

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Horseshoe Lane West, Mewsey, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 2SX

Inspection dates 11–12 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- This school is loved by parents, pupils and staff alike. Pupils thrive in its caring ethos, and feel safe and happy. Pupils from all faiths and heritages feel welcome and included.
- The school develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural qualities exceptionally well. As a result, pupils are extremely thoughtful and caring to one another.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils enjoy learning and concentrate hard on their tasks.
- Pupils achieve well during their time at the school. Attainment is well above average. Pupils throughout the school make strong progress in their learning. This reflects the good quality of teaching over time.
- Teaching is good, enabling all groups to make similar progress, so that no group falls behind.
- Pupils benefit from good links between subjects, enabling them to learn about different aspects of topics.
- Teachers work well with their assistants. Questioning is a strength of the teaching.
- Children in the Reception classes have a varied and inviting range of activities and learn well.
- Leaders and managers work well together to plan for future improvements. Their plans cover the right priorities. They check the progress of all pupils carefully.
- Governors are enthusiastic and effective in supporting school leaders.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has not stood still but is focused on improvement. Pupils now take more responsibility for managing their own learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Teachers occasionally do not set tasks with sufficient challenge for pupils of varying abilities, and progress slows for some pupils.
- Marking does not always help pupils to understand how to improve.
- Though leaders check the quality of teaching carefully, their guidance to teachers does not always focus sharply enough on how well pupils are learning, and on how to improve their learning.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 28 lessons across a range of subjects, many observed jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, looked at samples of their work and attended assemblies.
- Meetings were held with: leaders and managers; pupils; the Chair, Vice-Chair and four other members of the governing body; and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors took account of the views of staff in 25 questionnaires.
- There were 107 responses to Parent View, the online survey of parents and carers. Inspectors considered these, and also three letters from parents and carers.
- Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents including: the school's own views of how well it is doing; its plans for the future; information on pupils' attainment and progress; safeguarding information; records relating to behaviour and safety; and the governing body minutes.

Inspection team

Natalia Power, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Victoria Turner

Additional Inspector

Steve McGuinness

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Thomas of Canterbury is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Around one pupil in 10 is known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides schools with additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, and for those with a parent in the armed services. This proportion is less than half the national average. At St Thomas, nearly all the pupils eligible for the pupil premium are those eligible for free school meals.
- Almost half of pupils come from a wide range of minority ethnic heritages, and this proportion is higher than usual. Around one pupil in five speaks English as an additional language, and this proportion is a little higher than the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action is a little lower than average, as is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate progress for all pupils so that it is outstanding, by:
 - making sure that pupils are always fully engaged in their learning with a suitable level of challenge for pupils of all abilities
 - ensuring that marking in all subjects offers pupils helpful guidance on how they can improve, and offers them chances to show in their written responses that they are making progress.
- Ensure that much teaching is outstanding, with nothing less than good, by:
 - offering teachers clear guidance on how they are doing and what they need to do to improve
 - making sure at all times that that their focus is on how well pupils are learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' overall achievement is good. Their attainment throughout the school is considerably above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils make at least the progress expected of them, and many do better. However, over the past three years, slightly fewer pupils than previously have made more than expected progress between Year 2 and Year 6, and this is why pupils' achievement is judged to be good rather than outstanding.
- Children learn well in the Reception Year. This is because they are given creative activities with a strong focus on teaching them to read, write and use number skills confidently.
- Good teaching ensures that pupils continue to make good progress from Year 1 to Year 6. No group lags behind. This reflects the school's commitment to equal opportunities, making sure that all have the chance to do well.
- The large proportion of pupils from a wide range of minority ethnic heritages are supported well and make good progress in line with others. Those who speak English as an additional language are given effective support and quickly catch-up and, in many cases, do better than others.
- The school is responsive in putting in place additional support for disabled pupils and those with a range of special educational needs. As a result, these pupils make good progress in line with others. As one parent told inspectors, 'Staff and pupils expect my child to be included in all aspects of school life, and he has learnt to have high expectations of himself.'. This reflects the school's extremely strong commitment to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school fosters in pupils a love of reading, and they told inspectors that they enjoy reading for pleasure. Pupils are effectively taught sounds and letters and how they come together to form words (phonics). Consequently, Year 1 pupils did very well in the 2012 phonics screening check. The strong focus on reading is sustained throughout the school and recent test results for the current Year 6 cohort show that two thirds gained Level 5 in reading.
- Pupils eligible for additional funding through the pupil premium achieve well. They make similar progress to others in the school, and the gap between their attainment and that of others is much narrower than is found nationally. Recently published national figures for pupils currently in Year 6 show that there was hardly any gap between the attainment in both English and mathematics of the small proportion of pupils eligible for the additional funding and that of others in the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching over time is good because it enables pupils to make strong progress in their learning.
- Most lessons move briskly and purposefully, and pupils make good progress because they are clear about what they are expected to do. For example, in one Year 3 English lesson, where pupils were set the task of writing a leaflet, the teacher provided plenty of chances for pupils to manage their own learning. This helped them to check for themselves how well they were learning and what steps they still needed to take. Such careful planning led to their writing high-quality leaflets.
- Teachers question pupils well, encouraging them to think for themselves. They frequently draw pupils' names at random, and this keeps pupils on their toes, as they do not know in advance if they will be selected to answer.
- Pupils are frequently encouraged to comment on how well they and their classmates are doing, and this helps them to find out for themselves how to improve. The school's policy in marking pupils' books is to provide guidance on how to improve, and to encourage pupils to respond to the marking to show that they have understood what they need to do. Where this policy is followed, it is effective in enabling pupils to make fast progress. However, such high-quality marking is not always used in all classes and in all subjects.

