

# St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	101459
<b>Local Authority</b>	Bexley
<b>Inspection number</b>	355002
<b>Inspection dates</b>	21–22 September 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Gordon Ewing

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>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	339
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Michael Jones
<b>Headteacher</b>	Collette Doran Hannon
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 September 2007
<b>School address</b>	Sheldon Road Bexleyheath DA7 4PH
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 17 lessons, observing 12 teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, governors, members of staff and groups of pupils. Informal discussions were conducted with some parents, carers and pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, including the systems for assessing and monitoring pupils' progress, pupils' work in their exercise books and teachers' planning and marking. Inspectors took account of separate questionnaires completed by 99 parents and carers, 21 staff and 28 older pupils.

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

- How much progress children make in the Early Years Foundation Stage from their starting points.
- The relative rates of progress of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities in English, mathematics and science, through different parts of the school.
- How effectively leaders at all levels monitor the quality of teaching and ensure that assessment information is used effectively so that all pupils achieve as well as they can, particularly more able pupils.
- The early impact of the new senior leadership on the maintenance and strengthening of attainment and achievement, as well on the establishment of a clear and convincing vision for the future.

## Information about the school

St Thomas More is a larger than average primary school. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. The largest groups of pupils are those from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who are at the early stages of learning English is below average. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is close to that found nationally. Predominantly, these pupils have speech, language and communication difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school provides care out of school hours in breakfast and after-school clubs managed by the governing body.

The current headteacher and deputy headteacher have been in post since September 2010.

**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

St Thomas More Primary School provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Some aspects of its work are good. Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where all features are good. All pupils experience good levels of care and support so that they develop positive attitudes to learning and behave well in lessons and around school. They feel safe in school and take on responsibilities such as the Buddy Bunch, with evident pride. For vulnerable pupils, the school's partnerships with others in the community ensure that they make similar progress to their peers. Pupils, parents and staff speak very positively about the changes introduced since the start of the autumn term and an air of expectancy pervades the school. As one parent commented, 'The new headteacher and deputy have already made a big impression on the school.'

In recent years pupils' subsequent attainment has varied considerably in English, mathematics and science because the quality of teaching fluctuates significantly, and the early momentum is not sustained.. Consequently, rates of progress through the school are inconsistent from class to class so that, by the end of Year 6, overall achievement is only satisfactory. The attainment of boys and girls is broadly similar. However, attainment in writing across the school lags well behind that in reading, mathematics and science. Furthermore, not enough pupils attain the higher National Curriculum levels of which they are capable.

Current inspection evidence demonstrates that a key factor in the underperformance in writing and of more able pupils is the variable quality of teaching. Although broadly satisfactory, teaching is often uninspiring and laboured. Teachers are not yet confident in using the assessment data available to ensure that lesson activities are well matched to the learning needs of pupils, especially the more able. The analysis of pupils' progress is not sufficiently rigorous so that teachers do not always know why some pupils are not making the expected progress. Consequently, opportunities are missed to move pupils on rapidly and link learning, for example in writing, across subjects. Many pupils do not know quite how well they are doing and teachers' marking, although corrective and praising, does not consistently help pupils to move their learning forward or to develop independence. Teaching assistants demonstrate sound skills when working with small groups but they are not always deployed to best effect. As a result, time, which could be better used to provide individual support to targeted pupils, is sometimes wasted during lessons.

The new headteacher and deputy headteacher work seamlessly together and have clearly communicated their vision and ambition to all stakeholders. One pupil commented, 'Our headteacher's motto is "Play hard, work hard and pray hard," and we

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do!' They have swiftly undertaken a review of teaching and how assessment data are managed. Using the resulting evidence they have initiated strategies to address significant weaknesses. However, it is too early to measure the impact of such actions on outcomes for current pupils. Staff morale is high and there is an evident commitment to respond to the challenges ahead. Middle managers, while clearly passionate, have not yet had the training they need in how to monitor and evaluate the school's work in order that they are able to contribute effectively to whole-school improvement. Given the determination of the new leadership, the strong team ethic clearly evident amongst all stakeholders, and the additional support being provided by the local authority, the school is demonstrating a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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

- By the end of the summer term 2011, raise pupils' attainment in writing by:
  - training teachers to assess pupils' progress in writing accurately
  - developing writing skills through new initiatives
  - increasing opportunities for writing by providing frequent activities to write for clear purpose
  - ensuring that writing skills are developed across the curriculum.
- By the end of the summer term 2011, improve teachers' marking, assessment and target setting by:
  - reviewing the current assessment and marking policies to ensure that best practice is adopted
  - providing training and support so that the school's revised marking and assessment policies are implemented consistently
  - monitoring how pupils' learning targets are used to celebrate learning, involving all pupils in assessing their own learning and setting future targets.
- By the end of the summer term 2011, improve teaching so that at least 75% of lessons are judged as good or better by:
  - providing training to improve teachers' planning so that lesson activities are consistently challenging and motivating for all pupils
  - providing training for teaching assistants to ensure that they support pupils of all abilities effectively so that they achieve as well as they can
  - regularly undertaking lesson observations, pupil interviews, work scrutiny and data analysis to measure the impact of these initiatives.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****3**

