

# St Thomas More Catholic First School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	116910
<b>Local Authority</b>	Worcestershire
<b>Inspection number</b>	338921
<b>Inspection dates</b>	6–7 October 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Alan Giles

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	191
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Laura Smiles
<b>Headteacher</b>	Elizabeth Fitton
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 June 2007
<b>School address</b>	Woodrow Centre Studley Road Redditch
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 17 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, parents and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' work books, assessment information about pupils' progress over the past three years, records of the school's review of its work, the school development plan, minutes of governors' meetings, documentation to ensure that pupils are safe, and 22 parental questionnaires.

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

- the full extent of the challenges and barriers to learning faced by the school, including distinctive variations in yearly cohorts, high pupil mobility and special educational needs and/or disabilities figures, and a changing ethnic context.
- the impact of new leadership strategies on moving the school forward in light of emerging issues, especially the achievement of vulnerable pupils with specific learning and personal needs.
- whether the monitoring of teaching and learning has successfully improved the use of assessment since the last inspection.
- the provision for writing and mathematics throughout the school.

## Information about the school

St Thomas More Catholic First School is situated in the Woodrow Centre in Redditch. Most pupils come from the school's immediate catchment area where many of the families face challenging social and economic circumstances. This is reflected in the extended school support the school receives and the newly built Sure Start centre on the school site. Since the last inspection the school's population has become increasingly diverse with now nearly 20% of its pupils being from ethnic minority groups. The proportion of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs has risen sharply and is very high compared to the national average. A high number of families frequently move in and out of the area, resulting in an increase in the numbers of pupils arriving or leaving the school other than at normal periods since the last inspection. The school has a Healthy Schools Award as well as an Activemark.

**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?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

## Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. The good quality of care and the effectiveness of partnerships strongly promote pupils' personal development. The individual needs of each pupil are at the heart of the school's work. As a result parents, staff, pupils and other professionals speak warmly of a school where 'staff take great care of the children' and where pupils 'can talk to the teachers about any problems or worries they may have'. This child-centred approach is shared by all staff. However, the additional rigour and support needed to enable all pupils to catch up on their learning from very low starting points to the school is inconsistent.

The school's Catholic ethos is reflected in the pupils' good behaviour. The adults in the school support and encourage the pupils to be tolerant and fair and these values have continued to blossom at the school since the last inspection despite the many changes and challenges over the last two years. The result of the care and examples pupils are set by adults means they respect and value their friendships with their classmates from different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Although the trend for overall standards has fluctuated year by year because of the changing needs of each year group, the achievement of many pupils is good. However, the progress some older pupils make slows down as teachers' planning does not consistently build on previous learning and understanding. Attainment on entry to the school is exceedingly low. Some children have had mixed pre-school experiences and some have had none. Through the effective provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, children of all capabilities and backgrounds make good progress. In spite of this good provision some children do not reach the goals expected for their age group by the end of the Reception Year. However, there is good continuity into Key Stage 1 with leaders and teachers providing a relevant curriculum that matches the needs of pupils who are still trying to catch up to levels expected for their age. The generally good progress across this stage means pupils reach standards in Year 2 that are usually broadly average or just below. However, pupils' attainment in writing is not as good as in reading and mathematics. The achievement of pupils in Years 3 and 4 is more mixed. Inconsistent provision at this stage results in a small minority of pupils making barely satisfactory progress. This is a result of teachers' planning and challenges not entirely meeting the wide range of pupils' individual needs.

Areas for improvement from the last inspection have been tackled satisfactorily. Priorities have generally been relevant but implemented in an uncoordinated way. Significant improvements have been successfully established. Good progress has been made in the Early Years Foundation Stage, mathematics and some assessment practices. Where this happened it has been underpinned by a carefully tailored training

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programme for leaders with appropriate practices to review the impact. The close teamwork of the leaders and success in tackling some weaknesses, give the school satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement. However, school self-evaluation is still not consistently monitoring the quality of teaching appropriately. There is a further need to ensure that feedback to all staff helps them to understand what is required needed to secure future improvements, especially in using assessment to improve learning, and also the timescales for these actions.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of improvement planning by:
  - more rigorous monitoring of targets and intended outcomes
  - establishing clear lines of accountability by the use of robust and relevant data
  - itemising appropriate professional development of staff to galvanise enthusiasm and high expectations.
- Raise attainment in writing by:
  - improving pupils' spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and use of imaginative vocabulary
  - providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length and for a range of purposes in different subjects.
- Ensure consistent and comprehensive assessment practices throughout the school, but especially prioritised in Years 3 and 4, by:
  - making sure that regular assessments clearly identify the next stage of pupils' learning
  - ensuring that planning for all groups of pupils clearly identifies the knowledge and skills pupils should gain by linking them to appropriate curriculum targets.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**3**