- Teachers often give pupils chances to make links between different subjects and in this way to benefit from rich learning experiences. In one Year 2 lesson seen, pupils made use of their learning of the seasons to debate the merits of summer and winter. This task was hugely enjoyed by the pupils, and they all rose to the challenge.
- Children learn well in the Reception classes because the indoor and outdoor areas are used imaginatively to stimulate their learning of language and number skills, and to help them to share tasks and talk with one another.
- Most teaching provides pupils with stimulating tasks that engage their interest. For instance, in one absorbing Year 4 religious education lesson, pupils were put into six groups and given the same challenge as the legendary blind Hindu scholars of describing an elephant from its varying parts. Their thoughtful answers showed that they made rapid progress because they thoroughly enjoyed the task, and were given plenty of opportunities to discuss ideas with their classmates and find things out for themselves. This quality of teaching is typical of much of the teaching seen during the inspection.
- However, there are isolated occasions where pupils make slower progress. This happens when pupils spend too long on whole-class activities, or are kept waiting while the teacher goes through work intended for only a few.
- Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, helping them individually and in small groups, and working with pupils of all levels of ability, including those with a range of additional needs, to enable all to make good progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' outstanding behaviour comes in large part from the calm and welcoming ethos of the school, where each child and adult is valued. In this happy and inclusive environment, pupils are eager to learn, and this is seen from the earliest years. Inspectors enjoyed seeing children in the Reception classes explaining to their classmates whether the temperature, as predicted on the BBC website, would be hotter or cooler than the day before.
- Pupils' exemplary behaviour reflects the school's extremely strong commitment towards their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's spiritual values are seen in the wealth of shared experiences that the pupils are offered. For example, music makes a strong contribution to their social skills, and it was lovely to see groups of pupils in the hall concentrating hard in creating sound effects for a spooky play with a range of musical instruments.
- Pupils are polite and highly considerate towards others. One parent told inspectors that 'the children look out for one another'. Pupils told inspectors that pupils are rarely unkind to one another and that there is no actual bullying such as racist or cyber-bullying. They reported that, if they have any concerns, they knew which adult to turn to. As a result, they feel very safe in school.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. They understand road safety and the risks from fire, or from unguarded communication with strangers, in person and online.
- Almost all parents and carers who spoke to inspectors, or responded to the online survey of parents' and carers' views, agreed that their children are safe and happy at the school, and one spoke for many in describing St Thomas's as a 'warm-hearted school'.

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership and management are good because school leaders, working closely with governors, ensure that teachers teach well and pupils learn well. The headteacher, ably supported by his deputy, has created a happy and harmonious school. In their uniformly positive responses to the staff questionnaire, and in discussion with inspectors, staff showed that they feel valued and supported.
- Parents and carers spoke to inspectors of good communications between school and home.

They valued the helpful website and the informative newsletters to parents and carers.

- Leaders and managers are focused on school improvement. They check pupils' progress carefully, so that no group falls behind. They know their school well. Plans for future improvement, drawn up in conjunction with governors, cover the right priorities and, in most cases, have a clear and achievable timetable for implementation. However, plans for improving the consistency of marking across all classes have been a little too slow in taking full effect.
- Aspects of the school's work have improved since the previous inspection. Pupils now take more responsibility for checking the quality of their own learning, and for contributing their thoughts and words in drawing up the school's golden rules. Because of this forward movement, the school is well placed to improve further.
- School leaders support their teachers well, and ensure through regular classroom observations that teaching is good overall. However, the advice to teachers on how to improve occasionally errs on the side of generosity, and lesson observations sometimes focus too much on describing how the teachers are teaching rather than on how well the pupils are learning. As a result, pupils occasionally make slower progress in their learning than they might. Leaders and governors use the information from the leaders' careful monitoring to decide on the teachers' movements up the salary scale to ensure good value for money.
- The local authority provides light-touch support for this good school.
- The school keeps pupils safe and ensures that those who work with them have been properly checked.
- The curriculum prepares pupils well for the next stage of schooling, and offers pupils a good range of experiences beyond the classroom, including many exciting outings, clubs and sporting activities. The long-standing links between St Thomas's and Busenya Primary School in Uganda help pupils to have a strong understanding of the world around them. The school uses modern technology in creative ways to promote learning, such as by encouraging pupils to use PowerPoint to illustrate prayers for those about to leave the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The committed governing body takes an active interest in the school and works supportively with school leaders and staff. Governors take part in regular tours of the school to see its work for themselves. The governing body is kept well informed about how pupils are doing through detailed headteacher's reports. Minutes of meetings show that governors are ready to ask searching questions about the link between teachers' pay and the progress that pupils are making, and this ensures good value for money. Governors have a good understanding of comparative figures on how well pupils at St Thomas's are doing against their peers nationally. They accept, however, that they are not always familiar with figures on the proportions of pupils making more than expected progress, in order to ensure that the school takes firm action to accelerate their progress. They also have a working knowledge of the quality of teaching and where it needs to improve. Governors keep a firm hand on the school's budget. They carefully check the uses to which pupil premium funding is put, making sure it benefits those for whom it is intended. As a result, pupils eligible for this additional funding generally do as well as others in the school. Governors are well trained, attending courses on safeguarding and frequently joining staff in their in-house training. They effectively carry out their statutory duties, including safeguarding and ensuring equality of opportunities.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	125291
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	412001

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	427
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ben Marlow
Headteacher	Kevin Gawley
Date of previous school inspection	6 March 2008
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