

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115710
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	375434
Inspection dates	6–7 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Smith HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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	158
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs June Little
Interim Headteacher	Mr Andrew Darby
Date of previous school inspection	23 March 2010
School address	Lewis Road Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL51 0HZ
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. He observed seven teachers teaching seven lessons, met with the Chair of the Governing Body, staff, pupils and a representative of the local authority. He observed the school's work and looked at documents provided by the school and local authority, pupils' work and the records of pupils' achievements. He analysed results from 78 parent and carer questionnaires, nine staff questionnaires and 52 pupil questionnaires based upon the Ofsted questions which the school had issued. The inspector also drew on evidence from the three previous monitoring visits since the last inspection.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work. He looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well the school has progressed against the areas identified for improvement in the previous inspection, namely:
 - requirements for keeping pupils safe
 - ensuring that the school's leaders have an accurate view of the school's provision and performance
 - using the results of the analyses above to draw up detailed plans for improvement
 - improving the quality of teaching.
- The effectiveness of leaders, at all levels, in bringing about sustained improvements.
- How well the local authority has supported the school while in special measures.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average-sized primary school. The vast majority of the pupils are from White British or White other backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is over double the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.

At the time of the previous inspection, the school was judged to need special measures. The school has been visited by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors in each of the previous three terms to monitor the progress the school has been making. Since the time of the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to the teaching staff. The school has been led at different times by an interim headteacher and also by the substantive headteacher who has now resigned. At the present, no substantive headteacher has been appointed. There have also been changes to the membership of the governing body and a new chair has been appointed.

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

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. It now provides a good quality of education.

The school has made very good progress in raising the aspirations of staff so that all are fully committed to raising the achievement of the pupils, which is now good. The highly effective interim headteacher has been pivotal in empowering staff so that they have a clear understanding of what is expected from them. Leaders, at all levels, are now able to bring about improvements because they have ambition and the expertise to convert this into practice. This has been instrumental in ensuring the school is much improved since the previous inspection. The local authority has provided good support, through the School Improvement Partner, to the headteacher, members of the governing body and subject leaders. The school has an effective system of monitoring its work and using this information to formulate clear improvement plans. These plans are then implemented to bring about improvements and leaders check to ensure these are fully embedded. The school has a good capacity to improve.

Aspects which were identified as good in the previous inspection have continued as strengths. Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In Key Stage 1, attainment has risen but it still remains below average in reading and mathematics. In Key Stage 2, results from the 2011 tests in English and mathematics are average, which is a significant improvement upon the results when the pupils at the school last took the tests in 2009. Teaching has improved so that pupils make good progress in lessons. This enabled last year's Year 6 pupils to make up for past underachievement and to make satisfactory progress overall across Key Stage 2. Lessons are lively and engaging. Pupils are able to work well independently. Assessment is used well to ensure that teaching builds upon pupils' prior learning. Very good pastoral care and support ensure that pupils feel safe and develop well as individuals, both socially and morally. As a result, pupils behave well. All areas identified as concerns about safeguarding in the previous inspection have been quickly remedied and the school provides excellent support for pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable, as well as to their parents and carers.

The school's self-evaluation is accurate and it has ambitious plans for further improvements. Leaders and managers rightly recognise the need to continue improvements by appointing a substantive headteacher. Senior leaders have shown

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they have the capability and expertise to sustain developments and to build upon improvements to date. The day-to-day running of the school is very orderly and testament as to how effective leaders at all levels have become. Improvements to the self-esteem of staff and the pride they take in their work resulted in all those who answered the questionnaire saying they were proud to be a member of the school community. Pupils have a good understanding of the local community and also global issues. The school rightly recognises it needs to provide first-hand opportunities for pupils to learn about different cultures within Great Britain.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards further in reading so that the vast majority of pupils are reading at their age-related levels, or above, by:
 - ensuring all pupils have a daily session to support them in recognising the letters and related sounds which make up words
 - ensuring that guided reading uses words in context to improve pupils' inference and deduction.

- Raise standards in mathematics in Key Stage 1 by:
 - ensuring all pupils have a daily session of mental calculation to improve recall and number dexterity
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to relate basic calculation strategies to everyday contexts.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 has risen markedly. The school's very strong emphasis on improving writing has meant standards have risen sharply across all years. Pupils receive additional support with their reading but this is not always systematic and does not always include opportunities for pupils to see how words are related to their context. In mathematics, older pupils have a good grasp of number facts and frequently practise mental strategies. This is not as well developed with younger pupils.

The school's accurate assessment records show that progress in literacy and numeracy is now good across all years. Pupils identified as needing additional support because they have special educational needs and/or disabilities are helped to make equally good progress as their peers, particularly those who have additional support for their social and emotional needs.

Classroom observations and work in books show that pupils are confident with their work and they make good progress in lessons. Pupils were observed working independently as well as supporting each other when tackling difficult problems. Pupils are fully engaged in lessons and they say they enjoy how the theme work is used in mathematics and literacy. The themed curriculum has been highly effective in ensuring there is an enthusiastic buzz in lessons and learning is good.

