

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	115180
Local authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	379028
Inspection dates	4–5 July 2012
Lead inspector	Raymond Lau

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 of pupils on the school roll	628
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Patricia Wilson
Headteacher	Christopher Birtles
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2007
School address	Ward Avenue Grays RM17 5RW
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Age group	4–11
Inspection date(s)	4–5 July 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Raymond Lau	Additional Inspector
Gillian Bosschaert	Additional Inspector
David Whiteside	Additional Inspector
Emily Simpson	Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspection team sampled 29 lessons, observing 21 teachers. Five lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. The team also conducted a series of brief observations of learning in classrooms and around the school. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, members of the governing body and staff.

Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at improvement plans, records and analyses of pupils' behaviour, the tracking of pupils' progress and examples of pupils' work. They looked at the school's attendance figures and monitoring information. They also analysed questionnaire responses from staff, pupils, and 115 parents and carers.

Information about the school

This school is larger than the average-sized primary school. Half of the pupils are from minority ethnic heritages and the other half are White British. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of pupils who are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs is below average.

The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. It holds the Quality Mark in basic skills, Healthy Schools status and Activemark accreditation, and has very recently gained the Artsmark award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good and improving school. St Thomas' is highly inclusive; this is evident in its strong ethos that places pupils at the heart of the school's operations. It is not yet outstanding because some teaching remains satisfactory rather than better, and attainment in mathematics is not as high as in English.
- Pupils from all backgrounds achieve well overall, and attainment is rising. Children join the school with limited skills and understanding. They make good progress, but it is more rapid in Key Stage 2, where teaching is stronger, than in reception and Key Stage 1. When pupils leave at the end of Year 6, attainment is broadly average in mathematics but above average in English.
- Good teaching is improving pupils' achievement. Teachers and support staff have strong relationships with the pupils. Staff have high expectations of the pupils and plan activities that meet the needs of most learners well. On occasions, the more-able pupils are not stretched enough when teachers do not use assessment information to fine-tune their lesson planning. Teachers do not always give pupils good guidance on how to improve their work, or ensure that they respond to the comments made in marking.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning and behave well, demonstrating respect for each other and towards staff. They have a good understanding of what constitutes safe and unsafe practices. Pupils clearly enjoy coming to school, as reflected in their consistently above-average attendance.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher take strong and decisive actions in managing performance and improving the quality of teaching. The good curriculum includes extended opportunities for pupils to enhance their strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, but does not yet maximise pupils' opportunities to develop their numeracy skills in different subjects.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By September 2014, raise attainment in mathematics to the above-average levels seen in English, by:
 - consolidating the improvements made to the teaching of mathematics this year
 - taking every opportunity to promote numeracy skills across the curriculum.

- By September 2014, ensure that teaching is good or outstanding across the school by:
 - sharing the most effective teaching and assessment practices among staff
 - ensuring that the marking of pupils' work is consistent in providing the next steps for improvement, and that pupils respond to the comments made
 - consistently challenging the more-able learners in lessons, to ensure that their progress is rapid and sustained over time.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

In lessons observed during the inspection, pupils were typically making good progress. Children enter reception with knowledge and skills that are typically below national expectations, particularly in communication and language skills. Through a varied range of activities, children develop their independence and social skills well, interacting with other children. In other areas of learning they have made satisfactory progress in the past, although they are now beginning to make better progress thanks to better quality teaching. In one lesson, children were learning to blend sounds together (phonics); with determination and increasing challenge, they made exceptional progress.

Attainment is also rising in Key Stage 1. Attainment in reading is average. In a Year 2 session, led by a skilful support assistant, less-able pupils made good progress when working on phonics blending the sounds to form well-constructed connectives. Pupils' progress accelerates in Key Stage 2. By the end of Year 6, attainment is broadly average in mathematics but consistently above average in English, including in reading. The work seen during the inspection and the school's unconfirmed national test results show that attainment has risen across all subjects this year, as a result of effective teaching across English and mathematics. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils made good progress while working highly collaboratively in processing and interpreting Venn diagrams to sort data.

Girls have achieved better than boys in the past, but the gaps are closing rapidly thanks to well-targeted intervention work and effective action taken by the school to improve the quality of teaching. Disabled pupils and those who have special

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educational needs make good progress, as do the minority ethnic groups. Parents and carers rightly feel that their children make good overall progress.

Quality of teaching

Teaching over time is good. It is most effective in Years 3 to 6. During the inspection, the large majority of teaching observed was good or better. Parents, carers and pupils support this view. Strong relationships fostered between staff and pupils are a real strength in helping pupils to learn. In the most effective lessons, the planning of well-sequenced activities meets the needs of all learners. The pace of lessons is brisk, encouraging pupils' attentiveness and promoting collaborative skills. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs achieve well thanks to the skills of well-deployed support staff. These aspects of teaching, along with good use of well-targeted questioning and assessment, enable pupils to make typically good progress. This was highly evident in a Year 5 English lesson. During the inspection, pupils had attended a trip, dressing as people living during the 'Tudor' period, and applied the knowledge gained from this visit to turn prose into a play script. The teacher modelled different responses that enabled pupils to subsequently achieve well.

Marking and the pupils' responses to this are usually good. While pockets of effective practice exist, the next steps to help the pupils in their learning are not always made clear. On occasions, even where this feedback is provided, pupils do not act upon this guidance.

