

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103441
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	336084
Inspection dates	13–14 July 2010
Reporting inspector	David Speakman

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	313
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephen Henry
Headteacher	Sister Susan Collins
Date of previous school inspection	23 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 18 lessons and observed 15 teachers. They held meetings with groups of pupils, governors and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documents, which included the school's analysis of standards and progress, development planning, policy documents and documents relating to the safeguarding of pupils. The inspectors considered responses to questionnaires from 153 parents, 100 pupils and 20 staff.

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

- comparing the attainment of boys and girls, particularly at Key Stage 1
- the current levels of attendance and if poor attendance has a negative impact on learning
- the quality and range of intervention strategies to support pupils' progress
- leadership and management roles under the restructuring of the staff and the impact of different levels of leadership.

Information about the school

This is a large primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average. The large majority of pupils are White British; with an average number coming from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. A small minority speak English as an additional language. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs is below average. In the main these are pupils with moderate learning difficulties and are mostly in Key Stage 1. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is in one of two Reception classes. The school has National Healthy School status, Artsmark (Silver) Award, Activemark and Basic Skills 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

This is a good school. Children get an exceptionally good start to their education in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They join with attainment that covers a wide range, but overall is below that typical for children of this age. They make exceptional progress and by the end of the Reception Year are extremely well prepared for transfer to Year 1. Pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2 make good progress and standards at the end of Year 6 are consistently above the national average.

Good progress is made possible by good quality teaching and learning. Most teaching observed was of a good and sometimes outstanding quality but satisfactory, good and outstanding teaching was observed at both key stages, leading to some inconsistency in the rates of progress pupils make as they move through the school. Some lessons were satisfactory because there was a lack of challenge, particularly for the higher attaining pupils. Lessons were occasionally directed too much by the teacher, so not allowing pupils to develop the good skills in independent learning gained in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The quality of marking is inconsistent in the extent to which it informs pupils how they can improve their work.

Pupils enjoy school a great deal. This is evident in the extent to which they enthusiastically engage in the learning process. For example, in a Year 2 science lesson, pupils could hardly contain their enthusiasm at the prospect of exploring a range of tropical fruits. Their behaviour is outstanding and this has a positive impact on establishing a calm and productive learning environment. Excellent behaviour around the school and at break times means that pupils feel exceptionally safe while at school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. In line with the Catholic ethos of the school, pupils care deeply about each other's feelings and respect each others' differences. They develop a strong understanding of human emotions in lessons such as English where Year 6 pupils explored the relationships between two characters in their class novel. They showed a strong understanding of how initial mistrust can turn into deep respect. Moral and social development is excellent as seen in self moderated behaviour. Pupils have good multicultural awareness through many links with other faiths and through their work in religious education and humanities.

The school has sustained a good level of improvement since the previous inspection. Most key areas of outcomes and provision were judged to be satisfactory then and are now good. The headteacher and her senior leadership team have been effective in resolving issues identified at that time, particularly in relation to standards in mathematics and the role of middle managers. The school is therefore in a good position to sustain further improvement; its capacity to improve is good.

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

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teaching is of a good or better quality to assure consistent rates of progress across the school by:
 - challenging pupils at all levels of attainment, especially those capable of doing harder work, so that all achieve their full potential
 - establishing a consistent quality in marking pupils' work so that it clearly informs pupils how they can improve
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to take on responsibility and develop initiative to enable them to improve their skills in independent learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils achieve well and attainment at the end of both key stages is consistently above the national average. In 2009 there was a significant difference in the performance of boys and girls at the end of Year 2, with girls outperforming the boys. This was related to the nature of the cohort and the number of boys with identified learning difficulties. This year there is no significant difference in attainment. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive a good level of support in class and in the good quality intervention groups. Consequently, they make good progress and numbers on the special educational needs register decrease as pupils move through the school.

Pupils respond well to high expectations in both behaviour and their work. Where challenging tasks are set, they persevere with a good level of determination to succeed. Group work is effective and pupils make good use of opportunities to discuss with their talk partners and in small groups. However, opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own work are limited and pupils themselves say that independent learning is mostly directed and not related to their own choices. However, they do develop other skills that prepare them well for their future and well-being. Attendance is in line with the national average. Frequent absence of a small number of pupils has a detrimental impact on the standards those pupils achieve. The school makes every effort to overcome this, but with some limited success.

Pupils make a good contribution to both the school and local communities. During the inspection Key Stage 2 pupils performed for the school and parents to a high standard. They played a wide range of instruments and the choir sang songs from 'The Sound of Music' to a very high quality. During this event, pupils showed high levels of confidence in what they were doing and enjoyment was evident in both performers and audience members. On the day after the inspection they were due to give a pre-matinee performance at the Birmingham Hippodrome, while the audience arrived to see the professional production. The quality of music is excellent.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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	2
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is good. Although some satisfactory lessons were seen during the inspection, most were of a good and sometimes outstanding quality. Teachers assess pupils accurately and use this information well to target work to pupils' individual needs. Careful thought is given to making tasks interesting, appealing and challenging. Occasionally there is less challenge than intended because teachers direct work too much and leave insufficient opportunity for pupils to develop independence. On these occasions the progress of a few pupils, particularly those capable of doing harder work, is satisfactory rather than good. Resources are selected carefully to engage pupils' interest instantly. Teaching assistants make a strong contribution by taking small groups of pupils who need more intense support. They provide good support in class, by giving help when it is needed but also encouraging perseverance. Marking is variable. Some excellent marking was seen in Year 6 literacy books, which clearly identified what pupils did well and what they needed to improve. However, this is not the consistent practice in all classes. Pupils take part well in assessing their own work and that of others and older ones are secure about their expected and current levels of attainment in English and mathematics.

