

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122050
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	327631
Inspection dates	27–28 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Gulshan Kayembe

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 (total)	217
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms H Steadman-Powell
Headteacher	Mr A Agnew
Date of previous school inspection	22–23 May 2006
School address	Northampton Road Kettering NN15 7JZ
Telephone number	01536 512112
Fax number	01536 512112

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a Christian faith school drawing its intake from Catholic communities in and around Kettering. About a fifth of pupils, a significant increase from the time of the last inspection, are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Most of these pupils speak fluent English but a small proportion, largely Polish nationals, are at the early stages of learning English. The school has a broadly average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and a small number with disabilities. It has achieved the Healthy Schools Award. Staffing is now stable, following a difficult period in the recent past due to illness.

The school provides breakfast and after-school clubs which are managed by an external provider.

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 which provides a good education for its pupils. Standards are high and pupils' personal development is good. Parents are very happy with the quality of education provided and appreciate the difference the school makes both to their children's learning and their wider development. Pupils enjoy school and are happy to be here.

Pupils make good progress and standards are currently well above average at the end of Years 2 and 6. Progress has consistently been strong in reading, and targeted work to improve writing has ensured that pupils make very good progress in this. Pupils make good progress in mathematics, and especially so in Year 6, but progress across the school is uneven. In particular, girls' attainment is not as good as that of boys, and they say that they find mathematics difficult. The school is providing additional support through 'booster' sessions to help girls to improve their knowledge and confidence in mathematics. However, it has not yet examined its mathematics curriculum in sufficient depth to identify how this could be further developed to help improve the performance of girls through mainstream teaching. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds make good progress. Those who are beginning to learn English are well supported so that their English improves at a good rate. Higher attaining pupils are now achieving well, and much better than at the time of the last inspection.

Good teaching contributes to pupils' good progress. Teachers make sure they identify clear learning outcomes so that pupils know what they are expected to do. The school has worked hard, and very effectively, to develop robust systems for assessing and tracking progress. Pupils have individual targets for learning and there are good opportunities for them to assess their own and one another's work. However, marking, though regular, does not give enough guidance on improvement and therefore pupils are not always sure what they need to do to achieve their targets.

Pupils are well cared for and looked after. Good links with a wide range of agencies mean that their individual needs are well supported. Teaching assistants provide good support to those who find learning difficult so that they make good progress. There is sensitive and well-informed support for the few with disabilities. This reflects the very positive and caring ethos of the school. Within this positive atmosphere, pupils from a wide range of backgrounds learn to get on well with one another and to appreciate one another's differences. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in their good attendance and their keenness to join in activities in school. Pupils appreciate that people sometimes have difficult lives and this adds to their enthusiasm for raising money for a wide range of good causes both at home and abroad.

A good curriculum helps pupils to understand how to be safe and enables them to develop a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. Overall, pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next step in education through their excellent social skills and the high standards of literacy and numeracy that they attain. By the time they are in Year 6, they are mature and thoughtful youngsters with a good level of awareness of

the wider world. The school's Catholic ethos contributes significantly to their capacity to empathise with others and to reflect on life's deeper questions.

The school is well led and managed and there is an exceptionally strong and profitable partnership with governors. The work of the school is carefully monitored by staff and governors and this leads to an accurate understanding of how good it is. The good quality of self-evaluation has enabled the school to address the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report and, by improving key aspects of provision, to improve pupils' progress and standards of work significantly. Hence the capacity for further improvement is good.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage **Grade: 2**

Children currently in the Early Years Foundation Stage began school with skills and understanding that were broadly in line with those typical for their ages. They are making good progress and are on track to attain above average standards by the end of the year, especially in personal, social and emotional development, knowledge and understanding of the world, creative and physical development and some aspects of literacy and numeracy. However, standards are lower in aspects of literacy and numeracy such as writing, calculation, and shape and space. Nonetheless, children are making good strides in their learning and enjoying this stage of their education.

Good teaching ensures that children are provided with good-quality, well-planned activities. Practical work makes learning more meaningful and there is very good provision for role play and creative development. Occasionally, children need more encouragement and help to achieve the planned outcomes, for example to explore how they can compare shoe sizes in the 'shoe shop'. Children are quick to learn their letter sounds because they are taught well through very well paced and challenging games. However, opportunities for developing writing are sometimes missed. Support staff make a good contribution to teaching and help to ensure that children's work is well assessed.

With good oversight and support from the deputy headteacher, the Early Years Foundation Stage is well managed and led. Individual children's progress is tracked well but patterns in progress and attainment of the whole group are not always analysed in enough depth. There are good home-school links and parents are very happy with the provision their children receive.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the progress that pupils, especially girls, make in mathematics.
- Ensure that marking provides guidance to pupils on what they need to do to improve their work.

