

St Thomas CofE Primary School, Halliwell

Eskrick Street, Bolton, Lancashire, BL1 3JB

Inspection dates 5–6 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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

- Between Years 1 and 6 not enough pupils are making consistently good progress from their starting points. As a result, standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 are well below average.
- Teaching over time has not been consistently good, especially in Key Stage 2. Work planned for pupils is not always demanding enough and this slows progress, particularly for the most able.
- Teachers' marking does not always help pupils to improve their work. Teachers do not always ensure pupils understand how to achieve the targets they are given.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise and extend their skills in reading, writing and mathematics in other subjects.
- The instability caused by the many changes in senior leadership has hindered the effectiveness of the school, the efforts to improve the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils.
- Teachers are not yet held fully to account for ensuring pupils' make good progress.
- Plans to improve teaching and pupils' achievement do not always help leaders judge whether pupils' progress is good enough.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed headteacher has an excellent understanding of what the school needs to do to improve.
- Governors are well informed and hold senior leaders to account for the school's performance.
- Pupils' progress is improving and standards are rising. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and those supported through the pupil premium now achieve well.
- Pupils behave well, feel safe and have very positive relationships with staff.
- Strong relationships exist with parents and the local community. Parents feel valued and appreciated.
- The school works well with the local authority and other schools to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Efforts to improve teaching and raise expectations are being successful.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 20 lessons or parts of lessons, including two joint observations with the headteacher. They also checked closely on pupils' work in lessons, in books and on display around school and listened to them read.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other members of the school staff. Discussions were held with groups of pupils, representatives from the local authority and governors.
- The inspectors observed the school's work, including the school improvement plan, the school's checks on how well it is doing and pupil progress data. They checked the school website, documents relating to safeguarding and child protection, records of the attendance and behaviour of pupils and minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors also reviewed reports on the school by the local authority.
- The views of parents were collected from brief informal meetings during the inspection and surveys undertaken by school. There were too few responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) to be considered. Inspectors also took account of the views of staff through discussions with them and the 15 voluntary questionnaires that were completed.