There has been variation in the national test results for Year 2 pupils over time, with a significant dip in 2007. This reflects the recent rise in numbers of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and a significant rise in the rates of pupil mobility. In spite of this, attainment indicators have not been low overall, with the gap between reading and mathematics narrowing. Writing standards generally remain too low because spelling, sentence structure and extended writing are still relatively weak. The school has redoubled its efforts to maintain reading standards because of the rising numbers of pupils who have English as an additional language. The 2008 test results show significant differences in the weaker performances of boys compared to girls. This can be explained partly because of the complexity of their needs, backgrounds and

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education history and that in some cohorts there were double the number of boys compared to girls. Considering the very low standards on entry to the Reception class, the majority of pupils who remain at the school until the end of Key Stage 1 make good progress and achieve well. A scrutiny of relevant data and present work shows that this good progress is inconsistently carried into Years 3 and 4. Inconsistent teaching and tracking of progress mean that progress for some pupils, especially boys and the more-able pupils, slows down. Although these pupils display admirable learning attitudes they are not always challenged to maximise their achievement before leaving for their middle schools.

Pupils make good gains in their personal development because of the good and often outstanding provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Support for those whose circumstances make them vulnerable is outstanding and enables these pupils to thrive in spite of the challenges they face in their lives. The majority of pupils display a tolerance of others' needs and socialise well. They are interested and motivated to learn and to volunteer for extra responsibilities and charity functions. Good levels of engagement are further displayed in sporting activities and the work of school councillors, mentors and buddies, for example Year 3 more able pupils mentoring their Year 4 classmates. Pupils' confidence is further enhanced by their experiences in the local churches, youth clubs and especially with interaction with other pupils in their partner schools. The school's achievement of national awards such as Healthy Schools and Activemark and the extent of school and extra-curricular sport demonstrate pupils' good understanding of and commitment to keeping safe and healthy. Recently increasing absenteeism has become a significant barrier to learning for a small number of pupils. The school has appropriate strategies in place to improve these figures and is beginning to take action in having higher expectations of parents, especially regarding the taking of holidays in school time.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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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<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b> Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	<b>3</b>
	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

### How effective is the provision?

Imaginative use of exciting and practical resources, well-informed teaching assistants and knowledge of pupil targets contributed to lessons where good teaching was observed. Foundation Stage and Year 1 teaching is successful because teachers know what stage pupils are at in their learning. A Year 3/4 literacy lesson had very successful learning because each group had specifically planned tasks with understandable success criteria. Inconsistent assessment practices are the major reason teaching is not better overall. Planning is not always building on previous learning or pitched adequately to make those with different capabilities extend their thinking. Teachers are often clear about the main aim of the lesson but plans and targets for group work are less focused. In a Year 4 lesson, pupils were asked to count in multiples of fives and tens although many patently could work with far more difficult concepts. Teachers and support staff are skilled at promoting pupils' speaking and listening but are insufficiently challenging and demanding of pupils' writing. A Year 1/2 science lesson required little in the way of appropriate age-related writing and thinking. Although the school has invested significantly to update its technology resources the present use of computers is still underdeveloped in the classroom, especially missing opportunities to stimulate further independent learning.

The curriculum motivates and engages pupils well with learning. It has successfully evolved in some areas to match pupils' changing needs. In addition to the focus on the main areas of literacy and numeracy, it provides well for sport, art, modern foreign languages and educational visits, and is beginning to reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of pupils. The attainment of pupils who learn more slowly and those with gaps in their learning has been boosted by initiatives such as nurture groups, 'busy bees' and language booster groups. Many pupils take advantage of the sporting activities on offer.