The teaching of mathematics has improved across the school and this is accelerating pupils' achievement. In an outstanding example in Year 2, pupils were identifying numbers and using simple calculation techniques and strategies in solving some complex problems. Through the buzz and excitement for learning in a strong atmosphere of trust, pupils' well-developed social and collaborative skills and the exceedingly skilful support from the staff, pupils were able to make exceptional progress. Reading is taught well in all age groups, and individual and small group activities are led well by support staff.

During the inspection, a small minority of lessons were not as effective in promoting pupils' progress. On occasions, the teachers' explanations were longer than was necessary and the planned activities lacked challenge, particularly for the more-able pupils.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour is good. They are typically polite and respectful to each other in lessons and around the school. They are courteous to staff. They work particularly well in lessons when the teacher creates a culture for success that encourages pupils to be enthusiastic and work collaboratively. A small minority of pupils, parents and carers expressed some concerns regarding behaviour in lessons, and the way behaviour management systems are applied by staff. Just occasionally, where the

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teaching is not yet good, a few children are allowed to lose concentration by chatting and this inhibits learning.

The school is a very inclusive and caring environment. The 'nurture' group provides support to pupils who have behavioural and emotional needs, and helps them to develop more positive behaviour and attitudes to learning. There have been no fixed-term or permanent exclusions for some years. The school promotes positive behaviour through the personal, social, health and education curriculum. As a result of all these strengths, attendance is consistently above average.

The vast majority of parents, carers and pupils agreed that the school provides a safe environment. Pupils interviewed stated that bullying very occasionally occurs, but reported that the school tackles this appropriately. Pupils have a good awareness of what constitutes safe and unsafe practices and different types of bullying, in particular cyber-bullying. Pupils have strong moral views about the use of social networking websites. Some pupils act as members of the school council, and Year 6 in particular act as 'PALS' at lunchtime to support pupils in the dining area and at play. Pupils show concern for others when they raise money for local and national charities.

Leadership and management

The good strategic leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher, along with the assistant headteachers, has ensured greater accountability in managing and developing the quality of teaching and learning. A range of mentoring and coaching strategies and opportunities have had a clear impact in improving teaching, although this has not included enough opportunities to share best practice. There remains a minority of satisfactory teaching, and only a very small proportion is outstanding. The subject coordinators play a key role and are committed to improving the quality of provision. A sharp focus by the English and mathematics coordinators on developing the pupils' key skills has improved attainment and achievement during the course of the current academic year. The new leaders of the Early Years Foundation Stage, Years 1 and 2 have already taken swift and decisive action to improve the quality of provision, which is beginning to have an impact on pupils' outcomes in Year 2.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets pupils' needs well. English is a key strength, and the revised mathematics curriculum is helping to improve learners' enjoyment and achievement across the school. The pupils commented that themed days (such as a Roman day) support cross-curricular learning, but such planned opportunities to develop numeracy skills are not yet commonplace. Pupils' cultural development is promoted well. Provision for music is good. The school has its own orchestra and pupils have instrumental lessons. During the inspection, the choir were singing with energy and increasing accuracy. The sporting provision is strong, with noticeable successes at local level. The high uptake promotes the pupils' social and teamwork skills well. Their spiritual development is also promoted well through a strong school ethos and a religious education curriculum that supports the pupils'

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understanding of different faiths.

The governors play a proactive part, with a supporting and challenging role in holding the school to account. The school works particularly well with parents and carers, and has adapted its provision appropriately. For example, newsletters are now sent via email. Nevertheless, the school continues to work with all parents and carers to foster better relationships in supporting their children to learn. Strong partnerships with the local parish and other external providers further support the school's work. All safeguarding requirements are met.

The school has shown that it has a good capacity to make further improvements. Since the previous inspection, it has raised the quality of teaching across all key stages, sustained above-average attendance, and raised pupils' achievement in English. Improvements made in the teaching of mathematics are now improving pupils' attainment. The school addresses equality of opportunity well, and the way in which it tackles discrimination is good. Previous differences in achievement between groups of learners are decreasing. Support is given for trips and activities to ensure that the benefits for all pupils are maximised.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



6 July 2012

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School, Grays
RM17 5RW**

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We particularly appreciate the time spent by those of you who spoke to us, were interviewed or completed the inspection questionnaire. You go to a good school that is very caring and helps you to achieve well by the end of Year 6. These are some of the other things that impressed us most.

- The school is led well and is improving.
- Almost all of you enjoy coming to school, and this is reflected in your above-average attendance.
- The rich curriculum matches your interests well. Music and sports are particularly strong. Your good-quality artwork is displayed across the school.
- Despite the concerns a few of you expressed in the questionnaire about behaviour, we have judged that your behaviour is good and the school deals with any issues such as bullying appropriately.
- You demonstrate good attitudes to learning. You usually work at a good pace and support each other with your learning.

We have asked your headteacher and teachers to improve the school by ensuring that:

- you reach higher standards in mathematics across the school
- you make even faster progress in your learning in all year groups
- teachers always mark your work carefully, so you are clear about the next steps in your learning.

You can all help and play your part by continuing to work hard, behave well, enjoy your learning, and respond to the feedback given to you in your work. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Raymond Lau
Lead inspector

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