

Inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, Belmont

Thorndale Road, Belmont DH1 2AQ

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 February 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and safe at this school. Parents speak positively about the school's caring, friendly and welcoming ethos.

The headteacher and staff go the extra mile to ensure that the school's high expectations are realised. The basics in reading and mathematics are carefully planned and taught. As a result, pupils achieve well in these subjects. In other subjects, such as history, and art and design, leaders have improved the school's planning and developed staff's expertise. This has further enhanced how effectively pupils are taught in these subjects.

In the early years, children quickly learn the school's routines and how to socialise with one another. Pupils are attentive and hard-working in lessons. They socialise well at playtimes and lunchtimes. Older pupils demonstrate kindnesses and care for their younger peers. Incidents of bullying are extremely rare. Staff take any incidents very seriously. Pupils are confident that teachers will help them with any concerns.

Pupils' personal development is a strength of the school. In the early years, staff develop children's independence in a sensitive manner. Pupils have opportunities to take on a range of responsibilities. Staff teach pupils about important environmental issues. The school's values of 'family, aspiration and love' are evident in all that the school does.

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

Leaders have ensured that reading and mathematics are well planned and effectively taught. Mathematics planning starts from Nursery and progresses well through to Year 6. Teachers revisit aspects of pupils' previous learning at the start of lessons. This approach combined with well-structured lessons ensures that pupils successfully gain and retain important knowledge.

Leaders have implemented a structured phonics programme. All staff have received suitable training. Younger pupils are achieving well in both phonics and early reading. Staff provide extra support for pupils who have any gaps in their phonics knowledge.

Occasionally, some younger pupils are not practising their reading regularly at home. Leaders are aware that they need to check this more regularly. Pupils read high-quality texts in lessons. They have an enthusiasm for reading and can talk articulately about books and authors.

Leaders are refining the quality of planning in foundation subjects. Teachers' questioning at the start of lessons helps pupils to retain useful knowledge. This is helping pupils to know and remember more in these subjects. For example, older pupils have a secure knowledge of the history topics that they have been taught.

They are also developing a secure understanding of the chronology taught in recent topics. In art and design, younger pupils develop their drawing techniques well. Leaders have clear plans to continue to refine other foundation subjects in a similar manner.

Children make a positive start to school in the early years, both socially and academically. Following training from the trust, leaders are refining early years planning to ensure that this specifically meets children's needs. Leaders are also reviewing how effectively the early years plans link to Year 1 planning for foundation subjects. Some of these revisions are not fully complete. The early years indoor learning environment provides high-quality learning opportunities. Leaders have clear plans to further enhance the outdoor learning environment to bring it to a similar standard.

Suitable assessments are in place to check pupils' learning in early reading and mathematics. Where leaders have refined curriculum plans in foundation subjects, they have introduced appropriate and manageable approaches to check what pupils have learned.

Children in early years listen attentively, turn-take well and share resources sensibly. Pupils are respectful, demonstrate good manners and are kind to one another. In lessons, they respond well to teachers' questions and work diligently. There is a calm purposeful learning atmosphere around school.

The school's curriculum raises pupils' understanding of personal responsibility. Pupils become active citizens and have instigated real improvements to their community. This includes, for example, fundraising to provide a defibrillator in the neighbourhood and highlighting their concerns about river pollution to the local member of parliament. Pupils have opportunities to take several responsible roles across school. Sports activities and residential help pupils develop their independence and social skills. The 'positive futures' adviser supports pupils if they need additional pastoral support.

Everyone at the school has high expectations and ambitions for pupils to achieve well. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have suitable support plans. Staff implement these plans effectively. Occasionally, some adaptations by staff to pupils' tasks are not as carefully considered. Where this is the case, the progress of pupils with SEND can be reduced.

In this small school, the headteacher and staff successfully fulfil a wide range of leadership roles, including subject leadership. Staff believe that leaders take account of their workload and well-being. Leaders, staff, governors and trustees have a clear understanding of the strengths and priorities for the school. Trustees use a wide range of mechanisms to assure themselves of the quality of education and that the school meets its statutory obligations. Leaders have made effective use of support from the trust. This has strengthened leadership, increased staff capacity, and supported curriculum development and implementation.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff promptly identify pupils who may be vulnerable to safeguarding risks. They work well with other agencies to get help for pupils and families where required. The safeguarding leader has a secure understanding of how to deal with allegations or safeguarding concerns about staff. The school maintains well-kept records of recruitment checks for staff and governors.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe, including online. They are taught how to respect one another and what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not completed the revision of planning, and the associated checks on pupils' learning, in some foundation subjects. Where this is the case, subject planning and checks on pupils' learning are not as strong. Leaders should continue with their structured approach to the revision of planning and checks on pupils' learning in some foundation subjects.
- Sometimes teachers' adaptations to pupils' tasks and the use of suitable resources are not fully meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. At times, this can reduce the success that these pupils have and slows their learning. Leaders need to ensure that staff receive further training to ensure there are consistent approaches to adapting the teaching of pupils with SEND.
- Leaders have begun to revise the planning for early years, taking account of the recent addition of nursery provision. At present, leaders' revision of planning to secure a smooth transition through early years and to begin learning in Year 1 is not fully completed. Leaders should continue with their plans to refine and embed the planned sequence of learning from Nursery into Year 1.

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	148705
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10240999
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	89
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Martin Gannon
Headteacher	Tom Hunt
Website	www.stthomasmorebelmont.durham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Thomas More Catholic Primary converted to become an academy school in September 2021. When its predecessor school, St Thomas More Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- There have been several changes to staffing since the inspection of the predecessor school. The headteacher was appointed in September 2021.
- The school is in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and is part of the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust.
- The school has not been inspected under section 48 since converting to an academy. Trustees are aware of the statutory requirement for the section 48 inspection to be completed within the prescribed period.
- The school uses no alternative providers.

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.
- The lead inspector met with the headteacher and with two members of the local governor committee.
- The lead inspector completed telephone calls with a trustee, the trust's director of standards, the school improvement partner and a representative from the diocese.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history, and art and design. For each deep dive, they 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.
- Inspectors discussed the school's safeguarding procedures with a range of staff. They reviewed the school's documentation regarding safeguarding. They discussed how safe pupils feel in school and how staff teach them to stay safe, including online.
- The lead inspector analysed the responses to Ofsted's pupil, staff and parent surveys. An inspector met some parents at the end of the school day.

Inspection team

Michael Reeves, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Deborah Ashcroft

Ofsted Inspector

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