

# St Thomas' CofE (A) Primary School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	124380
<b>Local Authority</b>	Staffordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	363980
<b>Inspection dates</b>	14–15 July 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Doris Bell

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>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	193
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	David Shemlit
<b>Headteacher</b>	Lynne Williamson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	2 July 2008
<b>School address</b>	Poplar Drive Kidsgrove, Stoke-on-Trent ST7 4HT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01782 787099
<b>Fax number</b>	01782 783540
<b>Email address</b>	office@st-thomas-kidsgrove.staffs.sch.uk

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 21 lessons, taught by seven teachers. They also met with parents and carers, groups of pupils, members of the governing body and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including teachers' planning, the school improvement plan, assessment, monitoring and evaluation records, records for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and safeguarding policies and procedures. Inspectors also analysed the responses to the questionnaires for pupils and staff, and the 96 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

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

- What is in place to ensure the improvements in English this year are sustainable, that mathematics does not fall behind, and that even more pupils reach the expected levels in both subjects?
- Do pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with hearing impairments, make as much progress as possible?
- How significant are the reported inconsistencies in teaching and progress, what are leaders and managers at all levels doing to eliminate them, and how effective are they in this?

## Information about the school

This school is smaller than the average-sized primary school. It has an above-average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The proportion of pupils who have statements for special educational needs is well above average. The school has specialist resourced provision that caters for three hearing impaired pupils from North Staffordshire. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The school has before- and after-school clubs, and it has achieved Healthy Schools status. It also holds a curriculum award. A privately run nursery, which is inspected separately, operates on the school site.

**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?**

**2**

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

**2**

## Main findings

This is a good school. Effective leadership and management have brought about good improvement since the previous inspection. The school is reflective and its self-evaluation is accurate. The checks on teaching and learning are robust, and they lead to improvement because areas for development are followed up. As a result, achievement is good for all pupils, from the least to the most-able, and attainment is above average by the end of Year 6. The resource base for pupils with hearing impairment is managed well. The provision is especially successful in helping the pupils to integrate fully into mainstream classes, and to take a full part in everything the school has to offer. Good systems have been put in place to sustain the improvements made in English, and to boost progress in mathematics. The school, consequently, has good capacity for further improvement.

Children learn and develop exceptionally well in Reception because of the excellent provision, leadership and management in that age group. In the rest of the school, almost all teaching is good or better. It is supported by an outstanding curriculum, which gives pupils a say in their learning. Staff and pupils are equally enthused by the new, creative approach, which sees writing skills promoted exceptionally well in different ways in different subjects. Early indications from the test results at the end of Year 6 in 2011 are that, while writing has improved, attainment in mathematics has fallen slightly. Pupils' books show good progress and above average attainment in mathematics, with particular strengths in number skills. Nevertheless, although there is good use of mathematics in some subjects, opportunities are missed to encourage pupils to use their mathematical skills consistently well to solve real-life problems, in mathematics lessons and in topic work. Additionally, while marking is good in English, it is not as well focused on the next steps in learning in mathematics, and therefore does not always show pupils what they need to do to improve. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used extremely well in most subjects across the curriculum, for research, and to support reading and writing. It is not always used as effectively to promote mathematical learning.

All pupils spoken to feel very safe in school. They talk animatedly about how the school keeps them safe and teaches them to keep themselves safe. They have an excellent understanding of what is involved in following a healthy lifestyle and why it is important to do this. Pupils behave well. They report that they are not always 'Peter Perfect', but that staff deal quickly and effectively with any misbehaviour, including the occasional incidence of bullying. They appreciate this. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and wider community, and attendance is above average. All of this is the result of the excellent care, guidance and support provided for all pupils. These ensure that pupils leave the school well prepared for their future.

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

- Improve attainment in mathematics by:
  - giving pupils more opportunities to use their numeracy skills to solve problems in mathematics and in topic work, and to use ICT to support mathematical learning
  - raising the quality of marking in mathematics so that, as in English, pupils always know what they need to do to improve.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils thoroughly enjoy learning, and they achieve well. Children start school with skills that are below those expected for their age. By the time they leave Reception, these skills are at average levels, and by Year 6, they are above average. The school has successfully raised attainment in Year 2, and in writing throughout the school, since the previous inspection. Both are now above average. Writing is imaginative and well-presented, boys and girls are equally proud of it, and both make good progress. Pupils know their targets, the levels they are at, and can explain clearly what they need to do to improve. In lessons, they are able to explain their tasks, for example, how to use a particular word in different ways.

