

St Thomas' Church of England VA Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103419
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	355379
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Carol Worthington

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	198
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hayward Osborne
Headteacher	Daniel Lassetter
Date of previous school inspection	13 May 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 13 lessons led by eight different teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, and the Chair of the Governing Body. Discussions were held with three groups of pupils from Key Stage 2. Many pupils were spoken to informally. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at records of assessments of pupils' attainment, tracking of their progress and samples of their work in books. All safeguarding documents were scrutinised. Inspectors analysed 31 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, and those completed by 75 Key Stage 2 pupils and 10 staff.

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

- Inspectors looked at how effectively transition procedures between Reception and Year 1 provide a secure baseline for entry to Key Stage 1.
- They examined current assessments in Key Stages 1 and 2, to see if they show improved attainment in English and mathematics.
- Inspectors investigated whether the reported increase in good teaching is resulting in consistently good progress and higher standards throughout the school.
- They looked at the impact of the school's recently introduced pastoral support strategies in improving attendance and maintaining good behaviour.

Information about the school

This small primary school is in an inner city location which has for some years been an area of urban regeneration. The impact of this has been a very high proportion of pupils entering and leaving the school in all year groups, but especially in Years 3 to 6. The majority of pupils are of Black British, African, or Caribbean origin. Thirteen percent are White British. There are over 10 other ethnic heritages present in small numbers. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is slightly higher than average. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is around average. Very few have a statement of special educational needs, and they mainly relate to specific learning or behavioural difficulties. The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average.

Since the previous inspection there have been many staff changes, including the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior leadership team and class teachers. The school has been restructured into 4 phases: the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Lower Key Stage 2 and Upper Key Stage 2. Children are taught within these phases rather than in separate year groups. The school runs a breakfast club.

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

2

Main findings

St Thomas' Primary School provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils. After a period of severe disruption caused by staffing changes, it is now improving rapidly. This is because of the clarity of the headteacher's vision for improvement and determination in taking the steps necessary to bring this about. The leadership team has recently been strengthened by the addition of a Head of Pastoral Care and an Extended Schools Manager. This has resulted in rapidly improving attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning throughout the school. Most noticeable is the harmonious family atmosphere, which stems from a complete appreciation of shared values between adults and children from a very wide ethnic mix. The school is an outstandingly cohesive community which reaches out to other communities in this country and abroad.

Teaching and learning have improved since the previous inspection from satisfactory to good as a result of rigorous monitoring and evaluation carried out by the headteacher and deputy headteacher. A much-improved system for tracking pupils' progress has enabled teachers to plan more precisely to meet the needs of all pupils, and to identify specific areas of underachievement to be addressed with targeted support. The grouping of classes into phases rather than single year groups is effective because teachers plan together and group children of similar ability in English and mathematics. This has resulted in much-improved progress in these subjects in all years. Pupils' writing is still hampered by narrow vocabulary, weak descriptive and creative skills and the lack of a consistent handwriting style. In mathematics, pupils do not have sufficient recall of multiplication tables, number bonds and place value to enable them to do calculations rapidly and accurately. However, the school's assessments and work seen during the inspection show that attainment is rising rapidly throughout the school. Pupils in Year 6 have made double the expected progress in the current year, and are rapidly making up the ground they lost in previous years. Very significant improvements are seen in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Lower Key Stage 2, as a result of a specific scheme to improve writing. The recent rapid improvements and the strong systems underpinning them mean that the school's self-evaluation procedures are robust and effective. It has good capacity for further sustained improvement.

Pupils say they enjoy school and it is obvious that they do from their absorbed concentration in lessons and their delight in showing off their work. Their achievements are good when doing practical tasks which they can see are relevant to their own lives and the world around them. They say they enjoy writing about their own investigations, and this is shown by the wide range of topics they have studied in the relevant and creative curriculum, which they have helped to devise.

