

St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Aided Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115184
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326145
Inspection date	30 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Sheelagh Barnes

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	223
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Matthew Bemand
Headteacher	Mrs Caroline L'Estrange
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Sawyers Hall Lane Brentwood Essex CM15 9BX
Telephone number	01277223606
Fax number	01277232004

Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- Current achievement of pupils from all groups, including the achievement and progress of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Whether the curriculum for young children gives due regard to outdoor as well as indoor activities.
- The quality of planning to develop community cohesion across the three strands.
- How effectively teachers and leaders monitor pupils' progress and put this information to use.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations and observations of playtimes, lunchtime and assemblies, scrutiny of pupils' work and documentation, including assessment tracking data, parents' letters and comments and also interviews with parents, pupils and staff. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Voluntary Aided Infant School is of average size. Below average proportions of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Most of the pupils come from White British backgrounds and fewer than average speak English as an additional language. None of these is at a very early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils who need extra support with their learning is also lower than nationally. The proportion with statements of special educational need is average. The school has been awarded the Financial Management standard, Foundation Level International School award and the Activemark for sports.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The outstanding quality of leadership and management at all levels has enabled the school to make excellent progress since the last inspection. As a result, the quality of education it provides for pupils of all ages and from all groups is excellent. Under the dedicated leadership of the headteacher, all staff and governors work together as a seamless team to continuously and rigorously assess all aspects of the school's work and to seek ways of making things even better. Areas identified by the previous inspection have been swiftly and effectively tackled and improved. The openness with which self analysis is undertaken is a major key to the school's success. As the chair of governors said 'We will happily look at anything which could improve things for the children'.

Pupils achieve exceptionally well in this school, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Standards at the end of Year 2 have generally been very high for some years and this year is likely to be no exception. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are all very high when compared to those attained nationally for pupils of this age. The current Year 2 group has made outstanding progress since the end of Reception in all aspects of their work. Since the previous inspection there have been significant numbers of pupils entering the school at times other than Reception, many with learning difficulties. However, due to the rigorous tracking systems in place, individuals in need of some extra support, for whatever reason, are soon identified and helped. Standards at the end of Year 2 dipped slightly in 2008, but were still significantly well above national standards. The school's confident prediction that results at the end of Year 2 will once again be very high in reading, writing and in mathematics is borne out by current standards in lessons and books. Boys and girls of all abilities achieve equally well. A good proportion of pupils, including some with English as an additional language, attain levels higher than those expected for their age.

Pupils achieve as well as they do because of the outstanding quality of teaching and their exceptionally positive attitudes towards school and learning. From the very moment they join the school, pupils attainment and potential is carefully assessed. Teachers have a very clear picture of what each pupil needs in order to make progress. This information is then used exceptionally well when planning lessons, so that teachers provide exactly what each individual pupil needs at that time to make the best possible progress. Targets are highly challenging and contribute very effectively to pupils exceptional achievement and high standards. For example, some higher attaining pupils in Year 2 were confidently and methodically working out the value of three quarters of 66 pound. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and excellent support for those who need it, is provided by classroom assistants. Practical opportunities are provided and excellent use is made of information and communication technology, both as a tool for teaching and also for learning. Because of this, all pupils are fully involved and engaged in learning and find lessons interesting and meaningful. Teachers make lessons very demanding and exciting. They are based on the exceptionally well-planned curriculum that sets learning into context so pupils are able to see a purpose to what they are doing. In nearly all respects there is a strong and very appropriate emphasis on practical tasks. Curricular enrichment is outstanding. An exceptional range of visits, visitors, themed days and extra-curricular and supplementary activities, such as musical performances, add significantly to the quality and range of learning opportunities.

