



The Thomas Coram Middle School - Church of England Voluntary Aided

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117559
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280118
Inspection dates 8 June 2006 to 9 June 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. John Godwood LI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary	School address	Swing Gate Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		HP4 2RP
Age range of pupils	9 to 14		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01442 866757
Number on roll	359	Fax number	01442 865467
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs. Julie Griffiths
Date of previous inspection	6 March 2000	Headteacher	Mr. Edward Delasalle

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Thomas Coram Middle School is a little smaller than most middle schools. It is in a socially advantaged area and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language is below average. Pupils' attainment on entry is generally above average, although more pupils have learning difficulties than would be expected for a school this size. As a result of recruitment difficulties and illness, the school did not have a permanent headteacher from April 2002 to September 2003, and again from October 2004 to September 2005. These gaps in leadership had a significant impact on the school's development. The current headteacher and deputy headteacher have been in post since September 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school. It gives satisfactory value for money. After a period of instability in leadership, it is now moving forward. Leadership and management are satisfactory and the headteacher is steering the school well in the right direction. The good improvements in management, teaching and progress, since the new headteacher has been in post, show that the school has good capacity for further improvement. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory but there are pockets of underachievement. The lack of a permanent headteacher for long periods over the past four years resulted in little checking on pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. Under the leadership of the new headteacher, the school has made great strides in improving teaching and management. This has begun to have an impact on pupils' achievement, although it remains satisfactory. The headteacher has an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness and its strengths and weaknesses. As a result, the inspectors' judgements closely match those of the school. The headteacher has provided staff and governors with a clear direction and a detailed improvement plan. This includes most of the issues identified in this inspection. He is well supported by the senior leadership team. Most staff are well motivated and keen to take the school forward. Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. Their attendance is good because of this. Relationships are good and pupils behave well almost all the time. Care, guidance and support for pupils are satisfactory overall. The monitoring of pupils' progress is now more systematic and improving. Teachers are committed to their pupils' welfare and they support pupils' personal development well. As a consequence, their personal development is good. Teaching has improved this year as a result of systematic monitoring, clear guidance on the school's expectations and support for individual teachers. There is much good teaching but the quality is satisfactory overall. This is because there are inconsistencies in the quality of teachers' questioning and the feedback they give pupils on how they should improve their work. Pupils' attainment is now assessed more frequently. The data is used effectively to identify pupils who are doing well or need additional support. It shows that progress is improving. However, the systems are new and the data is not used sufficiently to check whether measures to rectify underachievement are working or how well different groups of pupils are achieving. Although the curriculum is satisfactory overall, the school is rightly reviewing the curriculum for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE). Pupils are taught effectively how to stay safe and healthy, but they have too little careers education in Years 7 and 8. Citizenship does not meet statutory requirements because too little time is devoted to it on the timetable and there is little ongoing assessment of pupils' progress. However, pupils' views are valued and they have good opportunities to make a positive contribution to the community. The headteacher has focused management processes more effectively on pupils' achievement. Subject leaders and year leaders are increasingly taking responsibility for pupils' progress and the quality of teaching in their area. They create action plans, but neither they nor governors have this year been involved in creating the whole school plan. This means that they are not fully involved in evaluating or planning school improvement. The improvements

made this year have put the school in a good position to keep moving forward and to raise standards further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teachers' questioning and the feedback they give to pupils on how they should improve their work . - Use assessment records to check the impact of measures to improve achievement and to track the progress of groups of pupils. - Ensure that statutory requirements are met for citizenship by providing adequate time for the subjects and assessing pupils' achievements. - Fully establish the role of middle leaders and governors in strategic planning and evaluation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory overall. Pupils make satisfactory progress in relation to their prior attainment and achieve above average standards in Year 6 tests and by the time they leave in Year 8. There are, however, some pockets of underachievement. Year 6 test results have been above average for the last four years but in 2005 girls underachieved, particularly those of average ability. English results improved, but mathematics results declined and progress in mathematics was lower than it should have been. Pupils' progress has improved in most year groups and subjects this year. However, Year 8 pupils have made less progress than other year groups in English and mathematics. Current progress remains satisfactory in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress, as do pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Targets for Year 6 English tests have not been sufficiently challenging, although in 2005 the results exceeded the targets. The mathematics targets were reasonable but were not met. The targets set for 2007 are appropriately challenging.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Most pupils enjoy school. They get on well with one another and report that there is little bullying. They feel safe, confident that if they have a problem they can approach an adult and it will be resolved. Attitudes to learning are good and sometimes excellent. Behaviour is generally good and has improved this year through staff training and a clear framework of rewards and sanctions. There is, however, occasional silliness in lessons and around school. Pupils know how to keep safe and healthy; they understand the importance of exercise and healthy eating. They contribute to the school community as monitors and peer mediators and actively participate in charity events to raise significant sums. The school council effectively represents pupils' views and takes responsibility for a small annual budget. Pupils' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory and will be enhanced by the school's plan to extend careers and enterprise education. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school effectively fosters

