

St Thomas More Roman Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118769
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	313082
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Eileen Chadwick

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	393
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	P Machin
Headteacher	M S Williams
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2003
School address	Bleakwood Road Chatham ME5 0NF
Telephone number	01634 864701
Fax number	01634 687643

Age group	4-11
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2007
Inspection number	313082

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This large school serves a mixed area that includes the local parish as well as communities further afield. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is average. Pupils start school with a range of abilities but overall they are a little below the level expected. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school holds the Basic Skills Quality Mark, Inclusive Mark, Schools' FA Charter and Healthy Schools Award. The number on roll is higher than it was at the previous inspection.

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 with some outstanding features. Pupils' personal development, including their behaviour, is excellent and this is a springboard for all the school does. Pupils thrive both academically and personally and parents justifiably hold the school in high regard. As one parent commented, 'My children have loved attending St Thomas More, they have been exceptionally well cared for and we couldn't wish for a better school.' Central to this is the very good leadership of the headteacher, who is ably supported by staff and governors.

Pupils achieve well throughout the school. They make good progress in Reception and achieve the standards expected by the time they begin Year 1. Standards in Year 2 are beginning to rise and are now above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' progress in Key Stage 1 has accelerated because there have been improvements to teaching and systems for checking pupils' progress.

Pupils continue to make good progress in Key Stage 2 and by the end of Year 6, standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly well supported throughout the school and, by the time they leave, many reach the nationally expected standards. Pupils' good progress is as a result of good teaching and the interesting curriculum which motivates pupils to want to learn. However, there are a minority of lessons in Key Stage 1 when the challenge for more capable pupils slows. There is strong provision throughout the school in information and communication technology (ICT) and sport.

Provision for care, support and guidance is good. Outstanding pastoral leadership promotes a strong and caring Roman Catholic ethos and a sense of family in which all pupils feel valued. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils' great enjoyment of school is reflected in their good attendance. They are very proud of their school and make an excellent contribution to the community in their care for others and by helping others less fortunate than themselves. Pupils know how to stay safe and healthy. Partnerships with other schools, the church and outside agencies are excellent.

Assessment systems are good and help the school to know how well it is doing. The school knows itself well and has accurately identified its strengths and weaker areas. Demanding targets have been set for most pupils. However, in Key Stage 1 targets are too modest for more capable pupils compared with their standards at the end of Reception. The school is already working to build better continuity in children's learning and assessment across Reception and Year 1 and is aware that there is more work to do in this respect.

Leadership and management are good. Senior leaders provide strong leadership and the headteacher has successfully sought to give staff opportunity to monitor and manage their areas of responsibility. Issues from the last inspection have been effectively tackled and the school's record shows it has a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children are given a good start in Reception. Children arrive with skills that are generally below expectations, especially in communication, language and literacy. They make good progress through Reception so that they start Year 1 with standards that meet expectations in all areas including in speaking, reading, writing and mathematics. Teaching and the curriculum are good

and there are excellent opportunities for children to learn through talking and practical activity. They make excellent progress in developing their speaking, listening and personal skills. The Foundation Stage is well led and children thrive in a stimulating, happy and caring environment. Reception staff are a very effective team and planning makes sure that provision across two classes is consistently good. There are very thorough induction arrangements to make sure children settle readily into Reception. Staff go that extra mile to make sure good links are formed with the many playgroups that children attend before entering Reception. Checks on children's progress are very thorough and the impact of provision is effectively evaluated. The school is focusing on improving transition into Year 1 so that children's learning is not interrupted.

What the school should do to improve further

- Set more challenging targets for more capable pupils in Key Stage 1 and make sure they are always given demanding work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good. From a starting point that is generally below average children achieve well in the Foundation Stage and they begin Year 1 having reached nationally expected standards. They make good progress through Years 1 to 6 and standards are above average in English, mathematics and science by Year 6.

Standards in Year 2 have improved in the last two years after a dip. This reflects the school's focus on improving teaching in Key Stage 1. However, whilst most pupils now make good progress in Key Stage 1, there is still the occasional lack of challenge for more capable pupils.

In Key Stage 2, pupils' progress is good compared with their starting points. Pupils of all abilities do well. Consistently good teaching and 'catch up' programmes help pupils to redress any underachievement from when they were younger. Test results for Year 6 have been rising and have been above average in English, mathematics and science for several years. Staff training, challenging targets and rigorous assessment of pupils' progress are contributing to improving achievement. Throughout the school pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do particularly well because of the strong support they are given in English and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and the school's strong Roman Catholic ethos provides a secure framework for this. Their understanding of different cultures is enhanced by visitors from different backgrounds. Pupils show care and consideration for each other and feel very safe at school. They are particularly appreciative of the 'place-2-be', which helps them to deal with any emotional difficulties they may experience. They confidently cite examples of how to keep healthy and the healthy choices that are promoted in school. There are many quality examples of pupils' contributions to the community, including the way they initiate and conduct charity events. Year 6 pupils show sensitivity and maturity in their supervision of Reception pupils when they collect their coats during lunchtimes. Work skills, including teamwork and decision making, are embedded in the school day. Staff promote the importance of punctuality and appearance in relation to their future work roles. The consequences are evident in the pupils' pride in their appearance and in attending the school.