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The school’s faith-based ethos ensures very good spiritual development. Pupils’ good social skills mean they get on well with each other and behaviour is good. Virtually all pupils who answered the questionnaire said they felt safe and this was also corroborated by all parents and carers who responded. Pupils have a good understanding of different cultures around the world, especially through their work in the themed curriculum. Pupils also have a good appreciation of art and music. Pupils often consider a variety of moral issues, for example the need for sustainability and the ethical sourcing of raw materials during the manufacture of products, or the plight of Native Americans. The work around being an entrepreneur supported pupils’ understanding of how to run a business and their economic awareness. Attendance has continued to improve and is average with only a very small proportion of pupils identified as being persistently absent.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	3
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	2
Pupils’ behaviour	2
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	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Learning is good, through a combination of good teaching, a much improved and engaging curriculum and excellent care, guidance and support. Pupils enjoy practising their literacy skills in their topic work and using the theme from the topic in English lessons. At times, numeracy skills are also incorporated across the curriculum and, when this occurs, pupils feel that this gives greater relevance to their work. Key strengths in teaching are good relationships, good opportunities for pupils to work independently and good marking of pupils’ work to identify how they can improve. Teachers plan appropriate lessons and give pupils clear success criteria by

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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which they can judge how well they have achieved. These are always ready in pupils' books when they start work so time is not wasted by pupils copying them. Attendance and punctuality have improved because pupils enjoy lessons. At times pupils complete additional homework because of their enjoyment of and excitement about the themes they are studying. Pupils also enjoy a variety of visits and visitors These include visiting local museums and working with local schools in sport, drama and dance.

Termly pastoral meetings between class teachers and a senior leader are effective in identifying the need for additional pastoral or academic support. They also evaluate the impact of previous interventions. The pastoral support worker is also effective in supporting families including those with children who have low levels of attendance.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership team feels empowered and has a good understanding of how it can build upon the success to date and carry on improving. Leaders at all levels monitor the quality of teaching and identify what needs to be refined and improved. Consequently, teaching has improved. Leaders are not complacent and have identified what needs to be improved after the school is removed from special measures. In mathematics, good work by the subject leader and the local authority has identified how to make mathematics lessons more challenging and how to ensure learning progresses at a faster rate. These are being trialled by the subject leader at present before being extended to all classes.

The update to the management structure, in response to a recommendation in the previous monitoring visit, has ensured clarity of roles and responsibilities within the senior leadership team. It has been instrumental in the school showing it has the capacity to continue improving. Relationships with parents and carers are good. They said they are able to influence school practice; for example, staff are now readily available to discuss pupils' needs before school. The school has extended partnerships within the local community. There are good plans to work with a local insurance company and also with staff from the nearby Government Communication Headquarters.

Members of the governing body have a very good understanding of what needs to be done and hold the school to account. Effective systems for ensuring equality of

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opportunity concentrate effectively on vulnerable groups to ensure they achieve well. The Chair of the Governing Body is very active in school and her expertise and challenge is very apparent. This is particularly evident in ensuring all aspects of safeguarding are fully in place. Safeguarding procedures are good. Governors have agreed a plan with the local authority to manage and reduce the budget deficit over a three-year period and projections for the end of year indicate that they have already reduced it by half. Because of the deficit budget and its good outcomes the school is judged to give satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children generally join the Reception class with skills and knowledge well below the levels expected for their age. They enjoy their learning and make good progress to reach below average attainment when entering Year 1. Progress is particularly good in developing children’s personal and social skills, albeit from a very low baseline. Children’s weak communication and literacy skills are an area which the school is making a concerted effort to improve before children progress into Year 1. Children are confident and they were observed being imaginative and confident when devising a dance to reflect the sounds of rain and thunder. They were able to recognise how well others were doing and give feedback in a constructive way.

Staff have a good understanding of the children’s needs, and how they learn. Children use the inside and outside environments well showing interest in their surroundings. They make appropriate choices for themselves without undue adult direction. Good use is made of assessment information to identify how well children achieve to plan their next steps.

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The leader is successful in bringing about good outcomes. She has an accurate understanding of strengths and weaknesses of provision and takes effective steps to improve it. This has included carefully planning the transition of children into Year 1 by incorporating good Early Years Foundation Stage practice in their initial work in Year 1.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
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

The views expressed by parents and carers in the recent questionnaires were very positive. Virtually all responses agreed or strongly agreed with all questions. All parents and carers said their child enjoyed school and that their child felt safe. A number of parents and carers made individual comments. These included a number which said they had noted a big improvement in the quality of the education within the school. As one said, reflecting the views of others, 'I have witnessed a marked improvement in my child's education and happiness... I feel the school is making great steps to keep up with their improvements'.

It is responses and comments like these which enabled the school to be judged to be providing a good standard of education and no longer requiring special measures.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Parental questionnaires are not normally distributed for monitoring inspections conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, unless inspectors have specific reasons to request that the school does so.

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and 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.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



8 December 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Cheltenham GL51 0HZ

I visited your school this week. As many of you are aware, I have been visiting every term for the last four terms. In fact, some of you know me so well you greet me like a friend. As always, I was impressed with how well you behave, how hard you work, and how polite and courteous you are. As one of you said when completing your questionnaire, 'I think the school is the best and they give us more encouragement.' Well done, as these attitudes have helped your school to improve, and you can help it further by continuing always to work hard and do your very best. It is with happiness that I tell you that your school has improved and is now good. It is well run and it no longer needs special measures. Sadly though, for me, that means that I will not be returning each term to see how well you are getting on.

You are all doing much better in English and mathematics. That is because the teaching has got better and lessons are exciting and interesting. You enjoy the work you do around your themes and you have been able to choose these for yourselves. This has also meant many of you get to school early and attendance has improved. Your teachers have concentrated on making sure that you all do well in lessons and have improved all you do. They provide excellent pastoral support and they know you very well. I have asked the school to improve your reading and mathematics. I have suggested your teachers give you more opportunities with reading so you have a better understanding of words when they are used in a context. I have also asked your teachers to ensure that, in Key Stage 1, you practise mental calculations every day and you use more mathematics in real-life situations.

Your leaders have greatly improved and the work of the interim headteacher and Chair of the Governing Body has been very effective in making sure the school is now in a position to get even better. All of your teachers and other adults in the school have worked very hard to bring about these improvements. I hope you all carry on improving and that you do well in the school before you go on to secondary school.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

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