

St Thomas More RC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	110854
Local authority	Peterborough
Inspection number	378192
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2012
Lead inspector	Kath Campbell

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	407
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brendan Killeen
Headteacher	Anne-Marie McElhinney
Date of previous school inspection	16 March 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

Kath Campbell Additional Inspector

Andrew Read Additional Inspector

Margaret Pawlowski Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspection team observed 22 lessons taught by 14 teachers. Inspectors also spent time talking with individual pupils about their work and their enjoyment of school as well as hearing pupils read. In addition, inspectors made short visits to some sessions where support is provided by teaching assistants. They held meetings with groups of pupils, members of staff and members of the governing body, as well as talking informally with parents and carers to gain their views of the school. Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including samples of pupils' past and present work, information about child protection and safeguarding and the progress of pupils. They scrutinised 73 questionnaires completed by parents and carers and 73 completed by pupils.

Information about the school

St Thomas More is larger than average for a primary school. A high proportion of pupils come from minority ethnic groups and most of these pupils speak English as an additional language. An increasing proportion of pupils, currently around 40%, come from Eastern Europe. Many pupils join or leave the school partway through their primary education. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The school has a below-average proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. The school meets the current government floor standard which sets the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment. The school has gained numerous awards in recognition of its work, including the International Schools Award.

The school runs a daily breakfast and after school club. St Thomas Nursery is also situated on the school site. This facility is affiliated to the school but is not managed by the governing body. It is inspected and reported on separately.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school that has improved rapidly after a period of staffing instability. It is happy and welcoming, and provides high quality nurture and care. It is not good because progress is uneven, and teaching is inconsistent. Attainment in English is not high enough and monitoring does not focus sufficiently on pupils' learning. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.
- Achievement is satisfactory, although the rate of progress has not always been good enough. This year, attainment improved across the school. An average proportion of pupils are on track to achieve nationally expected levels in English and mathematics at the end of each key stage. The proportion of pupils reaching higher levels, particularly in English, is below average. Strategies for raising attainment further, especially for developing literacy skills in different subjects, are successful, but have not yet had a full impact.
- The quality of teaching is satisfactory because good quality teaching is not shared sufficiently throughout the school. The school meets the needs of pupils at an early stage of learning English well. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils, particularly the more-able, can achieve. Marking does not always show pupils how to improve. Pupils are not involved enough in judging their own levels of understanding.
- This is an inclusive, harmonious community where pupils from different ethnic backgrounds work and play together impressively well. Behaviour is good and relationships between adults and pupils are strong. Pupils feel safe and value the care they receive. Tenacious monitoring has successfully raised attendance to average levels.
- Strong leadership from the headteacher and deputy headteacher has moved the school forward during a period of staffing change. The leadership of teaching

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and management of performance are successfully supporting improvements. However, overall leadership is only satisfactory because monitoring of quality is comprehensive but does not focus with sufficient rigour on the impact on learning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- During the next academic year, raise attainment in English throughout the school by:
 - extending the range of opportunities for pupils to practise their reading and writing skills in different subjects
 - developing pupils' enthusiasm for reading and writing so that they become confident, independent learners as they move through the school.

- During the next academic year, increase the proportion of good or better teaching by:
 - sharing the good practice that exists within the school
 - ensuring all teachers have the highest expectations of what pupils, particularly the more-able pupils, can achieve
 - using marking with greater consistency to move pupils on to the next step in their learning
 - involving pupils more in assessing their own levels of understanding.

- Strengthen the role of leaders and managers at all levels and governors by:
 - ensuring monitoring and evaluation focuses with greater precision on measuring the impact of teaching on pupils' learning outcomes.

