



St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115710
Local Authority Gloucestershire
Inspection number 290309
Inspection dates 8–9 March 2007
Reporting inspector Jacqueline Marshall

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Lewis Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		Hesters Way
Age range of pupils	4–11		Cheltenham GL51 0HZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01242 513339
Number on roll (school)	178	Fax number	01242 257402
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	John Kyffin
		Headteacher	Shirley Cox
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2005		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average sized primary school. Children's skills and knowledge when they join in the Reception class are below those expected, particularly in their language, mathematical, personal, social and emotional development. The school has a greater than average proportion of pupils joining at times other than when they first start at school, including a small number of Traveller pupils. In addition, the planned closure of a local school has swollen the number of pupils on roll by a fifth since September 2006. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above the national average. Most pupils are of White British heritage. A very small number of pupils are in the early stages of learning English. The school has a small number of looked after children. The headteacher has been in post since January.

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 school that provides a sound education for its pupils. The strong focus on providing good care results in the overwhelming majority of pupils and parents alike praising the school's warm and welcoming atmosphere where everyone is caring and supportive. This is well demonstrated in the way that all children settle quickly, whatever their backgrounds or whether starting in Reception or joining from other schools. Consequently, pupils are good at welcoming new friends and develop caring attitudes to one another. This, coupled with good relationships with staff, means that pupils enjoy coming to school and behave well, key factors in pupils' good personal development.

The youngest children get off to a good start in the Reception class, where provision is good. Pupils in Years 1 to 6 make satisfactory overall progress to reach below average standards by the time they leave at age 11. All pupils achieve satisfactorily because teaching overall is satisfactory and the school provides an adequate curriculum that meets all pupils' needs. Although all teachers regularly check how well pupils are doing, they do not always make sufficient use of this information to plan lessons that challenge pupils to achieve well. Teachers plan appropriate opportunities in English lessons for pupils to develop their writing skills. In other subjects, opportunities to motivate and make writing meaningful and to ensure pupils always use the skills they have learnt when they write are not yet regular enough in order to raise standards further. Assessment is used adequately to set targets in English and mathematics which are shared with the pupils. However, targets are not yet precise enough to focus pupils on just what they need to do next to improve, nor are they referred to consistently enough in teachers' marking to raise standards and secure good progress.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. School leaders make regular checks to understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and what needs to be done to improve. For example, they identified the need to raise achievement in mathematics by teachers planning even more opportunities in lessons for pupils to discuss and explain their ideas. However, the checks they make are not yet effective enough to improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good. The headteacher and other leaders have quickly built on the school's ethos of teamwork and partnership with parents. They know what is needed to take the school forward and have demonstrated a satisfactory capacity to improve the school further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Help teachers make better use of assessment information to plan lessons that always challenge pupils and extend their achievement.
- Ensure that teachers' marking helps pupils understand what to do next to improve their work.
- Raise standards in English by ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to write and use the skills they have learnt in other subjects.
- Raise achievement in mathematics by always encouraging pupils to explain their ideas in order to better develop their mathematical understanding.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The achievement and standards of all pupils are satisfactory. From below average starting points children make good progress during the Reception Year in all areas of learning, but particularly in their personal, social and emotional development, because of the effective use of assessment to plan lessons that give children just what they need to learn next. Although progress is good, few children reach the early learning goals and, as a result, start in Year 1 with below average skills and knowledge. All groups of pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 to 6. Standards for pupils in Year 6 in 2006 were exceptionally low in mathematics and English. This represented satisfactory progress for that particular year group, where over half the pupils had learning difficulties and disabilities. Year 6 pupils are currently making satisfactory progress and are on track to reach below average standards in English, mathematics and science by the time they leave.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral and social development, is good. This is reflected in pupils' enjoyment, positive attitudes and good behaviour. Right from the start in the Reception class, pupils quickly learn to share and help one another because of the strong focus on developing these skills. Pupils themselves stress this is a key factor in why they enjoy the school, explaining 'Everyone's considerate and kind'. Consequently, they get along well and help one another, as is demonstrated by their readiness to welcome new pupils to the school. They have a good understanding of the importance of staying safe and are increasingly becoming aware of the need to have a healthy lifestyle too. Cultural development is satisfactory because pupils' understanding of other cultures and living within multicultural Britain is still developing. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the community, with those on the school council enjoying taking responsibility and proud to have an impact on school life. Attendance is below the national average though improving due to the school's systems and the headteacher's work with parents and other agencies.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and is closely linked to the satisfactory progress pupils make through the school. Teaching and learning in the Reception class is good. Relationships between pupils and adults are good. Consequently, pupils enjoy lessons and are keen to learn. Behaviour is managed well. In some lessons, where pupils make good progress, teachers effectively provide quality opportunities for pupils to discuss and explain their ideas. This is not yet consistent practice. Teachers plan lessons that

