

St Thomas the Martyr Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

Mill Lane, Up Holland, Skelmersdale, Lancashire, WN8 0HH

Inspection dates 21–22 March 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Clear vision and dedication from the headteacher, shared by staff and governors, have ensured that pupils' achievement and teaching have rapidly improved since the previous inspection.
- Children make outstanding progress in the highly creative and greatly improved Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Pupils achieve well through the school in reading, writing and mathematics. An increasing proportion of pupils reach above average levels in national tests.
- The quality of teaching is good and occasionally outstanding. The curriculum provides very well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development.
- The school is extremely welcoming especially to those pupils who join during the school year.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and they say, and their parents unanimously agree, that they feel extremely safe.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not check that all lessons get the best out of all pupils and especially the more-able pupils.
- Marking of pupils' work does not always show them how to improve their learning and teachers do not provide pupils with enough time to act upon the advice given.
- The role of subject leaders, other than English and mathematics, is not fully established. They are not involved enough in checking on teaching and learning and their links with governors are not strong.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 12 lessons, one of which was a joint observation with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, members of the governing body, pupils, both in school and those spoken to on their residential trip, and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors checked school documents relating to safeguarding, looked at pupils' work in their books, heard some pupils read and reviewed the ways in which the school checks on pupils' learning.
- The inspectors took account of the 12 parental responses received at the time of the inspection from the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), the school's own parental survey and the staff questionnaires.
- Years 5 and 6 pupils were on an outward bound trip during the two days of the inspection. However, an inspector travelled to meet and talk with them and their class teacher.

Inspection team

Clare Henderson, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Pamela Hemphill

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (this is extra government funding to support children of armed forces families, pupils who are looked after by the local authority, and pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals) is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled and those with special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported through school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The proportion that have joined the school other than at the usual times is above average in some year groups.
- Almost all the pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school runs a breakfast club and an after-school club.
- The school is a partner in the Shares Consortium, developing collaborative learning activities with other schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching so that achievement is outstanding by ensuring:
 - teachers check that all lessons get the most out of all pupils and especially the more-able pupils
 - marking of pupils' work always shows them how learning can be improved and ensuring pupils have enough time to act upon the advice given.
- Raise the quality of leadership and management to outstanding by ensuring subject leaders, other than English and mathematics, are provided with more opportunities to check on the quality of teaching and pupils' learning in the subjects they lead and establish closer links with the governors.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start school in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills which are below those typical for their age. Excellent teaching in the recently improved indoor and outdoor settings enables children to make outstanding progress.
- A strong emphasis on developing children's investigation in mathematics gets off to an outstanding start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and continues in all year groups.
- Pupils in Years 1 to 6 achieve well. Results of national tests have rapidly improved and current attainment shows that pupils leave school with attainment above average in English and mathematics. More pupils reach the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics tests.
- Test results in 2012 were lower than in 2011 but remained above average at the expected levels. Given that a considerable proportion of these pupils joined the school during Key Stage 2 and, taking account of their individual starting points, their progress was good in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Although overall the more-able pupils make good progress and this is raising attainment, this is not consistent between years. Occasionally, these pupils are given work that is not hard enough and in these lessons they could make more progress. This is the main reason for overall progress being good rather than outstanding.
- Pupils enjoy reading, and read confidently in Years 1 and 2. Consequently, pupils in Year 1 achieved above the national average in the reading test in 2012 and by Year 2 exceeded the expected level.
- Younger pupils have a good understanding of letters and the sounds they make and work out words they are unsure of. Older pupils talk enthusiastically about their favourite authors.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs receive extra support, combined with well planned activities. This enables them to achieve at least and, often, better than other pupils.
- The pupils who benefit from the pupil premium achieve well because money is spent wisely on extra teaching and support for pupils' social and emotional needs. This group includes pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and their attainment is above average. They make good progress similar to other pupils in the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good and occasionally outstanding and enables pupils to make good progress.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Excellent planning, exciting topics that interest the children and exemplary records which are shared regularly with parents extend children's reading, writing and mathematical skills very well.
- Reading is taught effectively. The increased focus on teaching letter sounds has raised pupils' confidence to tackle unfamiliar words. Older pupils have time to read regularly and this ensures they know a good range of authors.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They plan different activities, which are often practical and involve pupils in lots of discussions with partners to boost their speaking and listening skills. This sustains their interest throughout the lesson.
- Pupils in Year 3, for instance, eagerly shared the song they had composed to sing to the school cook who is retiring. Excellent singing and composition was accompanied, on the guitar, by the talented class teacher.
- Although Years 5 and 6 pupils were not observed in school, an inspector spent time with them on their residential outward bound trip in the Lake District. Pupils were found to be using skills of resilience and self-confidence very well, applying them confidently to the real life problem-

solving tasks they faced on the trip. Such activities prepare them very well for their future lives.

