



St Thomas a Becket Catholic Junior School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114578
LEA East Sussex
Inspection number 279417
Inspection dates 21 September 2005 to 22 September 2005
Reporting inspector David Collard RISP

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Junior	School address	Tutts Barn Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Eastbourne
Age range of pupils	7 to 11		East Sussex BN22 8XT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01323 737221
Number on roll	246	Fax number	01323 738580
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr John McManus
Date of previous inspection	25 September 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Rachel Turner

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

St Thomas a Becket Catholic Junior School is of average size located on in the centre of Eastbourne. It has a good reputation locally and is oversubscribed. The school has a broadly average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities with a smaller percentage than expected with statements of special educational need. The proportion of minority ethnic pupils, while relatively low, is slowly rising as more European children enter the school.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is an effective school with an increasingly good capacity to improve because of a realistic view of its own performance. It knows its own strengths and weaknesses well and can take effective action, which improves pupils' academic and personal successes. It therefore provides good value for money. Standards have continued to improve since the last inspection and more pupils are now making good rather than satisfactory progress. Good leadership and management have been at the core of the improvements in teaching and learning, combined with a balanced and relevant curriculum linked to a strong Catholic ethos. The school is a calm and orderly community where each individual is valued. The environment is enlivened by high quality, attractive displays and interesting lessons. The weaknesses identified by the inspectors in writing, the provision for pupils with English as an additional language and the development of information and communication technology (ICT) are already part of the school improvement plan and practical solutions have been started that will raise achievement further.

What the school should do to improve further

- raise the number of pupils achieving the higher levels in writing
- improve the in-class provision for pupils with English as an additional language
- continue to improve the provision in ICT to help raise standards in other subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils enter school with above average levels of attainment and achieve well in all subjects except writing. This weaker progress is because there are too few pupils attaining higher standards in writing when compared to other aspects of English, mathematics and science. The school is well aware of this and has actions in place to improve attainment. National test results provide a healthy picture for the school with standards rising steadily since the last inspection. These improvements are the result of a key focus by the school on improving standards in mathematics and science through better quality teaching. Standards in ICT are, however, only average because, until recently, there was not enough hardware and some teachers had little confidence in delivering the subject. The school checks information on pupils' progress well, which has enabled it to be sure that pupils with English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well. It is surprising, however, that the targets set in the past for pupils have been too conservative and did not set realistic challenges. The school is now in the process of resetting these at higher levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is very well catered for and, in keeping with the school's religious character, spiritual development is a strong feature. The one assembly seen was inspiring. In class discussions, pupils show respect for the opinions of others and often applaud their achievements. Personal beliefs and values are encouraged, for instance through writing on topics such as "Dream a dream of a new beginning". Pupils are very committed towards leading healthy and safe lifestyles and have helped the school to achieve a "Healthy Schools" award. Pupils are concerned about and make good contributions to the local community. For example, they write to the local council and celebrities about things that concern them. The school council has members from each year group. Year 6 pupils also act as prefects supervising behaviour which contributes to the happy experiences during playtimes and increasing their personal maturity.

