

The Thomas Coram Church of England School

Swing Gate Lane, Berkhamsted, HP4 2RP

Inspection dates 19–20 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- The Thomas Coram Church of England School is a welcoming place and, in its caring and purposeful atmosphere, pupils quickly adapt to school routines.
- Pupils make good progress in all subjects and achieve higher-than-average standards in English and mathematics. They develop their self-confidence and speaking skills well.
- Most teaching is good and some is outstanding. Teachers plan activities that interest and engage pupils in learning and use homework as an effective teaching tool.
- Pupils behave well. They are keen to take on extra responsibilities and leadership roles. Attendance is above average.
- Parents are pleased with the way the school managed the transition from middle to junior school and praise the quality of communication between home and school.
- The school is led and managed well. There is a constant drive to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well within a strong Christian ethos.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Less-able pupils do not make as much progress in reading as they should.
- When marking written work, teachers do not always give pupils advice on how they can improve or enough time to act upon any advice given.
- The pace of learning is not always appropriate: pupils are not moved on to harder work promptly and explanations are sometimes too lengthy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 22 lessons or parts of lessons, including six which were observed jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. They also looked at pupils' written work.
- Inspectors spoke to two groups of pupils and informally with other pupils in lessons and around the school. A small group of pupils were heard reading, and inspectors talked to them about their reading habits.
- Inspectors examined some of the school's documentation, including: the school's own evaluation of its performance and its improvement plan; information about pupils' progress and the support given to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs; evidence about the quality of teaching; and records relating to behaviour, safeguarding and attendance.
- Meetings were held with: the Co-chairs of the Governing Body; the headteacher and other school leaders; and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 90 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the views expressed by parents as they arrived at school and three letters from other parents. Fifteen questionnaires returned by staff were also analysed.

Inspection team

James McVeigh, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Isobel Randall

Additional Inspector

John Greevy

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Thomas Coram is larger than an average-sized primary school. Currently, there are two classes in Years 3 and 4, four classes in Year 5 and three classes in Year 6. The school population is expected to grow over the next few years.
- From September 2013, as part of the local authority's reorganisation from a three- to a two-tier education system, the school was re-designated as a junior school from its former status as a middle school.
- The headteacher, formerly deputy headteacher at the school, has been in place since 1 September 2013.
- The large majority of pupils come from a White British background and the remainder from a large number of different ethnic backgrounds. There are fewer pupils than average who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (extra government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children in local authority care and other groups) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above the national average and the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- 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?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding and raise achievement further by:
 - ensuring teachers' marking of pupils' written work has more impact on their achievement by including guidance on how pupils can improve their work and giving regular opportunities for them to act on that advice
 - making sure that teachers maintain an appropriate pace of learning in all lessons by moving pupils on to the next task promptly and not extending introductions or explanations unnecessarily.
- Accelerate progress of less-able pupils in reading so that it at least matches their progress in writing and mathematics by building on the good teaching of phonics (the sounds letters make) with a closer focus on improving their comprehension skills.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- In a caring and friendly atmosphere, pupils settle into school life well. They develop self-confidence quickly through regular opportunities to take on leadership roles, for example, during worship or on the school council.
- From relatively high starting points, pupils make good progress in all subjects in Key Stage 2 and reach high and improving standards in English and mathematics.
- Pupils are articulate and have extensive vocabularies. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to read and to discuss their ideas and explain their thinking to others. Pupils enjoy reading and read often and widely. A group of pupils in Year 4, engrossed in their reading, were able to explain plot and character clearly. One pupil was able to explain in great detail the story of a mythology trilogy.
- Pupils' progress in writing has continued to improve. They have many opportunities to practise and consolidate their writing skills in other subjects and for a variety of purposes. For example, pupils in Year 5 made good progress in analysing and evaluating advertisements in a well-constructed lesson.
- Pupils eligible for the pupil premium are supported well. The school ensures they make good progress in English and mathematics by closely checking the impact of the extra support put in place. At Key Stage 2 last year, eligible pupils reached the same standards as similar pupils nationally in reading and mathematics but higher standards in writing.
- In 2013, the majority of this small group of eligible pupils also had special educational needs. The attainment gap of just over a year, between them and their peers in school, narrowed in English but remained in mathematics. The gap for eligible pupils without special educational needs had reduced from around three terms to less than one term in English and two and a half terms in mathematics.
- Higher ability pupils are taught well. They make better progress than their peers nationally in English and similar progress in mathematics.
- Pupils with disabilities and those who have special educational needs are identified accurately. They receive well-targeted support from teachers and from specially trained teaching assistants that matches their learning needs well. This group of pupils make good progress from their differing starting points. Parents are kept well informed, and external specialists are involved when appropriate.
- Phonics is taught well as part of daily guided-reading sessions. Pupils are supported well in developing their phonics skills, but the small group of less confident readers do not develop good enough skills of comprehension.