The good pastoral care delivered by high numbers of adults increases pupils' chances of success and allows them to play a full part in school life. Links with other agencies and health professionals are an important part of this provision given the range of needs in the school. The newly established Sure Start facilities at the school are beginning to give the school opportunities to work alongside parents to improve their involvement in their children's learning. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified well but specifically tailored planning is not consistently updated sufficiently quickly to

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guarantee accelerated learning. The school is developing good support assistance for its growing numbers of pupils whose first language is not English.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

A newly created management structure has been well thought-through by the headteacher who has received constructive support from the governing body. Appropriate training has been given and the senior leadership team is now beginning to lead with a view to increasing the pace of improvement. Their action plans are relevant and they are beginning to both inspire and challenge all the staff, including newly appointed teachers, to raise attainment and achievement more consistently. Early successes have been attributable to good tracking and analysis of pupils' progress to identify and bridge gaps in pupils' learning. However, the lack of consistency and rigour has meant there has only been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Senior teachers are monitoring teaching and learning but guidance on how learning can be improved is not applied consistently enough.

The headteacher and her senior leadership team actively promote equality of opportunity and the celebration of diversity in and out of school. As a result, a cohesive and supportive community has been established in the school and strong links have been formed with parents and the wider community. Close attention is paid to ensuring that safeguarding procedures meet requirements and that statutory duties are reviewed regularly.

The headteacher is imaginatively locating additional sources of funding to help break down the barriers to learning. The use of sports coaches is a good example of this. The development of learning partnerships with other local schools and the sharing of lead teachers is another exciting development that is having a real impact on raising aspirations to improve teaching and learning .

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3



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<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

The ambitions and energy of the senior leadership team have resulted in significant developments in provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children settle in remarkably well given their lack of pre-school experiences. They are actively involved and thoroughly enjoy a range of art, dough-making, house-building and computer activities. These activities are effectively led by very knowledgeable adults. At appropriate times they ask relevant questions that lead to accurate assessment records and learning journeys. These follow on from comprehensive assessments of pupils made on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage. Through well-planned activities, children make good progress, particularly in their personal development. Despite a considerable effort to raise achievement in early communication skills this aspect of children's learning, along with mathematical understanding and creative learning, is still low when they transfer to Year 1. Very strong partnerships have already been established with parents because of the good provision. 'My child has settled in brilliantly and already has better independence and self-belief,' wrote one parent whose comment was typical of others. Comprehensive policies and procedures ensure that children are very well protected and supported.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

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

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## **Views of parents and carers**

Only a few parents responded to the parental questionnaire but of these almost all were very positive about the school and its impact on their children's well-being. The quality of care and support for pupils who have been struggling with their learning and lacking confidence was highly praised by these parents. In the returned questionnaires parents and carers commented: 'The school provides a safe environment,' and that 'teachers are very supportive of the children.' Many parents and carers comment on how well the youngest children settle quickly into the Reception class and how they quickly gain confidence and readiness to learn.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas More Catholic First 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 22 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 191 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	19	86	3	14	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	20	91	2	9	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	15	68	5	23	1	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	82	4	18	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	19	86	3	14	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	73	5	23	1	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	77	5	23	0	0	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)	15	68	5	23	1	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	64	8	36	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	15	68	5	23	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	68	7	32	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	17	77	5	23	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	18	82	4	18	0	0	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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



9 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic First School, Redditch, B98 7RY

As you are aware, a little while ago two colleagues and I spent a short time inspecting your school. We really enjoyed sharing your lessons and playtimes and would like to thank you for taking time to talk to us about your work and for telling us about your school.

It was very clear from talking to you, and the questionnaire replies we received from you and your parents, that you enjoy school and think that you are safe and very well cared for. You especially talk about all the good friends you make and how your teachers help you. You work hard and often have fun in lessons, in sport, in clubs, and on your visits out of school. As well as working hard you are also well-behaved. You usually make satisfactory progress in your learning and sometimes you make good progress.

We believe that your school is providing you with a satisfactory education and cares for you well. We agree with your teachers that sometimes you could do even better and to do this we have asked them to do the following things.

Improve your spelling, punctuation and use of describing words to help you do better in your writing and to give you more opportunities to do longer pieces of writing, in different subjects.

Make sure you are clear what you will be learning in your groups and what your individual targets are.

Have a clear plan for making sure these improvements take place.

We know you will do all you can to help your teachers and we wish you every success in your future learning.

Yours faithfully

Alan Giles

Lead inspector

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