme of care, guidance and support ensures that pupils are kept safe and have immediate access to help as and when they need it. For example, reasons for any poor attendance are researched carefully so that there is every opportunity for pupils to attend regularly and enjoy school. Parents fully recognise the quality of the school's pastoral work and know that it very firmly underpins the quality of the total learning experience that pupils enjoy.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Good leadership and management are at the heart of the school's success. The headteacher gives strong direction and has a very effective and relentless focus on ensuring that pupils receive the best possible quality of education. He communicates his vision for the school very clearly so that managers at all levels know exactly what is required of them. Weaknesses in aspects of pupils' progress in Years 3 and 4 last year are being rectified effectively. Equal opportunities are extremely strongly promoted and there is no evidence of discrimination of any sort. Governors have a highly successful partnership with the school. They understand very clearly where the strong features lie and they know what still needs to be improved. They challenge and probe extremely thoroughly and very effectively monitor the quality of the school's work, often from first hand observation of lessons and communication with parents. All required procedures

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for safeguarding pupils are firmly in place. Arrangements for the promotion of community cohesion are good. Older pupils have lots of opportunity to take responsibility in the school community. Charity work and links with other schools both in the UK and abroad provide pupils with a good understanding of the multicultural nature of Britain and the world. Staff morale is excellent and the school is well-placed to improve further.

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	2
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
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

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. As a result of first rate teaching, children make excellent progress across all areas of learning from starting points that are broadly average. As a result, a large majority reach the level expected for their age in all areas of learning by the end of their time in Reception and many exceed these goals. Their progress is particularly rapid in personal, social and emotional development, reflecting the strong emphasis given by all adults to these key aspects of children's learning. Planning is very effective and stems from the astute assessment of pupils' individual learning needs. Teaching is lively, captures children's interest strongly and reflects the staff's keen awareness of how young children learn. Children benefit from a wide range of learning opportunities, which means that they love coming to school. Relationships between children and adults are excellent, and the quality of care, guidance and support is high. Leadership and management are outstanding, and the adults work together very efficiently to promote children's learning. It is clear that members of staff love their jobs, and their commitment is exceptional.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents have a very positive view of the school and the quality of education it provides for their children. Inspectors received many written comments praising the school for the quality of care that it offers to all of its pupils. They agree that these positive views are accurate and that the school does provide a good standard of education for its pupils. Inspectors do not share the negative views expressed by a very small number of parents.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St. Thomas Catholic Primary 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 165 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 252 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	113	68	52	32	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	121	73	44	27	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	98	59	62	38	4	2	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	95	58	63	38	6	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	105	64	59	36	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	89	54	73	44	3	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	90	55	72	44	2	1	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)	82	50	73	44	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	91	55	69	42	2	1	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	96	58	63	38	5	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	73	44	87	53	3	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	94	57	65	39	6	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	108	65	53	32	3	2	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.



12 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas Catholic Primary School, Ilkeston DE7 4LF

Thank you very much for your warm welcome when we came to inspect your school recently. A particular thank you goes to those of you who talked to us and to those who answered our questions while you were working. Thank you also to those who provided us with such a positive picture of your school through filling in our questionnaires. We thoroughly enjoyed our visit and you will be pleased to know that St Thomas is a good school.

The school is well led and managed. It provides you with good quality lessons that pitch the work at the right level to enable you to make good progress. Your teachers and classroom assistants do their very best to ensure that all of you do well and they are there to help you if you have problems of any sort. We are glad to hear that you enjoy school and we wish to congratulate you on your excellent behaviour and good manners and the way that you co-operate in class. The way that all the adults in school look after you is absolutely superb.

We have asked your headteacher, the staff and governors to do two things to make your school even better. These are to:

- make sure that pupils in Years 4 and 5 reach higher standards in mathematics
- make it clearer to you how the work you are doing in class relates to your National Curriculum targets.

With very best wishes for the future

Yours sincerely

John Paddick

Lead inspector

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