

The Saint Thomas Church of England Primary School, Boston

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120546
Local Authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	358785
Inspection dates	30–31 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Lois Furness

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	419
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephen Brown
Headteacher	Mark Millinson
Date of previous school inspection	2 July 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. Thirty-one lessons were visited and 16 teachers observed. Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, staff and two members of the governing body. They spoke informally with parents and carers, and with pupils. The school improvement plan, safeguarding documentation, assessment records, planning documentation and the School Improvement Partner's reports were scrutinised, as was pupils' work in lessons and on display. In total, the team analysed responses to questionnaires from 84 parents and carers. Responses to questionnaires from 29 staff and 150 pupils were also considered.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The team considered pupils' attainment by the end of Year 6 to check if it is average, and whether more-able pupils in English and mathematics are making sufficient progress.
- How well the curriculum is adapted to meet the learning needs of all pupils, including those at the early stage of learning English.
- Whether monitoring and evaluation systems are improving teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Why there has been a decline in children's attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, and how the leader of this key stage is improving children's skills in reading, writing, calculation, and shape, space and measures.

Information about the school

This school is much larger than most primary schools. Most pupils are White British. A below average number of pupils is known to be eligible for free school meals. Although the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, the proportion of those with a statement of special educational needs is above average. Eight of these pupils are supported by the resource base for deaf pupils situated within the school. A below average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language, and an increasing number of these pupils are at the early stage of learning English. Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage is provided in two Reception classes. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2010. The school has a number of externally accredited awards such as the Activemark award, and has achieved Healthy School status.

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?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

4

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

The overall effectiveness of the school is inadequate. Insufficient improvement has been made since the previous inspection and key priorities have not been tackled. Attainment has declined at the end of both key stages, and serious concerns remain about pupils' attainment in writing, which is well below age-related expectations throughout the school. More-able pupils are not sufficiently challenged in most year groups. In 2010, on the basis of teacher assessment, attainment at the end of Year 6 rose from well-below average to broadly average in mathematics, but remained well-below average in English. The work of pupils currently in Year 6 is below age-related expectations in both subjects. In most year groups attainment is well below the expectations for pupils' ages. Because children enter school in the Reception classes with skills that are mainly in line with those expected, this low attainment shows their learning and progress, and their resulting achievement, are inadequate. However, deaf pupils make good progress, as a result of specifically targeted support from well-qualified staff in the resource base.

Pupils achievement is inadequate because the quality of teaching is inconsistent and does not support pupils' learning well enough. Although inspectors saw evidence of some good teaching, too much inadequate teaching occurs in nearly all year groups. The most effective teaching is in Year 6 and, in this year group, pupils make good progress. This is because assessment information is used to plan activities that match precisely pupils' learning needs. In other year groups, assessment information is not used well enough, resulting in inappropriate activities for the age and skills of pupils. For example, Year 2 pupils with below average reading and writing skills were asked to use a thesaurus to write a description of character. Assessments are not accurate and the subject knowledge of some teachers is not secure. Teachers' expectations of the quality and quantity of pupils' work are not high enough. The curriculum does not match pupils' needs, and there are too few opportunities for them to systematically practice their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects. Marking and feedback does not support or accelerate pupils' learning. Teachers do not consistently inform pupils of why their work is good or what they can do to improve it. Where helpful comments are made, teachers do not always provide pupils with the time to respond to them.

Despite these weaknesses pupils say they enjoy school and their work. This is confirmed by their above-average attendance. Behaviour is mainly satisfactory, although in Years 1 and 2 some inappropriate behaviour occurred when pupils lost interest in their work.

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Pupils say they feel safe and are confident that adults will help them if they are worried or upset. The learning mentor provides good support, and the school provides good care, guidance and support for its pupils.

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is inadequate. There is no leader for this stage and, consequently, no one to drive improvement. The curriculum is inappropriate and the balance between teacher-led and child-chosen activities is not clear. Children spend too much time listening to adults, who in turn spend too little time carrying out observational assessments to guide future planning. Although an outdoor area is available, this is not used effectively. Both the indoor and outdoor environments are not organised sufficiently well to promote learning, and resources are not of good quality. Although staff are aware of weaknesses in reading, writing, calculation, and shape, space and measures, they provide too few opportunities for children to improve their skills in these areas.

