

St Thomas A Becket Catholic Junior School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	114578
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	378893
Inspection dates	29 February–1 March
Lead inspector	Hilary Macdonald HMI

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	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	263
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John McManus
Headteacher	Rachel Turner
Date of previous school inspection	23 October 2008
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Age group	7–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Hilary Macdonald

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christopher Chamberlain

Additional inspector

Anthony Hayes

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 12 lessons and observed parts of another 14 lessons, taught by 11 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and school staff, including the headteacher, deputy headteacher and middle leaders. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, including scrutiny of pupils' books and looked at a range of documents, including assessment data, monitoring evidence, and curriculum and strategic planning. Completed questionnaires from 117 parents and carers, 24 staff and 121 pupils were received and analysed.

Information about the school

St Thomas A Becket Catholic Junior School is a little larger than most primary schools. It serves a wide area that includes four Catholic parishes in Eastbourne. The majority of pupils come from Catholic families. Most pupils are of White British heritage, although an above-average proportion of pupils come from a range of minority ethnic groups, including other White backgrounds, Asian and mixed White and Asian. An average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or who require significant extra support is slightly higher than average. The needs of these pupils are associated with autism and specific learning difficulties. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than that typically found. The school meets the current government floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. The school is federated with the co-located infant school and these two schools share the same governing body. As executive headteacher, the headteacher of St Thomas A Becket holds overarching responsibility for the ethos and religious education aspects of both schools.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. ‘My daughter loves school, it keeps her challenged and interested in every subject and looks after her pastoral needs brilliantly!’ is a comment that reflects the overwhelmingly positive responses made by parents and carers. Outstanding provision is made for pupils’ spiritual, moral and cultural development. Overall effectiveness is not outstanding because some inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching and, as a result, pupils do not make sustained and rapid progress throughout the school.
- Attainment at the end of Year 6 is consistently above average and, at times, is well above national averages. Nearly all pupils make good progress in all subject areas. Occasionally, lower ability pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable when the planned activities are too difficult to enable them to work independently and with success.
- Teaching is good overall, with some examples of outstanding practice. Assessments of pupils’ learning are regular and usually accurate, although written feedback does not always provide sufficient guidance on what pupils need to do to improve further. In a minority of lessons, teachers tend to spend too long on the introductions to lessons and during these times they dominate the talking, reducing opportunities for pupils to be active learners.
- Behaviour and relationships throughout the school are positive, with a culture of respect and cooperation. Attendance and punctuality are high. In conversation and in questionnaire responses, pupils said that they feel safe in school.
- The headteacher and senior staff, including governors, monitor the school’s performance closely. They accurately identify strengths and weaknesses of the school and use this information to steer improvement effectively. For example, they correctly recognise that maintaining focus on basic skills of reading and writing will help pupils’ progress in all subjects. Teaching is improving as a result of carefully planned training and rigorous monitoring, and the performance of staff is managed well.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching further by:
 - ensuring that all pupils are consistently involved actively in introductions to lessons
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to discuss and reflect upon their own learning.
- Further raise achievement by ensuring that:
 - all teachers provide consistently clear guidance and advice to pupils through the day-to-day marking of their work so that they always know what steps to take in order to improve further
 - activities planned for lower-attaining pupils in lessons are more accurately matched to their learning needs, so that they participate fully and make progress and that time is not wasted.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

All parents and carers who returned questionnaires feel that their children make good progress in school, and the pupils themselves are highly positive about their learning. Inspection evidence shows that achievement is good overall, with some significant strengths. One example of this is the progress made by the most-able pupils as a result of the additional support provided for them. For example, two Year 6 pupils were observed working confidently on complex mathematical calculations more typically expected towards the end of Key Stage 3. In other classes, such as a Year 4 science lesson, pupils worked accurately and enthusiastically in pairs and groups to devise quiz questions. As a result, pupils reinforced and extended their learning successfully.