Pupils' good progress in acquiring literacy, numeracy and ICT skills prepares them well for their life ahead.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Children in Reception learn well because teachers provide a good blend between direct teaching and allowing children to explore and work independently. Throughout the school, excellent relationships between teachers and pupils as well as high expectations of good behaviour produce a climate where pupils work hard. There is a good balance for pupils to learn through instruction and through sharing ideas and working things out for themselves. Teachers' skilled use of practical resources and interactive whiteboards enliven learning. Teachers' planning is good overall but occasionally work does not challenge more capable pupils and the pace of their learning slows. Assistants are effectively used in supporting those who find learning difficult. Marking is good in English and mathematics and helps pupils to know what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve, although it is less consistent in other subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum in Reception is interesting and varied. Teachers plan a wide range of worthwhile and stimulating learning activities indoors and outside. In Years 1 to 6 the curriculum is well organised and meets pupils' needs and interests. Programmes for literacy, numeracy and ICT thoroughly promote pupils' basic skills. Music, sport and cross-curricular activities help to increase the breadth and relevance. A wide range of good quality extra-curricular activities enhances pupils' learning and their personal development. Partnership links with other schools and professionals greatly extend sporting activities. Close attention to the social and emotional aspects of learning has a very positive impact on behaviour. The school is currently improving the transition between Reception and Year 1 to minimise repetition of work already covered.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is high quality pastoral support in a family atmosphere and an attractive and safe environment. The school provides an excellent level of care and safety for all its pupils. Any vulnerable pupils are very well supported and there are excellent links with outside agencies to ensure they are given every opportunity to succeed. There are very good arrangements for making sure children settle into Reception and for easing their transfer to secondary school.

Systems for tracking pupils' progress are thorough and have recently been improved. School leaders use these meticulously for evaluating pupils' progress and the impact of provision on progress. Teachers too are becoming more skilled at analysing achievement. However, there is still a little inconsistency in making sure end of Reception assessments are used to plan the next steps in learning as children enter Key Stage 1. Individual target setting is established in English and mathematics and pupils can usually say what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The strong leadership of the headteacher in close partnership with the deputy headteacher and senior staff has provided clear direction since the last inspection. The headteacher has gathered, motivated and developed a team which shares her vision and sense of purpose. Good structures have been set in place to widen leadership responsibilities for subjects and key aspects across the staff. These include the appointment of a Key Stage 1 leader next term. The school has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and improvement planning is focused on outcomes for pupils. Leaders at all levels undertake monitoring of teaching and learning, giving the school an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of its provision. Rigorous evaluation of data has led to the school improving the way pupils' learning in Key Stage 1 builds on their skills gained in Reception. The steps being taken are now beginning to make a difference to pupils' progress. Target setting is satisfactory for Key Stage 1. Targets are demanding for most pupils but, compared with their attainment at the end of Reception, too modest for more capable pupils. The process of target setting is effective in Key Stage 2 with the school regularly adjusting pupils' targets to make sure they are demanding. Governors are well led by the chair who makes sure governors' skills are well deployed so the governing body provides good levels of challenge and support.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------

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 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?	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
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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 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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More Roman Catholic Primary School, Chatham, ME5 0NF

Thank you for your help when we visited your school. We felt very welcome and we enjoyed meeting you and thought you were very friendly and polite. You certainly seem to enjoy school. I now want to tell you what we found out about your school.

Firstly, you need to know you go to a good school where you make good progress. Here are some good things about your school:

- Your headteacher leads you all very well and your teachers and the school governors are working hard to make the school even better.
- You make good progress in English, mathematics and science.
- You have good opportunities to develop your information and communication technology (ICT) and sporting skills.
- Your behaviour is excellent and you are very helpful. This makes your school a happy one.
- You take pride in your school and work and are a credit to your school.
- Teachers take superb care of you and really help you with your learning.

This is what we are asking the school to change:

- Make sure those of you who are more capable are always given hard enough work.
- Target more of you to reach higher levels by Year 2.

I hope you will continue to enjoy school and work hard at using your targets so your work gets better and better.

Best wishes

Eileen Chadwick Lead inspector