

# St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Lewis Road, Hesters Way, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL51 0HZ

## Inspection dates

12–13 June 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- The actions taken by leaders to ensure that teaching is consistently good have not yet been fully effective.
- Pupils' progress over time has not been good enough, especially in writing. Pupils struggle with key aspects of writing. Poor handwriting reduces the quality of work further.
- Newly established middle leaders contribute positively to school improvement. However, their leadership does not consistently ensure that pupils make good progress in reading and writing.
- The pupil premium has not been used effectively to secure strong progress for disadvantaged pupils over time. Improvements to the way this funding is used have not had the time to become fully embedded.
- Pupils' attendance has risen and is now close to the national average. Nevertheless, some pupils miss school too often.
- The school's assessment systems are inaccurate and this hinders pupils' progress. Leaders recognise this, but a new system has not yet been put in place.
- Teachers do not always challenge the most able pupils sufficiently. As a result, these pupils do not make the progress that they should.
- Children in the early years are happy and confident. However, some teaching does not support their learning well enough. The curriculum does not develop their skills sufficiently in all areas of learning.

### The school has the following strengths

- Governors, the headteacher and the newly appointed senior leadership team are ambitious for the school and have started to bring about the necessary improvements.
- The teaching of mathematics and phonics is becoming increasingly effective in promoting pupils' learning.
- Behaviour is good, and pupils feel safe in school. Caring for everyone is embedded in the pupils' attitudes to one another.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.
- Pupils enjoy a rich and diverse curriculum.

## Full report

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

- Sustain and build upon the recent improvements made in leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that middle leaders are supported to develop their skills and expertise further in driving whole-school improvement
  - ensuring that additional funding provided to support disadvantaged pupils is more effective in helping this group of pupils make stronger progress.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
  - teachers use prior assessment information to plan and adapt teaching so that it meets the needs of all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
  - teachers challenge the most able and build on the skills they have to deepen their understanding
  - teachers' proficiency in teaching writing is further developed, including making sure that pupils form their letters correctly.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
  - improving attendance rates, especially for pupils who frequently miss school.
- Improve the early years provision by:
  - further developing the curriculum so that children acquire a wider range of skills.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Significant leadership changes over time have had an unsettling effect on the school. This has contributed to a decline in the schools' performance. Support from the newly appointed governing body and the local authority school improvement team has enabled the senior leadership team to put several new initiatives in place. Recent actions of the new leadership team are now driving the necessary improvements. However, the full impact of this work on pupils' progress is yet to be revealed.
- New middle leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in their subject areas. However, they require further support to fulfil their roles and responsibilities effectively. They have not had sufficient time to pay close attention to the impact that teaching, learning and assessment has on pupils' progress. As a result, they have not noticed the inconsistencies in these areas.
- Leaders' strategies to ensure that teaching is consistently good are not yet fully effective. Leaders have ensured that intervention is in place to help pupils catch up when they are falling behind. However, teachers rely too heavily on this help to close gaps in pupils' knowledge. Conversely, the most able pupils are not challenged sufficiently in order to achieve as well as they might. Consequently, some pupils still underachieve. This is because teaching is not helping pupils move on in their learning well enough.
- The school's internal assessment information is unreliable. It provides an inaccurate impression of pupils' progress as teachers' use of it is inconsistent. Leaders have rightly identified this, and plans are in place to move to a new system of assessing pupils' progress.
- Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Pupils' interactions with each other and the adults in the school are characterised by mutual respect and tolerance. They celebrate their own heritage and learn about other cultures well.
- Leaders' plans are clearly linked to the school's priorities, including the English and mathematics plans. The teaching of mathematics and phonics across the school has improved since the previous inspection and, as a result, pupils are achieving well in these subjects. The headteacher has built a strong team around her to support her drive for improvement.
- The appointment of a new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has led to changes to the assessment of needs and support of pupils with SEND. Much of this work is in its infancy and has yet to show impact. Leaders have improved the precision of targets they set for pupils, so they better meet their individual needs. However, over time, leaders have not monitored the impact of interventions on pupils' progress and achievement closely enough.
- In previous years, leaders' targets for disadvantaged pupils were not precise enough, lacked aspiration and did not consider pupils' prior attainment. This year, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils has been more closely monitored and interventions put in place to support pupils who have fallen behind. The attendance of these pupils

has improved, and they are increasingly encouraged to take part in extra-curricular clubs. However, their progress and attainment are still not good enough.

- Leaders use the sport premium effectively. They have successfully raised the profile of physical education across the school. They have targeted pupils who had previously low engagement in sporting activities to good effect. Pupils have benefited from external expertise, including archery, mountain biking and dance. Leaders have also used funding to increase teachers' confidence when teaching physical education, through the involvement of a specialist coach.
- Leaders are effective in delivering a wide and enjoyable curriculum. They have developed a broad and balanced curriculum that focuses on local, national and international aspects. Pupils say they really enjoy visits to places such as the Space Museum and the Corinium Roman Museum to help them understand their learning more clearly. There are many opportunities for pupils to engage in clubs and sporting activities outside school.
- Leaders have created a nurturing school with pupils' well-being at the heart of all decision-making. Pupils enjoy school and speak enthusiastically about how the school benefits them. Parents are equally positive about the education provided for their children.
- Leaders are increasingly working closely with parents. This has resulted in an increase in attendance so that it is now much improved. The numbers of persistent absences have reduced considerably. However, these remain stubbornly above national averages.