Pupils' achievement in recent years has varied considerably so that, by the end of Year 6, attainment is broadly average and pupils' progress though inconsistent, is satisfactory overall. Progress in English has sometimes been good, so that, in 2009 for example,

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levels of attainment were high. However, in 2010, results in English fell and overall rates of progress by Year 6 were no more than satisfactory. A significant factor in this fall was the poor performance in writing. Inspection evidence demonstrates that pupils, and especially the more able, are not given enough opportunity to write for different purposes and teachers' understanding of assessing writing is not sufficiently precise. In some lessons, across a range of subjects, expectations are not high enough so pupils do not receive effective support to consolidate and extend their learning. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar rates of progress to their peers, though opportunities are missed in the deployment of teaching assistants to develop pupils' independent learning skills.

Pupils clearly enjoy school, although their overall attendance has fallen to broadly average levels in recent years. This is partly due to the school's lack of rigour in tackling the persistent absence of a few pupils. Pupils collaborate well and demonstrate perseverance, even when lesson activities lack imagination and challenge. They show good attitudes to living healthily and understand the dangers of smoking, alcohol and drug taking. They demonstrate an eagerness for sport and would like to see more clubs in school. Through the work of the school council, pupils make a sound contribution to school life and are evidently keen to do more, given the opportunity. The breakfast and after-school clubs also contribute to pupils' personal development and well-being. As one parent wrote, 'We are very fortunate to have a fantastic breakfast/after school club...my son enjoys the out-of-hours' provision and does feel happy and safe.' Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good. At the start of one lesson the teacher asked if anyone wanted to express a 'special intention' and one pupil announced that his mother was expecting a baby. The whole class responded with an uplifting communal prayer. Pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. The school recognises that more needs to be done to engage with a broader range of cultural groups beyond the school and to give pupils opportunity to gain experience of other cultures locally and globally. Pupils are developing some of the wider skills needed to equip them for the future but do not have a secure understanding of the next steps they need to take to succeed in their learning. As a result, the preparation they receive for the next stage of their education and the world beyond is no more than satisfactory.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

### How effective is the provision?

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Where teaching is good pupils are engaged and interested. In one such lesson, pupils actively explored the properties of two-dimensional shapes and, prompted by good questioning from the teacher, they identified the key characteristics of squares, rectangles, pentagons and hexagons. They worked well in pairs and independently and used 'talk partners' well to consolidated their understanding and share their ideas. The teacher swiftly recognised that a few pupils were unsure about some aspects of the activity and rapidly adapted the task to meet their needs. The teaching assistant skilfully supported pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, allowing them to work independently at times so that she could check on the understanding of others around the class. Staff use interactive whiteboards to present activities visually, although the benefits are reduced because the images cannot always be seen clearly in some classrooms. A common weakness observed in a number of lessons was the lack of challenge and pace. Activities were not consistently matched to pupils' needs and sometimes the activity selected was the same for the whole class. Expectations are not high enough to extend the significant proportion of more able pupils across the school and opportunities to develop pupils' writing skills or technical vocabulary in mathematics and science lessons are often missed. Involving pupils in the evaluation of their work and that of their peers is not a common feature.

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is generally broad and balanced. It is not sufficiently adapted to meet the needs of more able pupils so that they can achieve their full potential. Good attention is given to a range of subjects, including French and

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Spanish, although there are limited links across subjects to reinforce pupils' skills and understanding, enable independent learning or to foster pupils' self-sufficiency. Some extension activities, such as educational visits, have a positive impact on learning, bringing added colour and vibrancy to the curriculum.

The quality of the care and support of pupils, including those who attend the breakfast and after-school clubs, is good. Case studies of the support given to vulnerable pupils demonstrate strong working partnerships with parents and outside agencies which enable individual pupils to overcome significant barriers to learning. Transition and induction activities ensure that pupils settle quickly into school routines and prepare them effectively for the move to secondary school.

*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?**

The governing body rigorously ensures that health and safety and safeguarding requirements are met. Governors have some good skills in supporting the work of the school but the degree to which they hold the school's leadership to account is limited due to their over-reliance on the school for improvement information.

