

St Thomas CofE Primary School

Hodnet Drive, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Wigan, Lancashire, WN4 8PQ

Inspection dates 10–11 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- Pupils achieve well. They make good progress from their starting points to reach above average standards overall by the end of Year 6.
- Teaching is good. It promotes good progress in all subjects and prepares pupils successfully to make the most of their future education.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because teaching is carefully matched to their individual needs. This means the school promotes equality of opportunity effectively.
- Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good, because of the strong focus on respect for rights, and the high quality care the school gives to each pupil.
- The school ensures that pupils have opportunities to participate in sport and learn about what makes a healthy lifestyle.
- Pupils' behaviour is good, in lessons and around school. Pupils feel safe and secure, and enjoy trusting relationships with the adults in school.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's vision for excellence is shared by governors and all staff. Actions are prompt and effective and this has secured improvements in teaching and learning. Staff morale is high and all are committed to securing further improvements in achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not yet outstanding. Tasks do not always match pupils' ability especially for the more-able pupils and boys in reading in Key Stage 2. Marking does not consistently make it clear how pupils can improve. In lessons teaching assistants are not always used effectively.
- Middle leaders do not always make the best use of progress data to help them raise the achievement of all pupils. Plans to make the school better do not make it clear how the impact of change will be measured.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 16 lessons and parts of lessons, one of which was observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were conducted with governors, the staff team and four groups of pupils. A telephone conversation took place with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 55 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), written correspondence and the school's own records of parents' views.
- Evaluations of a range of school documentation contributed to the inspection judgments. These included the details relating to safeguarding, the improvement plan, the school's procedures for gaining an accurate view of its performance, records of pupils' attainment and progress, and of checks on the quality of teaching, and samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also met with groups of pupils to listen to their views on lessons and behaviour. Pupils in Years 2 and 6 discussed their reading with inspectors and read to them.

Inspection team

Jean O'Neill, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Chris Maloney

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is similar in size to most other primary schools. In the last two years the school's admissions policy has changed and numbers have reduced. Most pupils are of White British background with a very small proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational need is below average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is below the national average. (The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after).
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching, and so raise achievement, particularly for the more-able pupils and boys in reading by:
 - ensuring that teachers plan work which stretches pupils of all abilities especially the more-able
 - making sure that teachers give consistent advice to pupils on how to improve their workbuilding on recent improvements to the curriculum aimed at encouraging boys to read
 - ensuring that skilled teaching assistants are always used well, throughout the whole lesson, to support pupils' learning.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - sharpening the action plans of all leaders making it clear how the impact of actions taken on pupils' learning can be measured more clearly
 - ensuring that middle leaders make the best use of progress data to help them raise the achievement of pupils.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Overall achievement throughout the school is good. The majority of children start school with skills which are typical for their age. Children make good progress from their individual starting points in the Early Years Foundation Stage, so that their attainment is in line with, or above average by the time they begin Year 1.
- Good progress continues in Key Stage 1. The proportion of pupils who met the required standard in the Year 1 check on their phonic skills, which investigates their knowledge of letters and sounds, was above average in 2012 and again in 2013. By the end of Year 2 most reach above average standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils make good progress overall in Key Stage 2 to sustain standards by the end of Year 6 that are above average and rising, especially in writing and mathematics because an increasing proportion of pupils reaches well above the level expected for them (Level 6). Progress in reading is now accelerating so that attainment is above average and the gap with other subjects is closing.
- Pupils' achievement is not outstanding because teachers across Key Stage 2 have not provided consistent challenge for the more-able pupils and for boys in reading.
- Pupils make good progress in reading from an early age because they are taught their letters and sounds effectively. They use these skills well to read new words. Older pupils enjoy reading and apply their skills in other subjects. Boys do not always make as much progress as they should because teachers do not capture consistently their enthusiasm for reading.
- Achievement in mathematics has improved significantly because teachers now ask probing questions that increase pupils' confidence in applying skills. By the end of Year 6 there are some highly skilled mathematicians working at high levels.
- Pupils quickly learn to put down their ideas in writing and some pupils make excellent progress from their lower starting point in writing. Examples of imaginative work were seen and older pupils produce biographies and reports which show accuracy in basic skills and are presented neatly.
- Whilst the most-able pupils make good progress overall in mathematics and writing, this is not the case in all lessons and their achievement in reading is closer to the average nationally.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and the few from minority ethnic backgrounds, make the same good progress as that of their peers. This is because they receive good support from skilled teaching assistants and their needs are closely identified. This reflects the effective promotion of equal opportunities for all.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, make good progress overall, and attain at similar levels to these pupils nationally. However, their attainment at the end of Year 6 in 2013 was five terms behind the very high levels achieved by other pupils in school in mathematics and writing, and two terms behind the levels achieved by other pupils in reading. Due to effective actions taken by the school, this gap is now closing very rapidly, especially in writing and mathematics.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching is good overall. Where teaching is strongest, there is a brisk pace of learning because the activities are at exactly the right level of difficulty to ensure that pupils, including the most-able, make rapid progress. This was seen, for example, in a phonics lesson in Key Stage 1, where the teacher used highly skilled questioning to ensure that all pupils, including boys, were challenged to think deeply and try hard.
- Mathematics and writing are taught particularly well. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and develop pupils' understanding very effectively. In mathematics, pupils are taught in small groups according to their ability, and this means that tasks are closely matched to their

