

St Thomas Church of England Primary School

Kenyons Lane, Lydiate, Merseyside, L31 0BP

Inspection dates 17–18 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Pupil's achievement is outstanding. They make excellent progress throughout the school to achieve standards in reading, writing and mathematics which are well above average by the time they leave Year 6.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are exceptionally well supported and their achievement in all subjects is outstanding.
- Teaching is exemplary. Teachers have excellent relationships with pupils, and have very high expectations as to what they can achieve. They ensure that lessons are vibrant and stimulating and are careful to make sure that lessons are challenging.
- Pupils' exceptional behaviour makes an excellent contribution to their achievement. They are eager to learn, and have a highly developed understanding of their responsibilities towards others.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. They say that they feel very safe at school, and that adults take good care of them. Their behaviour in class and around the school is exemplary.
- The leadership of the headteacher and her senior leadership team is outstanding. They lead the school with compassion and commitment and ensure that all staff and pupils learn and work together in a well planned and exciting environment.
- The governing body and all staff have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and what it needs to do to improve further.
- The school's relationship with parents is first-class. The school provides many opportunities for parents to be actively involved in the education of their children.
- The school's Christian ethos promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceedingly well. As a result the school is harmonious and well respected within the community.
- Teachers are further developing their practice to ensure that pupils use their initiative, become even more adventurous in their learning, and apply their investigation skills across all subjects.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons as well as small group activities, parts of lessons, one celebration assembly and the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make).
- Inspectors listened to pupils read from Years 2, 3, 5 and 6, and held discussions with two groups of pupils from across the school, and one group of Year 6 pupils.
- Meetings were held with various members of staff, including members of the senior leadership team and subject coordinators.
- Pupils' work was scrutinised by inspectors during lessons, and separately with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with ten governors, including the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body. A meeting took place with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 89 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), as well as the school's own surveys of parents' and pupils' views. Questionnaires completed by 17 staff were also taken into account.
- Various school documents were examined. These included school data on pupils' progress, minutes of the governing body meetings, monitoring records of the quality of teaching, external school evaluation reports, development plans, records of pupils' attendance, records of behaviour, and safeguarding documentation.

Inspection team

Lenford White, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Elaine Murray

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is much lower than average, and no pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives additional funding through the pupil premium is well below the national average. (The pupil premium is additional government funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children with a parent in the armed services, and those children that are looked after by the local authority.)
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- A privately run breakfast club, and after-school clubs operate on the school site.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Encourage pupils to use their initiative more, and become even more adventurous in their learning, by creating more opportunities for them to work independently and apply their investigation skills across all subjects.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- For the last five years, up until 2012 standards reached by pupils at the end of Year 6 have been significantly above the national average; in 2013 they were well above average. This is because the school's 2013 Year 6 class of pupils included a very high number of boys with special educational needs. Discussions with this group, and a close scrutiny of their books and progress reports throughout Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, reveals that from their initial starting points, all made outstanding progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Excellent facilities, high quality teaching, effective teamwork and an exciting curriculum ensure that children get off to an exceptionally good start in Reception and make outstanding progress in all areas of learning from their starting points.
- Throughout Key Stage 1 pupils achievement is outstanding, especially in reading and writing which are significantly above the national average by the end of Year 2. Half-termly pupil progress review meetings ensure that any pupils in danger of falling behind are quickly identified. One-to-one support and small-group teaching activities ensures that such pupils quickly catch up to other pupils in the class.
- The teaching of phonics (the links between letters and the sounds they make) is outstanding. The school's results in the national phonics screening check are significantly above the 2012 national average. Those pupils who read for inspectors shared a passion for reading and read books from a wide range of authors and genres.
- The school carefully identifies the nature and level of support needed by each individual pupil. As a result, pupils from minority ethnic groups make at least good progress and achieve as well as other pupils.
- Teachers ensure every pupil has an equal opportunity and consistently track the progress of pupils ensuring, for example, that boys' performance in writing is continuously improving and that there are no significant gaps in standards between any groups of pupils.
- The school uses its pupil premium funding exceptionally well. For example, when necessary each eligible pupil receives small-group reading support to achieve specific targets. The school has no free school meals pupils in the current Year 6. However last year's pupils did exceedingly well in reading, writing and mathematics. Their average point scores were, on average, two terms ahead of other pupils who were not entitled to the pupil premium.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make at least good progress. Some make outstanding progress in reading and mathematics. This is as a result of the targeted support they receive.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- A high proportion of teaching observed during the inspection was outstanding and none was less than good. A scrutiny of pupils' work reveals that their achievement and the quality of teaching are typically outstanding over time.
- Lessons are purposeful and move along at a rapid pace, ensuring that all pupils are engaged. Objectives for all lessons are clear and shared with pupils. Teaching assistants and other adults are well trained and work very well to support small groups of pupils in class.
- Teachers ensure that lessons are both interesting and engaging. Year 6 pupils who spoke to inspectors were keen to share their Second World War project work, which they were excited about because of their visit to The Imperial War Museum and the research they had done. However, such opportunities for pupils to use their initiative, apply their investigation skills and become even more adventurous in their learning are sometimes missed.
- Across the school all teachers expect pupils to achieve very high standards and ensure that literacy and numeracy skills are developed across all subjects.