Pupils join Year 3 with attainment that is broadly in line with, and sometimes above national averages. From this starting point, they make good progress and, as they reach the top of the school, attainment is usually above average. The teaching of reading and writing is successful. Year 3 pupils demonstrated understanding of sounds that different groups of letters make and, in reading to inspectors, some of the oldest pupils selected complex texts and were able to explain the meaning of phrases and inferences. Standards in reading by the end of Year 6 are typically above average.

Throughout Key Stage 2, there is acceleration in pupils' rates of progress, and in older classes inspectors observed a faster pace of learning. This view is borne out by the school's own monitoring data and target setting processes which show that between Years 5 and 6, pupils' targets are more challenging and they progress more rapidly. Most pupils, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and those with English as an additional language, make good progress overall. The positive impact of additional support groups for disabled pupils and those with

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special educational needs is shown through these pupils' increasing confidence as well as through increased levels of attainment. Immense care is taken when selecting pupils for targeted support, which may be musical tuition or an extra-curricular club. Although sometimes lower-attaining pupils find class work too difficult, most continue to progress effectively as a result of the additional support provided. Other gaps in achievement, such as that between boys and girls at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2011, are no longer evident.

Quality of teaching

Inspection evidence confirms the views of parents about the quality of teaching, which is mainly good with some outstanding practice. Teachers have increased their understanding of what makes effective practice through a range of professional development opportunities, including peer observations and visits to other schools. There are common strengths in lessons. Expectations are always high. In the main, teachers prepare thoroughly and use a range of assessment techniques to plan activities that will extend and reinforce learning. A wide range of resources are used that capture pupils' interests and develop a range of skills. For example, in one Year 5 English lesson on structuring an argument, pupils looked at photographs of parliamentary debate before engaging in a range of practical activities related to the history topic of the Trojans. In this way, pupils extended their general knowledge, and applied information they had previously acquired in another context. In many lessons, such as a Year 4 lesson on habitats, pupils use computers effectively to research information. As well as discovering more about woodlands and deserts, pupils were increasing their information and communication technology (ICT) skills as they generated presentations. Elements of all lessons contribute towards the outstanding development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.

Careful consideration is given to the role of adults. Teachers work with focus groups and teaching assistants provide an effective layer of support, particularly for those who find learning most difficult. Typically, lessons see happy well-motivated pupils using and applying their knowledge in a range of practical and stimulating activities, with opportunities to investigate, predict and direct their own learning.

The marking of pupils' work is not yet fully effective in promoting further improvement. There are examples of helpful comments from teachers, but this good practice is not yet sufficiently widespread. Although overwhelmingly positive, questionnaires received from pupils identified that they were not always aware of next steps to take in order to improve their work further and, in a few lessons, pupils are not sufficiently involved in evaluating their own learning. Occasionally, opportunities are missed to maximise pupil engagement in lessons when introductions are lengthy and teachers dominate the talking. Questions are not sufficiently varied to challenge all abilities of pupils, which further limits active participation.

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Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils typically demonstrate high levels of mutual respect and a sense of value for the extremely positive ethos of the school. Within this Catholic community, every pupil, regardless of belief, is treated equally as a member of the school. Pupils' personal development, particularly their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is exceptional. The high quality singing, contrasted with silent personal prayers, sets an ambience of faith and spirituality. Pupils and staff participate equally in assemblies, reinforcing the relevance of the messages conveyed.

Pupils are proud of their school. They are welcoming and polite and are eager to discuss their work with visitors. In this, they display both confidence and respect. Pupils have a sound awareness of their responsibilities as well as their rights and they have a clear understanding of right and wrong. They develop a strong social conscience, and collectively sponsor a child in Ghana. Transgressions in behaviour are repaid through a well-understood system of 'community service'.