The curriculum provides a broad range of relevant experiences for pupils. Visits and visitors enrich learning opportunities well and add, for example, to pupils' cultural development. It is well supported by a good variety of extra-curricular activities, which

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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appeal to a range of preferences. The curriculum is adapted to suit individual needs and a good range of support strategies helps those pupils in danger of underachieving to succeed. Through initiatives such as this, the school is effective in promoting equality of opportunity. Care, guidance and support are good. The school works effectively with external agencies to support pupils and their families, with considerable success. As a result attendance is improving. Those pupils in difficult circumstances are supported well so that their progress compares well with other pupils in 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, deputy and other members of the senior leadership team work effectively to monitor all aspects of the school's provision and its outcomes. As a result there is a shared drive to move the school forwards constantly. Monitoring information is used effectively to identify any areas of underperformance and to take action to improve. For example, the quality of teaching and the resulting achievement have both improved and are now good. Teaching is monitored regularly and the school's own records show clearly where strengths and weaknesses lie. Staff members receive clear feedback and follow through support aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The governors play an effective role in supporting and challenging the school. They help drive improvement and are involved in major initiatives in, for example, improving attendance or linking with subject leaders to work on raising standards. Governors ensure safeguarding arrangements are all in place. Policies and procedures for all aspects such as health and safety, child protection and recruitment, are robust and kept under regular review.

The school evaluates how well it promotes community cohesion. However the evaluation does not clearly identifying what needs to be done to further develop this area. There are plans to extend its arrangements further. Community cohesion is strong within the school, local community and with charity work. It has developed good links with parents, even those who may be hard to reach. The school maintains good links with schools of different faiths. There is regular contact with Muslim schools and a Hindu temple, through which pupils from St Thomas More benefit greatly.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

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

The learning environment, including the outdoor learning area, is bright and exciting. It is highly effective in motivating the children's enthusiasm for learning, with a rich range of interesting resources, expertly set out for ease of access. Learning activities immediately capture children's interest. During the recent 'Pirate Day' in which all children and staff were in role as pirates, the delivery of a letter from Captain Blackbeard, requested that children undertake a range of activities and problems to solve, including using maps to hunt for treasure. Children were immediately keen to get going and sustained their concentration throughout the day. They clearly enjoyed the day immensely. Activities were very well planned to address all six areas of learning.

The Early Years Foundation Stage staff arrange a number of themed days such as this one, but at other times when the unit is working routinely, there is a very good choice of activities and children have ample opportunity to select for themselves. This is highly effective in developing their independence. Children's learning experiences are carefully monitored and when necessary, individuals are directed so that they all experience a good balance of learning across all areas of learning. Children's progress is assessed regularly and recorded carefully so that staff know clearly the next steps in learning for each child. This helps adults move children's learning on at a quick pace and supports the excellent progress seen. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader is extremely knowledgeable and has a clear educational vision of providing high quality for the children in her care.

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

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 very positive views about the school and the questionnaires represent a good level of parental satisfaction with what the school is doing. Parents expressed a few concerns mainly to do with feedback on their children's progress and how the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. The inspectors found no reason to have concerns about the information provided by the school or how the school deals with any inappropriate behaviour.

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 153 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 313 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	98	64	53	35	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	100	65	51	33	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	64	42	78	51	10	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	76	50	69	45	4	3	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	87	57	60	39	3	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	77	50	68	44	5	3	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	77	50	70	46	2	1	1	1
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)	68	44	78	51	3	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	74	48	70	46	4	3	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	58	38	70	46	18	12	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	49	32	83	54	9	6	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	67	44	76	50	3	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	94	61	55	36	1	1	1	1

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	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 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"> ■ 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.



15 July 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Birmingham, B26 3HU

Thank you very much for welcoming us into your school. We all enjoyed our visit and agree that your school is a good school.

We think that the school has improved a lot since the last inspection and under the direction of your headteacher we feel the school will improve a great deal more. You have a strong contribution to make. Your continued outstanding behaviour, very positive attitudes to school and learning and the way in which you all get on so well together so pupils feel very safe in school and enjoy being there, are important factors to the school's success. Because of this your progress is improving and standards in subjects are rising.

It is clear that you enjoy lessons a lot and your teachers make sure that almost all of you make good gains in your learning. We were very impressed by the skills some of you show in assessing how well you have done in lessons and how well you know what you have to do to improve your writing, for example.

We have asked your teachers and governors to make sure that all teaching is good or better so you all make steady progress. To do this we are asking teachers to provide challenging work for you all, identify how you can improve when marking your work and giving you more opportunities to take on responsibility and develop initiative and independence.

We wish you all the best for the coming years and look forward to reading about further improvements.

Yours sincerely

David Speakman

Lead inspector

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