

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Creswick Lane, Grenoside, Sheffield, S35 8NN

Inspection dates

11–12 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Skilful leadership; effective governance; the strong influence of the Catholic Diocese of Hallam; as well as good input from the local authority, underpin the school's success.
- Pupils' achievements, the quality of teaching, leadership and management, and governance have all moved from inadequate to good, which is a great accomplishment. The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage has also improved from satisfactory to good over the same period of 18 months.
- The latest academic tracking data indicates that the accelerated progress now evident throughout the school and over the past 12 months in particular, is set to continue.
- The school has weaned itself off the intensive support it was subject to and now operates effectively and efficiently on its own.
- The areas the school was charged with improving at the previous inspection have been tackled well and quickly.
- Pupils with special educational needs and those who are supported by the pupil premium make good progress.
- The school has cultivated a welcoming and inclusive ethos with very positive relationships between pupils and staff, and among pupils.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils feel safe and secure. They are polite, considerate and respectful, routinely exhibiting the Christian values the school endorses. Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is effectively promoted.
- The school has benefitted from effective partnerships which have helped its progress.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The impact of the school's work in some aspects requires further improvement, such as attendance and outdoor provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Not every pupil's progress is yet good or better, and not all of their attainments are high, especially in writing. With the need to achieve this consistency, despite the big gains made, the school remains on a journey towards being an outstanding provider of education.

Information about this inspection

- When the school was inspected in December 2011, it was judged to require special measures. Since then, one of Her Majesty’s Inspectors and additional inspectors have visited the school four times to monitor its progress.
- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in each of the school’s seven classes twice, including the Early Years Foundation Stage provision. Nearly all of these were joint lesson observations with either the headteacher or the deputy head teacher.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, evaluated the quality of the work in a range of pupils’ books. Inspectors watched an assembly, and saw staff delivering sessions to develop and improve pupils’ literacy skills, particularly their writing.
- Meetings or discussions were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher; two groups of pupils; a local authority representative; three members of the governing body; and a Catholic Diocesan representative. Inspectors also met with the Early Years Foundation Stage leader.
- Inspectors analysed the school’s own pupil and parent questionnaires. There were insufficient responses available on the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) for the lead inspector to access.
- The inspection team examined a range of school documentation including: safeguarding and child protection arrangements; improvement strategies; records of lesson monitoring and checks on pupils’ learning and progress; and the minutes of meetings, including those of the governing body. Inspectors also looked at records relating to behaviour and attendance.
- The inspectors considered the school’s arrangements for making best use of the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, those whose parents are in the armed forces and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.