The school's senior leaders know there are inadequacies in teaching and learning and, since September 2010, they have worked to try to overcome these weaknesses. A secure tracking system clearly identifies where pupils' progress is not good enough, and this has been shared with staff. However, some staff have been very reluctant to change and have not accepted the good advice given. This means the pace of change has been too slow. The quality of teaching is not improving fast enough to accelerate pupils' progress and compensate for the trend of underachievement and the gaps in pupils' skills. Monitoring and evaluation are not sufficiently rigorous and leaders, including middle leaders, do not check carefully enough that planning matches pupils' needs or that pupils' work shows they are making good progress in their learning. Staff are not held fully accountable for the progress of pupils and the targets set are insufficiently challenging. The governing body has recently become more involved, and now knows the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, it does not challenge the school's underperformance strongly enough and governors do not visit the school often enough to find out for themselves the quality of provision. The school's self-evaluation is too generous, and has not taken sufficient account of the underachievement of pupils. The decline in attainment, pupils' progress and provision since the last inspection and current weaknesses in leadership and management indicate that the school does not have the capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and accelerate pupils' progress in English and mathematics by:
 - increasing the proportion of good lessons and eliminating inadequate practice
 - ensuring the accuracy of assessment with teachers rigorously using this information to plan next steps of learning
 - improving teachers' knowledge of progression in learning in English and mathematics
 - raising teachers' expectations of the quality and quantity of pupils' work
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects
 - ensuring feedback clearly identifies the good features of work, how pupils can improve, and providing time for them to respond to the feedback given.

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- Improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - appointing a leader to drive improvement in this stage of education
 - developing staff knowledge of a good Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and the place of observational assessment in planning children's learning
 - maximising opportunities for developing children's skills in reading, writing, calculating, and shape, space and measures across all areas of learning
 - ensuring there is an appropriate balance between teacher-led, child-chosen and indoor and outdoor learning
 - improving the quality of both indoor and outdoor environments, including learning resources.
- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - all leaders taking responsibility for ensuring pupils' good progress and high achievement
 - establishing rigorous monitoring and evaluating systems which include regular reviews of planning and pupils' work
 - agreeing aspirational targets for pupils which are used to ensure staff accountability
 - developing the role of the governing body in challenging underperformance and becoming more directly involved in the school's work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**4**

Although pupils are eager to learn, their slow progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills means they are not prepared well for the future. Throughout the school there are pupils who make satisfactory and even good progress, especially deaf pupils, but too many pupils are making slow progress. Grouping pupils by ability for English and mathematics is helping to ensure pupils are given appropriate activities. However, weakness in teaching means that tasks lack challenge and the pace of learning is slow. The progress of more-able pupils is too varied, ranging from good to inadequate. In Year 6, good progress was evident when pupils considered the features of a newspaper report. Film was used effectively to provide a topical context for report writing and timed targets ensured learning proceeded at a good pace. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well especially when working in small groups. However, as activities are not always appropriate, their progress also varies too much. The progress of pupils, who are at an early stage of learning English, is similar to that of their peers.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and want to learn. They speak highly of the learning mentor and say that they feel safe in school. Parents and carers agree. Pupils are confident that staff will listen to their concerns and that any problems will be swiftly resolved.

Increasingly, pupils recognise the difference between right and wrong and get on well with each other. Their spiritual moral and social development is good. Assemblies are particularly effective in promoting pupils' spirituality. Although the school encourages pupils to develop an appreciation of the wide range of cultures that make up British society, this aspect of their understanding is relatively less well developed. Pupils know the importance of eating healthily and taking regular exercise. This has been endorsed by the

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school's achievement of Healthy School status. However a minority of pupils do not always take action for themselves, eating unhealthy snacks at playtime. Pupils contribute satisfactorily to the school and wider community, and enjoy taking on responsibilities as members of the school council and peer mediators, for example.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	4
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

¹ 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?

During the inspection, teaching was inadequate in one third of the lessons observed. Teachers adopt a range of strategies to improve the effectiveness of lessons, but the way they implement them shows that they have not always fully thought through their purpose. For example, teachers routinely set out at the start of each lesson 'learning objectives' and 'success criteria'. Too often, however, these learning objectives are a statement of the task to be carried out, not what the pupils will learn. The success criteria are often not sufficiently focused on improving pupils' skills. Senior leaders have accurately identified the weaknesses in teaching and are beginning to tackle them. Inspectors agree that lessons are not challenging enough, especially for those who are most able. This is because teachers do not use the information they have about what pupils can already do when planning lessons. As a result, work is not suitably matched to pupils' abilities. In a few lessons, teachers have good subject knowledge and encourage pupils to discuss what they are learning with a partner, such as in a Year 5 mathematics lesson as pupils explored the difference between mode, median and average. Although marking often

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relates to the learning objective and success criteria, in doing so it misses the opportunity to pick up basic skills of handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar. The curriculum is very focused on English and mathematics but, despite this, the school does not provide pupils with appropriate learning opportunities because the curriculum is not adapted to suit their needs and abilities. A suitable range of extra-curricular activities and educational visits adds to pupils' experiences.