Pupils make exceptionally good use of their writing skills in different contexts. This was seen in their books and in lessons where, for example, geography provided the basis for literacy work, in English and in French. In one outstanding lesson, pupils brought together knowledge from geography, mathematics, French and ICT, as they used their understanding of compass directions and climate to create a weather forecast for the whole of Africa, in French. Pupils use their ICT skills extremely well to assist their learning in most subjects, although not always consistently so in mathematics. Nevertheless, this is done well in some classes, for example, to promote calculation skills and self-assessment. Pupils' calculation skills are good because mental agility in mathematics is promoted consistently well across the school. In Year 4, for example, pupils talk confidently about square numbers and relate the need to calculate rapidly to what they might need to do in real life.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Issues are identified early; detailed planning focuses on the needs of individuals, and skilled support staff help pupils learn successfully. Pupils who attend the resourced base are supported well in class, for example, by the use of hearing equipment, including radio microphones, and signing, and in the withdrawal sessions that focus on their particular needs. As a result, they make the same good progress as their classmates. Depending on their different ability levels, their attainment, too, is in line with their peers.

Pupils' excellent understanding of safety issues begins in Reception and continues throughout the school. Pupils are proud of having been told they are 'the best school' on trips, because they 'listen and don't misbehave'. They are entirely confident that poor behaviour is dealt with well. They appreciate the range of rewards and sanctions that encourage good behaviour, and they understand that some pupils need different approaches because of their specific difficulties. Pupils make healthy eating choices at lunchtime and those who bring packed lunches are proud to show off the healthy food in them. A large proportion of pupils regularly take part enthusiastically in the many sporting activities available to them. Pupils have a real voice in the school, for example, through

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the school council, and in class, as they determine some of their own learning. This adds to their enjoyment of school. They are reflective, caring, and respectful. They learn also to care for the environment, and they raise money for different charities at home and abroad. Links with other schools enable them to mix with pupils from different faiths, cultures and backgrounds. They readily accept each other's differences, reporting that it is much better to concentrate on the similarities, and to learn to live together. Relatively speaking, however, their understanding of cultural diversity in the United Kingdom is the least well-developed aspect of their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school is working on this.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	2
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</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?**

Teaching and learning have greatly improved in consistency. This is a highly inclusive school where pupils are known as individuals, and work is planned effectively to meet their needs. Pupils respond well to the high expectations staff have of their learning and behaviour, and this assists their progress. Planning is usually securely based on what pupils already know. It is most often translated into lively teaching and a good range of exciting activities that ensure pace and challenge for all pupils. Good subject knowledge and well-focused questioning add to this by building on pupils' responses and encouraging them to think more deeply and answer questions fully. This happens also in French lessons where pupils, immersed in the language, make good progress in learning to speak

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and understand it. Occasionally, pupils spend too long passively listening, with too little time to engage fully in their own learning. Consequently their progress slows. In whole-class sessions, pupils show good ability to reflect on their learning and progress, and teachers use this to good effect to move learning on.

The curriculum is exceptionally well planned to capture the interests of boys and girls, and to promote their academic and personal development. It has rekindled enthusiasm for writing because it provides pupils with a wide range of contexts within which to develop their language and literacy skills. The creative, topic-based approach is exceptionally successful in developing learning in different subjects in a range of exciting ways. For example, pupils 'experienced' an Egyptian tomb when an area of the school was converted into one, and the school grounds have been developed extremely well to promote learning in, for example, science, art and the environment. A very wide range of extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors enrich pupils' learning and personal development and add to their enjoyment of school.

Extremely effective monitoring and evaluation processes are built into the individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has developed exceptionally good links with their parents and carers, and a range of external agencies that assists teaching and support staff, and greatly benefits all pupils. Well-organised activities with the on-site nursery and with secondary schools ease transition for pupils between different phases of education, as do the high-quality arrangements for transition from one year group to the next. Parents and carers comment accurately that the school 'goes the extra mile' for its pupils to make sure they are 'happy and settled', and ready to learn. The procedures for promoting good behaviour and above average attendance are effective. They include nurture provision for a small group of pupils with behavioural difficulties which is very successful in helping them improve their behaviour. This ensures they do not disrupt learning for others. The before- and after-school clubs provide pupils who use them with a calm start and finish to the school day.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

Senior leaders have successfully embedded in all staff a strong determination to help pupils achieve as well as they can. Staff are deployed well to address any shortcomings in pupils' learning, and they are supported effectively through carefully selected professional development. This, along with challenging targets and the robust monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, is driving improvement across the school. Links with parents and carers are good. All parents and carers who responded to the inspection

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questionnaire said the school is well led and managed, and it communicates well with them, particularly about their children's progress.

