

St Thomas of Canterbury RC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118767
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	313081
Inspection date	14 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Hemmings

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	259
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jeremy Chapman
Headteacher	Alma Myatt
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2004
School address	Romany Road Rainham Gillingham ME8 6JH
Telephone number	01634 234677
Fax number	01634 234677

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the achievement of more able pupils and the performance of boys; the progress that pupils make in Years 3 to 6; the way the school checks pupils' progress and uses the information to guide their learning and the opportunities for pupils to use information communication technology in other subjects. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form (SEF); assessment data; observations of the school at work; and discussions with staff, the chair of the governing body and pupils. The parental questionnaire responses were analysed. Other aspects of the school were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This is a large primary school. Children's attainment on entry to the Reception class is broadly in line with that of children of a similar age nationally. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below that found nationally. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or difficulties is above average. Most pupils are of White British heritage. A high number of pupils join the school in Years 3 to 6.

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 a good school in which pupils flourish within a Christian ethos that promotes mutual respect, positive encouragement and care for others. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and the experiences provided for their children. One parental comment captures the views of many: 'I am very pleased with how my children are progressing at school. They are both very happy and love going to school. I couldn't ask for more'. Teaching and learning are good and so pupils make good progress and achieve well. Children make a good start in Reception, with staff effectively meeting their individual needs. They quickly settle into everyday school routines, growing in confidence and developing their skills in making choices for themselves. Good progress is maintained throughout Years 1 to 6. As a result, by the end of Year 6, pupils attain above average standards in English, mathematics and science. A relative weakness, acknowledged by the school, is that not enough pupils reach the higher levels. The main reason for this is that teachers do not always use assessment information from previous work effectively to set further work that stretches pupils, particularly those who are more able. Although their achievement is good, the school has identified that boys do not perform as well as girls and have introduced a variety of strategies to bring about improvement. These include more use of drama and increased use of visual stimuli to capture and maintain their interest. It is too early to evaluate the impact of these strategies. Teaching assistants support all pupils well, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. As a result, these pupils make good progress and achieve well. This is important, as many of the pupils who join school in Years 3 to 6 have learning difficulties and require extra help to support their learning. Pupils have positive attitudes to their work and are keen to do well. This makes a positive contribution to the good progress they make. Pupils demonstrate their good personal development in many aspects of school life. They behave well and are caring and considerate of others. They accept responsibilities gladly, such as being a member of the school council. They take their roles seriously and carry out their tasks diligently and, in so doing, make a positive contribution to the school community. They also contribute well to the wider local community through the strong links with the church and activities such as singing carols at the local hospital and local care home. Pupils show a good awareness of the need to eat healthily and take regular exercise. They also know how to stay safe. This is demonstrated by the responsible way they move around in school and on the playground. Although pupils clearly enjoy school, their attendance is only average. This is largely because many parents take their children on holiday during term time. The school actively discourages this and is doing its best to raise attendance rates. Pupils' above average skills in literacy and numeracy shows they are prepared well for their future lives. The headteacher provides strong leadership and has a clear vision for school improvement, which is shared by all involved in the work of the school. The senior management team support her well and a powerful sense of teamwork has been forged through the school. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and has enabled it to identify and prioritise areas for development. These include an increase in the numbers of pupils achieving the higher levels in English, mathematics and science and the provision of more opportunities to develop information and communication technology skills (ICT) in other subjects. The effectiveness of subject leaders has improved since the last inspection and governors also are now more actively involved in helping the school improve than they were previously. Leaders have been effective in improving teaching and learning and in strengthening partnerships with others to promote learners' well-being, demonstrating that the school has a good capacity to improve further. There are good procedures in place for individual teachers to check the progress that their pupils make

from lesson to lesson. However, the school acknowledges that it lacks a comprehensive tracking system that would enable it to check individual pupils' progress over the course of each school year to ensure all are making sufficient progress towards their targets. The curriculum is planned well to give a good balance between promoting pupils' academic and creative skills. Religious education forms a core part of the curriculum and effectively supports pupils' personal development. A wide range of enrichment experiences makes a positive contribution to pupils' learning and personal development. Pupils go on many visits of educational interest, including a residential stay in which they develop good social skills. There are frequent visitors to the school that include the fire brigade and theatre groups, along with people who give advice on road and railway safety. These experiences effectively extend pupils' learning. There are a number of after-school clubs, with a strong emphasis on sporting activity to promote pupils' health and fitness. Some parents expressed concern that the range was limited, especially for pupils who did not like sport. The school agrees this provision needs reviewing, in order to meet a wider range of interests. There are not enough planned opportunities for pupils to practise and refine their skills in ICT by making use of those skills to support work in other subjects. The pastoral care and support of pupils is strong. They are valued and cherished as individuals, with all staff being firmly committed to their health and well-being. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous. All staff are trained in child protection issues and know the procedures to follow if they have concerns about a pupil. Risk assessments are thorough, both in and around school, and during off-site visits. Pupils appreciate how they can talk to a member of staff if they have any worries. As one commented, 'If we have any problems, we can talk to an adult and know we will be listened to and they will sort things out'. There are good links with outside agencies to provide extra support for individual pupils when needed. Parents are very pleased with the way the school cares for and looks after their children. Assessment information is not always used effectively to guide them to improving their work. This is particularly the case for pupils who are more able.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Staff are very aware of the needs of children of this age and, because of this, are able to tailor activities to meet individual needs. These activities are interesting, practical and much enjoyed by the children. This plays an important role in their good progress. Children are encouraged to make choices for themselves, which helps them develop as independent learners. They achieve well and, by the time they enter Year 1, a significant number of them are exceeding the levels expected of them in all areas of learning. The school keeps parents fully informed of the progress their children make. Children behave well, playing and working happily, either on their own or with others.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of assessment information to improve guidance to pupils and to plan work that always challenges them, especially for those who are more able.
- Develop a system to track the progress pupils make towards meeting their individual targets through the school.
- Provide more planned opportunities for pupils to improve their skills in information and communication technology in other subjects.

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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?	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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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 the 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?	2

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.

Annex A

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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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**

- 15 November 2007 Dear Pupils Inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury RC Primary School, Gillingham ME8 6JH Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school. I enjoyed meeting you and seeing the things you do. I found your school to be good. It helps you to achieve well, and attain standards by the end of Year 6 that are above average in English, mathematics and science. You are well taught. Your teachers want you to do well and usually give you interesting activities that make you think hard. However, sometimes your work is too easy and does not challenge you enough to improve your performance. There are not enough opportunities for you to develop your skills in information and communication technology in other subjects. You show positive attitudes to your work and are keen to learn. You behave well and are growing into mature and responsible young people. You enjoy your work and are kind and considerate to others. There are good opportunities within the curriculum to extend your learning. These include the out-of-school clubs you can join and the wide range of visits and visitors you experience. You told me you especially enjoy the many sports in which you can take part. All adults take good care of you and ensure you are safe while in school. You told me that if you have any worries or concerns you can talk to an adult and are confident you would be listened to. Your school is well run and the people in charge are working hard to make it even better. I would like to give a special word of thanks to the members of the school council who gave up their time to talk to me. The school is right to be proud of you. What I have asked your school to do now:
 - make better use of the information about how well you are doing to help you improve and to plan work that always makes you think hard
 - improve how it checks the way you are making progress to achieve your targets
 - give you more opportunities to improve your skills in information and communication technology by making better use of them in other subjects. You can help too by keeping up the good work you are doing. I hope you keep being kind and friendly to everyone you meet.Best wishes Melvyn Hemmings Lead Inspector