Inspection team

John Young, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Doreen Davenport

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- At this smaller than average-sized primary school the large majority of pupils are White British. The remaining small numbers of pupils originate from a wide range of minority ethnic heritages.
- The proportion of pupils who are believed to speak English as an additional language is low.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is lower than average. This is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children in the care of the local authority or children with a parent in the armed services).
- The proportions of pupils supported at school action, school action plus or who have a statement of special educational need are higher than national averages. Their needs range from Autistic Spectrum Disorders to physical disabilities, and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- All of the pupils are educated at the school and none receive alternative provision.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure all pupils' achievement is outstanding by:
 - improving all pupils' progress, especially those that are not yet making consistently good or outstanding progress, such as Year 3 pupils
 - further improving the quality of writing throughout the school so that pupils' attainment is consistently high when compared with national age-related expectations.
- Taking steps to ensure the quality of teaching becomes outstanding throughout the school by:
 - building on the success of current strategies to further improve the consistency, quality and impact of all teachers' practice
 - ensuring outdoor provision matches the good provision indoors, in the Early Years Foundation Stage and is more conducive to the continuous provision of all aspects of the curriculum.
- Improve pupils' rates of attendance and reduce levels of persistent absence by:
 - introducing more effective procedures and strategies to raise attendance, especially among those pupils who are persistently absent
 - helping parents to understand the negative impact poor attendance can have on their children's education and encourage them to support the improvement strategies introduced.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Most pupils' good achievement in reading, writing and mathematics in the school is reflected in their high attainment by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 in 2013. Pupils' rapid progress over the past 18 months has enabled them to overcome the underachievement that saw the school plunge into special measures. This is the case for all of the groups in the school, including minority ethnic pupils, those who attract pupil premium funding, disabled students and those with special educational needs.
- There has been a big rise in the ratios of pupils gaining the highest levels in Year 2 and in Year 6. While the current Year 6 journey has been a particularly impressive one, improving their attainment from broadly average at the end of Year 2, to well above average at the end of Year 6. Indeed, 96% of them gained Level 4 or better in both English and mathematics in their SAT's! In addition, 100% of them made the expected progress from their starting points in reading and writing and 92% in mathematics.
- Progress in Years, 1, 4 and 5 is also strong, with substantially increased numbers working at and beyond age-related expectations.
- Pupils' read widely, confidently and often. They enjoy reading and have benefited from a more systematic and whole-school approach to developing their reading skills. Investment in a commercial package has paid dividends. So too have: the extra reading resources, picked to appeal more to pupils' interests; more focused one-to-one support; guided reading; and the encouragement of more home reading.
- Pupil premium funding is being used effectively to raise the achievement of the targeted groups through a series of on-going initiatives designed to boost pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics and improve their attendance, behaviour and their attitudes to learning.
- More rigorous target setting and assessment, and focused intervention by staff, have supported the improvements evident throughout the school, and are producing more reliable data from which staff are more-precisely tracking and evaluating each pupil's progress.
- School data, which has been moderated, and inspector's observations, indicate that the large majority of children in the Reception class have made accelerated progress from their starting points, which are usually in line with expectations for their age. Children in Reception learn fast and by the time they move up to Year 1, their overall development is often beyond the expectations for their age.
- Pupils' achievement is not outstanding because there are variations in the performance of some pupils' and subjects. For example, Year 3, pupils' learning and progress requires improvement, and standards are not yet consistently high in writing across the school.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Most of the teaching in the school is good with elements that are outstanding, which is reflected in the good and better progress that most pupils are making in reading, reading and mathematics throughout the school. Inspectors also saw effective delivery of music, physical education, religious education, art and geography. There is a small amount of less effective teaching, which have slowed pupils' progress.
- Staff are conscientious and committed to school improvement. They have embraced and benefitted from the training, coaching and mentoring they have received and it has increased their effectiveness significantly.
- Typically, classrooms are a hive of activity with engaging activities that stimulate pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of key concepts and skills in a range of subjects effectively. Clear success criteria, skilful questioning and progressive challenge, help to ensure all pupils are stretched and know what is expected of them. Staff bring learning to life, with themes pupils can immerse themselves in like Pirates of the Caribbean, and Aboriginal culture.

- Most Staff have grown ambitious for the pupils and expectations are high. However, pupils in Year 3 would benefit from greater consistency and further embedding of their key learning skills.
- The deployment and use of teaching assistants has improved over time and they invariably provide effective intervention to support groups and individual pupils' learning.
- Effective marking and feedback is embedded. Pupils know how well they are doing, what precisely they can do to improve further. They are praised and their misconceptions corrected.
- Teaching in the Reception class is effective and supports children's good learning and progress. Careful planning, accurate assessment and a good balance between child-initiated and teacher-led activities, together with a wealth of visits, visitors and events, stimulates children's curiosity and makes life varied and exciting. In this context, children thrive. They relish being creative, developing their thinking and social skills and exploring the interesting indoor environment.
- Staff realise that the outdoor area does not match the quality of the indoor area, and that this can inhibit the opportunities for continuous provision of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.
- Teaching is not yet outstanding because its impact is not consistently of the highest standard in every classroom. The school understand that the challenge they face is to build on the success of current strategies to further improve the consistency, quality and impact of all teachers' practice, and to narrow the gap between the most and least effective teaching in the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils are polite and courteous. The school is a happy and welcoming place in which pupils, including those deemed more vulnerable than others are made to feel safe and secure. Pupils told inspectors that they 'love coming to school', and believe that staff really 'look out for them'.
- Most pupils, including those who have special educational needs, have positive attitudes to learning and conduct themselves well in lessons and at social times. There are few reports of racial taunting, homophobic or cyber bullying, and pupils say behaviour has improved a lot.
- Staff manage pupils' behaviour well and stick to the agreed procedures for diffusing and challenging any instances that arise. Their consistency of approach helps to ensure pupils are not confused by staff applying differing tolerance levels. The school's religious character, the effective strategies used, and a determination to promote harmony in the school has resulted in a big reduction in the levels of permanent and fixed-term exclusions, or referrals for detentions.
- Pupils are aware of the potential risks they face and know how to keep themselves and others safe. They are confident that if they had an issue staff would help them to 'sort it out'.
- Most of the parents who completed the school's own questionnaire agree that behaviour is good, well managed, and that their children are safe and happy at the school.
- Pupils' attendance is somewhat of an Achilles heel; it has risen a little, but despite the school's efforts it still requires improvement. Punctuality is better, but rates of persistent absence are a concern. The school accept that they need to be more effective in addressing these aspects.

