

# St Thomas Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113085
<b>Local Authority</b>	Devon
<b>Inspection number</b>	357257
<b>Inspection dates</b>	29–30 September 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Martin Kerly

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	188
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Dan Jenkins
<b>Headteacher</b>	Justin Stone
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	25 June 2008
<b>School address</b>	Union Street Exeter EX2 9BB
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 14 lessons and eight teachers, held meetings with pupils, governors and staff, and informally met parents and carers at the start of the day. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including the school's plans, policies, records of progress made by the pupils, and 51 completed questionnaires received from parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- The attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage and on transfer to Years 1 and 3.
- Changes in progress made by pupils last year and this year.
- The consistency of the quality of teaching.
- The effectiveness of systems the school uses to check how well it is doing.

## Information about the school

The school is an average-size primary school. It changed from being a first school to a primary school in 2005. The pupils currently in year 5 are the first group to have been in the primary school throughout their primary years. There have been significant and are ongoing changes in staff recently, including the majority of the leadership team. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in one class. Almost all the pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, but there are more pupils with statements of special educational needs and more again who are in need of additional support than usually found in a school of this size. The special educational needs are varied, but in the main relate to emotional and behavioural and/or speech and language issues. The All Saints Pre-school, breakfast and after-school clubs on site are not managed by the school's governing body and so are not reported upon here.

**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: how good is the school?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

## Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. After a period of transition and some uncertainties, during which the progress of many pupils declined significantly, the school is now improving and has a number of strengths, particularly in relation to the pupils' personal development and the good care, guidance and support they all receive. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. The headteacher has set a clear agenda for improvement across the school and the rate of pupils' progress is accelerating. The progress is now satisfactory and in individual lessons it is frequently good, as pupils recover from earlier lost ground. Pupils' attainment is broadly average, being stronger in reading and science than in writing and mathematics, where it remains a little below average. ♦ Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress, albeit often from very low starting points. However, relatively few of the more-able pupils exceed national expectations for their age.

While much of the teaching is good, a few inconsistencies remain. Some of the improved ways of planning and of assessing pupils have yet to become embedded across the school or be used to best advantage by all teachers when planning their lessons or organising their classrooms. A significant proportion of pupils report being unclear about how well they are doing and strategies for making the next steps in their learning clear are not fully in place. The quality of the learning environment varies significantly from class to class and does not consistently promote pupils' learning effectively. The school is committed to providing a stimulating curriculum, with a wide range of imaginative experiences. An excellent example of this, seen during the inspection, was the Year 6 pupils' excitement engendered by a train journey, dressed as Second World War evacuees. The school is working to improve the provision and use of computer technology, but at present the opportunities for pupils to use computers to help their learning across the curriculum are too restricted. ♦ Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities, but there are relatively few opportunities for them to take the initiative within the school and local community.

Many aspects of pupils' personal development are good, including their behaviour and the extent to which they feel safe in school. The headteacher and leadership team have a clear vision for the school and have created a staff team approach towards achieving the planned developments. This has contributed to significant recent improvements and the school's sound capacity to improve further. Leaders carry out a number of checks on the school and have a mainly accurate view of its work. The headteacher has established comprehensive systems for tracking pupils' progress, but other monitoring systems are not always systematically scheduled, recorded or followed up and the relatively inexperienced governing body, while fulfilling its legal responsibilities and supporting the school, does not sufficiently challenge or hold the school to account for its performance. ♦

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## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate progress in writing and mathematics, particularly for more-able pupils, so that a greater proportion exceed age-related expectations by July 2011, by ensuring that:
  - all teachers make full use of the assessment information when planning work so that the work matches the needs of and challenges pupils of all abilities
  - all classrooms provide an effective learning environment, with prompts and guidance to promote and celebrate learning
  - pupils understand how well they are doing and the next steps they need to take.
- Ensure pupils in all classes have frequent and easy access to computers within and beyond the classroom by April 2011.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of systems to monitor the school's performance by December 2010 by:
  - establishing and implementing a systematic cycle of activities designed to monitor performance
  - ensuring findings are carefully recorded, shared and followed up
  - enabling governors to be part of this process and have the training needed.
- Provide increased opportunities for pupils to express their ideas and take on more responsibilities around school and the local community.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

