

St Thomas More RC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110854
Local Authority	City of Peterborough
Inspection number	310441
Inspection dates	16–17 March 2009
Reporting inspector	John Mason

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	377
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Tessa Barcham
Headteacher	Mrs Anne-Marie McElhinney
Date of previous school inspection	4 July 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Park Lane Eastfield Peterborough Cambridgeshire PE1 5JW

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	16–17 March 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspections.

Description of the school

St Thomas More Roman Catholic Primary School is a large primary school. As it has continued to expand in recent years, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals has declined. Although this proportion is now below average, many pupils come from circumstances of social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic communities is very high, including growing numbers of children from Eastern European migrant families in recent years. Many pupils do not speak English as their first language and many pupils transfer in or out of the school during their primary education. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. The school governors run a breakfast club and an after-school club in order to provide continuous childcare from early morning to early evening. The school holds the Full International Schools Award and the Community Cohesion and Global Dimension awards of the City of Peterborough.

A private nursery operates on the school site and children often attend this prior to joining the school for the Reception Year. This provision was not inspected.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Thomas More is a good school. It provides outstanding care, guidance and support for its pupils. The challenges it faces with a very diverse and mobile body of pupils are turned to advantages in the ways that these are used to promote pupils' social development and learning. Pupils' personal development is good and has many significant strengths. Indeed, it is only because pupils' attendance is average, not better, that inspectors are unable to judge that pupils' personal development and wellbeing is outstanding.

Pupils are highly motivated and enthusiastic learners who immensely enjoy being at school. They develop friendships and grow rapidly in self-esteem by supporting one another and living by the clear moral codes which the Catholic foundation of the school promotes. Pupils have excellent trusting relationships with adults and feel extremely safe in school. The lack of exclusions or racist incidents attests to this. Pupils' behaviour in class and at play is outstanding. The school works unstintingly to follow up all absences and overall attendance has improved well since the last inspection. Although pupils thoroughly enjoy school, not all parents and carers get their children to school regularly enough for them to benefit.

Although standards are below average by the end of Year 6, pupils of all backgrounds make good progress throughout the school and achieve well. When children join the Reception classes, half of them have had no pre-school education and their skills and abilities which are well below those expected for their age. Good teaching sets consistent expectations across the school. Lessons are generally planned well, but different groups of pupils in a class are not always given sufficiently clear guidance about the progress expected of them in each lesson. The curriculum is well tailored to meet pupils' needs. The support given to targeted groups in intervention classes and from teaching assistants, many of whom are bilingual, helps pupils to develop their learning and integrate into the school community very well. Many activities help promote pupils' awareness of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles.

Leadership and management are good. Under the strong and experienced leadership of the headteacher, the school has made very effective progress since the previous inspection. Strengths in leadership are now being more widely shared so that middle leaders are much more accountable for progress and developments in their fields of responsibility. The quality of assessment and the tracking of pupils' progress has improved, so that the school is able to identify and take effective action to address any underachievement. Improved provision in the Reception classes has led to the youngest children making better progress. The implementation of a phonics scheme is contributing to improved progress in English. This, together with high level of engagement with the different communities represented within the local area, has helped the school adapt very well to the growing number of pupils from families which have recently arrived from abroad. The growing international links, including collaboration with schools across Europe and Africa, complement excellent partnerships with external agencies and Church links in the local community to improve provision. A range of prestigious awards testifies to the school's outstanding commitment to community cohesion and to the value that children place on the diversity of their community. The school has a good capacity to improve further and provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children are given a good start to their education in the Reception classes. Staff have a good understanding of how young children learn and use this knowledge to plan exciting activities that cover all areas of learning. Close attention is given to observing and assessing children in order to plan the next steps in learning. The supportive, nurturing environment encourages children to have a go at new things and not be afraid of making a mistake. Children greatly enjoy learning through play, both indoors and in the outdoor area, because of the good balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities.

Children make good progress. They enter Reception with skills that are exceptionally low for their age. By the time they leave, their physical development is broadly in line with expectations. Although they make significant progress in their acquisition of English, they leave Reception with skills that are still low for their age. Girls reach higher standards than boys in reading, writing and aspects of numeracy. A high level of care and good links with the on-site nursery help children to settle quickly and to form constructive relationships with each other and with adults, despite the wide range of cultural backgrounds and languages spoken at home. Leadership and management are good and all welfare requirements are met.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by ensuring that teachers make more explicit the progress expected of different groups of learners within lessons.
- Work with parents to encourage them to make sure their children attend school every day unless they are ill.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils enter the school with skills which are exceptionally low and a large proportion speak very little English. By the end of Year 2, standards are below average for pupils who have been at the school all the time but are lower when including pupils who have arrived at the school during Years 1 and 2, often speaking little or no English. Consequently, formal assessments do not reflect the true ability or progress of pupils. Nonetheless, these assessments indicate a marked rising trend in the standards reached over the past three years. The significant improvement in reading and writing in 2008 was, in part, attributable to the successful implementation of a new phonics programme. By the end of Year 6, standards are below average overall. In 2008 standards in science were close to average, but the proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 5 in writing and mathematics was low. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, new arrivals and those learning English as an additional language is tracked very carefully. Outcomes of this tracking provide clear evidence to support inspection findings that all groups of pupils achieve well from their various starting points.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Because of the school's inclusive ethos, pupils of all backgrounds settle rapidly and make friends. They quickly become sociable and considerate, showing genuine concern for the well-being of others. Pupils thrive in the cultural diversity of the school. They respect the languages and beliefs of others and