The quality of teaching is good

- Planning for lessons is good. Pupils usually find the tasks planned for them interesting and persevere with them. For example, pupils in Year 4 were fully engaged in a physical education lesson learning how to 'travel' along gymnastics apparatus. Pupils tried hard and performed to

the level of their capability while skilled gymnasts inspired others.

- Teachers explain what they expect pupils to learn and often model the expected outcomes well. Also, they often make good use of pupils' recent experiences. For example, pupils in Year 6 made outstanding progress in planning a newspaper article which was based on a recent charity event the pupils had organised. Homework is used well to consolidate and extend pupils' understanding.
- Pupils are given good opportunities to prepare and present their work to develop confidence in public speaking. For example, two pupils prepared a slide presentation on inspirational people which was well received by others in their class.
- Effective use is made of 'partner talk' and whole-class discussion for pupils to share ideas and evaluate their own and others' work. Teachers often question pupils skilfully, giving them time to respond and using open or follow-up questions to extend their understanding further.
- Teachers support pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs well. Teaching assistants are well trained in their roles, for example, in skilful questioning and improving pupils' reading, and are deployed well in lessons or in accurately targeted intervention programmes to improve levels of literacy and numeracy. Suitable testing is carried out to establish pupils' starting points, such as reading age, and evaluate the effectiveness of support.
- Generally, lessons run smoothly. Ideas are developed logically through linked activities, and pupils are familiar with classroom routines. Occasionally, when teachers spend too long introducing or explaining activities or do not move pupils onto the next task promptly enough, a few pupils become restless and are not attentive. For example, a group of pupils in Year 5, having finished an exercise, were left with nothing to do in mathematics until the teacher had finished helping another pupil.
- Teachers give pupils regular opportunities to assess their own understanding. They mark pupils' work regularly and often in detail. They focus on celebrating what pupils have done well but do not always give advice on how pupils can improve their work. Pupils often indicate they have read the comments but do not always have good enough opportunities to respond to them.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- During the transition period from middle to junior school, where most pupils were new entrants, pupils say they were made to feel safe, welcome and part of the school. Parents were very pleased with the transition process and that their children settled easily into their new school and were happy.
- Pupils like their lessons, finding them interesting and enjoyable. For example, pupils in Year 4 thoroughly enjoyed creating their own music by investigating mixing different rhythms and melodies using a software program. Pupils feel valued and say teachers will always give them help when they need it.
- Pupils know the school's rewards for good behaviour and the sanctions associated with poor behaviour. They say they are keen not to lose their three 'ready to learn' ticks on the classroom behaviour chart. Pupils work well together in small groups, listening to each other when discussing ideas and sharing resources fairly.
- Pupils have a good range of responsibilities they can take on, such as house captain, school

council representative, class monitors and prayer leaders during worship. Pupils in Year 6 are eager to volunteer as peer mediators or 'play makers' and receive training in resolving minor arguments or organising games for younger pupils.

