

St Thomas' CofE Primary School

Parkgate Road, Stockton Heath, Warrington, Cheshire, WA4 2AP

Inspection dates 17–18 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Although action taken by senior leaders has led to improvements in teaching and pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching is still inconsistent across the school.
- Attainment is rising overall but pupils' progress rates are uneven as they move up through the school, especially in Key Stage 2.
- Checks made on the quality of teaching have not been sharp enough to ensure it is consistently good or better. In some lessons, the pace of learning is too slow and tasks are not hard enough for pupils.
- Teaching and progress require improvement in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Activities provided for children are not always practical enough to encourage investigation and discussion. The teaching of letters and sounds is not effective. It is not always clear what children are expected to learn.
- Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage require improvement. Teachers' planning is not always focused sharply enough on supporting children's learning and progress; assessment does not provide a sufficiently clear picture of how well children are doing.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher, governors and a new leadership team are putting in changes that are starting to move the school forward at a brisk pace.
- As a result, the proportion of good or better teaching is increasing.
- Achievement is very good in Year 2 and Year 6, where teaching is outstanding.
- Pupils have good social and communication skills. They are keen to learn, enjoy school and play together cooperatively and feel safe. They behave well and their attendance is good.
- Good, well managed provision enables pupils with special educational needs to achieve well.
- Parents say they have confidence in the school and its new leaders.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 12 lessons, including one joint observation with the headteacher. They also made a number of short visits to lessons. They listened to pupils read in Years 1, 2 and 6 and they observed the teaching of letters and sounds in the Reception class and in Key Stage 1.
- Meetings were held with six members of the governing body, with staff, with a group of pupils and with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors reviewed information from 38 responses to the on-line parent questionnaire (Parent View), from the outcomes of a parent survey conducted by the school in November 2012 and from letters and individual submissions received from parents during the inspection. They also met with a group of parents to hear their views about the school.
- They took into account the views that staff expressed in the questionnaires they completed.
- They observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including safeguarding documents, development plans, local authority reports, records of pupils' current attainment and progress, documents relating to pupils' attendance and behaviour and pupils' work.

Inspection team

Diane Auton, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Katherine Lee

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is similar in size to most other primary schools.
- Most pupils are White British, with English as their home language. There are no pupils at an early stage of learning English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is below average, as is the number of pupils at school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is well below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Before- and after- school care are offered on site by a private provider. This facility is inspected separately and reports are available on the Ofsted website.
- Since the time of the school's previous inspection, changes in leadership have included the appointment of a new headteacher in September 2011. The appointment followed a period during which an acting headteacher was seconded to the school. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2012 and a new senior teacher joined the school during the summer term of 2012. There have also been a number of changes in teaching and support staff, in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stages 1 and 2.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching, especially in Key Stage 2, is consistently good or better, so that pupils make consistently good or better progress as they move up through the school, by:
 - sharing excellent practice and guiding improvements
 - checking even more carefully on the impact of teaching in lessons and in pupils' workbooks
 - ensuring teachers always have high expectations of what pupils can do and achieve and that learning moves along briskly in lessons.
- Ensure that teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is consistently good or better, so that children are enabled to make good or better progress, through:
 - planning and providing a wide range of opportunities for children to learn actively through play and investigations
 - ensuring that adults help them to think and talk about their play and encourage them to be creative and critical
 - improving the methods used to teach children about letters and the sounds they make.
- Improve leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - providing guidance and direction for staff in planning and teaching the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum
 - ensuring that planning is based on an accurate assessment of children's progress towards the goals expected of them.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Children's skills are usually above expectations for their age group when they join the Nursery class. They make variable progress in early literacy and numeracy because activities do not always support their learning well, but their personal, social and emotional development is good. Children are happy and secure in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They enjoy coming to school and are able to express themselves clearly and confidently in conversation.
- Children's progress in learning about letters and their sounds (phonics) requires improvement in the Reception class because teaching is not tailored closely enough to their needs.
- Progress from Year 1 to Year 6 requires improvement because it is not yet consistent between classes. Progress in reading in Years 1 and 2 is very good reflecting the better teaching of letters and sounds in these classes. By the end of Year 2, pupils' reading skills are above average for their age. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 has been high for the past five years and pupils in the current Year 2 show evidence of high achievement.
- Progress in Key Stage 2 requires improvement because of the inconsistencies between year groups. However, strengths in some classes, especially for the older pupils, have led to achievement improving. As a result, results of national tests 2012 for Year 6 were above average in reading and mathematics and average in writing.
- The very effective teaching in Year 6 is leading to a number of pupils in this year group making very rapid progress from their starting points at the beginning of the year. Indications are that this group will sustain and possibly exceed last year's attainment in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school's data on progress, lesson observations and work in pupils' books all show that progress is less rapid when teaching is less effective. This was seen, for example, in an English lesson in Key Stage 2 where pupils' attention had wandered from their work because the pace of learning was too slow to engage their interests fully.
- Variations in progress also link to previous staffing turbulence in past years. This has resulted in some gaps in learning for some pupils, especially those who are currently in Key Stage 2. Leaders and staff are working hard to address these issues and progress in reading, writing and mathematics has started to improve.
- The achievement of the very small number of pupils known to be entitled to the pupil premium, including those eligible for free school meals, is similar to that of the other pupils in the school. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in relation to their abilities and starting points, often making significant progress as a result of the good provision that is made for them.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because while there is an increased proportion of good and outstanding teaching this is not yet consistent across the school. Most lessons in reading, writing and mathematics enable pupils to make good or better progress, but, in the minority of lessons where teaching is weaker, pupils' progress is not rapid enough.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, supervision and welfare arrangements meet requirements and children settle into the Nursery class quickly and happily. Teaching does not always support children's learning and progress sufficiently, however, especially in the Reception class. Opportunities to challenge children to think and find out more through questions and activities are sometimes missed and children do not gain as much interest and enjoyment from their play as they otherwise might.
- In a minority of lessons elsewhere in the school, expectations of what pupils can do are not always high enough and so activities are not always hard enough to ensure good progress. This was seen, for example, in a mathematics lesson in Key Stage 1 where pupils working with two-dimensional shapes did not make enough progress because the activity was too easy for them.