### **Governance of the school**

- Until recently, the governors have not been effective in holding leaders to account for the quality of education provided, including the use of additional funding. Funding is directed towards additional staffing, educational visits and other support for disadvantaged pupils. However, governors have not held leaders to account for ensuring that the impact of these actions is well enough evaluated. Consequently, outcomes for these pupils remain low when compared with their non-pupil-premium counterparts.
- Governors are becoming more robust in putting in place the strategies necessary to improve the school. Governors are now providing more challenge to leaders, particularly in relation to the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. However, the impact of strategic governance on improving teaching, learning and pupil outcomes is not yet evident.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All systems for safeguarding are fit for purpose and the vetting checks on staff are complete. Staff keep records of safeguarding cases securely and in sufficient detail. All staff are trained regularly in how to keep children safe.
- The team of designated safeguarding leads, and behavioural and family support workers ensures that concerns and issues are dealt with well, and that pupils are kept as safe as possible. The school has made much progress on this over a short space of time.

- Leaders responsible for safeguarding are proactive in developing their understanding of local risks and helping pupils and families manage these. Leaders have regular contact with local agencies so that they can share information and expertise. Leaders respond swiftly when incidents have the potential to make pupils feel less safe.
- The curriculum for safeguarding is well developed and effective. Where pupils have specific vulnerabilities, teachers support them well. Pupils say that they feel safe. They know how to stay safe in a variety of contexts, including when using the internet.

### Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

### Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good enough. This is because planning does not securely meet the needs of learners. Therefore, the challenge for the most able is not always in place, which means that they are not able to demonstrate higher levels of understanding. Similarly, teachers do not consistently give the appropriate support to pupils who have fallen behind.
- Teachers' focus on literacy is having a positive impact on pupils' confidence to write in a more independent and extended way. Younger pupils know what a sentence is and begin to use a variety of punctuation. However, inaccuracy of spelling and punctuation, across all abilities, hampers some pupils' ability to express their meaning effectively. Teachers do not address this sufficiently well and therefore pupils' writing does not improve rapidly enough.
- Some pupils do not take enough pride in their work. In particular, pupils' handwriting and presentation is poor, which makes it difficult to read their work. Presentation in pupils' mathematics books is variable. Where teachers have high expectations, presentation is better, for example in Year 6 mathematics books.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers encourage pupils to explore mathematical concepts and uses a variety of techniques that support pupils well. However, in some teaching, poor planning and management of resources mean that pupils are not able to progress quickly enough.
- Some teachers do not check what pupils can do carefully enough and do not plan work that is matched to pupils' learning needs or which builds on their prior learning. They do not use the school's assessment systems effectively in order to have a clear picture of how well pupils achieve. When this occurs, learning slows. This is particularly evident for disadvantaged pupils who need additional support.
- Pupils with SEND do not make as much progress as they should because assessments do not accurately identify their learning needs. The additional learning support is then not structured sufficiently enough to help them develop the appropriate skills.
- Teachers regularly develop pupils' understanding of basic skills in mathematics and this is beginning to address underperformance in this area. Pupils are now more confident in their ability to make simple calculations.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum provides meaningful activities to consider, relating to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Pupils are able to consider topics on a local as well as global scale. Well-planned visits and visitors are effective in widening pupils' experiences further.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning. They are eager to learn and enthusiastically share their learning with one another and visitors, as they did during this inspection. Pupils show perseverance and resilience to finish their work.
- Most pupils pay attention and engage well in lessons. They follow the clear routines put in place by teachers and generally listen attentively and respond well to teachers' questioning.
- Staff make sure that pupils are taught how to stay safe. The pupils who spoke with inspectors confirmed they feel safe in school. They say that everyone is generally kind to each other and that bullying is not a problem. Pupils say they can talk to an adult and problems will be sorted out quickly. They know how to stay safe online because they have special lessons about this as well as talking about it in assembly.
- The school works extremely well with other agencies to support the health and welfare of all pupils.
- Pupils collaborate well together in the playground, lunch hall and the classroom because the staff at the school have created an environment where everyone is respected.
- The breakfast club is well led and managed. Secure health and safety practices are in place and risk assessments adhered to.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They are polite and courteous and move about the school sensibly, calmly and in an orderly manner.
- Incidents of poor or anti-social behaviour have fallen since the previous inspection. On the rare occasions where this still happens, measures have been put into place to limit disruption to teaching. Higher expectations have been welcomed by parents, pupils and staff.
- The school environment is orderly and well organised. The high quality of displays in classrooms and around the school is also supporting pupils in their learning.
- Leaders have been effective in raising pupils' levels of attendance, which is now better than the national average. However, although reducing, there are too many pupils who are absent from school too often, which adversely affects their progress and attainment.

## Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Standards in writing are not good enough. Too few pupils reach the standards expected of them. Writing is marred by errors in spelling and to a lesser extent, punctuation and grammar. Poor handwriting makes some texts difficult to read and assess.

- Over time, too few pupils in key stage 1 leave Year 2 ready for the next stage of their education. The progress and attainment of current pupils continues to reflect a similar picture. Although an improving picture in key stage 2 in 2018, too few pupils are ready for the next stage of their education.
- The percentage of pupils meeting the standards expected of them in the national phonics screening check rose, to be in line with the national average in 2018. Scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that this improvement is being sustained by current pupils.
- Pupils in key stage 1 apply their phonic knowledge to read well. Most of the time, teachers pitch books accurately to support pupils' reading development. However, the reading books of pupils in key stage 2 are less well matched to pupils' reading ability. Pupils say that they are too easy to read and not very exciting. In some cases, this hinders pupils' progress as well as the enjoyment of reading, which the school is working hard to develop.
- In the past, too few disadvantaged pupils have made the progress they should. This year, the attainment of pupil premium pupils has been more closely monitored. Interventions have been put in place to support pupils who have fallen behind in their learning to catch up. Currently, however, teaching does not support disadvantaged pupils well enough to catch up with other pupils.
- The support for pupils with SEND is helping them to overcome barriers to their learning. This is particularly evident with pupils who have social and emotional difficulties. However, too few make the progress they need to make.
- Better teaching in mathematics is beginning to support improvement in pupils' progress and attainment. Nevertheless, too few of the most able pupils make the progress they should to reach the higher standards. However, across key stage 2, pupils with low starting points are beginning to catch up.

### Early years provision

### Requires improvement

- Children join the Reception class with skills and abilities below those typical for their age. They make inconsistent progress towards achieving a good level of development, including disadvantaged children. This is because the school's assessment system recording children's progress is not yet secure and does not always match the outcomes at the end of the reception year.
- The quality of teaching across early years is not good enough. Some staff do not know when to intervene in children's learning to provide support or challenge to take their learning forward. This does not help some children to make strong progress because they find some activities too hard or too easy. Some children are not sufficiently engaged in their learning in lessons and when this happens progress stalls.
- Some elements of the outdoor provision are not as strong as indoors, which limits children's ability to learn.
- Planning is not consistently tailored to children's specific needs and interests. This results in a lack of challenge for children in order to deepen their understanding across the areas of the curriculum.
- Leaders have high expectations and a clear vision to improve the life chances for

children. The teaching of phonics is effective and writing skills are developing well for all children. Increasingly, parents are encouraged to support their children's learning at home.

- Children make good progress in phonics and writing. However, children have fewer opportunities to explore and learn across all areas of the curriculum and broaden their understanding. This results in their learning in these areas not being effectively assessed.
- Children's speaking and listening skills are developed well by most of the staff. Staff engage in conversations and model the correct use of language. They also encourage children to use good manners. This creates a positive learning environment where children behave well and socialise with each other. They are happy and confident learners.
- Children in the Nursery are absorbed in their learning and cooperate well with each other. They engage in activities that are mostly appropriate for their stage of development and listen carefully to instructions.
- School leaders build good relationships and partnerships with other providers and external services to provide specialist provision as required.

## School details

Unique reference number	115710
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10055208

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	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	199
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cathy Hipkiss
Headteacher	Nicola Tippen
Telephone number	01242 513339
Website	<a href="http://www.st-thomasmore.gloucs.sch.uk">www.st-thomasmore.gloucs.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:head@st-thomasmore.gloucs.sch.uk">head@st-thomasmore.gloucs.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	27 March 2018

## Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection the school has faced significant changes, particularly in staffing. Four new teachers started in September 2018, who included the SENCo and the mathematics and literacy leaders. The senior management team is also new to the role. The school has received a high level of support from the local authority. A local outstanding school in the diocese also works to support the school.
- St Thomas More is an average-sized school. It is Roman Catholic in denomination.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average.
- A breakfast club and after-school club are provided for the pupils.
- The school currently takes two-year-olds. However, this is not continuing in the next academic year.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils learning in all year groups. Some of the observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the lead practitioner and the early years leader.
- Discussions were held with pupils, inspectors listened to a selection of pupils read and observed them in the breakfast club, at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the lead practitioner, the leader of special educational needs and leaders with subject responsibilities. The lead inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair, and the school improvement partner from the local authority. The lead inspector also met with the attendance officer/designated safeguarding lead and conducted a telephone conversation with the chair of the diocesan committee.
- Books from all year groups and a range of subjects were scrutinised.
- A wide range of documents was scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plans and a progress report from the local authority. Inspectors also considered information about pupils' progress, the use of additional funding, behaviour, safety and attendance.
- Inspectors took account of the 10 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke to parents before school. There were no responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire. The lead inspector considered the comments made in five free-text responses and took account of the 18 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Julie Jane, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Tracy Hannon

Her Majesty's Inspector

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