Good care, guidance and support are evident throughout the school's work and parents and carers agree their children are kept safe. Partnerships with a wide range of outside agencies, including the school nurse and the local Children's Centre, enhance this care. A designated room provides a safe haven where pupils can go if they need support. Pupils at the early stage of learning English are well supported by a 'buddy' system, where another pupil who speaks the same language offers help. A member of staff is also available during lessons and at playtime to mentor and support. In order to ensure that deaf pupils feel they are able to communicate easily with others, a club to learn 'signing' is held at lunchtime. Over 70 pupils attend this club, showing how strongly pupils feel it is important to support others.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	4
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	4
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	4
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The school's leaders give a high priority to pupils' well-being. While whole-school strategies for ensuring good care and managing behaviour are effective, those to secure good learning are not sufficiently developed. Self-evaluation has not focused enough on the impact of the school's provision, especially teaching, on pupils' learning and progress. In spite of some recent improvements, including improved monitoring and evaluation systems, the effectiveness of the school's leaders in embedding ambition and driving improvement is weak. This is because the issues for improvement highlighted at the last inspection have not been tackled with sufficient rigour. Too many staff have been resistant to recent changes and have not implemented agreed straightforward actions, for example, ensuring pupils write the date at the start of each piece of work. Middle leaders are not effective and their monitoring and evaluation is not identifying where improvement is needed or supporting change. The governing body has not been sufficiently effective in challenging the school and holding staff to account so that weaknesses, such as declining outcomes for pupils and inadequate teaching, are tackled.

Policies and procedures for safeguarding meet statutory requirements and all staff are suitably trained and well informed on all issues relating to child protection. Although pupils are given equal opportunities to participate in activities provided and any discrimination is

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securely tackled, pupils' inadequate overall achievement has come about because the needs of individuals and groups have not been responded to rigorously enough. The school's promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. Good links are evident within school and the local community, but pupils are less aware of other communities nationally and globally.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	4
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Reception classes with skills that broadly match those expected for their age although this year there is an increasing number of children who are at an early stage of learning English. Although staff try hard to plan activities which will engage children, the activities do not pay enough attention to children's prior learning and interests. Adults do not have sufficient knowledge of how young children learn and too much time is spent on teacher-led activities. This inadequate teaching results in children making inadequate progress and last year children entered Year 1 with skills that were below average. Adults do not use assessment well enough to ensure that each child makes good progress. The indoor and outdoor environments do not enable children to be involved in purposeful play and exploration. At times, although behaviour is satisfactory, children just wander from one activity to another unable to find something that captures their interest. Adult interaction with children is not good enough, and adults' questioning skills are weak. Classroom routines are not clearly established and opportunities are missed for children to take responsibility, for example, organising snack-time. Welfare requirements are satisfactory. There is no designated leader for this stage and not enough emphasis is placed on raising achievement and improving children's outcomes.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	4
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	4
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	4
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	4

Views of parents and carers

Fewer parents and carers responded to the Ofsted questionnaire than is typical for a primary school of this size. Of those who responded, all of them felt their children are kept safe in school. Almost all said their children are happy, and the school helps them to lead a healthy lifestyle. Parents and carers are pleased with their children's experience of school and think that teaching is good. The inspection found that, although there is evidence of some good teaching, teaching is inadequate overall.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Saint Thomas' Church of England Primary School, Boston 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 84 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 419 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	50	60	33	39	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	51	61	33	39	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	41	49	33	39	9	11	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	38	45	39	46	7	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	40	48	41	49	3	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	32	38	43	51	9	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	38	50	60	1	1	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	31	48	57	5	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	33	39	45	54	4	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	33	45	54	8	10	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	26	31	51	61	5	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	35	42	42	50	6	7	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	43	51	38	45	3	4	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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



1 April 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Saint Thomas Church of England Primary School, Boston, PE21 7RZ

Many thanks for the welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. You are very polite and many of you welcomed us by saying good morning as we walked around school. We enjoyed talking with you and seeing all that you do. We enjoyed listening to your views about the importance of saying 'thank you' during a very good assembly. This showed how thoughtful you are and how you have a good understanding of right and wrong. We were very impressed by the care you show for each other, and the way everyone is included in all activities. The school looks after you well, and we agree with you and your parents and carers when you told us you feel safe in school.

You told us you enjoy your lessons and we could see that you all tried hard to complete your work. However, we have judged the school needs to help you to learn better and make quicker progress. We have decided the school needs 'special measures', which means that other inspectors will come and check that things are improving. We think that your teachers should use information about what you already know to make sure you all learn as fast as you can, so that you achieve better in English and mathematics. Your teachers spend a lot of time marking your work, and we have asked that when they do this they give you clear guidance on how to improve. Also, we have asked them to give you lots of opportunities to practise your literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects. We think that children in the Reception classes could learn much more. So we have asked school leaders to look carefully at the things that happen in these classes, and find ways to make learning better. Finally we have asked school leaders and governors to check regularly that you are all making the best progress you can.

You can all help by continuing to work hard and by telling your teachers what makes your lessons interesting and what helps you to learn. We wish you all the best in the future and thank you again for your help.

Yours sincerely

Lois Furness

Lead inspector

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