<b>3</b>
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Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. A significant proportion of children enter the school with attainment below the levels expected for their age. The good start they make in the Early Years Foundation Stage has not been maintained in recent years by older pupils and progress by many has been too slow. Evidence from lessons, pupils' books, work displayed in classrooms, discussions with pupils and the school's much-improved assessment records shows attainment is rising as progress accelerates. The large majority of girls and boys are catching up to where they should have been, with many making good progress. Attainment in writing has been the slowest to recover, but pupils are showing positive attitudes to writing, as was seen in several lessons that provided them with stimulating experiences and good opportunities to discuss and share ideas in pairs before starting to write. As a consequence, pupils now make sound progress. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities respond positively to the support and intervention work. They receive additional help, enabling them to make good progress and narrowing the gap with their peers. Pupils' attainment is broadly average, with the large majority of pupils, and more than in previous years, attaining the minimum expected levels for their age by the time they leave, particularly in reading and science. The school sets challenging yet realistic targets for all pupils and monitors progress carefully, by individuals and by groups. By the time they leave, the pupils have an acceptable level of skills to support them in the next stage of their education and beyond.

The pupils enjoy school and relish the special events and activities. Their attendance has improved significantly in the last year and is now above the national average. The pupils

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recognise that the adults in school take good care of them, helping them to feel safe and secure. The Healthy Schools award received by the school reflects the successful work in helping pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. The pupils know about the importance of a good diet and are keen to become involved in physical activities, for example in the additional clubs that have recently been introduced. Almost all pupils behave well in lessons and around school, play comfortably with one another and listen respectfully to their peers and adults. Their spiritual, moral and social development are good, but cultural development, although sound, is more limited. The newly elected school councillors are looking forward to taking up their responsibilities and Year 6 'buddies' help younger pupils. Pupils enjoyed being involved in a civic project related to Cowick Street, but the school recognises there are relatively few opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities, for example helping to enhance the school grounds or contribute their ideas.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

## How effective is the provision?

All aspects of care, guidance and support for pupils across the school and throughout the day are good. The school is very committed to supporting the significant number of pupils who in some way need additional support and it works effectively, 'going the extra mile' when needed, with parents and carers and other external professionals to help meet pupils' particular needs. This was recognised by several parents and carers, with comments such as , 'It is a friendly, safe and secure environment where all the staff work

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closely with parents,' and 'The school has supported our child superbly.' The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well co-ordinated and pupils' needs are identified early and addressed sensitively.

Teaching and assessment are improving and are already frequently good in individual lessons. Improved systems for planning and assessing learning introduced over the past year or so are leading to more stimulating and interesting lessons, but this is not yet consistently so. The pupils respond very well to special events, as was seen when they were thinking about ideas for story writing, following a visit to the Golden Hind in Brixham. They benefit frequently from working in small groups with well-trained teaching assistants, for example when practising the sounds that letters make during a guided-reading session. The teachers establish good, trusting relationships with pupils. The massage programme is an innovative approach and contributes to the strong focus on personal, social and emotional development in the curriculum. Humour and a sense of fun are often present, for example in French lessons supported by a French assistant, and teachers manage behaviour consistently very well. At times, work is not sufficiently challenging for some pupils, especially the more able, and in a few lessons, too much time is spent with the whole class together at the beginning or end, when some could be working independently or with an adult in a small group. The school has identified that there is limited 'hands on' time for pupils to use computers in the computer suite, where learning is hampered further by the crowded conditions, as it is also in the classrooms where access is very limited. This is a weakness in the range of teaching and learning experiences and the overall curriculum. ♦ A few classrooms are full of interesting displays, questions and ideas to promote pupils' curiosity and learning. Too many others are somewhat uninteresting, with insufficient guidance about current learning objectives, key vocabulary or guidance on how to study and learn, and inconsistent approaches to sharing targets with pupils and the next steps they need to take. ♦

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The headteacher shows resolve and determination to raise attainment and progress and has a clear vision for how this will be achieved. Together with the other leaders and the staff team, he has set about raising expectations and is already making a difference. Much-improved systems for assessing and tracking progress were introduced and these enabled the school to identify those groups of pupils whose progress had stalled and the extent of any underachievement. A concerted effort to raise expectations and progress, begun last year, is being maintained, involving carefully targeted and focused additional

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support for specific groups. It is already paying off. This is an important element supporting the school's sound capacity to improve further. The school has a broadly accurate view of its current performance, although it is a little generous in its view of the quality of provision. Some checks are not sufficiently robust or systematic, for example monitoring lessons, teachers' plans or pupils' work. Records of findings are not always formalised and there is no clear annual schedule of such events or clarity about the audience for any report and timescales for following it up.