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 attainment in English by the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 by:
 - building on improved language and communication skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 4
 - widening pupils' vocabulary and understanding of how to make their writing more descriptive and creative, by frequent use of discussion and inspiration from a wide range of literature
 - providing frequent opportunities for pupils to do writing based on their own practical investigations
 - teaching and modelling a consistent style of handwriting.
- Improve attainment in mathematics by the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 by:
 - ensuring that pupils know number bonds, place values and multiplication tables sufficiently well for instant recall by the end of Year 4
 - providing a good range of practical mathematical activities which motivate pupils by their relevance to their own lives and developments in the world around them.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils enter the school with skills and knowledge which are well below expectations for their age, particularly in speech and language. Although the majority speak English fluently, they do not have a wide vocabulary. Many of the oldest pupils have not made enough progress lower down the school or in previous schools, and still have much ground to make up. They are currently making good progress and attainment, while still low, is rising rapidly. Pupils in Upper Key Stage 2 made good progress in learning technical vocabulary and using connectives when writing a report about caring for the chicks they had hatched. Pupils learning English as an additional language were guided well by teaching assistants, being given visual clues and made to read back what they had written to see if it made sense. Pupils in Lower Key Stage 2 were let down by their basic times table, number bond and place value knowledge when trying to decide which large numbers were divisible by five and three.

Pupils develop as confident individuals who have a good knowledge of how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Their consistently good behaviour and attitudes are major factors in enhancing learning. Pupils with special behavioural needs are kept engaged in lessons through good strategies for behaviour management, and usually make similar progress to their classmates. In some lessons, behaviour is exemplary. Pupils' social skills are very well developed; they work and play harmoniously together and willingly take on responsibilities as monitors, play leaders and school councillors. They enjoy very active playtimes and sporting clubs. Pupils show their care for others by a wide variety of charitable giving, both in their immediate neighbourhood and through national events such as 'Red Nose Day'. Pupils' good personal attributes and the school's use of 'Inspire' workshops prepare them well for life beyond school, but standards in English and mathematics currently reduce this to satisfactory.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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?

Teachers capture pupils' interest by imaginative planning of work with interesting and relevant activities, often making use of interactive whiteboard images, for example, to stimulate ideas and consolidate learning. They make good use of assessment to plan for groups at different target levels within their classes. Pupils know their targets well and can say how to achieve them and progress to the next level. Teachers routinely use peer- and self-assessment techniques. For example, older pupils exchange written work to check how well each other's targets have been met. Sometimes teachers talk too much themselves, and this limits pupils' opportunities to express themselves and widen their vocabulary through discussion.

Pupils' enjoyment is enhanced by opportunities to choose particular curriculum themes that match their interests. Good opportunities for developing literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are resulting in good progress, with improving standards. The curriculum is enhanced by a very wide variety of clubs and enrichment opportunities, including music and sports. These are very popular and have a very large take-up. Partnerships with local schools are important in developing teachers' expertise and in gaining subject support from secondary schools, for example in design and technology.

All pupils are well known as individuals. Pastoral care is particularly strong and extends to the well-run breakfast club. The work of the pastoral care team is very important in

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making sure that pupils attend school, and are confident they can talk to an adult if they are worried. Good guidance is given to pupils and their families when they start school and leave for secondary education. The school's work with children and families facing challenging circumstances is outstanding, and includes weekly 'drop-in' services. There are many examples of barriers to learning being overcome for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those learning English as an additional language.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership team is effective in communicating its own high expectations. Consequently, all staff work as a cohesive team with a strong drive for further improvement. Increasingly challenging targets are set for all pupils and often exceeded in Key Stage 2, for example in writing as a result of a recent pilot initiative to improve writing in Year 4. This is to be extended to Key Stage 1 and Upper Key Stage 2 next year.

The governing body's effectiveness is good; it is led and organised well. Governors have specific roles. They gain first-hand experience of the school's work and are effective in challenging its leaders for further improvement. The governing body is vigilant in ensuring that good provision for safeguarding retains its high priority. It took good account of the views of parents and carers, for example, when recently reorganising the school entrance.