Main report**Achievement of pupils**

Pupils make satisfactory progress. Most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire or who spoke with inspectors felt their children made good progress. The inspection evidence shows progress to be satisfactory, rather than good, because there is some inconsistency in quality caused by staffing disruption. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills, knowledge and understanding that are well below the levels expected for this age. Despite making satisfactory progress, they enter Year 1 with lower than expected attainment. Some older pupils also join the school at different times throughout the year with particularly weak language and literacy skills. A high proportion of these pupils are of Pakistani or Eastern European heritage, and many speak little or no English when they start. A tightly structured programme tailored to their specific needs ensures pupils newly arrived from overseas make rapid progress in acquiring vital communication skills.

Attainment in reading is below average in Years 1 and 2, rising to average in the current Year 6. Good quality teaching at the end of Key Stage 2, combined with initiatives such as e-books for older pupils, have started to raise the profile of reading

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and led to improved standards. However, the picture is by no means consistent. In classes disrupted by staffing changes, progress slowed temporarily when pupils were not always able to read regularly with an adult. They also missed opportunities to practise their reading and writing skills in subjects other than English.

Following a dip in attainment in 2011, the school took strong effective action to reverse the decline. Attainment is now a little below average. Mathematics was the principal area of concern. Several initiatives, including good use of local authority support, proved successful. Pupils, particularly those in Year 6, have made accelerated progress and are on track to reach average attainment in mathematics. A large proportion of these pupils are also on track to make nationally expected rates of progress in English and mathematics. This is a real success story. Writing is now the school's main focus for improvement because progress is inconsistent and too few pupils reach higher levels. Until recently, pupils lacked the skills and confidence to write at length and develop their writing in subjects other than English. There is good evidence to show that new initiatives are starting to have a positive impact because pupils enjoy the activities and are motivated to succeed.

Pupils with disabilities and those who have special educational needs are supported well, particularly during group activities. They work effectively with good quality teaching assistants and tasks are matched well to pupils' needs, enabling them to make at least satisfactory progress. By accurately targeting pupils in most need, the school works well to close the gap between what these pupils achieve and what is expected nationally.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is satisfactory. Most parents and carers believe their children are taught well. However, inspection evidence shows that, although there are pockets of good practice, there is too much variation in teaching quality.

The teaching of reading is satisfactory. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 make a good start through the effective teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters represent), ensuring firm foundations for future learning.

Adults have a consistent approach towards behaviour management so that pupils collaborate and co-operate well. Strong relationships and consequent good behaviour make a major contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As a result, pupils are enthusiastic about their work and want to succeed. They are successfully encouraged to express opinions and listen with respect to the views of others. A key strength is the effective teamwork between teaching and support staff. Teaching assistants make a positive contribution towards the learning of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. They are also instrumental in ensuring those who initially speak little English develop the confidence and skills needed to succeed.

Most teachers are clear about what they want pupils to learn and planning provides

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effectively for most pupils' needs and abilities. In the best lessons, learning is purposeful and full of fun. A good example of this was observed in a Year 3 lesson, when pupils were devising a persuasive argument against the demolition of a street to make way for an Olympic theme park. Pupils were highly motivated and animated in their paired discussion. Not a minute was wasted and pupils came up with some very searching questions in a short space of time. Good humour prevailed throughout and contributed to effective learning. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, staff take every opportunity to develop children's language skills. Activities are well structured to encourage good personal and social development through a wide variety of indoor and outdoor learning experiences. In Key Stage 1, high quality group activities were observed developing basic numeracy skills very effectively.

Occasionally, when teaching is satisfactory, pupils listen passively for too long and miss valuable opportunities to practise their skills. In some lessons, teachers do not evaluate learning with enough precision to ensure pupils make as much progress as they should. Some marking is usually of good quality; other marking lacks clarity and does not give pupils sufficient guidance for future learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents and carers agree that behaviour and safety are good. Pupils move around school in an orderly manner and are polite and courteous. In discussion, they demonstrate immense pride in their school and show mature attitudes towards learning. They willingly support each other during lessons, if required. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage talk to each other proudly about their ethnic background as they enjoy working together on their activities. They say they feel secure and are well informed about what constitutes bullying, including avoiding cyber bullying. They are certain that, when very rare incidents of inappropriate behaviour occur, these are dealt with effectively. There is good evidence to show that the strategies employed by the school to support pupils who demonstrate potentially challenging behaviour result in a significant improvement in their attitudes and behaviour.

