

Inspection of St Thomas More Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Greenway, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire HP4 3LF

Inspection dates: 29 and 30 November 2022

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected over 13 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and well cared for by the school staff. Relationships between pupils and adults are warm and friendly. Bullying is very rare. Pupils show tolerance and respect for their peers. They are confident that if any unkindness were to happen, teachers would quickly and effectively stop it from occurring again.

Pupils appreciate the religious character of the school. They develop a strong sense of belonging within their community. They are happy to include each other in their activities. Pupils value the opportunity to pray regularly and to embody the school's values, which include love and faith. Pupils enjoy learning about other religions. They leave school as kind and respectful citizens.

From the early years, behaviour is good. Pupils pay attention in lessons. Any off-task behaviour is quickly dealt with by staff and pupils are supported effectively to return to their learning.

Pupils enjoy taking part in sports and drama clubs as well as school trips. This allows them to develop their interests and build confidence.

Pupils, including those in the early years, do not achieve as well as they should because the quality of education is not consistently effective throughout the school.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have adopted or created curriculum plans that set out what pupils learn in all subjects. Where these work better, for example in physical education, teachers understand the sequence of what pupils learn. They then provide appropriate learning activities which help pupils to feel confident and get better over time.

In mathematics and reading, assessment is used effectively to check what pupils know. Teachers then plan suitable activities to support pupils to improve. However, this is not routinely the case. Teachers do not routinely check what pupils know in all subjects. This means the work they set can be too easy or that they do not help pupils to resolve misunderstandings in a timely way.

The curriculum for early years is ambitious and well planned. Children are safe and well cared for. However, not all children learn as well as they could. This is because the curriculum is not being taught as leaders planned. Leaders have not ensured that the learning environment is appropriately designed and used to promote learning. Staff have not developed the expertise they need to fully support children to develop their personal, physical and social skills.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are accurately identified. Leaders work closely with external agencies to ensure these pupils get some of the help they need. However, as with other pupils, teachers do not check well what these pupils have learned. As a result, too often, what they teach does

not cater for pupils' individual needs. Consequently, some pupils do not make good progress from their starting points.

Leaders ensure that pupils learn to read quickly. From the early years, children are taught phonics in a well-planned manner that prepares them effectively for their next stage. Pupils love reading. They learn to decode effectively, and they read regularly from books that match the sounds that they have learned. Pupils who fall behind are quickly identified and supported to catch up.

Pupils are calm and orderly in most lessons. This allows everyone to listen and focus on their learning. Sometimes, pupils lose focus. This tends to happen when they find the work too easy or need more guidance from staff. When this happens, staff quickly support pupils to manage their behaviour and return to their learning.

Leaders have ensured that an appropriate personal, social and health education programme is in place. Pupils are very positive about what they learn. They develop a strong spiritual understanding and a clear sense of right and wrong. Pupils gain lots from the extra-curricular activities and clubs. They can develop teamwork skills in the football club, or gain the confidence to speak in public as part of the drama club.

Governors are passionate and knowledgeable about the school. They have the appropriate skills to fulfil their statutory duties. Despite accurately identifying the areas for improvement in the school, governors have not been sufficiently robust in holding leaders to account in improving the quality of education in a timely manner.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that appropriate systems are in place to identify pupils who may be at risk of harm. Staff are well trained in recognising signs that pupils may be at risk of harm. They use the school's systems to report any potential concerns. Leaders act on these concerns in a timely manner, including liaising with external agencies where appropriate. Pupils learn how to stay safe online and offline.

Leaders ensure that all adults are checked for their suitability to work with children.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not use assessment routinely to check pupils' understanding and to plan what pupils, including those with SEND, will learn next. For some pupils, this hinders them in securing their understanding of the concepts that leaders want them to know. For other pupils, it means they complete activities which are too easy for them. Leaders should support teachers to understand how

best to use assessment to make sure work is not too easy or hard for pupils, to check what pupils have learned and to inform how teachers adjust what they teach to ensure pupils learn what leaders intend.

- In the early years, the activities staff arrange and their interactions with children are not tightly focused on children learning the words, ideas and skills they need to know. As a result, children are not as well prepared for Year 1 and beyond as they should be. Leaders need to ensure they and their staff receive the training and support they need to optimise learning for children to best prepare them for the next stage in their education.
- Governors are not all sufficiently robust in holding school leaders to account regarding the quality of education. Despite a good awareness of what needs to get better, improvements are not being implemented in a timely manner. Governors should ensure that they are effective in holding leaders to account for their work.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	117479
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10228988
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	181
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	David Swarbrick
Headteacher	Kathryn Little
Website	www.stmore.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 January 2009

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, the school has appointed a new executive headteacher and a head of school.
- School leaders do not currently use alternative provision for any pupils.
- The school has a Roman Catholic religious character. The school's most recent section 48 inspection took place in June 2019. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight school years.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, governors and a school improvement partner working on behalf of the local authority.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult.
- To further inspect the curriculum, inspectors spent time in the early years environment.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors reviewed safeguarding records, the school's safeguarding policy and the single central record of pre-employment checks. Inspectors also spoke with leaders, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation during the inspection, including curriculum plans, school development plans and records of governor visits.
- To find out about pupils' experiences and views on the school, inspectors spoke with groups of pupils and observed their behaviour across the school site at different times in the school day. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- To gather the views of staff, inspectors spoke to several of them. There were no responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- Inspectors reviewed the 44 responses, including 30 free-text responses, submitted by parents and carers to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Bessie Owen, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sarah Stevens

Ofsted Inspector

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