- Although the marking of pupils' work is regular the quality of the advice given and time provided to respond to teachers' comments varies throughout the school.
- Teachers' explanations are generally clear. As a result, pupils know what is expected of them and can settle quickly to their work. Work is usually set at the correct level for pupils' ability but the more-able pupils are not always set hard enough work. Some pupils, often the more -able, said they would like to get on more quickly, rather than complete introductory activities, as they understood the task.
- Staff foster pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural understanding exceptionally well with frequent reminders about how to work together, value differences and to be patient with others.
- The teaching of the pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding is good and support staff ensure all these pupils achieve well.
- Teaching of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is good. Adults, and particularly the skilled teaching assistants, ensure these pupils receive help tailored to their needs.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and enjoy school. This is reflected in their rapidly improving levels of attendance which are above average.
- Inspectors' observations and school records show that behaviour is typically good in classes, around the school and over time. Pupils say that poor behaviour never spoils lessons.
- Behaviour observed by inspectors was good and sometimes outstanding. This has a positive effect on pupils' good achievement. Parents fully agree with this view. They are very supportive especially about their children's well-being and safety.
- Behaviour is judged as good rather than outstanding because occasionally pupils are not fully engrossed in their learning as their concentration slips.
- Pupils feel strongly that the school belongs to them. They enthusiastically welcome the good range of responsibilities given to them, such as being school or eco councillors and peer mediators. Such roles teach them to act responsibly and support each other.
- Teachers insist that pupils obey school's rules. Systems for recording and following up incidents of poor behaviour are consistent and secure. Strong links with social services and other educational partners ensure all pupils and their families are given appropriate support and guidance.
- Pupils say they feel very safe and understand how to keep safe. They say teachers and support staff have helped them to understand how to take care on the roads or when using the internet.
- Pupils have a strong sense of fairness and eagerly support those they believe are less fortunate than themselves. Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying and say staff deal swiftly and effectively with any incidents that arise.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children are extremely safe and secure. They confidently learn to share equipment and to play happily together.
- A daily breakfast and after-school club, attended by a good proportion of pupils, make a good contribution to pupils' personal development.

The leadership and management are good

- Very effective leadership from the headteacher and the deputy headteacher, the exceptional leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage and good quality of governance has ensured the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement has improved well since the previous inspection.

- Leaders regularly check the quality of teaching. Any weaker aspects are identified and improvement suggested. This is more effective in English and mathematics where subject leaders play a full role in monitoring what is happening in their subjects. It is less effective in other subjects where this role and links with governors are not as well established. Nevertheless, there is little variation between teaching.
 - Pupils' progress is closely monitored and help provided where it is most needed. Teachers are asked to account for any lack of progress.
 - Teachers have targets based on raising pupils' achievement and their performance. These are linked closely to training and to teachers' salary progression.
 - The local authority's regular and perceptive support has aided the school's improvement. The strong partnerships which exist with the local school consortium provide excellent opportunities for staff to share their expertise.
 - The curriculum offers a balance of experiences and promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceptionally well. These aspects thread through lessons, assemblies and clearly taught Christian values and ensure pupils behave well. Pupils' learning is greatly enriched by residential visits, sports, artistic opportunities, clubs and activities.
 - Parents say they are well informed about events in school by regular newsletters and the informative website. As a result, parents are very supportive of the school.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors' regular visits to school provide them with enough information to gauge the progress of initiatives. They recognise the quality of teaching and the link between the performance of the headteacher, teachers, posts of responsibility and salary progression. They review data and are fully aware of how pupils are achieving compared with other schools nationally. They are more informed about English and mathematics than other subjects where the role of leaders is less well developed. In conjunction with the headteacher, they manage the school's finances efficiently, including the use of pupil premium funding. Governors ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures meet statutory requirements. They do not tolerate discrimination of any sort and ensure that equal opportunities are provided for all pupils.
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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	119495
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	401847

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	168
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Helen Foster
Headteacher	Julie Butcher
Date of previous school inspection	4 November 2009
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