

# St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117477
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	326620
<b>Inspection date</b>	24 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Ian Jones

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.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	243
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	50
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Stella Milligan
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Mary Hewitson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	7 March 2006
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Highfield Letchworth Hertfordshire SG6 3QB

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<b>Age group</b>	3–11
<b>Inspection date</b>	24 March 2009
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**Telephone number**  
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- pupils' achievement, especially boys at Key Stage 1 and reading across the school
- the extent to which pupils understand Britain as a culturally diverse society
- the effectiveness of academic guidance in engaging pupils in learning
- how well the school tracks and monitors the progress of pupils, to raise standards.

Evidence was gathered from documents, observations of teaching and other aspects of school life, discussions with staff, pupils and school governors and parents' views. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors 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 this report.

## Description of the school

The school is situated in the town of Letchworth and serves a wide catchment area. It is of broadly average size. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. A larger than average number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. A small minority of pupils is at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. There is an average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including some with a statement of special educational needs. Most of these pupils have moderate learning, or speech, language and communication difficulties. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises an integrated unit where three- and four-year-old children are taught. A breakfast and lunch club, managed by the governing body, operates daily during term times. The school has achieved the Inclusion Quality Mark, an Eco Award, the Healthy Schools Award, the Sports Activemark and the Basic Skills 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

This is an outstanding school. It provides an excellent education, enabling pupils to make exceptionally good progress in their learning. This is mainly the result of purposeful leadership and a consistently high standard of teaching. Pupils' personal development is outstanding. A very large majority of the parents are very happy with the school. Typical of many comments was one from a parent who wrote, 'Saint Thomas More School has a wonderful ethos, where everyone is encouraged to care for one another, work together and enjoy being at school.'

When children start at the school they are assessed in some detail and this data shows that skills are broadly in line with national expectations. Careful monitoring of progress continues, and by the end of the Reception Year, children reach standards that are consistently above those expected. This outstanding progress continues throughout the school and by the time pupils leave the school their standards in English, mathematics and science are exceptionally high. In recent times, standards in writing were not as high as they could be. In response, the school successfully put in place a number of measures that continue to have a positive impact on the quality of pupils' work. The content of much of the writing has clearly improved. More interesting ideas and reasons for writing have encouraged pupils, especially the boys, to write more and to a higher standard. As a result, the proportion of pupils who attain higher levels in writing is now twice the national average. Standards in reading too have improved, especially at Key Stage 2, and pupils benefit from a wide and interesting range of activities that supports their progress and contributes very effectively to their enjoyment of learning. Pupils who find learning difficult, including those with speech, language and communication needs, make excellent progress, due to the high quality support they receive. The school has a number of pupils with English as an additional language. These pupils also make outstanding progress, achieving above average standards thanks to the high level of care and support they and their families receive.

The school makes good efforts to challenge the most able pupils, and work in lessons enables them to progress well. There are no significant differences in achievement between boys and girls or any other groups of pupils. The school's excellent tracking system is enhanced by regular discussions between the headteacher and staff. This in turn results in early interventions put in place to support any child that is seen to be falling behind. Occasional catch-up programmes, often carried out by the high quality teaching assistants, are very effective. Pupils appreciate the opportunities to learn and the voluntary early morning information and communication technology (ICT), English and mathematics sessions are popular and well attended.

The pupils are extremely well looked after and cared for. Safeguarding requirements are securely met and child protection procedures are robust. The breakfast and lunch clubs run by the school are effective in their support and care for children. Pupils say they are well cared for and they have adults they would trust to talk to if they had concerns or worries. In addition, the school provides them with good academic guidance and support. This helps pupils understand what they need to do to improve, although feedback to pupils is better developed in some years than others. In the best examples, pupils are clearly told how well they have done and what they need to do to improve. In some cases however, the pupils are not always clearly informed about the next steps in their learning. Older pupils assess their own work well and develop their understanding of learning by assessing each others' work. Target setting is challenging and as they get older, pupils have a good awareness of the level at which they are working.

Outstanding provision results in excellent personal development. Pupils show a great enjoyment of all aspects of school life and they talk enthusiastically about lessons, their teachers, after school clubs and the encouragement they are given to take on responsibilities. Through the school council, pupils have excellent opportunities to have their voice heard and to make a real difference to school life. They demonstrate an excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lives and keep safe. Their behaviour is exemplary in and out of lessons and they respond with great maturity to the interesting and challenging activities that are a regular feature of lessons. Attendance is well above average.