Behaviour is good and often very good in lessons. Pupils respond very well and as a result, concentrate hard and are keen to volunteer answers to teachers' questions. Pupils collaborate well and good work habits are firmly established. These are all having a positive impact on pupils' future well-being. The school has taken effective action to improve attendance, which is now above the national average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good overall, with many very good features. Lessons are well structured around a clear focus so that pupils learn in small steps. They then apply their new knowledge in highly relevant tasks. In the best lessons, teachers are energetic and dramatise key points. Resources are used well to catch and hold pupils' interest. Pupils are encouraged to be responsible for their own progress and to make realistic self-evaluations of their work. For instance, in a literacy lesson it was not good enough for a pupil to just say they had understood the objectives set, the teacher asked for confirmation by testing whether the pupil could provide a better example of an adjective. All teachers have a thorough understanding of the need to use the assessment data provided by testing and combining this with their own professional knowledge. This results in appropriate changes to the next lesson plan, although planning is not as good in writing. In some classes, teachers' subject knowledge in ICT is not as strong as in other subjects and the school is providing training and targets to ensure that the subject moves forward more rapidly. Resources are being upgraded and there is now the support of a newly-appointed technician. Teaching assistants have been thoroughly trained and deployed, often taking groups of pupils for intensive instruction that helps them overcome any specific learning difficulties.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well planned. Good use is made of official guidance to ensure that pupils make consistent progress, an issue identified at the last inspection. Topics are generally stimulating and there are good links between subjects. Special days or weeks are used to boost interest and provide a different approach to learning. For example, Science Week is used to set challenges through practical investigations. Outside normal lessons, pupils are encouraged to take part in a wide range of clubs and other activities. Sport is well represented and popular with boys and girls of all ages. Many learn to play a musical instrument and have the chance to perform in public. Those needing a boost in mathematics skills took part in a club last year, which was of significant benefit to them. This is now being extended to a writing club aimed at increasing the number of pupils gaining the higher levels of attainment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are given good quality care, guidance and support. Inspection evidence agrees with the school's own evaluation that pupils feel safe and are confident in approaching adults with their concerns. Staff know the pupils well and the atmosphere of the school is friendly and welcoming. Any elements of bullying are quickly dealt with. There has been a good improvement in provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and the targets in individual education plans are well informed. Assessment procedures are generally used effectively to identify what individuals need to learn next but are not well linked to setting challenging targets. Assessment procedures are very well developed in mathematics but, while satisfactory in English, systems do not have the same level of sophistication. Similarly, there is a need for more formal procedures for assessing and recording the needs of the increasing number of pupils for whom English is an additional language.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The strong leadership and management of the school is a significant factor in its very good improvement since the last inspection. The headteacher has managed to bring about change in an environment of shared responsibility, She has raised standards and the quality of educational provision substantially. She is ably supported by the senior management team which has worked hard on the correct priorities to remedy weaknesses. An example of the success of this can be seen in two recent initiatives which have increased the number of pupils achieving higher levels in both mathematics and science. Parents are kept fully informed of developments and have the opportunity to offer opinions. Similarly the school council provides pupils with an opportunity to help them to make a difference to how the school runs and improves. The governing body has a good educational understanding and offers good support and critical challenge to the headteacher. As a result of these structures, teaching, learning and

general provision have all improved well since the last inspection. This is confirmed by other external monitoring which reports that relative weaknesses in the past have been acted upon quickly and effectively. This, along with future developments identified by the school, means that there is a very good capacity to bring about further change.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

St Thomas a Becket Catholic Junior School Tutts Barn Lane Eastbourne East Sussex BN22 8XT

September 2005

Dear Pupils

My inspection team would like to thank you all for looking after us so well during our recent visit to your school. You really made an effort to welcome us and we very much enjoyed joining you in your lessons and in your assembly on the first morning. No doubt you would like to know what we thought about your school so I have written a few of the main points below.

Your headteacher, the teachers and the governors make sure you are all well cared for and know how to make things even better for you in the future.

As you told us, your teachers give you lots of exciting things to do. They want you to enjoy your lessons but also to do your very best. We think they get just the right balance.

We liked the way that you were able to work out how well you were doing in mathematics and how you could keep a track on whether you were improving.

You all get very good results in your tests and perhaps this year many more of you will get higher scores for your writing.

The new computer equipment and different programs are helping you with your ICT and we are sure that when all the problems are sorted out you will be able to do as well in that subject as in all the others.

You are very good at looking after the new children who come from other countries and who cannot speak English very well to begin with. We have asked your teachers to try and provide some more ways that will help them.

Thank you again for being so polite and well mannered. We wish you all the best in your future schooling.

Yours sincerely

David Collard Lead Inspector