

St Thomas' Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105824
Local authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	377308
Inspection dates	7–8 March 2012
Lead inspector	Adrian Guy HMI

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	148
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Philip Day
Headteacher	Rebecca Williams
Date of previous school inspection	16 July 2007
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Introduction

Inspection team

Adrian Guy

Her Majesty's Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed teaching and learning in 11 lessons and one assembly. He observed all six teachers in the school; this included joint observations with the headteacher. The inspector observed the teaching of reading to small groups as well as listening to individual pupils read. The inspector held meetings with school staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, the local authority's representative, and groups of pupils. He observed the school's work and scrutinised a number of documents, such as those relating to the safeguarding of pupils; the teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment and their progress; the school improvement plan; and documents identified by the school to support its self-evaluation. The inspector also took into consideration the 71 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and others returned by staff and pupils. There were no responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).

Information about the school

St Thomas' is a smaller than the average-sized Church of England Voluntary Aided primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of pupils from a minority ethnic background is very small and there are very few pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is slightly higher than the national average, as is the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The number of pupils joining and leaving the school partway through their education is lower than the national average. Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes in school leadership. In 2011 the results from Key Stage 2 national assessments were above the government's floor standards.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key Findings

- The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory. Although pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 has been above average over the past three years, the attainment of pupils in Key Stage 1 has declined since the previous inspection. This decline has been halted and currently the picture of attainment across the school is generally in line with expected levels. However, the overall effectiveness is not good yet because pupils' progress across the school is inconsistent. Although some pupils are making better progress, particularly older pupils, progress for other pupils, including those who have special educational needs, is satisfactory.
- Pupils are polite and courteous and generally behave well in school. They say they feel safe and incidents of bullying are rare. They cooperate effectively and show good levels of engagement in lessons where teaching is stronger. However, in too many lessons pupils' behaviour was affected by limited opportunities to engage effectively.
- There are some examples of good and outstanding teaching, particularly for older pupils. However, this varies across the school and, overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. This is because, in less-effective lessons, activities are not always challenging and learning does not move forward at a fast enough pace. The assessment of pupils' learning varies across the school and feedback to pupils does not consistently move their learning on by identifying the next steps they need to take.
- The recently appointed headteacher has an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Aspects of underperformance in Key Stage 1 have been addressed and the school has identified the need to improve aspects of responsibility and accountability of middle leaders and is in the process of restructuring this aspect of leadership. The governing body is supportive of the school and meets its statutory obligations. However, the extent to which it holds the school to account is limited.
- Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency and quality of teaching and ensure that all pupils make good progress by:
 - ensuring pupils are fully engaged and motivated during lessons and that activities are challenging and matched accurately to pupils' needs so that their learning moves forward at a brisk pace
 - developing teachers' use of continuous assessment of pupils' learning to ensure that misconceptions are identified promptly and lessons are adjusted to meet pupils' needs more effectively
 - ensuring that feedback to pupils is clear and consistent and enables them to know what they need to do to improve.

- Develop the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the school's development planning contains sharper criteria to enable the governing body to hold the school to account more effectively
 - middle leaders are clear about their roles and responsibilities and are held accountable for improvement.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Children settle well into school and display good levels of independence and cooperation. When they join the school, their skills levels and abilities are broadly in line with expectations for their age. They progress satisfactorily and, although levels of attainment at the end of the Reception Year have varied, the current picture of attainment is at expected levels. Since the previous inspection, the decline seen in attainment in Key Stage 1 has been addressed and, currently, pupils' attainment in reading, writing, and mathematics at the end of Year 2 is broadly average, although slightly fewer pupils than might be expected achieve the higher levels in reading and writing. Pupils enjoy reading and, although pupils who read to the inspector demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of letters and the sounds they make, their ability to use appropriate skills to help them read words they are unfamiliar with was varied.

In Key Stage 2 most pupils make expected progress and many make good progress. In 2011, most of the pupils leaving the school in Year 6 gained the expected level for their age in both English and mathematics. Although slightly fewer than might be expected gained higher levels in English, slightly more gained higher levels in mathematics.

Parents and carers have positive views about the progress of pupils. However, the picture of pupils' progress is not consistent as they move through school. The progress seen in lessons and confirmed by the school's assessment information and pupils' work shows the progress of the majority pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, is satisfactory. There is evidence of better progress, particularly where there is stronger teaching. For example, in a mathematics lesson for older pupils, the pupils were very clear about what they were learning and the teacher made effective use of assessment information during the lesson to adjust the activity and ensure the pace of learning was brisk. Consequently, pupils were enthused and focused, enjoyed their learning and made

good progress. However, the inspector also found evidence of weaker progress in the school, particularly where the teaching is less effective.

Quality of teaching

Although the inspector saw some examples of good and outstanding teaching, the majority of teaching and learning observed during the inspection was satisfactory. Where teaching was most successful, the teacher's effective questioning and skilful use of a wide variety of teaching strategies resulted in high levels of engagement in learning, high-quality pupil responses and accelerated progress. In these lessons, pupils were encouraged to work together and cooperated well in an atmosphere that was positive and supportive and teachers made sure pupils were clear about what was expected and what they needed to do to move their learning on.

