

# St Thomas's CE Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	111318
<b>Local Authority</b>	Warrington
<b>Inspection number</b>	363776
<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–28 April 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Lynne Read

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>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	245
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Rev Michael Ridley
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Mary Cummings
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 February 2008
<b>School address</b>	Parkgate Road Stockton Heath, Warrington Cheshire WA4 2AP
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 12 lessons and observed nine teachers. They held meetings with members of the governing body, managers, staff, the School Improvement Partner and groups of pupils. In observing the school's work, they looked at pupils' workbooks, assessment records, school policies and school development plans. In total 87 parental questionnaires were received, analysed and considered, alongside 30 questionnaires completed by the pupils and nine by school staff.

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

- Whether there are any improvements to attainment and progress, especially in Key Stage 2.
- Whether teaching is promoting the best possible progress among pupils, especially for the more-able and in writing.
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers in providing stability and raising attainment.

## Information about the school

This school is of average size for a primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Most pupils are of White British heritage with around five per cent having African, Caribbean or Asian backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than that seen nationally.

The school holds the Healthy School status, the Basic Skills Quality Mark, as well as the Activemark and Artsmark Awards. A private provider offers before- and after-school care sessions on the premises. This facility is subject to a separate inspection and report.

At the time of inspection the school was experiencing a period of turbulence with many changes in staffing and leadership. An acting headteacher has been in post since the beginning of the current term and has been providing support for the school since the start of the academic year.

**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

St Thomas's CE Primary School provides a satisfactory quality of education. Pupils' personal development and behaviour are good. Under the strong leadership of the acting headteacher, there has been a concerted effort to boost pupils' achievement, with improvements made to provision and the assessment of pupils' progress. As a result, attainment is improving, although it is not as high as in previous years. Senior leaders regularly check pupils' achievement so that the school has an accurate view of its performance. The senior and middle leaders, including the governing body, have a clear vision and ambition for the future and are making best use of expert support from the local authority. The capacity for sustained improvement is therefore satisfactory.

Children make satisfactory progress in the Nursery and Reception classes, from starting points which are above those usually expected for their age. An improved, shared learning environment offers good opportunities for children to work independently. However, the new, collaborative curriculum is not implemented fully so, at times, the range of learning experiences is reduced. Achievement is satisfactory overall and there are examples of good progress, especially in Key Stage 2. Pockets of underachievement have been tackled and standards are rising. Attainment is above average by Year 6 but writing is weaker than reading.

Teaching is satisfactory overall with some good practice in Key Stage 2. The school fully recognises that the proportion of good teaching needs to rise in order to achieve its own targets. Currently, the systems for monitoring teaching are not rigorous enough to ensure that improvements are consistently embedded and make the intended impact on learning. At present, detailed assessments of pupils' progress are not always used to plan work that challenges the more-able fully, especially in mathematics. In some classes, marking is helpful and useful targets explain to pupils how they can improve. This good practice is not consistent, however, so some pupils have little idea of how well they are doing or where they should focus their efforts. During recent changes at the school, some opportunities for further literacy training for staff have been missed. As a result, the teaching programme for letters and sounds is not fully effective, leading to some difficulties with spelling. The curriculum is satisfactory. Sometimes however, opportunities for pupils to write when studying other subjects are limited.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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

- Improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by fully implementing the new collaborative curriculum, which provides good opportunities for children to learn independently.
- Improve provision and learning in writing by:
  - improving expertise among staff in teaching the programme for letters and sounds, especially in Key Stage 1
  - ensuring that pupils in all classes have regular opportunities for writing when studying other subjects.
- Improve the proportion of good teaching by:
  - ensuring that the assessments of pupils' progress are used to plan sufficient challenge for the more-able, especially in mathematics
  - improving marking and ensure that pupils' targets are useful in showing them how to improve
  - injecting more rigour into the monitoring of teaching to ensure consistency of approach and check whether improvements are having the intended impact on learning.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

<b>3</b>
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Pupils of all age groups have positive attitudes, enjoy their learning and work hard in lessons. For example, Year 6 pupils worked confidently with decimals and percentages, showing good collaborative skills. Those in Year 3 demonstrated their writing skills by appraising different types of invitations, then writing their own, carefully choosing the appropriate language and tone. Achievement and progress are satisfactory for all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those from minority ethnic groups. A successful project to improve girls' confidence especially in mathematics means that they now make equal progress to that of the boys.

Pupils enter Key Stage 1 with an above-average range of skills. Across both key stages progress is accelerating and this better learning has made some impact on overall attainment, which is now above average by the end of Key Stage 2. However, the school knows that there is some way to go before pupils reach their full potential and standards return to the high levels seen previously at the school. Some pupils, especially in Key Stage 1, have difficulties with spelling because their understanding of letters and sounds is not secure. Others are less confident in writing because they have too few opportunities to practise their skills across different subjects and to build up speed, accuracy and confidence.

Pupils are polite, considerate of each other and clearly know the difference between right and wrong. Good links with the local church support their spiritual development well and they have good respect for faiths and beliefs that are different from their own. Their understanding of different cultures around the world is developing. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of healthy living and enjoy plenty of exercise. They assert that they feel safe and they have a good awareness of potential dangers. Their basic skills are secure, their attendance is above average, they are punctual and are well-prepared for

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their future education. The school council ensures that pupils' views are represented in the decision-making process and they contribute enthusiastically to events within the local community. For example, the gospel choir is well-regarded for the quality of its performances.

*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>	2
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	3
<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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</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?

