



Inspection report

# St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

**Better  
education  
and care**

Unique Reference Number 115710  
LEA Gloucestershire

Inspection number 273581  
Inspection dates 9 and 10 February 2005  
Reporting inspector Ms L McGill HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

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|-----------------------------|--|--------------------|-----------------|
| Type of School              | Primary                                      | School address     | Lewis Road      |
| School category             | Voluntary Aided<br><i>Diocese of Clifton</i> |                    | Hesters Way     |
| Age range of pupils         | 4 to 11 years                                |                    | Cheltenham      |
|                             |  |                    | Gloucestershire |
|                             |  |                    | GL51 0HZ        |
| Gender of pupils            | Boys and girls                               | Telephone number   | 01242 513 339   |
| Number on roll              | 145  | Fax number         | 01242 257 402   |
| Appropriate authority       | The governing body                           | Chair of governors | Mr J Kyffin     |
| Date of previous inspection | June 2003                                    | Headteacher        | Mr L Jordan     |

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|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Age group     | Published     | Reference no. |
| 4 to 11 years | 14 March 2005 | 273581        |

## Introduction

When St Thomas More Catholic Primary School was inspected in June 2003 it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on three occasions to monitor its progress, and re-inspected the school in February 2005.

### Description of the school

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is situated in the west of Cheltenham, in an area of social and economic disadvantage. The number of pupils on roll has fallen steadily over the past few years and with 145 pupils the school is smaller than average, although numbers are beginning to rise. Some of the pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. Most of the pupils are of white, British origin, and there is a small but significant number from Traveller families. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is slightly higher than that found nationally. About one third of the pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, and one pupil has a formal Statement of Special Educational Need. This is a greater proportion than that typically found in primary schools. On entry to school, the pupils' attainment varies widely, but is below average, overall.

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## Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

St Thomas More is an improving school. Following the school's inspection in June 2003 and the subsequent resignation of the headteacher, the acting headteacher, staff and governors worked with determination to implement the action plan to tackle the areas of weakness; quickly putting into place systems and structures to guide the school's work and taking steps to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The school now provides a sound education for its pupils. Overall, the pupils attain standards which are broadly in line with those of pupils in similar schools, although not enough of the pupils attain more highly. The quality of teaching is consistently satisfactory and there is a secure core of good teaching, although the proportion is not yet high enough. This means that the pupils' progress in lessons and over time is steady and often good. The pupils who have special educational needs are given good support in lessons. The pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are never less than good, and the oldest pupils have a sensible, mature approach to their work. The curriculum is broad, and the cross-curricular use of information and communication technology (ICT) is growing. The school is effectively led and managed and the headteacher, staff and governors, together with the local education authority (LEA), have a firm commitment to further improvement.

### Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of June 2003 required the school to make improvements in six areas by: raising standards; strengthening leadership and management; improving the quality of teaching; improving the curriculum and the use of assessment; improving the care, welfare and safety of the pupils; and improving the partnership with parents. The school has made good progress in four areas, and progress in improving teaching and raising standards has been reasonable. Recent changes to the teaching staff mean that the quality of teaching is set to improve further, with a corresponding impact on the pupils' learning and the standards they achieve.

### Capacity to improve

The school is well placed to build on the improvements already made. The headteacher has a clear vision for the future and he, the senior staff and governors are committed to ensuring that the school offers the best to its pupils. The school has a good deal of information about the pupils' attainment; it tracks their progress and identifies those who need particular support. The school's systems for self-evaluation are developing well and the headteacher and senior staff know the school's strengths and the aspects of its work which require attention. These are set out in a detailed plan for future development. The governing body has strengthened the part it plays in school life; it offers the school good support, is beginning to question and challenge and is committed to ensuring continued

improvement. The LEA has drawn up a sensible plan, which shows how it will continue to support the school and monitor its progress.

What the school should do to improve further

The school's development plan recognises the areas where improvement is needed. However the key priorities are to:

- continue to work to raise standards, particularly in English;
- further improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that all pupils are suitably challenged in lessons;
- further develop evaluation procedures to strengthen the link between initiatives and the outcomes for the pupils.

## Achievement and standards

Overall, standards are sound. The pupils in the reception class make a good start, especially in developing their personal and social skills. By the end of the reception year, despite the good progress that many pupils make, some of them do not achieve the goals expected for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy and mathematics. In lessons at Key Stage 1, most of the pupils achieve what is expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics, but in the current Year 2 class there is a significant proportion of pupils whose attainment is below, or well below that of their classmates. In last year's national tests, there was a good improvement in the number of pupils who reached the expected Level 2 in reading and writing, although the school's results fell in mathematics. The results in all subjects were close to, or above those of schools in similar circumstances, however, too few pupils achieved a higher level in writing.

At Key Stage 2, standards in lessons are usually in line with what is expected for the pupils' ages. In the national tests in 2004, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected Level 4 in mathematics and science was similar to the national figure, and although the English results were below the national figure, they were close to those of similar schools. As at Key Stage 1, too few pupils achieved a higher level in English. The school is taking swift and sound steps to bring about improvements in the pupils' writing skills.

The pupils make satisfactory progress from year to year. Because of improvements in teaching, in particular the teachers' higher expectations of what the pupils should achieve, progress in lessons is often good; the pupils are beginning to make up lost ground. The pupils who have special educational needs are set clear targets, and make steady progress, in line with their ability. The results of the national tests show that the pupils made good progress over Key Stage 2, from their low starting points. Nevertheless, the proportion of pupils achieving higher levels was too small.