take account of some difference of ability within their classrooms. However they do not always take sufficient account of assessment information to adapt work enough for pupils' capabilities. As a result, in some lessons, pupils could be challenged more and make even greater progress in their learning. While all work is marked, teachers' marking is inconsistent and comments do not always make clear to pupils how they can improve their work. Teaching assistants contribute satisfactorily to pupils' learning, and are most effective when supporting those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those at the early stages of learning English, ensuring they make the same progress as others.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The satisfactory curriculum is appropriately adapted to meet the needs of all groups of pupils. In the Reception class pupils do well because the curriculum is enriched effectively and good links are made between different areas that make children's learning relevant and fun. Pupils' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) abilities are developed satisfactorily and are enabling pupils to develop their skills for the world of work. However, teachers do not always plan enough opportunities to allow pupils to reinforce their skills. This is seen, for example, when the quality of pupils' written work in other subjects does not always match that seen in English lessons. In mathematics, pupils sometimes struggle to explain their ideas because opportunities are missed to encourage pupils to discuss more frequently what they have learnt or how they have solved a problem.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Overall, care, guidance and support are satisfactory but with considerable strengths in the pastoral care provided for pupils. Most pupils and parents recognise this is a caring school where pupils' well-being is of paramount importance. This is a key factor in pupils' positive attitudes to school. Health and safety procedures are well understood and any pupils who are at risk are quickly identified and supported well. Pupils say that they feel safe and know whom to turn to, if necessary. Support for different groups of pupils such as those with learning difficulties and disabilities, those in the early stages of learning English and Traveller pupils is satisfactory as a result of sound links with outside agencies and parents, enabling them to achieve as well as other pupils.

The academic guidance and support provided by the school are satisfactory but there are some inconsistencies. Procedures to enable the school to track pupils' progress more carefully are being introduced. However, assessment information is not used well enough in some lessons to inform teachers' planning, set high expectations or help pupils with the next steps in their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new headteacher has quickly established a culture of teamwork and is maintaining the school's focus on improvement from the last inspection. Leaders analyse data and monitor teaching regularly to see where it is best and what needs to be improved. This process is being refined to make better use of assessment to check and evaluate the quality of education and how well pupils are doing, but at present is not yet rigorous enough to ensure teaching is consistently good. Whilst cautious when assessing how well the school is doing in developing pupils' personal qualities, leaders have a clear understanding of the school's overall effectiveness. The school takes into account the views of parents, resulting in a very large majority responding positively when asked about the effectiveness of their school.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for talking to us and showing us your work when we visited your school. We are pleased to hear that you like school and that the grown-ups are kind and look after you well. We think that they help you to know just what you have to do to keep safe and are helping you to know more about how to keep healthy. We were happy to hear that you think that you all get on well with each other and get good at sorting out any problems you have, for example through training to be play buddies and peer mediators. We think you are good at welcoming new friends to your school, are polite to adults and behave well.

St Thomas More is a satisfactory school. In order to make your learning even better, we have asked the adults at your school to make sure:

- your lessons always stretch you to do your very best
- teachers always help you to know what you need to do to improve your work
- you are always encouraged to explain your answers and ideas in mathematics
- you are given lots of opportunities in all subjects, not just English, to practise your writing.

You can help by always remembering to use the skills you learn in your English lessons whenever you are doing any writing. Thank you again for helping us with our work.