



St Thomas More Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117477
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280090
Inspection dates 7 March 2006 to 8 March 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Paul Missin LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Highfield
School category	Voluntary aided		SG6 3QB
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01462 620670
Number on roll	245	Fax number	01462 620670
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs. Jo Wiffen
Date of previous inspection	4 December 2000	Headteacher	Mrs. Mary Hewitson

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is of average size and takes pupils from a very wide catchment area around Letchworth. Most pupils are from Catholic families. A larger than average number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The most common groups are from Eastern Europe. A small minority are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is broadly average but the proportion with statements of special educational need is above average. A below average proportion is eligible for free school meals but the number is rising. Attainment on admission varies from year to year but is broadly average. There are 10% more boys than girls on roll. The school has achieved several external awards, including most recently the Inclusion Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is an excellent school. Parents are justifiably proud to be part of the school. One wrote, 'We feel lucky to belong to this community'. The school promotes and sustains high standards in all aspects of its work. Academic standards are consistently very high. The emphasis on literacy and numeracy and the very effective teaching of basic skills has resulted in pupils attaining well above average standards in these areas across all phases of the school, including the Foundation Stage. From a broadly average level when they enter the school, most pupils achieve very well and make good progress as they move through to reach standards which are well above average by the time they leave. The progress that pupils make between Year 2 and Year 6 in the last few years has been significantly better than that in most schools. Such good achievement is due to teaching and learning that are good, with some outstanding practice that could usefully be shared across the school. Indications are that standards are also very high across other subject areas and the school also promotes the spiritual and personal development of pupils very effectively. Important reasons for the school's success are the outstanding leadership of the headteacher and the excellent work of the governing body. The headteacher ensures that high standards are maintained and that the very strong ethos of the school is promoted fully in all aspects. The good management successfully involves staff, parents and governors. The imminent appointment of a new deputy headteacher is allowing the roles and responsibilities of the senior management team to be further strengthened. Governors are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and support and challenge the school very well. The school has a high profile within the local community and the full involvement of parents is another strength of the school. The school evaluates its work well, and responded effectively to the slight dip in English results in 2005. The inspection findings indicate that the school's performance is better than its own modest judgements of its effectiveness. The school provides very good value for money and has very good capacity to make continued improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement the plans to strengthen and define even more clearly the roles and responsibilities of the senior management team. - Continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning and share the very good practice evident in the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

This is a high attaining and achieving school. Attainment on entry to the school varies but most children are reaching average standards when they start in the Nursery. As they move through the school, pupils of all abilities make very good progress in their learning. In Year 2, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are well above average and this progress is maintained into Year 6 where standards in English, mathematics and science continue to be well above average. Overall standards were

judged to have been above average at the time of the last inspection and these high levels of attainment have been improved since then. A strength across the school is the way in which the needs of higher attaining pupils are met very well. The proportion of pupils reaching higher levels is well above average. The progress that pupils have made between Year 2 and Year 6 has been significantly better than that in most other schools except for a slight drop in 2005. Indications are that standards in other curriculum areas, such as design and technology, history and ICT are also well above average. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with English as an additional language make similar progress to their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. A strong Catholic ethos permeates every aspect of school life and relationships are warm and supportive. Pupils address adults and each other with great consideration and respect. Pupils' clear enjoyment of school is reflected in their consistently good attendance and very positive approach to learning. Pupils behave very well during lessons and at other times and they say that bullying is exceptionally rare. Pupils' strong cultural awareness is developed through, for example, the school's support for a community in Uganda and themed events such as 'One World Week'. They also learn about other faiths, such as Judaism and Sikhism, and are very well placed to take their place within contemporary British society. Pupils have a good understanding of being safe and healthy lifestyles. They are involved in a wide range of sports activities in school and at after-school clubs. They make a very strong contribution to the school and the wider community. Pupils in Year 6, for example, run the school council and act as friendship buddies in the playground. Pupils' personal qualities, their strong basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT and willingness to work hard should equip them very well for their later life within the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good with some outstanding features. This was also the view of the school and the judgement of the last inspection team. Important strengths are the teachers' high expectations and the way they encourage and promote pupils' positive attitudes to their learning. They do this by their enthusiasm and the way in which they devise interesting and challenging activities. Lesson planning is clear and pupils are made aware of what they need to learn and to do in each lesson. Where teaching is very good teachers use a wide variety of styles and techniques to involve pupils of all abilities in the class. A further strength is the way in which pupils are encouraged to talk about what they know and to explain how they work. This improves their learning. Teachers ensure that the needs of pupils of all abilities are met well. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is excellent. Here teachers plan very