Pupils' exceptional achievement is the result of excellent teaching and learning. Teaching skills have continued to develop since the last inspection, with increased opportunities for staff to work together and spread good practice. The excellent curriculum is very effectively designed to ensure a thematic approach that supports pupils' development of skills across different subjects. During the inspection for example, pupils used ICT skills very effectively to explain how to make biscuits, showing a good range of presentation techniques and writing skills. A key feature of lessons is the extent to which pupils are involved in understanding what they need to do to learn. Pupils take responsibility for their own learning, showing much maturity in carefully planning how to approach work set and enjoying opportunities to collaborate on tasks using team building skills. Teachers' excellent relationships with the pupils encourages their outstanding attitudes to learning. The deployment of teaching assistants and other helpers is very effective in providing pupils with more time with an adult in small groups.

The success of the school is largely due to outstanding leadership and management. The headteacher provides the school with dynamic and clearly focused leadership. She is ably supported by the very effective senior leadership team and together they have ensured that the school has continued to flourish since the previous inspection. Mutual respect is clearly evident and all adults work closely together to ensure the best possible provision for the pupils. The monitoring and evaluation of the school's work has a clear impact on improving performance. The school is far from complacent however, and has a genuine desire to improve further. This is evident in the recent writing developments and the way the school has continued to progress since the last inspection. Accurate self-evaluation and the well-focused plans for the future indicate that the school has an outstanding capacity to improve. This judgement is supported by the work of the governing body. Governors have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is helped by a clear picture of the school, informed by regular monitoring and a thorough evaluation of pupils' progress. The school has a well-developed programme to promote community cohesion, based on a clear audit of its work. Very thoroughly, it looks beyond its religious character and effectively develops pupils' understanding of how others live, through a wide range of activities which focus on national and global issues, as well as close links with pupils of different backgrounds.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 1**

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Children settle happily into the Nursery and Reception classes and quickly become confident about class routines. Adults are very supportive and encouraging, and this develops children's confidence and independence. Children are looked after with utmost care and attention. There are positive relationships with parents and many regularly come into school to help. Parents are well informed about what their child will experience and learn. Transition arrangements from Reception to Year 1 are also good and this helps to ensure children continue to learn successfully. Children achieve well

because relationships are good and they are praised and encouraged for their efforts. By the end of the Reception Year, most children reach standards that are above the level expected for their age.

Teaching is outstanding. Literacy and numeracy skills are taught well. Children are taught letter sounds and names and the skills to develop early writing and reading are taught effectively. Whole-class sessions engage children, for example, in joining in with sharing a book, talking about characters and thinking of rhyming words. Children enjoy selecting their own activities and are given many opportunities to make their own choices across the areas of their learning. All adults are involved in assessing children's progress, and they make regular observations of what children can do. Planning fully reflects the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements and interesting activities are planned that develop skills across all areas of learning. The stimulating outdoor learning environment is used to advantage and meaningful links are consistently planned for children to practise their skills when working outdoors. The Early Years Foundation Stage team leader manages staff well and all adults work very effectively as a team.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure the consistency of written feedback to pupils, so that they are clear as to how to improve.

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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?	1
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	1

### Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

### Achievement and standards

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

<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
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	1
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	1

## The quality of provision

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

## Leadership and management

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

25 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Letchworth, SG6 3QB

You may remember my recent visit to your school. Thank you for helping me, I enjoyed watching lessons and talking to some of you. I especially enjoyed the superb Easter dance performed by some of the older pupils during assembly, well done! I think that you attend a very happy and friendly school. Excellent things about your school include the fact that:

- you make outstanding progress in your work
- you concentrate and behave very well in lessons
- you really enjoy all the things you do at school
- your headteacher, governors and teachers have very good ideas about ways to make the school even better
- teaching is outstanding and all the staff work hard to make lessons interesting
- your parents have a very good partnership with the school
- staff care for you really well and listen to you thoughtfully.

I have asked your school to look at how they can make things even better. The most important thing is to:

- give you better guidance through teachers' marking so that you are clear as to what you need to do to improve.

You can help by continuing to work hard and enjoy all the things you are learning at school.

Yours sincerely

Ian Jones

Lead inspector