The role of the governors is developing and they provide good support, but there is little evidence of governors being proactive in holding the school to account or offering challenge where needed. There are effective procedures designed to safeguard pupils and they are implemented rigorously, be it ensuring a secure boundary, the handover of pupils at the end of the day or safe recruiting systems. There is a strong commitment to promoting equal opportunities and this is reflected in the time and energy given to meet the needs of specific individuals from time to time, and the strong family ethos appreciated by parents and carers. The school is strengthening its role within the local community, with local faith centres and the city council. A recent focus on fair trade increased the school's awareness of the global community's needs, but the school recognises that, at present, its promotion of community cohesion beyond the immediate community is an area for further development. ♦♦

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

**Early Years Foundation Stage**

The school has developed effective links with pre-school settings and with parents and carers. A well-managed induction programme enables children to settle quickly, as was seen after just three weeks in school, with the small group of oldest children admitted at this time of year. The staff team make accurate assessments of the children's learning



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needs through careful observations. On entry, attainment is below that expected nationally for this age group, particularly in relation to early language skills and personal and social development. Children of all abilities make good progress during their first year and a small minority achieve all the early learning goals expected for their age. Nevertheless, by the end of the year, the majority remain a little below nationally expected levels, especially in writing activities and in personal, social and emotional development. In only their second week of full-time attendance, the children were observed to be happy, gaining confidence in classroom routines, for example answering their names in French and Spanish, moving around the room and learning to sing simple songs together. The class is well led, with the adults working as an effective team. The good teaching features an effective balance of short sessions led by an adult and independent play activities, for example learning about the letter "t" or flying imaginary kites in and out of doors. There is a secure outdoor area. The teachers provide opportunities for children to move freely in and out of doors, but the absence of a weatherproof canopy restricts the frequency and range of activities on offer outdoors. The school has advanced plans to address this before the end of the year. The two inter-communicating indoor areas are well organised, but have relatively few collections and vibrant displays to stimulate the children's senses and enthral them.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

## Views of parents and carers

A significant minority of parents and carers returned the inspectors' questionnaire. The very large majority of these were positive, with over 90% agreement for almost every question. The majority of written comments were also positive and there was no pattern within the very few that suggested areas for improvement. All the parents and carers replying to the inspectors' questionnaire agreed that the school keeps their children safe and 98% reported that their children enjoy school.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 51 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 188 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	36	71	14	27	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	31	61	20	39	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	21	41	27	53	3	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	23	45	23	25	4	8	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	28	55	19	37	2	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	22	43	28	55	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	41	26	51	4	8	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	26	51	22	43	0	0	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	39	26	51	4	8	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	19	37	26	51	3	6	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	39	28	55	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	26	51	21	41	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	34	67	14	27	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.

**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.**



6 October 2010

Dear Children

**Inspection of St Thomas Primary School, Exeter EX2 9BB**

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing some of your work. We were pleased to see and hear that you like your school, especially the trips such as the Year 6 train journey dressed as Second World War evacuees. You looked great. Yours is a satisfactory school that is improving and already has several good features. There are, however, some things that need to improve. We were impressed by the way you all behave, in lessons and around the school. We are pleased you feel safe in school. This is because everyone who works at the school takes good care of you and there is always someone available if you need extra support. You know a lot about how to stay healthy, for example by eating healthy food and taking lots of exercise. That is why your school has received the Healthy Schools award.

In lessons, you listen carefully and get on sensibly with your work. Many of you are making much quicker progress than you were a year or so ago. This is because the headteacher and teachers have much better information about how well you are each doing and what you could achieve next. Those of you who find learning more difficult receive lots of help from the teachers and teaching assistants, and this is helping you to make good progress. Your headteacher and the other leaders are good at thinking of ways to improve the school. We have asked them to work together with the governors on four things to make it even better:

- Help you to make even more progress, especially in writing and mathematics, and by those of you who find work fairly easy, by ensuring work is always challenging, your classrooms have lots of displays to help you in your learning, and you are clear about how well you are doing and how you can improve.
- Provide more opportunities for you to use computers in your classrooms and in the computer suite to help your work in lots of different subjects.
- Improve the way leaders and governors carry out and use checks on how well the school is doing.
- Think of more opportunities for you to suggest ideas about projects and activities in the school and local community, and ways you can help out. ♦

I am sure your school councillors will be talking about these points, so start thinking about how all of you can help.

Yours sincerely

◆ Martin Kerly, Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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