Governance is good. The governing body supports and challenges the school well, checking its outcomes and gathering information through visits to school and meetings with staff, pupils and parents and carers. Safeguarding procedures, including those for child protection, are good. The school is vigilant in ensuring that all pupils, including those whose circumstances might make them vulnerable, are kept safe and that they are taught to manage risks, in and out of school. The school promotes equality of opportunity well. It ensures that all pupils, whatever their ability or circumstances, including those with hearing impairments, can participate fully in everything it has to offer. The school has an excellent understanding of its own community, and of the community it serves. It makes good use of its strong links with the parish and the local community to enrich the curriculum for the pupils. It also helps pupils to explore, accept and celebrate different faiths and cultures, and they are beginning to be able to compare them with their own. Overall, it promotes community cohesion well.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<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>2</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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## **Early Years Foundation Stage**

Excellent leadership and management, high quality teaching and an exceptionally well planned curriculum ensure that every minute of time is used for learning. Activities, indoors and out, give children a wide range of opportunities to learn new things. Some are planned specifically for individuals or groups, while others enable children to follow their own interests and take their learning in different directions. Literacy skills, including writing, are developed exceptionally well. Children's imagination was captured as they responded to a letter from an alien asking to visit them. They set their letters out well, wrote in complete sentences with accurate punctuation, and made good attempts at

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spelling. They also considered what they might ask the alien, and why, and how they would know whether it was safe for them to talk to the alien. Number skills are also developing well as children learn to count up to and back from a given number, to count in twos, fives and tens, and to calculate in different ways.

Adults are especially skilled at intervening in activities that children select for themselves. They move children's learning on almost imperceptibly without taking it over, and they record the children's progress meticulously. Transition from one part of a lesson to another is seamless because children are so used to the well-established routines, and settle themselves very quickly. Their social skills are developed particularly well. They listen carefully, share and take turns, and throw themselves wholeheartedly into everything they have to do. Behaviour is excellent. Children thoroughly enjoy learning and they are exceptionally well cared for.

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

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

## Views of parents and carers

Almost all parents and carers are highly satisfied with what the school does for their children. Comments such as, 'The school gives children a good education but also children are happy, well-mannered and have respect for others', and, 'The staff here always go the extra mile', are typical of those received. Parents and carers also praise the 'extra help' pupils get when they need it, although a few expressed concerns about how pupils with behavioural difficulties affect others. The inspection team found that the school manages the behaviour of all pupils well. It provides good support for pupils with behavioural difficulties, minimising any disruption their behaviour might have on the learning and personal development of other pupils.

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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas' CoFE (A) 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 96 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 193 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	61	64	34	35	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	76	79	16	17	3	3	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	58	60	38	40	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	57	59	37	39	2	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	61	64	33	34	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	43	45	51	53	0	0	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	57	59	39	41	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)	55	57	40	42	0	0	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	61	64	32	33	0	0	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	49	51	34	35	9	9	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	42	44	52	54	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	60	63	36	38	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	66	69	29	30	1	1	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](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.**



18 July 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Thomas' CofE (A) Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST7 4HT**

Thank you very much for the very warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school, and for talking to us about what you do there. It quickly became clear to us that you are really proud of your school, and that you behave well and want to make good progress. Alongside good teaching, your hard work and very positive attitudes enable you to do this. You told us that you feel very safe in school, and what you said shows us that you know how to keep yourselves safe in and out of school. Watching Reception children consider how they would know whether it was safe to talk to the alien that was about to visit their classroom shows that this teaching begins at an early age. You have an excellent understanding of what is involved in following a healthy lifestyle, and also in caring for the environment. These things are helped by the excellent care, guidance and support your school provides for each and every one of you.

You go to a good school. Those who lead and manage it constantly check how well you are doing and they ensure your good progress in English and mathematics. The excellent curriculum, which you have helped to create, contributes to this. We found that, while you are strongly encouraged to use your literacy skills in different subjects, not enough attention is given to ensuring that, wherever you can, you also use and apply your mathematical skills. We have, therefore, asked the school to do what follows, to increase the progress you make in mathematics even more.

Give you more opportunities to use your mathematical skills to solve problems in mathematics and in topic work, and to use ICT more to support learning in mathematics.

Improve the marking of mathematics so that, as in English, you can always be certain about what you need to do to improve.

Yours sincerely

Doris Bell

Lead inspector

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