



St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123206
Local Authority Oxfordshire
Inspection number 281429
Inspection date 9 October 2006
Reporting inspector Sean O'Toole

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Oxford Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Kidlington
Age range of pupils	3-11		OX5 1EA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01865 373674
Number on roll (school)	193	Fax number	01865 849821
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr James Ryan (Acting)
		Headteacher	Mrs Claire Robinson
Date of previous school inspection	12 June 2000		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Pupils come from a wide variety of economic backgrounds and few are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and statements of special educational need is below average. The majority of pupils have White British heritage and about 15 per cent are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Six pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The school went through a turbulent time following the previous inspection with staff changes and a decline in standards.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

One parent summed up the high quality education provided by this outstanding school, writing, 'It has the wonderful ability to treat all children as individuals and meet their needs on a day-to-day basis not just educationally but emotionally and spiritually'. Exceptional leadership and management underpin all aspects of the school's work and have led to impressive test results at the end of Year 6 which are among the top five per cent in the country in English, mathematics and science. Equally as important, the achievement of pupils of all abilities and backgrounds is outstanding.

These successes are the result of high calibre teaching and learning and an excellent curriculum which prepare pupils exceptionally well for the future. Right from the start in the Foundation Stage, the children thrive in an atmosphere where learning is fun. As a result, by the end of their Reception year, most children attain the expected goals for their age in all areas of learning, and a good proportion exceeds them. Children are especially successful in personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. These qualities provide the springboard for later learning and enable pupils to go on to develop outstanding personal skills which equip them to become responsible and caring citizens. Their excellent understanding of how to live healthily and stay safe is deepened through their commitment to extra-curricular activities including sport, music and art.

The headteacher has won the hearts and minds of staff, governors and parents and created a high-performing team. Their willingness to try new approaches to teaching, assessment and the curriculum has helped to lift the quality of learning. More remains to be done to ensure consistency in the marking of pupils' work and setting of targets so that pupils know what to do next to improve. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation by the headteacher have led to substantial improvement in all areas since the previous inspection and the school is in a very strong position to build on its success.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure consistency in the marking of work and setting of targets so that pupils are clear about what they need to do next.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Among the reasons why boys and girls of all abilities and ages achieve outstandingly well is the use of assessment to identify their needs. Children start school with a wide range of abilities; overall, attainment on admission is broadly average. Their start in the Foundation Stage enables the children to become competent in all of the areas of learning and especially confident in their personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy by the end of the Reception year. By building on this thorough grounding the pupils attain above average standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2.

Another reason why the pupils thrive, is the outstanding quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum. As a result, standards by the end of Year 6 are among those of the top performing schools in English, mathematics and science. These successes are not just a flash in the pan. High standards have been maintained for several years. But this school is not just about attaining impressive test results; at its heart is the belief that all pupils can achieve success. This is illustrated in the support for those with learning difficulties, most of whom attain average standards by the time they leave the school. As one parent wrote, 'The school is very child focused. There is no special agenda, for example, academic excellence at any cost'. Those who start school with little English make rapid gains in their learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils have excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural qualities. They are very positive about all aspects of school life and know that their views and feelings are respected. Attendance is good. From their time in the Foundation Stage pupils show a love of learning and clearly enjoy the challenges provided. Throughout the school, pupils are hard-working, highly motivated and proud of their own and others' achievements. Their eager response in lessons and desire to please their teachers result in high quality work.

Because everyone has a 'voice' there is a sense of mutual respect; bullying or rough play are rare. The peer mediators, buddies and school councillors take responsibility very seriously and have been influential in improving the playground and developing healthy lifestyles. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. They have high levels of competence in literacy and numeracy and their mature attitudes and exemplary behaviour equip them well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

'If you find the work difficult someone always helps you,' said a Year 6 girl. This statement sums up what is typical of the outstanding teaching in this school. Lessons are planned to take account of everyone's needs. This is exceptionally effective for those with learning difficulties, where high calibre support ensures that pupils are successful. Staff use a wide variety of methods and techniques to make learning effective; they are especially good at asking questions which get the pupils thinking. Encouragement, high expectations of behaviour and tasks which challenge are the essential ingredients of most of the teaching and such approaches inspire confidence in the pupils. Another reason for successful learning lies in the use of specialist teachers for physical education and music.