Achievement and standards **Grade: 2**

Pupils attained well above average standards in 2008 at the end of Years 2 and 6. Whilst past results in Year 2 have fluctuated between average and well above

average, those at the end of Year 6 show a generally good upward trend. Current standards in the school indicate that pupils' overall attainment is high. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds reach similarly high standards. The few at early stages of learning English make good progress in mastering the language. Their progress in mathematics is sometimes slower as they grapple with understanding the English used in questions, especially word problems. Overall, progress in mathematics, particularly in the area of problem solving, is not as consistently good across the school as progress in reading and writing. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are very well developed. They make good progress in science and are developing good levels of competency in using computers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good overall. Cultural development is not as strong as other aspects because pupils do not always understand the full extent of cultural and religious diversity across the United Kingdom. They do, however, show good awareness of linguistic diversity and are learning more from others in the school who originate from places as diverse as Europe, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Armenia, Mexico and Africa.

The school's Catholic ethos and respect for individuals mean that pupils' spiritual and moral development is good. Their social development is outstanding and behaviour is exemplary. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of safe practices and healthy lifestyles. They bring fruit to school as a snack, but lunchboxes are not always as healthy. Pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of clubs and teams. They make a good contribution to school, as Young Leaders organising play activities, helping in the school office, promoting recycling or working on the allotment. The school council plays a significant part in school decisions. Secure in the knowledge that the school respects their views, pupils express themselves with maturity and confidence both through discussion and in their responses to school surveys.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers identify clear learning outcomes and break down for pupils what they should be able to do by the end of the lesson in simple pupil-friendly language. This helps pupils to be clear about what they need to achieve and to know when they have done so. Questioning is good, and at times it is excellent in the way it probes and extends pupils' ideas. Support staff are used well in lessons and make a noticeable difference to pupils' learning. Activities are interesting and often of a practical nature. This engages pupils well. However, work is not always well matched to different needs with room for higher attainers to be challenged even more. Marking is detailed and offers lots of praise. It frequently identifies when pupils have achieved a personal learning target but too often does not tell pupils what they need to do to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well planned to meet the needs of all pupils. The local area is used extensively for visits and specialist contributions from parents, the church and agencies such as the police and fire service to broaden pupils' experiences. An excellent range of enrichment activities contributes well to pupils' personal development. They especially value theatre trips and residential visits. Pupils have good opportunities to take on responsibilities within school and to contribute to the local community. Increasingly, the curriculum includes topics to enhance pupils' grasp of cultural and faith diversity in Britain. The school is currently looking to form a partnership with another school in a contrasting area of Britain. Links with Uganda and developing ones with a school in India are extending pupils' understanding of other world cultures. The curriculum is well planned so that all subjects emphasise the importance of reading and writing skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All aspects of safeguarding and child protection are in place and regularly reviewed. Pupils are taught about safe procedures when using the internet and fire and road safety. The school works well with other agencies to support pupils. Individual needs are well diagnosed. Pupils who find learning difficult receive good support in lessons and this promotes their progress well. The rare incidents of bullying are dealt with promptly and effectively. Pupils feel safe in school and are confident they would find support if a need arose. Parents' views confirm that this is a supportive school which cares for all children as individuals.

Since the last inspection, the school has developed good systems to track pupils' progress. Pupils record learning targets in their work books, but in some classes these are not revised often enough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides good leadership and works effectively with staff and governors to set a clear direction for development. Governors' support for the school, especially during the staffing difficulties, has had a very positive impact on improvement since the last inspection. Overall, they acquit their roles outstandingly well. The headteacher and deputy headteacher work closely together to provide a clear lead and good support to individual staff members. Middle leaders, including subject leaders, provide sound oversight of their areas. Many staff are new to management roles and these are being actively developed, including development of skills in monitoring. However, there is a good sense of moving forward together and the school's key aims are well understood. Senior staff make good use of data analysis to set challenging targets and maintain a good overview of the school's performance. Community cohesion is well promoted. The school has clearly identified the school's needs and has a working plan to improve, in particular, links with other communities across Britain. Community cohesion in the school and the local community is strong.

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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?	2
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 is 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	1
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

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.

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	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	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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	1

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?	2

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?	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	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



29 April 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Kettering, NN15 7JZ

We enjoyed visiting your school, and in particular we enjoyed talking to you. We would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome. The school gives you a good education. Teaching and learning, the curriculum, and support and guidance are good because the school is well led and managed. You make good progress and reach high standards. As a result, you are exceptionally well prepared for your next school.

These are some of the best things about the school.

- You leave school as well-rounded, confident and thoughtful young people.
- Children in Reception get an enjoyable start to their education and learn a lot.
- You make particularly good progress in reading, writing, and speaking and listening.
- There is always a good atmosphere in lessons – you concentrate on your work and don't waste time but, at the same time, you enjoy what you are doing.
- Relationships with staff are excellent and you get on exceptionally well with one another.
- Your headteacher leads the school well and is well supported by staff.

There are a few things that the school can do to improve further:

- help to increase your confidence in mathematics, especially for girls, so that you become better at solving problems
- make sure you are given good guidance on how to improve your work.

It was very nice to meet you and we wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Gulshan Kayembe
Lead inspector