Through excellent provision for pupils' personal, social and health education the curriculum makes a significant contribution to pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural

development. Boys and girls develop mature attitudes, high levels of consideration for others and levels of respect that are impressive for their age by the time they are ready to leave the school. They behave outstandingly well and they have a very clear understanding of what to do if they have any concerns or worries. Pupils know they can approach an adult in school who will help them to deal with situations. They say they are not aware of any difficulties in getting on with others and that any rare instances of bullying, for example, are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Pupils make a significant contribution to making life in school pleasant. For example, older pupils take care at playtimes to ensure that no younger child is left out of games and fun. However, some opportunities for them to initiate activities, such as assisting younger children at mealtimes, are missed as each class eats in its own room. Only the oldest pupils, Year 2, are members of the school council. Pupils care very much for each other, reflecting the high level of care and concern that adults show for all in the school. All processes to ensure pupils' health and safety are fully in place. Equality of opportunity for all pupils is one of the foundation stones on which the school's provision is built.

Leaders work tirelessly to ensure there is no discrimination of any sort. Relationships with parents are excellent. The large number that responded to the inspection questionnaire were almost unanimously positive. Frequently comments were 'wonderful', 'staff all work amazingly hard' and 'each child is treated like an individual'. One parent summarised views well: 'The school has surpassed each and every one of my hopes and expectations with regard to all aspects of school life!' Excellent partnerships with other establishments and agencies to promote learners' well-being are very well established and very effective. Community cohesion is excellent, being extremely well planned at local, national and international levels. The school works exceptionally well to reach out and involve all families and the local community: community relationships are excellent. The curriculum and lessons are used very well to ensure that pupils' awareness of their role and responsibilities in the national and global communities are strong. Pupils have an excellent understanding of what they need to do to maintain a healthy lifestyle and also how to keep themselves safe and free from harm by adopting safe procedures and practices. They enjoy school and their extremely good levels of attendance reflect this. Pupils' excellent personal development, combined with their high levels of achievement, mean they are extremely well equipped for the future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children enter the Reception classes with attainment that varies slightly each year and some are already attaining at above, or well above, the levels expected for their age. However, when considered over time, attainment on entry is broadly in line with standards nationally for that age. Teachers soon have an excellent knowledge of each child's needs and respond to them accordingly. Consequently, children are confident and settle very quickly. Reception staff organise an excellent and varied range of purposeful activities. Some activities are led by staff and others the children choose themselves, enabling them to practise specific skills and promoting independent learning successfully. As a consequence, children have outstanding attitudes to learning, and those who have been in school full-time since September maintain their concentration well. The caring environment and structured routines support children's developing self-esteem and personal development outstandingly well. Procedures for promoting children's welfare are excellent. Parents say that they are very pleased with the induction procedures and are encouraged to be fully involved in their children's learning and welfare. As a result, children's progress in personal and social skills is outstanding, as also is their progress

in developing numeracy and literacy skills. Progress is always at least good in all other areas of learning; overall it is exceptional. Since the last inspection there has been a great improvement in the facilities and resources for children to learn outdoors. The recently redeveloped outside area is an excellent learning space that is thoughtfully set out and resourced to complement and extend indoor activities. It is used well but still, on occasion, opportunities are missed for children to learn out of doors. By the end of Reception, children attain standards that are above those expected nationally. The Foundation Stage leader works very effectively with the whole team of adults and has a clear understanding of the strengths and improvements to be made: leadership is excellent.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend opportunities for pupils to demonstrate citizenship in practical ways and to initiate and take on more responsibility within the school community.

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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?	1
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

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/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
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?	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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

1 July 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury CE VA infant School, Brentwood, CM15 9BX

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited you recently and for telling us all about your school. I am writing to tell you what we found out about how well you are getting on and how well your school is helping you to learn. There are many good and excellent things about your school. Some of them are:

- You make excellent progress in your work and achieve high standards.
- Your teachers are exceptionally good at giving you challenging tasks that really make you think.
- You behave excellently and try your hardest at all times.
- Lessons are interesting and you have lots of different fun things to do and learn.
- All of the adults in your school make sure you are extremely well looked after.
- Your headteacher knows you all well and she works hard with the governors and the other teachers to make your school even better.

All of the adults at your school are always working to improve things for you. I agree with them that the most important things to try to make even better are:

- For you to have more opportunities to take responsibility for yourselves and others and develop your skills of citizenship even more within the school community.

I would like to wish you the very best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Sheelagh Barnes

Lead inspector