Staff give high priority to the emotional needs of pupils through careful attention to personal, health and social education. As a result, relationships are strong. Pupils are confident that their voice will be heard. Typically, they comment, 'You can go to any of the teachers, to any of the adults in school, and they will always help you.' Pupils described an absence of bullying and were unable to recall incidents of inappropriate racial or homophobic language. School records over time confirm that such incidents are immensely rare and very firmly dealt with. However, a small number of parents and pupils said that sometimes there is 'mean' behaviour.

Behaviour in lessons is usually good and pupils work in a range of partnerships and groupings that enhance learning well. Less good behaviour coincides with activities that are less engaging or when pupils are required to sit and listen for extensive periods. A small minority of parents and carers expressed concerns about safeguarding. However, inspectors observed vigilant supervision of pupils. Pupils understand how to keep themselves and each other safe, including while using the internet.

Leadership and management

Religious faith, teamwork and a profound desire to improve outcomes for all pupils, with a focus on the most vulnerable, lie at the heart of school leadership. Collectively, senior leaders set the tone for steering the school forward and securing further improvement. All members of the school community understand and contribute to the school's ethos, vision and ambition.

Senior leaders are aware of the strengths of the school and where improvements are required. Comprehensive monitoring systems enable leaders to look in depth at the quality of both teaching and pupils' learning. In this way, monitoring activities focus on the impact upon pupils. Senior leaders recognise that there is more to be done to raise the quality of teaching further, for example in increasing pupil participation in

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lesson starters. Equally, senior leaders can identify where actions have been successful, such as the drive to improve standards of pupils' writing. As a result of staff training and a review of practice, pupils now demonstrate great enthusiasm for writing. They write at length, with accuracy, fluency and increasing skill. This track record of success, combined with accurate self-evaluation, shows that the school has the capacity for further improvement.

The school promotes equality of opportunity well. Senior leaders are alert to variation in achievement and are effective in improving pupils' life chances and tackling discrimination. Gaps in learning between groups have reduced since the previous inspection. Systems for transition from the infant school and onward to secondary school are comprehensive.

The governing body is committed to seeing the school improve further and is confident to act in support of improvements, or to question proposals rigorously. It has a sound understanding of the school's priorities. Safeguarding arrangements are clear; policies and practices are in place and consistently applied to ensure that pupils are safe and free from harm.

A good and wide ranging curriculum is provided. Attention is given to building basic skills of reading, writing, mathematics and ICT and these skills are applied and extended in other curriculum areas. There is a high take-up of the excellent provision of extra-curricular clubs and enrichment activities, for example opportunities to learn wind and stringed instruments. The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, through the broad curriculum, additional experiences and school values, is excellent.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



2 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas A Becket Catholic Junior School, Easbourne, BN22 8XT

Thank you so much for the very warm welcome you gave to inspectors when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you in lessons around the school and in the pupil group meetings. You expressed your views clearly and were able to talk to us in detail about your school and your learning. This was very helpful to us. You told us how much you like coming to school and, having spent two days with you, we can understand why.

You go to a good school and are taught well. It is a safe and happy place to be. Everyone takes good care of you and you look after each other well. Your behaviour is almost always very good! We were particularly impressed with the way in which the school provides for your spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. We thought this was outstanding. We were also impressed with the many extra-curricular clubs, activities, trips and visits that add to your enjoyment and learning.

All adults in school are working hard to ensure that the school keeps improving. You all have targets and most of you are making good progress towards achieving these. In order for you to do even better, we have asked that there should be more chances for all pupils to actively take part in lesson starters, with opportunities for all of you (not only those who put their hands up) to answer questions and to discuss and reflect on your own learning. We have also asked that when teachers mark your work, they tell you clearly what it is you need to do next to improve your work further. Finally, we have asked teachers to check that the work they plan for you to do on your own is at the right level for everyone in the class.

Keep trying hard. We can see why your teachers enjoy working with you every day.

Yours sincerely

Hilary Macdonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

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