gain a perceptive understanding of modern Britain, their part in the wider world and their responsibility towards other people, including those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils are very keen to lead a healthy lifestyle. They greatly enjoy sport and the many lunchtime and out of school clubs. Pupils behave very sensibly and safely, making an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community. For example, local residents come into the school for tea and pupils work on conservation projects with local schools and other young people. Pupils raise significant sums of money for charity. The school council and playground buddies make significant contributions to the cohesiveness of the school. Pupils' impressive personal skills, their readiness to work as part of a team and their good progress in basic skills help prepare them well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Very good relationships in the classroom make an excellent contribution to learning. Robust systems for monitoring and developing teaching ensure that increasingly consistent methods are in use across all classes. Clear expectations of good behaviour result in few problems with class management. Lesson planning carefully takes into account the needs of the high percentage of pupils who do not speak English as their first language. However, in some lessons, different groups of learners are not given sufficiently explicit indications of the progress expected of them and this tends to hold pupils back from developing greater independence in their learning. Support given by the teaching assistants is good, particularly for the pupils who have few English skills. Whilst the pace for learning is generally good, at times it slackens and, when this happens, pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress. The quality of teachers' marking in literacy is particularly good. The clarity it presents in identifying how well pupils have done and what to do next to improve is now being spread to other subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum focuses very well on meeting pupils' needs in English acquisition and social development. The impact on learning of the new phonics scheme, setting of pupils by ability, and the opportunity to apply acquired skills in English once they are mastered, is good. Planning in mathematics and science is also good, but investigative work in mathematics does not yet have a sufficiently strong focus to raise standards. The quality of the support programmes for pupils with identified learning needs is very good. Thematic topics enhance the curriculum and children enjoy learning about, say, the Romans and the Victorians, in different subjects. However, the school recognises the scope to develop greater links between subjects and particularly to promote literacy development in a wider range of contexts. Good out-of-hours opportunities for sports and music are well supplemented by educational visits and off-timetable days, all of which develop community links and cultural understanding. Opportunities for pupils from different cultures and backgrounds to interact with one another, including learning the languages of others, are promoted very well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

From their smooth introduction to the school to their well-managed transition to secondary education, all pupils are provided with exceptional academic and pastoral support. Celebrations of the diversity of world cultures and key notices in pupils' first languages help new arrivals to settle well. The breakfast and after-school clubs look after pupils well, helping to develop a positive frame of mind for learning. All necessary safeguards are in place to ensure children are kept safe from harm. The constructive support for families who are learning English as an additional language is appreciated by parents. Pupils who need additional support are looked after and supported very well, often with the effective help of a wide range of external agencies. This excellent standard of care and guidance underpins the strengths in pupils' personal development. It also helps to create a calm and very happy environment for learning. Procedures to monitor and promote good attendance are having a significant impact. Through daily call-ups, liaison with community workers and a motivating range of incentives, overall attendance has improved steadily in the last three years and the level of persistent absence has fallen by three quarters. Monitoring of pupils' academic development, both individually and by groups, is very thorough. Meticulous tracking data is used very well to identify those who are making more limited progress and to plan the actions necessary to remedy this.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher sets a clear and ambitious agenda for raising standards and securing relevant professional development for all staff. Middle leaders have become more accountable for analysing data and promoting initiatives which will sustain improvement, although in a few subject areas these roles are still developing. Due to thorough and well focused monitoring of provision and teaching by senior leaders and governors, the school knows its strengths and weaknesses well. This enables it to set clear priorities for improvement and actions taken to meet these priorities are monitored and reviewed effectively. Challenging targets are being used increasingly well with both individuals and groups as a means of helping to raise standards. The school's contribution to community cohesion is outstanding with a well planned and evaluated programme of activity within the school, the local community and internationally. Equality opportunities are promoted well. School governance is good. The involvement of governors in monitoring and supporting the work of the school is very good, but parents' interests are under-represented.

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Annex A

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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

18 March 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of St Thomas More RC Primary School, Peterborough, PE1 5JW

Thank you for welcoming Mrs Smith, Mr Foster and me so warmly when we visited your school earlier in the week. We enjoyed meeting you and your teachers very much and were very pleased that you hold such enthusiastic views about your school. We also spoke to some of your parents and read their questionnaire returns, which also gave us a positive picture of the school. Please pass on our thanks to them, too.

We agreed with your headteacher, Mrs McElhinney, that St Thomas More is a good school. We really like the excellent way you all get on so well together, making your very different backgrounds an advantage to your learning. You enjoy making friends and taking responsibility for new pupils when they arrive at the school, often speaking very little English. The respect you show each other you also show to the adults who work with you. This really helps you in class to learn well from your very dedicated teachers. They plan an interesting range of activities to help you make good progress. Teaching assistants also play a big part, particularly in helping new arrivals with their English. We agree with you that the care and support you receive is excellent.

We think that the school is well run and that much has improved since the previous inspection nearly four years ago. When pupils leave school at the end of Year 6 their standards in English, mathematics and science are not as high as in most other schools. In other words, they are below average. But this is understandable, given the fact that so many of you arrive speaking little or sometimes no English and that many pupils arrive or leave the school midway through the normal time you would spend at primary school. Your challenge now is to raise the standards you achieve even more. For all the school's efforts and your very obvious enjoyment of school, attendance is only just average. Being absent makes it harder for both you and for others to learn as you should.

To help raise standards further we are asking:

- teachers to make clearer to you how much you are expected to improve in each lesson
- parents to make sure their children attend school every day, unless they are ill.

On behalf of all of the inspectors we wish you every success in your future lives, especially to Year 6 who will soon be going on to secondary school.

Yours faithfully

John Mason

Lead inspector