effectively, use a very good range of interesting resources and provide a very good basis from which children are ready and keen to develop further. The teaching of pupils with particular learning difficulties or disabilities is also good. Teaching assistants provide unobtrusive support during lessons and provide additional help, for example, with reading at the before-school reading support sessions. Procedures for the assessment of pupils' work are good and teachers track their progress very closely. Pupils are familiar with the criteria for each national curriculum level and find tools such as the 'punctuation pyramid' very useful. Marking of pupils' written work is very thorough and pupils have a good idea as to what they have to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. It is broad and very well balanced and meets the needs and interests of pupils exceptionally well. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the development of basic literacy and numeracy skills to ensure that very high standards are maintained but a wide range of other curricular and extra-curricular opportunities are provided as well. Pupils enjoy taking part in the many activities that take place during lunchtime and after school. These opportunities are also very effective in encouraging pupils to use their initiative and become more self-confident. Pupils visit local places of interest, such as Hitchin Museum, and Year 6 pupils undertake a residential trip to an outdoor activity centre. A comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education provides clear information about staying healthy and keeping safe. These opportunities and the involvement of local initiatives such as the Hertfordshire Young Enterprise scheme help pupils to live and work together as a team and to develop important life skills. Provision for pupils with particular gifts and talents is good. Teachers provide plenty of challenge during lessons and talented writers can attend an after-school club. Pupils who find learning difficult also receive good support during lessons and additional help at other times, for example, at the reading club before school. Provision in the Foundation Stage is excellent. Here there is a very effective balance between allowing the children to choose activities for themselves and providing appropriate, adult guidance. The exceptionally wide range of interesting and carefully planned activities, the spacious and well maintained accommodation and the generous level of staffing all help to ensure that these young children get off to a flying start.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils of all ages receive outstanding care, guidance and support. Pupils feel safe and well looked after and their parents wholeheartedly agree. For example, one parent commented, 'The pastoral side of pupils' well-being is superb.' Rigorous procedures for child protection and health and safety and close links with outside agencies ensure that pupils with particular needs and difficulties are supported very well. This ensures that pupils remain in a positive frame of mind and that they are able to make the most of their time at school. Academic guidance is very good and pupils of all ages and

abilities are familiar with their particular targets for improvement. A very helpful feature is that all pupils have a copy of the learning intended in each lesson attached to their workbooks. This ensures that they know exactly what they are trying to achieve. The school analyses test data thoroughly and tracks the progress of individual pupils well. This ensures that they receive additional help as and when the need arises. The quality of this support is reflected in the high standard of work seen.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are now outstanding. This is an improvement since the last inspection. The school considers them to be good. The headteacher's leadership is excellent. She creates and supports a very strong school ethos which successfully underpins all its work. This is demonstrated through the way in which the school's mission statement and overall purpose are clearly set out at the beginning of the School Development Plan. One parent commented, 'I am extremely happy with the whole ethos of the school'. The way in which all staff, governors and parents are involved with school development planning is also an important strength. This helps to secure their full commitment to the life of the school. The rapid and effective response to the slight dip in achievement in English in 2005 is an example of the school's effective self-evaluation processes. The management of the school is good. There are effective procedures to inform and involve all staff in the school's work. The way that all staff work together is impressive. A relative weakness is that the roles and responsibilities of the senior management team are not sufficiently formalised. The imminent appointment of a new deputy headteacher is being used rightly as an opportunity for these to be reviewed and more clearly defined. Governors' involvement in the school is excellent as it was at the time of the last inspection. Governors take their roles and responsibilities seriously and are fully committed to the life of the school. This is shown by the willingness of governors to undertake training to increase their knowledge and expertise. They have a very clear view of the school's work and support and challenge the headteacher effectively.

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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?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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	1	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?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	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	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	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?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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?	1	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	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	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	1	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

Thank you for welcoming my colleague and I when we visited your school recently. We came to see how well you are doing. We enjoyed coming to your lessons and watching you at playtime. It was a pity it was so wet when we were there so you could not really enjoy playing outside. We think that you do very well and you told us how much you enjoyed the hard work that you do. We especially liked the way that you get on so well with your teachers and the other children in your classes. Your work is displayed very attractively around the school. The models of the Anderson shelters done by Year 6 were very realistic. We were very impressed with the way that teachers made their lessons interesting and you told us how much you liked coming to school. The teachers had made some very good booklets which showed photographs of you doing different things and visiting different places. You certainly have a lot of interesting things to do. We think that the school looks after you very well and that your headteacher and other staff work very well together to keep you safe and to enable you to do well. The school governors really help you too. Your teachers need to continue to find exciting and interesting work for you to do and to plan for the future to ensure that the school remains as good as it is. Thanks again for making us so welcome. We wish you all well for the future.