Pupils' work and the lessons seen show that teaching is never less than good. In some classes, but not all, the marking is outstanding and pupils are left in no doubt about what they need to do to improve. In these classes pupils also have sharply focused targets which spur them on to succeed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum reflects the school's commitment to enriching the lives of all pupils through stimulating and challenging experiences. Children in the Foundation Stage benefit from a stimulating curriculum which includes lots of practical experiences and opportunities to explore and investigate. The pupils' basic skills in English and mathematics are enhanced substantially by the vibrant and wide-ranging opportunities to apply what they have learned to their work in other subjects. Numerous well attended extra-curricular activities enhance learning and promote pupils' skills in sport, the arts and dance.

The curriculum is inextricably linked to promoting the pupils' personal development. Circle times, lessons about relationships and opportunities through the Junior Citizenship programme contribute much to preparing pupils for their role in society. As one pupil said, 'We learn lots about how to care for others and to look after ourselves'. An outstanding feature is the link with countries around the world, which contributes much to pupils' cultural and social understanding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

One parent summed up this aspect of the school's work, writing, 'The staff have helped my son tremendously by spending quality time on his academic nurturing'. The school not only has well crafted policies to ensure the pupils' health, safety and child protection but also responds calmly and sensitively to the physical and pastoral needs of all. High levels of support and encouragement inspire confidence in parents and their children. The vulnerable are looked after very effectively. All staff know the pupils well and keep detailed records of their academic progress. They make sure that individual and small group support is well focused. They involve parents in all aspects of their children's development. A parent with a child with learning difficulties commented, 'Since starting at this school he is a totally different child and that has transformed our family life'. This excellent rapport with parents and their children helps to ensure that care, support and guidance are outstanding.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The children are at the heart of this school. Led by an outstanding headteacher, the staff and governors share a common vision based on providing education of the highest quality rooted in the school's Christian traditions. These principles are reflected in the

vibrant and purposeful atmosphere which pervades the classrooms. One parent, reflecting the views of many, wrote, 'The headteacher is inspirational and continues to take the school from strength to strength'.

One of the hallmarks of the school's success is a refusal to accept second best. The rigorous use of performance data to determine priorities is a characteristic of how the senior staff work. They have undertaken a highly competent evaluation of the school's work. Any hint of underachievement is tackled robustly and subsequent actions are evaluated rigorously. Management at all levels works exceptionally well. The headteacher and her staff are ambitious for every pupil and pursue high quality relentlessly. They listen to parents and pupils, reflect on their own practice and adapt their methods wherever appropriate. As a high-performing team they are forward thinking and keep track of initiatives and their impact on teaching and achievement. Governors play their part effectively and offer much support. Their role in monitoring provision and standards is developing. They have a good understanding of why the school is so successful.

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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ 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 disabilities make progress	1

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 behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	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

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	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

Thank you for your friendly welcome to St. Thomas More's. I was sorry to have only one day in your school because there was so much to see. It was obvious from talking to you that you love coming to school and really enjoy lessons, extra activities and the residential trips. You help to make the school special. I was impressed by the high standards of behaviour and the ways in which you show care and concern for others. Your parents also thought that this was one of the best things about your school. The peer mediators, school council and buddies all do a fantastic job in helping to make your school a happy place.

Your school is outstanding which means that it is a really good place to learn and a fun place to be. Many of you said, and I agree, that you feel happy and safe, and that there are always interesting things to do. The adults do a wonderful job in caring for you and in helping you to be successful. Your test results are among the best in the country and much of this is due to the combination of your hard work and some outstanding teaching. I have asked the headteacher and staff to look at ways of making some lessons even better by making sure that you know your targets and that when your books are marked they give you good advice about how to improve. You can help with this by reading their comments carefully and doing your best to carry them out.

You have really good attitudes to each other and to the adults working with you. One girl told me that, 'You can have a laugh with the teachers but we all respect them'. It was a pleasure meeting you all and I hope that you will always be as happy at school.

Yours sincerely

Sean O'Toole

Lead Inspector