There is an evident commitment to the new senior leadership's vision for the school and some early initiatives, for example in monitoring teaching and learning, are raising expectations amongst all stakeholders, within and beyond the school. The newly formed senior leadership team meets regularly and steps to distribute leadership responsibility and accountability across all leaders are clearly reinforcing the staff's resolve and ambition to drive through necessary improvements. The school's policy to promote equal opportunities and tackle discrimination is implemented satisfactorily. The school has an effective no-tolerance stance on racism and bullying, which are extremely rare. However, the lack of challenge for the more able pupils hinders their learning and places them at a distinct disadvantage. The school is a cohesive and harmonious community but its evaluation of how it promotes community cohesion, locally and beyond, is at an early stage. The school has an adequate understanding of the religious and ethnic mix of its own community and promotes respect for individuals by celebrating the diversity of the school. The curriculum, however, provides limited opportunities for pupils to be aware of other cultures and links with national and global communities are under developed.



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*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
<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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

## **Early Years Foundation Stage**

Children are exposed to a well-equipped and stimulating learning environment that supports and encourages effective learning. Children concentrate well and activities are accurately matched to their needs. Relationships with adults are strong and children are well supported within a very safe and caring setting. Consequently, their behaviour is good and by the end of the Reception Year, overall, they have made good progress from their starting points. Adults are deployed effectively and undertake accurate observations that inform and enhance future learning. Progress in key skills is good due to effective teaching and clear leadership. Children enjoy opportunities for small tasks, such as clearing away equipment, and this aids the development of a range of skills for the future. There is a good balance between child-initiated and adult-directed activities. Resources and links with outside agencies ensure that vulnerable pupils achieve as well as their peers.

The Early Years Foundation Stage leader has a clear vision for improving the existing good provision further. Her track record for implementing initiatives effectively is impressive and, as a result, children, year on year, are achieving higher levels of attainment across all early learning goals. The strong team ethos and rigorous approach to monitoring the work of the setting create a thirst for improvement that ensures that all children flourish as individuals and learners.

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*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

## Views of parents and carers

Approximately one quarter of parents and carers returned completed questionnaires. The responses of the very large majority were positive about their child's overall experience at school. A small minority of parents and carers expressed concerns about the school's management of misbehaviour and the leadership's response to suggestions and concerns. With regard to the former, inspection evidence showed that pupils reported convincingly that any misbehaviour was dealt with effectively and swiftly. Behaviour in lessons and around the school was judged as good, although, when teaching was insufficiently stimulating, a few pupils sometimes became inattentive and engaged in low-level disruption. Regarding the latter, in discussions with parents and carers at the start and the end of the day, inspectors heard very positive views about the school's response to their suggestions and concerns. The new headteacher and deputy headteacher were described as always available and approachable. In written responses and in discussion, parents and carers were also sensitive to the fact that the school is going through a period of transition. One parent wrote, 'The new head and deputy are very welcoming to parents and children at the school gates. I am confident that they will manage the school effectively.'

## 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 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 99 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 339 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	60	61	35	35	2	2	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	65	66	32	32	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	36	36	54	55	6	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	36	36	52	53	6	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	42	42	51	52	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	38	38	51	52	7	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	37	37	58	59	1	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)	33	33	52	53	4	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	37	50	51	7	7	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	28	58	59	6	6	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	31	31	55	56	5	5	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	37	37	47	47	5	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	54	55	38	38	4	4	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.**



27 September 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Bexley DA7 4PH

The whole inspection team enjoyed its recent visit to your school to see you at work. You made us feel very welcome and all of you spoke positively about your school life. This letter sets out some of the things we found.

You reported that you enjoy school and that you learn a lot while you are there. Most of your parents and carers are also happy with the school. In particular, we liked these things about your school.

- You behave well, especially when lessons are interesting, and get on well together as a whole-school community.
- Those of you in the Reception classes have made particularly good progress by the time you move to Year 1.
- Most of you feel safe and secure and thoroughly enjoy lessons.
- The staff work hard to ensure that you grow as well-rounded individuals and develop good attitudes to learning.
- You are keen to improve your school and you play your part by taking on responsibilities such as being a school councillor or as a member of the Buddy Bunch.
- The staff take good care of you and you are confident that they are always available to help if you have any worries.

Everyone at St Thomas More Catholic Primary wants the school to be even better and to achieve this we have asked the staff and governors to improve these things.

- Your attainment in writing to the levels you achieve in mathematics and reading.
- The quality of teaching so that lessons are more stimulating and challenging.
- Teachers' marking, target setting and advice to you so that you know what you have to do to improve your work.

We know that you are keen to do more to make the school even more successful and you can help by continuing to work as hard as you can. We wish you all every future success.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Ewing

Lead inspector

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