needs. Pupils get the challenge and support they need and learn effectively. Reading is also taught well especially in Key Stage 1, where letters and sounds are taught through practical activities that pupils enjoy.

- Positive relationships between pupils and adults in the classroom contribute well to pupils' learning and progress. Pupils say 'If you're struggling, teachers really help you.' As a result, pupils behave well and are not afraid to seek help when it is needed.
- In most lessons teachers use assessment information effectively and work closely matches pupils' needs. However, in some lessons, teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations for the most-able pupils, especially in reading, and sometimes work is set that is not difficult enough to ensure that this group makes rapid progress.
- Good use of shared indoor areas in school enables the younger children in the Early Years Foundation Stage to enjoy practical activities which enhance their learning. The school is aware that the Reception outdoor space does not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to use their imagination and develop their skills, and the new Key Stage leader has appropriate plans to address this.
- Teaching is not yet outstanding because teachers do not always give pupils advice on how to improve their work, especially in subjects such as science and history. Consequently, they are not clear as to the next steps in their learning. Skilled teaching assistants are not always used to best effect at all times, to support pupils' learning and progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school is good. In lessons where the pace of learning is rapid, pupils show very good attitudes and are very well motivated to learn.
- Attendance is above average. Pupils enjoy after-school and lunchtime clubs such as cheerleading, chess, sign language and I-pad club, as well as a wide range of sporting activities.
- Pupils have a good awareness of different forms of bullying, and say that such issues are very rare and quickly resolved by adults who they are happy to go to for help. One pupil told inspectors 'I mention this school to other people, because everyone is very kind.'
- Comments from parents and the responses to the on-line Ofsted questionnaire (Parent View) indicate that pupils enjoy school and behave well. Pupils say that sometimes they don't enjoy science and themed lessons so much when 'the work is too easy', because everyone is doing the same work, regardless of ability.
- Pupils are polite, kind and get on well with each other. Behaviour is not yet outstanding because a minority of pupils, especially boys, sometimes loses interest in lessons and they do not pay attention as well as in other lessons.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher gives clear leadership and firm direction to the school. Her actions have secured improvements in the school's work so that teaching and pupils' progress are good.
- Teaching is monitored closely and training provided where it is most needed. A few issues remain to be resolved especially in the deployment of teaching assistants to ensure that they are used most effectively.
- The overall checking on pupils' progress is successful in ensuring that overall progress is good. However, recent changes in leadership, due to promotion of key staff to other schools, have meant that some middle leaders are at an early stage in their leadership role. As yet, there is not consistency in the use of pupil progress data to help them raise the achievement of pupils in all subjects.
- The school's evaluation of its work is accurate and is generally used well to decide priorities for further improvement. However, actions to achieve these priorities are not always sharp enough to show the impact they will have on teaching and learning and how success will be measured.

- The reading curriculum has recently been adjusted to meet the needs of boys, and this is starting to engage boys more in reading. The school's leadership recognises the importance of continuing to build on these improvements.
- The curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It helps pupils to respect and care for others and to gain a good understanding of the lives of others, for example a recent visit to school by a paralympian basketball player. A wide variety of visits helps to bring the themes to life for the pupils.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements. Good links with other agencies and services help to promote pupils' safety.
- The school has used the primary school sport funding to employ two Higher Level Teaching Assistants to help deliver physical education and sport lessons. This enriches the experience of pupils and extends staff knowledge. Pupils enjoy these sessions and achieve well.
- The school values the support provided by the local authority, which has helped it to continue to improve, and the group of local schools with which leaders work in close partnership.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body maintains high expectations of the staff and pupils. Governors summarise their work as 'demonstrating care with challenge'. They have a secure knowledge of teaching in school and have supported the senior leaders well in improving the quality to ensure that it is good. They use this information to ensure that performance management systems are robust. Leaders and staff are set challenging targets linked to pupils' progress and school priorities. Governors insist that the achievement of these targets is always closely linked to salary progression.
 - Governors review data about pupils' progress and compare their achievement with other schools. They check that the pupil premium funding is spent wisely, for example on providing additional individual or small-group support for pupils who need it.

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	106465
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	429201

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	233
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Malcolm Taylor
Headteacher	Judith Jones
Date of previous school inspection	23 March 2009
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