There have been many improvements in teaching over the last year. These have resulted in better use of assessment information in planning work, and higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. Good relationships exist in all classes and pupils say their teachers provide lots of help. However, there are inconsistencies in practice so the more-able pupils do not always have the challenge they need, especially in mathematics. Some strengths in teaching are not extended across all classes. For example good marking and helpful, personal targets make a good contribution to learning in some lessons, but not all. When teaching assistants are allocated to a specific teaching task, their support is good, but when they work in a general support role, they are less effective.

Links between subjects are developing and planning includes increasing opportunities for active and collaborative learning. Good enhancements, such as the after-school clubs, help to broaden pupils' interests, especially in sport. Intervention strategies are successful in boosting progress and staff are currently developing the provision for gifted and talented pupils. The letters and sounds work is helping pupils to read but is less effective in

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supporting spelling. This is because training for staff has been missed and the time allocated for the programme is sometimes taken up by other activities, such as handwriting. In some classes too many worksheets are used in subjects such as history or geography. Many of these require only a limited response and do not stretch pupils' writing skills sufficiently.

The quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory. Systems to deal with any incidents of bullying are established and pupils are confident that adults act promptly to tackle any concerns or worries that they have. Pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable are effectively supported, and established systems ensure a smooth transition as pupils move on to their high schools. The behaviour policy, although effective, is not consistently implemented and pupils say that expectations vary between different adults. In addition, the range of rewards for good effort, best behaviour or thoughtful deeds is limited.

*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>3</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The acting headteacher provides focused, determined leadership and strong direction for the school. School development plans show a clear vision for success and many improvements have been introduced in teaching and the curriculum. Managers check on the quality of lessons and pupils' progress is tracked closely. However, the monitoring process is not yet rigorous enough to ensure that improvements are implemented consistently and are making the intended impact on learning. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and gives satisfactory value for money.

Safeguarding procedures, including those for safe recruitment and child protection are satisfactory. Staff receive regular updates in their child protection training and are soundly-equipped to deal with any concerns. Groups of pupils have equal access to all that the school offers, although it is recognised that some pupils are not yet reaching their full academic potential. Community cohesion is satisfactory. The school is a harmonious community and pupils have good involvement with local groups. Links with schools in different parts of the country and overseas are developing. The governing body brings a good level of expertise to support management and has a secure overview of standards and achievement through its School Improvement Group. Governors are keen to ensure smooth succession in the leadership of the school and are working hard to that end. Their active role in monitoring and evaluating key policies and performance is developing.

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*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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>3</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

When they enter the Nursery, children's skills are generally above those expected for their age. Progress is satisfactory overall and by the time they enter Year 1 their attainment is above average. Many have good oral and communication skills and their personal and social development is strong.

Children are enthusiastic to learn; they select from a range of activities and work independently. For example, some nursery children enjoyed searching for mini-beasts and describing what they found. Behaviour is good. Children take turns and are willing to share resources and ideas. Leadership and management of the setting are satisfactory and improvements have been made to the accommodation, resources and curriculum. Some good practices are emerging. For example, in the Reception class, play and learning are very well supported, assessments are well-used in planning the next steps and children are often encouraged to write as part of their independent work. These aspects are less well-developed in the Nursery class. The shared indoor learning environment and collaborative curriculum provide good opportunities for children to explore and investigate their world and for staff to work together. However, this new curriculum is not implemented fully. At times when the two classes operate separately resources and staff expertise are not utilised to the full and children's choices are more limited.

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

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

## Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire agrees that their children enjoy school, are safe and encouraged to live a healthy lifestyle. Quotes that reflect these opinions include: 'the school has a great ethos' and 'my children are happy'.

Some parents and carers have concerns about leadership and management at the school. This is not surprising in view of the many changes to staffing recently. Inspection finds that the acting headteacher and governing body, together with senior and middle management, provide satisfactory leadership and management and are driving the school forwards. Some parents comment that the school does not take account of their suggestions and concerns and feel ill-informed about the many changes taking place. The governing body is aware of these issues and is pursuing better avenues of communication to allay any worries.

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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas's CE 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 87 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 245 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	56	64	28	32	3	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	48	55	36	41	3	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	28	32	43	49	12	14	3	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	28	32	41	47	12	14	4	5
The teaching is good at this school	30	34	46	53	9	10	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	28	32	42	48	10	11	3	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	31	36	51	59	4	5	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)	36	41	38	44	7	8	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	31	36	39	45	12	14	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	30	45	52	10	11	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	21	24	42	48	16	18	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	16	18	28	32	19	22	8	9
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	36	41	36	41	11	13	1	1

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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.

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"><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.**



3 May 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Thomas's CE Primary School, Warrington, WA4 2AP**

Thank you for the very warm welcome and lovely smiles you gave us when we inspected your school. We thoroughly enjoyed our time with you and appreciated all the help you gave us.

St Thomas's CE Primary is a happy and safe school. It provides you with a satisfactory standard of education and helps you to develop into well-mannered and caring people. Thank you to the pupils who filled in their questionnaire and those who chatted with us. It was good to hear comments such as 'teachers help you to improve'. You enjoy school and have an interesting range of sports and activities through the after-school clubs.

You are keen to learn and work hard. There have been lots of changes at your school and you are making better progress now. However, some improvements are not working equally well in all classes and we think there is scope for further improvement. Therefore, we have asked the adults in your school to:

- make sure that children in the Nursery and Reception classes always have lots of opportunities to explore, investigate and learn independently
- improve the letters and sounds work to help your spelling, and make sure you have enough time to practise your writing
- make sure that the work always stretches your skills and talents, especially in mathematics
- provide good marking and advice to help you improve your work, just like some classes have already.

In addition we have asked your teachers to check lessons to make sure that all these improvements are working. All of you can help by continuing to work hard, both at school and in completing your homework. Please accept our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Lynne Read

Lead inspector

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