However, less-successful lessons were characterised by fairly lengthy periods when pupils were listening to teachers talk and tasks were overly directed by adults, which led to insufficient challenge, engagement and independence for pupils. Too often, pupils' errors were not dealt with in a timely manner and lessons adjusted accordingly and, as a result, activities were not matched accurately to pupils' needs and, consequently, they made no more than the expected progress. Teachers' feedback to pupils is variable across the school. Although the marking of pupils' work offers encouragement, it does not consistently help pupils know how well they have done and what they could do to improve.

There are opportunities to develop social skills and reflect on beliefs, values and moral choices. For example, in a highly effective lesson in preparation for writing about the Egyptians, pupils used drama to explore how different parts of Egyptian society exercised power. They thought deeply about the moral aspects of what this meant to different people and were able to empathise and reflect different points of view. Links made between different subjects demonstrate the positive impact of the curriculum on learning; however, in some lessons these links are less well planned and the development of pupils' understanding in different subjects is less effective. Pupils, parents and carers have positive views about the quality of teaching in the school and few made any negative comments about pupils' learning and progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The high priority placed on the safety and care of pupils is a strength of the school. Pupils, parents and carers all agree that they are kept safe. They are confident that, on the rare occasion where bullying occurs, it is dealt with effectively. Although pupils are aware of some of the different forms of bullying, for example racist and cyber-bullying, their understanding of other forms is less well developed.

On the playground, pupils play together happily and show they understand the importance of getting along together. Pupils show excellent behaviour in lessons when they are fully engaged and teaching motivates them to give of their best. However, in other lessons, some pupils' behaviour is often passive and they are less engaged in learning, which adversely affects their progress. In a minority of lessons, a lack of engagement leads to 'off task' behaviour and some low-level disruption. While most pupils felt behaviour was good at the school for most of the time, many felt it could be even better. Pupils whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable are cared for well and support from external agencies provides well-targeted and timely interventions. Appropriate policies and systems are in

place to ensure pupils are kept safe and pupils' levels of attendance are above average. The breakfast club provides a safe and welcoming start to the day for the pupils who attend. The pupils socialise well together and treat adults and other pupils with friendliness and respect.

Leadership and management

The recently appointed senior leaders have an accurate and honest view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have quickly identified the correct priorities for improvement and have developed appropriate plans to achieve this. However, criteria against which improvements can be measured lack the sharpness required to enable leaders and the governing body to evaluate the effectiveness of these actions. Consequently, this limits the ability of the governing body to challenge the school to improve further. The governing body is very supportive and has steered the school through some significant changes in staffing. Although its members receive regular information about the school and the performance of pupils, it has relied on the headteacher and the governing body has not developed systems for reviewing and monitoring the work of the school for itself. Requirements in relation to arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are well-managed and effective.

The school has correctly identified the need to ensure that all staff are clear about their part in securing improvement across the school. The school has halted the decline in Key Stage 1 standards and the headteacher has quickly embarked on a process of restructuring leadership and management roles in order to clarify the roles and responsibilities of coordinators and key post holders. Together with the clear vision and direction set by the headteacher, this is indicative of the school's satisfactory capacity to improve. However, it is too early in the process to demonstrate the impact of the school actions to improve.

The curriculum follows a thematic approach linking subjects to areas of study. Although the effectiveness of these links varies between subjects and across the school, the framework is broad and balanced and meets requirements. It is enriched by a variety of extra-curricular club and educational visits. Space is at a premium in the school and is generally used well; however, the outdoor play resource is underused in the Early Years Foundation Stage. There are some strengths in the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development. Pupils have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument and a good proportion continue this through peripatetic music lessons. Social skills are developed well through personal, social and health education (PSHE) and in lessons where pupils show good levels of cooperation and respect. Assemblies focus on respect for others through considering the lives of people of faith. The headteacher is developing the programme of assemblies to focus on themes such as compassion and friendship. This is complemented by the school's work on promoting equality, tackling discrimination and challenging prejudice and stereotypes, which has seen some success. For example, the school has a programme of visits from members of a different faith community to foster understanding and respect for different faith communities. However, the school has yet to extend this work across the whole school and to include all characteristics required by legislation. Relationships with parents and carers are managed effectively. Parents and carers are generally positive about the school and the use of new technology, such as text messaging. The school's website is used well to keep parents and carers informed.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



9 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas' Church of England Primary School, Rochdale, OL16 3QZ

Thank you for welcoming me to your school recently. You may remember me coming to see how well you are learning. I learned a lot from watching your lessons, listening to you read, looking at your work and talking to you about your learning and life at school.

Your school provides you with a satisfactory education. The adults at your school work hard at looking after you and keeping you safe. Your well-being is very important to them. I was pleased to see that you behave well and get along together, especially when you are given interesting things to learn about and you get the chance to join in more with your lessons. There is a wide range of clubs and activities to join in with and I am pleased that so many of you continue to learn a musical instrument. You told me that most of you enjoy your work and feel safe and are happy to come to school. Your attendance is above average. Well done!

These are the things I have agreed with your headteacher that your school should do next:

- improve the quality of the teaching you receive to make sure you all make good progress
- make sure that your teachers, leaders and governing body are clear about their roles and all play their part in ensuring your school improves in the way they want it to.

Remember, you can all play your part by working hard and continuing to attend school as often as possible. I wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Guy
Her Majesty's Inspector

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