- Pupils have learned about bullying, its different forms and what to do about it, including through assemblies and visitors such as the police. Pupils state that bullying is rarely seen and if they tell their teachers it is sorted out quickly.
- Pupils have learned how to stay safe, including through visits from the police telling them about such things as road safety and 'stranger danger'. They are aware of the value of healthy eating and regular exercise.
- Break times are supervised appropriately and pupils say there is enough equipment to play with at lunchtimes. Although the school's grounds are very spacious, the hard-surface area for ball games is small and tends to be dominated too much by football games. Around the school, pupils are usually considerate and courteous though occasionally younger pupils in Years 3 and 4 run in the corridor.
- School records indicate few incidents of misbehaviour and, where they have occurred, they have been dealt with effectively. There have been no permanent exclusions, and fixed-term exclusions have been well below the national average. Attendance is promoted well and has been above the national average for the last three years.

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders and governors planned and executed a very smooth transition from the school's status as a middle school to that of junior school: a challenging operation involving a major change in the school population.
- The school is a welcoming place with a strong Christian ethos. It is well ordered, purposeful and runs smoothly day to day.
- Senior leaders have evaluated the strengths and areas for development of the school accurately and, as with the transition plan, have drawn up and are following a clear, succinct plan for sustained improvement. There is a comprehensive plan for monitoring the quality of teaching, including regular lesson observations and checking all the written work pupils produce in each subject.
- Teachers are given challenging targets for improvement to meet, including ones about pupils' performance and others linked to the overall school improvement plan. Teachers have good opportunities for training including external courses and work with local schools to moderate assessments of pupils' work. Teachers new to the profession are supported well by linking with more-experienced colleagues and having weekly meetings with a dedicated mentor. Planning to support subject leaders, including those new to their roles, is securely in place.
- Pupils' progress is checked regularly, and results are analysed carefully to ensure all groups are making similar good progress. Well-focused extra support is given to pupils who are in danger of slipping behind, demonstrating the school's commitment to equality.
- The school, in consultation with its two feeder infant schools, has recently modified the way subjects are organised to ensure continuity of pupils' experiences as they progress into Key Stage 2. Resources and facilities are good, for example for science and information and

communication technology, and the range of subjects is broad and balanced, providing good opportunities for pupils to practise key skills of communication, language and mathematics. Pupils' experiences are further enhanced by a good range of trips, visitors and clubs. Opportunities to engage with music are particularly rich.

- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. For example, regular acts of worship allow pupils to participate in or lead communal reflection on shared experiences and values, and awareness of different cultures is raised by visiting speakers.
- Most parents speak highly of communication between them and the school. They say they are listened to, teachers are approachable and the school responds quickly. They are kept well informed through the school's website and via social media and regular newsletters.
- The primary sports funding is being used effectively to enhance the quality of teaching of physical education and sport and to increase the variety of sports available to engage more pupils in and promote a love of regular exercise.
- The local authority has supported the school well during its transition to junior school status and provides regular training and a useful external view of the school's performance.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is well organised and has a good range of relevant skills and experience, augmented by further training from the local authority and the diocese. Governors are well informed from the headteacher's reports and their own regular focused visits, including talking to pupils. They offer strong support to senior leaders in their continual drive for improvement but also appropriate challenge by questioning the impact of initiatives on the quality of teaching.
 - Governors have worked with senior leaders and staff to develop the vision for the new school. They oversee the evaluation of the school's work and its planning for improvement. With the support of the local authority, governors set challenging targets for the headteacher and make sure that teachers' movement up the pay scale is warranted. Governors ensure the school makes sound financial decisions that have a positive impact on pupils' progress, for example, in spending the pupil premium. Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.

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	117559
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	429591

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	278
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julie Griffiths and David Wolstenholme-Williams
Headteacher	Rob Halls
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2009
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