This is a school which makes sure everyone has equally good opportunities to succeed. All pupils have individual targets to achieve, based on careful and frequent assessments, so they virtually all make good progress. Gaps identified between the progress of different groups have been addressed and are rapidly narrowing. They all have opportunities to take part in the good enrichment programmes.

Adults and children from a wide variety of ethnic groups have a strong understanding of a common set of values which hold their community together. A senior leader has been appointed to focus the school's exceptional contribution to its local community, where it has a markedly beneficial effect in providing support and guidance to families who find themselves in vulnerable circumstances. School leaders constantly evaluate the impact of their outreach to school communities in this country and in Jamaica and Malawi, aiming to improve it further.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

When children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage the majority are fluent in English, although their vocabulary is limited. Good and often excellent teaching by all adults who work with the children ensures that they make good progress and thoroughly enjoy learning. Staff place a good emphasis on the development of children's personal and early literacy skills. Children's vocabulary is strongly developed through the encouragement of constant discussions with adults and each other. The recently hatched ducklings are a particularly popular focus. Younger children learn words to describe them and their life cycle. They count the eggs. Older children are able to observe and write about their development week by week. Many excellent opportunities are provided for early writing to develop through games and role-play activities such as answering the telephone and writing notes in a diary.

Children are confident and happy in this secure and welcoming environment. Their personal, social and emotional skills develop rapidly and behaviour is often excellent. They know that 'good sitting' and 'good listening' are required when sitting on the carpet and at tables when being taught individually or in groups.

Good planning of exciting, independent activities helps to develop children's curiosity and creativity across all the areas of learning. Good use is made of rigorous assessment to move children's learning on, and differences in boys' and girls' attainment have been identified as areas for development. There is a very well-equipped learning environment indoors and immediately outdoors to develop all the skills expected for children of this age. Leadership is good, with high expectations in all aspects of provision and children's attainment. The welfare of all children has a similarly high profile to that seen throughout the rest of the school. The good partnership with parents and carers extends to home visits and learning workshops.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

There was a smaller than average return of completed questionnaires. The vast majority of those who responded were positive about their children's experiences at the school. All reported their children enjoy school and are kept safe, and that teaching is good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas' Church of England VA 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 31 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 198 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	22	71	9	29	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	22	71	9	29	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	21	68	9	29	1	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	61	11	35	1	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	17	55	14	45	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	45	12	39	3	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	35	19	61	0	0	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)	13	42	16	52	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	10	32	16	52	3	10	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	39	15	48	1	3	1	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	29	17	55	1	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	18	58	11	35	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	21	68	9	29	1	3	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	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).

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">■ 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.



17 June 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas' Church of England VA Primary School, Birmingham, B15 2AT

Thank you very much for being so helpful to my colleagues and me during our visit. It was good to see you all so happy and enjoying your learning. There is an exceptionally strong community spirit in the school which enables you to get on well with each other and people from other communities. We think St Thomas' Primary School gives you a satisfactory education. It has many strengths and is improving rapidly, but we think you are capable of achieving better key skills in English and mathematics.

Your headteacher, deputy headteacher and other leaders do a good job in running the school. Teaching is good, so you enjoy your lessons and work hard. Your teachers expect all of you to do well, and so you make good progress. Your behaviour is good and your attendance is satisfactory. You come to school wanting to learn, and this helps you make the most of your school days.

All the adults take good care of you and you can always talk to an adult if you are worried. You learn how to keep yourself safe and healthy. You make good suggestions about your curriculum topics, which helps your teachers plan how best to help you learn. You are very responsible and do a lot of jobs in school.

Your school has excellent links with the local community and church. It has good links with your parents and carers. You enjoy getting to know some new friends in schools in this country, Jamaica and Malawi.

I have asked your teachers to raise standards in English and mathematics by building on the good work they have already done for the youngest children and those in Year 4, making sure that you have lots of exciting opportunities to sharpen up your skills. You can help too by always doing your best work.

Yours sincerely

Carol Worthington

Lead inspector

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