## Personal development

The pupils' attitudes and their behaviour are never less than good. The oldest pupils have a very good attitude towards their work, they are mature and sensible and work well independently. The pupils behave well when they move around the school, in assemblies and at playtimes.

The school has effective systems for promoting and rewarding good behaviour. Clearly displayed class rules remind the pupils of acceptable standards of behaviour. A sensible system for giving reminders and sanctions is used consistently in all classes; the pupils respond with pleasure to praise and rewards and few have to be reminded of the need for good behaviour. There have been no exclusions during the past twelve months.

The pupils work well together in pairs and groups and show proper consideration for different points of view. They work well independently and concentrate on completing the tasks which they are set. However, the teachers give the pupils limited scope to manage their own learning, especially in the choice of resources and methods for recording their work. Relationships are good in the classrooms and around the school.

The pupils' attendance improved in the last year but is still well below the national figure. The school is working hard to improve attendance and since the start of this academic year unauthorised absences have reduced considerably. Conversely, authorised absence has increased slightly and more remains to be done to improve attendance. The pupils' punctuality to school has improved.

Provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The pupils know right from wrong and they learn to exercise personal responsibility; for example, by participating in the school council. They have also responded compassionately to world events, recently raising money for charity. The pupils are polite, friendly and responsive. Assemblies and other times of reflection during the day provide good opportunities for spiritual growth.

## Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was satisfactory overall; it was at least satisfactory in all of the lessons and good in just under half. Good teaching was observed in all key stages. The more effective teaching was characterised by a lively approach, confidence and a secure knowledge of the subject and the pupils. All of the lessons were carefully planned and prepared, and the teachers made good use of resources, including the recently installed interactive white boards, to engage the pupils, give demonstrations and illustrate ideas. The pupils usually understood what they were to learn in the lesson, and the increasing use of success criteria was useful in helping the teacher and the pupils judge whether the lesson's objectives had been achieved. The teachers generally used questions well to probe the pupils' understanding and their recall of previous work, but there was scope in some lessons to give the pupils more time to think and consider their answers before responding.

The teachers' growing knowledge of the pupils' attainment, together with evaluations of learning in lessons, is helping them to plan and provide tasks and activities that are more closely matched to the pupils' needs. Nevertheless, the teachers' expectations are not always high enough and the pupils could achieve more with a greater degree of challenge.

The pupils who have special educational needs are given good support in lessons and the teaching assistants make effective contributions to their learning; for example, by writing the pupils' spoken ideas for them and modelling appropriate responses. The teaching assistants know the targets in the pupils' individual education plans and help assess their progress towards them. They are not always effectively deployed during whole-class sessions, however, and these sessions are not usually tailored to the needs of different groups; there is scope to use the teaching assistants' skills more creatively at these times.

The school has established comprehensive systems for assessing attainment and tracking the pupils' progress. It has also carried out detailed analyses of the pupils' performance in national and optional tests, which have been used to set targets for each year group and identify where modifications need to be made to what is taught. The assessment information is also used to set targets for individual pupils in English and mathematics. The pupils are aware of their targets, but are less secure in their understanding of what they have to do to achieve them. The school has recently introduced a new marking system in English, which is working very well. The marking gives the pupils a clear indication of how they have done in relation to the objective for the lesson, and they are given time to respond to questions or issues raised by the teacher.

The curriculum is suitably broad, and what is taught is guided by schemes of work which ensure appropriate coverage of the National Curriculum. Suitable emphasis is given to developing the pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy, and to promoting the use of ICT in different subjects. The school provides a good range of after-school activities, including sport and drama, which enhance the curriculum. Regular educational visits and visitors to the school also enrich and broaden the pupils' experiences.

Links with parents have developed well and parents assist more regularly in class. The governing body has also taken steps to promote the school in the parish and wider community; this has had some positive impact as the school's roll is beginning to increase.

All members of staff care for the pupils and have their safety, welfare and well-being at heart. The school's approach embodies its Catholic ethos and the atmosphere is positive and supportive.

## Leadership and management

The headteacher leads the school well; his leadership is determined and committed. Although he has been in post for a short time, he has done much to set a clear direction, to develop and strengthen the work of the senior management team and to establish sound systems and procedures to guide the school's work. The senior staff's involvement in the Primary Leadership Programme has been particularly beneficial in focussing the teachers'

attention on teaching and learning, in the growth in the self-esteem and confidence of staff and the knowledge that the school can determine its own agenda. The impact of the headteacher's work is evident in the common approaches adopted by the teachers and their development as reflective practitioners. There is scope, however, to strengthen evaluation procedures still further and to focus more specifically on improvements in the outcomes for the pupils when judging the impact. There is a strong team spirit and morale is good. The leadership of the core subjects and special educational needs is good and leadership in other areas is developing well. The school's improvement plan is soundly based on an evaluation of the current position and contains appropriate strategies for bringing about change.

The work of the governing body has become more effective over the past year; statutory requirements are met, governors make more frequent visits to the school and the links between governors and subject co-ordinators are supportive and productive. Governors have kept a close eye on the budget as the school's roll has decreased, and change has been carefully managed. The governing body is more aware of its role in challenging the school as well as giving support, and training is helping to give the governors a clearer picture of the part they play in holding the school to account.

The LEA has given the school a good deal of support during its time in special measures. The support has been well focussed, appropriate and appreciated by the staff. Regular review inspections have kept the school's progress under scrutiny. The LEA has suitable plans to continue to support the school and monitor its progress.

## Appendix –Information about the inspection

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School was inspected in June 2003 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in January, July and November 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of June 2003.

In February 2005, two HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Twelve parts of lessons and two assemblies were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, the chair of governors, senior staff and a representative of the LEA and informally with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of June 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.



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