- Where teaching is most effective, pupils become entirely engrossed in learning activities and show that they can produce high standards of work. In a writing activity in Year 6, for example, pupils were intrigued by the challenge to produce a poem using surreal descriptions. Skilful use of questioning helped them to develop their ideas, which they tested out in discussions with a partner. Their completed work showed that they had achieved a mature understanding of how to inspire an emotional response through poetry. Learning targets and check-lists of how to succeed were used very successfully to move learning forward. Pupils made excellent progress in developing their writing skills and were clearly proud of their achievement in the activity.
- Most teachers provide constructive advice for pupils when they mark their books and this is helping them to know what they need to do to improve their work. Individual learning targets are used effectively to help pupils understand the next steps they need to take to improve.
- Teaching assistants contribute well to the learning and progress of all of the pupils, especially those who have special educational needs. They also play a key role in addressing issues for pupils who are identified as underachieving, providing booster support for those who need extra help.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' behaviour is good and they are considerate and polite. Pupils say they feel safe in school and that there is always someone on hand to help them if they have a problem.
- Behaviour in lessons is generally good and pupils usually apply themselves well to their work. Occasionally, in lessons where teaching is less effective, pupils become distracted and lose concentration and focus.
- Relationships between home and school are very positive. Parents' comments and questionnaire responses reflect their appreciation of everything the school provides for their children. A typical comment described the school as 'a caring, safe environment where children can maximise their individual potential'.
- Pupils have a clear understanding about different types of bullying. They say that neither bullying nor racism is tolerated in their school. They say that if they fall out with each other and they are not able to sort it out for themselves, staff will always help.
- Pupils readily take on responsibility as influential school councillors or as play leaders. At lunchtime, older pupils sit at dining tables with the younger ones and are positive role models for them.
- Pupils with additional learning, health, language and social needs are supported very well and so they are enabled to access all school activities and to make good progress in their learning and their personal development.
- The school provides sensitive support for pupils and families whose circumstances might make them vulnerable. Staff work productively with a range of external agencies to ensure they receive all the help they need.
- Attendance is above average and punctuality is good, reflecting the strong partnership between parents and school.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management are not yet good because leadership and direction in the Early Years Foundation Stage is not yet fully developed and also because, although improvements in teaching have been secured, there is still more to do to ensure consistently good or better teaching across the school.
- The headteacher is a strong leader and has created a positive climate for improvement in the school. Parents' comments and questionnaire responses say they feel well-informed about the school and about their children's progress. They describe the school as 'warm and welcoming',

saying staff are 'friendly and approachable'. Staff morale is high and parents comment on how well the staff work together as a team.

- The headteacher and the leadership team regularly check on pupils' progress and on the impact and quality of teaching. Leaders and teachers check on progress each term and identify any pupils who may be underachieving. Action is then taken to improve matters. Although progress is not yet consistent it is improving and the gaps in the year groups where it is slower are being closed.
 - The monitoring of teaching is more rigorous although not yet fully effective in resolving all weaknesses especially for the younger children. Nevertheless, effective training has been put in place to improve skills where needed. Staff are starting to share good practice and work together.
 - Systems to track pupils' progress are well-established in Key Stages 1 and 2 but this is not the case in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school is working with the assistance of the local authority to establish a more effective system for this age group.
 - Support for pupils with special educational needs and for pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is led and managed effectively. These pupils are included in all activities.
 - The curriculum brings subjects together into interesting topics and pupils say how much they enjoy their lessons. Visits, including residential trips, visitors and well-attended after-school clubs all add enrichment. Staff plan frequent opportunities for pupils to practise and develop their literacy, numeracy and communication skills in their topic work.
 - The local authority has given intensive support to the school in recent times. This has now been reduced, but regular advisory input continues.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - With the guidance of the headteacher and through regular reviews of data on progress, governors now have an improved overview of pupils' performance and of the impact of teaching in the school. This means that they are increasingly able to hold the school to account and to ask searching questions from a well-informed standpoint. They ensure that staff are set challenging targets linked to pupils' progress and school priorities. Governors are fully aware of the link between achievement of these targets and salary progression. Governors manage the budget well and check that pupil premium funding is spent appropriately on providing additional learning support for targeted pupils and to help to pay for visits and enrichment activities for eligible pupils. The governing body gives good support to the headteacher in meeting safeguarding responsibilities, particularly regarding the safety of pupils and staff appointments, and in ensuring that equal opportunities are promoted and discrimination is not tolerated.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	111318
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	405330

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	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Speed
Headteacher	Ian Moss
Date of previous school inspection	27 April 2011
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