Pupils know they are part of a very caring community. They take their responsibilities seriously and participate enthusiastically in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. This ethos of care that permeates the work of the school helps pupils whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable receive the support they need. Good quality breakfast and after school clubs successfully enhance pupils' enjoyment. There is a strong sense of spiritual and moral responsibility, underpinned by warm trusting relationships. Pupils enjoy coming together for occasions such as whole-school assemblies, and show genuine appreciation of each other's success.

The school has addressed the issue from the previous inspection relating to improving attendance well. Attendance is now average. Learning mentors work very closely with individual families and have been instrumental in this improvement. Pupils want to come to school and there are numerous incentives to encourage pupils to attend regularly and get to school on time. However, despite the school's

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relentless efforts, a small minority of families choose to take their children out of school during term time.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have skills that complement each other well. Their work has been the key to the rise in standards during the current academic year. Leaders at all levels are strongly committed towards securing rapid improvement and teachers are far more accountable than in the past for the standards achieved. The introduction of team leaders into the leadership and management structure has strengthened the school's ability to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. More precise data analysis ensures potential underachievement is remedied earlier than in the past. The monitoring of teaching is detailed and systematic and has enabled the school to move forward at a satisfactory pace during its recent difficulties. Sometimes this monitoring lacks rigour and precision, particularly when assessing the impact of teaching on learning. Professional development is an important part of the school's work and has been instrumental in, for example, raising attainment in mathematics. The school development plan is a good working document that accurately reflects strengths and weaknesses. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are secure and meet government requirements. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body is knowledgeable, supportive and not afraid to question or challenge. It has a programme for monitoring but does not always have enough first hand knowledge to judge whether standards are high enough.

The recent introduction of an internationally based curriculum has added greatly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The current Olympics theme is highly motivational and encourages collaboration across the school. Other planned opportunities, such as a residential visit to Derbyshire, effectively develop secure social skills. The school capitalises on its richness and diversity of culture and promotes multi-cultural awareness well. However, there are not always enough opportunities for pupils to practise their reading and writing skills in subjects other than English.

St Thomas is a very inclusive school where pupils are known and valued as individuals. It provides activities, particularly for new arrivals, that encourage and support their integration. It successfully removes barriers to enable all pupils to achieve equally well. These examples show the diligence with which the headteacher and staff promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination.

Through improved data analysis and use of assessment, combined with greater accountability of staff, the school has a satisfactory capacity to secure further improvement.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



27 June 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More RC Primary School, Peterborough, PE1 5JW

Thank you for looking after us so well when we came to visit your school. You were friendly and polite and told us a lot about your school. We enjoyed looking at your books, talking to some of you about your work and watching you play together. We also liked the way in which you helped us to find our way around school. You say you enjoy your work and feel safe. Most of you behave well. It is good to see that so many of you have hardly missed a day at school this year.

You go to a satisfactory school where everyone cares for you a great deal. Your headteacher and other staff are doing a lot to improve your school. We were really pleased to see that so many of you have improved your reading, writing and numeracy skills this year. Some of you have had more than one teacher this year. It was good to see that most of you have tried very hard to keep doing your best.

We have asked your school to do a few more things to help it improve. Some of the teaching in your school is really good and we want all of it to be as good as that. We want some of your teachers to make sure they give you hard enough work and give you plenty of chances to improve your reading and writing skills even more. We also want them to let you know how to improve each time they mark your work and let you work out for yourself how much progress you have made in lessons. Some of the teachers and governors are going to look a little more closely to see if you are reaching high enough standards.

Keep up that attendance and keep trying to do your best.

My best wishes to you all.

Yours sincerely

Kath Campbell
Lead inspector

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