This was seen in an exceptional phonics lesson in Reception where a teacher successfully managed to develop pupils' reading skills and their knowledge of geometric shapes (spiders' webs) while at the same time linking the lesson to their mini beast topic.

- Teachers challenge pupils to achieve as much as they can and develop exceptionally good relationships with them. This was evident in an outstanding Year 3 mathematics lesson where pupils were asked to come up with the best method for working out the smallest of a series of numbers which could be divided by five and three, then decide on a challenge for themselves.
- Pupils are adept at evaluating their own work and the work of others. This is evidenced in their books and at the end of most lessons where they are encouraged to examine each other's work highlighting the best aspects of, for example, a piece of writing, and saying how it might be even better.
- Teachers ensure that pupils are very confident in sharing their ideas with class-mates, as in a very effective Year 2 English lesson where pupils were asked to comment on and improve a paragraph describing conditions for nurses such as Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities and have exceptionally positive attitudes to learning. They are extremely courteous, proud to welcome visitors into their school and behave outstandingly well in lessons and around the school.
- Staff unanimously agree that behaviour is good, and well managed in school, as did the overwhelming majority of parents who completed the parent view and the school's own surveys of parents' views.
- Pupils embrace the many opportunities that they have to develop their leadership skills through participating on the schools many committees, such as the eco, global, behaviour and worship committees.
- Pupils' knowledge of how to keep themselves safe is very well developed and enhanced through the curriculum and through the many visitors who come to the school to talk to pupils about safety. Their knowledge and understanding of all types of bullying is exemplary. Those pupils who spoke to inspectors were adamant that bullying rarely, if ever, takes place at their school. As one pupil explained, 'no one would bully here because it is wrong and the behaviour committee would never allow it'.
- Discussions with pupils reveal that they have an impressive understanding of prejudice based bullying. The work that they have done on the Civil Rights Movement and what they have learned from speakers such as Chris Foy (Premier League Referee) has instilled in them a highly developed sense of right and wrong. As one pupil noted 'we don't judge a person by the colour of their skin in this school we treat everyone equally'.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of cyber-bullying and know how to keep themselves safe while using the internet. All pupils know never to talk to people they do not know through, for example, on-line chat-rooms.
- Pupils' sense of charity and compassion for others is highly developed. Those who spoke to inspectors were proud to share information about the funds that they have raised for Alder Hey Children's Hospital, the charity work they have done to support a Zimbabwean pupil through school, and the 700 parcels that they have sent, and the prayers that they have written, for soldiers in Afghanistan.
- Pupils are very confident that they can raise any concerns that they have with an adult, or with a friend, and that any such concerns will be taken seriously and dealt with immediately.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The school's senior leadership team have been very effective in continuously improving the quality of teaching and pupils' performance. The headteacher, supported by an able senior

leadership team, dedicated staff and knowledgeable governors is very ambitious and determined to ensure that all pupils realise their potential.

- Parents are very complimentary of the school and the headteacher in particular who has managed to successfully 'open up' the school to families. During one of the school's seven year-group assemblies, 50 parents and relatives came to share in the achievements of Year 2 pupils. After the assembly they were eager to talk to inspectors about how much they value the school. The exceptionally high response to the parent view on line survey, and family involvement in learning about literacy and numeracy, confirms that there is considerable parental involvement in the school.
- Leaders make sure that teachers' pay and performance is directly linked to whole-school priorities and pupils' achievement. Precise monitoring of teaching and sharing good practice has helped to improve standards across the school. Due to this the school is highly respected within its cluster of schools, and is increasingly sharing its successful practices wider afield.
- The school has an exceptionally strong commitment to learning, evidenced by a very broad range of professional development opportunities available to all teachers. Teachers are of the opinion that the training and development that they receive helps them in their work and supports them in continually improving their practice.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is exceptionally strong. The school's Christian ethos helps to ensure this, as do the excellent cooperation between pupils and the school's careful selection of visitors to enhance pupils' spiritual and cultural experience and understanding.
- The school's imaginative curriculum ensures that pupils reading, writing and mathematical skills are exceptionally well developed. Residential stays at, for example, Conover Hall and visits to Clitheroe Castle bring the curriculum to life, creating a sense of excitement and enjoyment of learning for pupils.
- The school's many after-school clubs, including cricket, football, gardening and tennis, further enhance the development of pupils' team work, communication, literacy, and numeracy skills.
- The local authority has a very good relationship with the school. Its targeted intervention and improvement team have supported it in assessing the overall quality of the school and in monitoring the quality of teaching.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are highly skilled and have developed their capacity through carefully selecting training to help them challenge and support school leaders to pursue excellence. Governors know where the school's strengths lie and what it needs to do to improve even further. This is because they attend meetings regularly, critically assess all documentation presented to them and actively engage in the life of the school. Governors know that the quality of teaching is outstanding and that pupil progress review meetings are effective, because they observe them.
- Governors are presented with information on the progress of pupils entitled to support through the pupil premium funding on a regular basis. They know that the extra support that they receive in English and mathematics and the funding available for school trips have ensured that such pupils make at least good progress. Governors see that targets to improve the performance of staff are continually reviewed and that teachers' pay is linked to pupils' performance.

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	104919
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	413295

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	197
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jane Dunn
Headteacher	Ann Lock
Date of previous school inspection	19 June 2008
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