The leadership and management are good

- The school has improved significantly. Credit is due to the collective influence, strategic direction and commitment of everyone involved. The headteacher and her deputy in particular, have modelled some excellent practice in teaching, leadership and change management.
- The initial, intensive and necessary, external support the school was subject to was quickly scaled down, in response to leaders' evident and growing capacity.
- Leaders have secured the whole-hearted support and confidence of staff, who understand and are committed to the role they must play in helping the school to improve further. A significant shift in the mind-set of staff as the whole ethos and culture of the school has evolved to create a more ambitious and pupil-centred environment.
- Accurate and frank self-evaluation; more rigorous and regular, monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the school's work; targeted training, coaching and mentoring of staff to improve the

quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum; clearer lines of accountability, more efficient systems and procedures; and a refusal to accept mediocrity are some of the non-negotiable aspects of the school's work now, which have helped it to significantly improve its effectiveness.

- A number of key partnerships exist. Foremost, is the Catholic Diocese of Hallam, which assumed the support, monitoring and challenge role usually adopted by a local authority. It brokered the arrangements and interventions that have orchestrated the school's swift emergence from special measures. Being able to draw upon the considerable experience and expertise within the Catholic family of schools in the region has been invaluable. The link with St Catherine's Catholic Primary School was also important, mainly in the early stages of the school's recovery.
- The school liaises with parents well, via regular consultation, newsletters, its website, and keeping them informed about their children's progress, and inviting them into school regularly.
- Performance management is rigorous and procedures such as staff codes of conduct and progress-linked performance management targets emphasise the corporate responsibility staff have to ensure the school meets the highest standards in everything it does. There is evidence that leaders reward the most effective staff and hold to account those who are underperforming.
- The curriculum is well-matched to pupils' needs and interests. A systematic approach to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics, involving small groups based on ability rather than age, is improving the progression and continuity in pupils learning, and helping to identify and resolve specific impediments to pupils' further progress. It also offers pupils regular chances to practice, consolidate and extend key learning skills. Pupils also benefit from a wide range of other subjects, which are taught through themes.
- The curriculum, assemblies, visits and visitors all help to promote pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development effectively. They are respectful, fund raise for charity and show an artistic aptitude. They can resolve difficulties that arise between themselves, and have an understanding of different world religions and cultures different to their own. Pupils enjoy serving as school councillors, sport leaders and representing the school in competitions. They also talked animatedly about the thrill of going to 10 Downing Street, when Year 6 performed the 'Mikado', and topics such as Aboriginal art, The Victorian era and Spanish.
- Underpinning the effective curriculum is the caring and supportive ethos the school promotes which helps pupils to feel safe and secure. They thrive under the nurturing guidance of staff who have their best interests at heart, including those deemed more vulnerable than others.
- Pupil premium funding has been used effectively to: accelerate the progress of targeted pupils in reading, writing and mathematics; improve pupils' personal development; and provide wider curriculum experiences. As a result, the gaps between these pupils' academic standards and other pupils in the school have narrowed markedly and they too make better than expected progress. Behaviour has also improved visibly and attendance is rising, albeit slowly.
- Safeguarding and child protection practices are fitting and systems for the safer recruitment of staff, assessing risk and site security are rigorous. Designated staff are well-trained and vigilant.
- Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is effective, illustrated by the better outcomes and improving quality of provision now evident when compared with the previous inspection. Leaders are aware of the remaining weaker aspects and have plans to address them.
- The local authority officer attached to the school has provided some effective strategic support, guidance and advice to the school's senior leaders and governors over time.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are now operating efficiently and effectively to complement their undoubted allegiance to the school. Support and challenge are more robust and governors have a very clear picture of the school's current effectiveness, particularly concerning teaching quality and pupils' progress. They also know what needs to be done to improve the school further.
 - Governors are visible in school and have undertaken learning walks, and have introduced focused committees to which staff can be called and held to account. The minutes of their meetings indicate that they are regularly asking senior leaders probing questions about all aspects of the school's work and request and receive detailed school information. Records show, and governors articulated in their discussions with the lead inspector, that they are

aware of the impact of pupil premium funding and the links between performance management and staff salary progression or promotion.

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	107119
Local authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	420661

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	198
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Maycock
Headteacher	Donna Faley
Date of previous school inspection	2 December 2011
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