pupils' self-esteem and understanding of right and wrong. It provides good opportunities to work together in groups and teams.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. They have improved since September as a result of training and individual support. There is much good teaching and, although the quality varies, no inadequate lessons were seen during the inspection. Lessons are planned to a consistent structure. Pupils are clear about what they are to learn. In almost all lessons, they behave well and respond positively to teachers' high expectations and good support. Most lessons include work to challenge pupils of all abilities. Teachers often use questioning well to probe pupils' understanding and encourage them to think and express their thoughts carefully. In some lessons, however, initial responses are accepted too readily without encouraging pupils to think deeply. Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress because they are supported by appropriate work and additional adults. Pupils' work is marked regularly, but the quality of feedback varies. Some teachers provide very helpful comments on what pupils have done well and what they should work on. Other teachers provide only ticks and occasional brief comments, which leaves pupils disappointed. The regularity and quality of homework are satisfactory.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. It meets most statutory requirements. Literacy and numeracy are given appropriate emphasis. The courses in design and technology and information and communication technology (ICT) have been strengthened this year, following the school's own identification of weaknesses, and are now satisfactory. Additional ICT facilities have been provided. Pupils who have difficulties with literacy or numeracy receive additional support. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is satisfactory. The small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language are well supported. Links with other schools are used well to broaden the curriculum, providing specialist sports coaching, for example, and enabling Year 8 pupils to learn two foreign languages. The PSHCE course promotes pupils' awareness of health and safety well. The citizenship curriculum in Years 7 and 8 does not meet statutory requirements for the reasons already stated. The school is aware of the shortcomings and has planned a more extensive curriculum for next year. There is a good range of extracurricular activities, including sports, music and ICT. Residential trips in Years 6 and 8 support pupils' social and academic development effectively.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Staff commitment to pupils and good pastoral care are strengths of the school. Pastoral needs are identified promptly and are met through effective communication and good links with specialist support agencies. There are good procedures for child protection and ensuring safety in school. Teachers value pupils' achievements and listen to their views. As a result, pupils feel secure and grow in confidence. Good links with other schools ensure a smooth transition into Year 5 and good preparation for upper school. This is achieved through visits and staff exchanges. The school recognises that there is insufficient careers education in Years 7 and 8 and has plans to strengthen this. Academic guidance has improved this year through termly assessment in each subject and systematic progress tracking. Pupils are set targets for their performance in each subject, although this is not done in a consistent style. The assessment records are beginning to be used effectively to provide additional support for individual pupils, but the procedures are new and are not yet used to their full effect.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher, who has been in post since September, provides good leadership. He has a clear view of what needs to be done. The focus on improving behaviour and teaching, creating a system to track each pupil's progress, and improving the effectiveness and accountability of all levels of management are beginning to have a positive effect on raising standards. This demanding agenda has been managed well. Staff and governors have worked hard and are well motivated. The leadership team provides the headteacher with good support. Local authority advisers have been used well. The school's monitoring shows that behaviour, teaching and pupils' progress have all improved. The quality of self-evaluation is good, providing an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Parents' and pupils' views are gathered and taken seriously. Most of their views are positive. The school improvement plan is well constructed and provides a good basis for raising standards. The current plan as a matter of necessity was written by the headteacher. It has been reviewed systematically in preparation for the new plan, which is being drawn up in consultation with middle leaders and governors. Subject leaders and year leaders have this year been given clear guidance on what is expected of them with regard to planning, tracking pupils' progress and monitoring the work within their area of responsibility. The school now has a good set of management processes, although many are new and have only just begun to have an impact on pupils' progress. Governance is satisfactory. It has improved over the past year under the good leadership of the chair of governors and headteacher and continues to improve. Governors are now well informed and have begun to ask challenging questions. They visit the school to develop links with individual subjects. Governors are keen and have undergone training. Their involvement in planning has been slight but is now increasing.

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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?	3	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?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	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	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	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	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	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	Yes
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

We enjoyed our visit to your school and would like to thank you for your friendly welcome and for sharing your thoughts with us. Your school has a good atmosphere that helps you to learn and to develop well as young people. Your teachers listen and take good care of you. Many of you help as school councillors or peer mediators. We were pleased to hear that there is little bullying. We could see that you get on well together and generally behave well. Some of you told us that you felt that the school has improved this year. We agree. The teachers have worked hard to make their lessons interesting and useful. We saw some good lessons where you learned a lot and some others where you did not learn so much. We have asked the school to try now to ensure that all lessons are good. The progress that you make has improved because teachers now assess your work more regularly and provide extra help to those who need it. We have asked the school to use the assessment records even more to check that the extra help is working and that all pupils are doing as well as they should. The school is improving the facilities and some of the courses. At present, pupils in Years 7 and 8 do not spend enough time learning citizenship and we have asked the school to make that sure this is put right next year. Mr Delasalle knows what needs to be improved and has a good plan. The subject leaders now check the quality of teaching and plan improvements. We have asked the school to keep developing their role so that all the staff work together to make the school as good as it can be. We think that the school will continue to improve. You can help by making sure that you cooperate with teachers and do your best. We wish you well with that. Yours sincerely