Inspection team

Chris Maloney, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kevin Boyle

Additional Inspector

Emily Wheeldon

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- There are many more pupils from minority ethnic groups or speaking English as an additional language than in most schools of this size. Significant numbers of international new arrivals, at an early stage of learning English, join the school in the Reception class.
- More pupils than seen nationally are supported by the pupil premium. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children looked after by the local authority and children from service families.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- There have been significant changes in senior leadership and governors since the last inspection. During the last two terms the school has been receiving support from Brandwood Community Primary School in Bolton.
- The current headteacher was appointed in September 2013 following a period of being the acting headteacher.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching between Years 1 and 6 so that it is consistently good or better, particularly in Key Stage 2, by making sure that teachers:
 - always plan work that is challenging for pupils, particularly the most able, in order to stretch their thinking
 - consistently provide marking and precise targets that clearly shows pupils how to improve their work and check they have understood and followed the advice given
 - make the best use of teaching assistants to support and extend pupils' learning.
- Improve standards and accelerate the progress of all pupils in mathematics and in reading and writing in Key Stage 2, by:
 - ensuring pupils, particularly the most able, make consistently good or better progress in all classes
 - providing pupils with as many opportunities as possible to use and extend their reading and comprehension skills, as well as writing and mathematical skills, in a range of subjects.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - actions planned by leaders at all levels to improve the quality of teaching and achievement, are clear and measurable, particularly in their impact on pupils' learning and progress
 - all teachers are held rigorously to account for pupils making at least good progress
 - systems used for tracking how well pupils are learning more accurately reflect the precise amount of progress they make, so that any at risk of underachieving can be more swiftly identified and supported.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Between Years 1 and 6, the achievement of pupils requires improvement. Pupils' progress from their different starting points is variable across classes, particularly in Key Stage 2.
- Children generally start the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are well below those typically expected for their age. However, due to good teaching most children make good and sometimes outstanding progress from their different starting points. The many international new arrivals, nearly all with a home language other than English make good progress in their language development because they are well supported, including by skilled bilingual teaching assistants.
- Following a sharp dip in levels of attainment in 2012 at the end of Year 2, standards rose significantly in 2013 and were broadly average overall, the best results achieved by the school in five years. Despite this increase, by the end of Year 2, not enough pupils reach the higher levels of attainment in reading, writing or mathematics.
- Pupils have not been achieving well enough in Key Stage 2. Standards by the end of Year 6 have declined since the last inspection and, in 2013, were well below average overall. Not enough pupils made the progress expected of them. However, standards improved in mathematics with more pupils reaching the higher Level 5.
- The work of current pupils in school and school checks on how well they are learning, show that standards across the school are beginning to rise and pupils are now making better progress than in the past. However, this is still too patchy, particularly in Key Stage 2. In particular, the most able pupils are not always given work that enables them to make good progress.
- Standards in reading are rising. This is because of improvements made to the teaching of reading. Intensive daily teaching sessions coupled with reading activities where pupils read in small groups alongside adults are helping to speed up pupils' progress. In 2013, an above average proportion of pupils in Year 1 reached the expected standard in a national check of their understanding of the sounds that letters make. This is a significant improvement on the proportion that did so in 2012.
- Older pupils love reading and read regularly. They eagerly discussed their reading with inspectors, telling them about their favourite authors such as David Walliams and Jacqueline Wilson. However, pupils do not yet make consistently good progress in reading, particularly in Key Stage 2 because they do not have enough chances to strengthen their comprehension skills.
- Improvements have been made to pupils' handwriting skills and their ability to spell and use punctuation and grammar correctly. However, pupils still do not have enough opportunities to use and improve their writing skills when completing work in other subjects. The written work of the most able pupils lacks the content and structure you would expect for their ability. As a result, achievement in writing is not yet good.
- Improvements in mathematics are also evident. Pupils' basic number and calculation skills are now more secure. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to use and apply these skills when working in other subjects.
- Disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language make at least similar and sometimes better progress than others in school due to the highly skilled extra help they receive, particularly from bilingual teaching assistants.
- In Year 6 in 2013, the attainment of pupils supported by the pupil premium, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, was approximately half a school year behind similar pupils nationally. In school, these pupils were about a year behind other pupils in reading and writing and one and a half years behind in mathematics. School data and the standard of work seen by inspectors shows that gaps are closing rapidly and these pupils are now achieving well.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because not enough has been good or better over time, particularly in Key Stage 2. As a result, pupils are not achieving the standards they should in English and mathematics. Senior leaders are now having a more positive impact so that teaching is improving.
- Some teachers do not take enough account of what they know about how well pupils are learning to plan work that it is sufficiently challenging for pupils of different abilities within their class. This is hindering the progress made by all pupils. In some lessons the most able pupils in particular are asked to complete mundane tasks that do not stretch their thinking.
- Although pupils work is marked regularly, it does not always help pupils to improve their work and not enough opportunities are provided for them to follow up any advice given. Teachers provide pupils with challenging targets to aim for in their work, but do not always help them to understand the steps they will need to take to get there.
- Skilled teaching assistants are not always used to the best effect throughout the whole lesson, particularly when the teacher is talking to pupils or explaining the work they have to do. As a result, pupils do not always make the best possible progress.
- Teachers and teaching assistants care about the pupils as individuals and get to know them and their families well. This helps to form strong and secure relationships built on mutual respect. A typical pupil comment was, 'You know teachers care about you because they are always interested in what we do at home as well as in school.'
- The quality of teaching is now improving. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, every opportunity is taken to capture children's interests and stimulate their learning in the best possible way, taking full account of their different abilities.
- Some teaching is good or better. This is where teaching inspires and motivates pupils to aim high, try hard and do their best. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to ask probing questions that make pupils think hard. They make regular checks on how well they are learning to move them on quickly to harder work. In a Year 2 English lesson, for example, the teacher successfully challenged the most able pupils in particular to think of better ways to improve their descriptions of tigers. They eagerly responded with 'fierce, vicious and roaring'. One pupil wrote, 'Tigers are carnivores and that means they are meat eaters.' As a result, pupils, including the most able, made good progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They enjoy school and are eager to learn as is reflected in their average and improving attendance.
- Pupils are polite and enjoy very positive relationships with staff. They are proud of their school and welcoming to visitors. A typical pupil comment was, 'Teachers make lessons fun and are kind and helpful. You can always trust them.'
- Pupils get on well with each other in class and during break times. Pupils show respect for other cultures and faiths and understand the rights of people to hold different beliefs. Typical pupil comments were, 'Everyone gets along no matter where you come from' and 'No matter what colour skin you have you shouldn't change, just be yourself.'
- Pupils really enjoy the many opportunities they have to take on responsibility such as being a school councillor or a playground pal. Older pupils particularly enjoy helping to look after younger children at lunchtimes, especially those who are at an early stage of learning English.
- Pupils enjoy joining in the many clubs and after school activities provided such as bollywood dancing. Older pupils gain in confidence and self esteem on their residential trip to Hawes End in Keswick. Pupils are also really keen on playing tag rugby bought in with the extra sport funding received by the school.
- In lessons, behaviour is at its best when teaching is good or better. However, when teaching is not challenging enough, a few pupils lose interest, stop working and begin chatting. This slows

the progress pupils make.

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel safe and understand a lot about stranger danger, road safety and healthy eating. A typical pupil comment was, 'You should come to this school because it is safe and friendly.' Older pupils know a lot about staying safe on the internet.
- Pupils show a good understanding of the different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying and bullying as a result of prejudice. They say it doesn't happen much, but are confident staff deal with it properly.
- Evidence from the school's own survey and from conversations with inspectors all show parents hold positive views on the standard of behaviour and safety in school. A typical parent comment was, 'My child is happy and safe.'

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because, until recently, the uncertainty surrounding changes in senior leaders since the last inspection, have led to a period of instability and delays in addressing the weaknesses in the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils.
- The headteacher, ably supported by senior and middle leaders, has an unrelenting and passionate determination to steer the school in the right direction and tackle weaknesses head on. She has quickly grasped a clear understanding of the improvements that are needed and has galvanised staff and governors in sharing her mission and boosting morale. Typical staff views are, 'The headteacher has clear goals and the drive to take us where we need to be' and 'I feel the school has made many crucial changes for the benefit of children and staff.'
- Significant improvements have already been made to the quality of the learning environment in the Early Years Foundation Stage and a number of initiatives introduced to improve teaching, raise standards and accelerate progress. However, these are only just starting to be successful.
- The school's plans for improvement identify specific areas that need to be improved and some actions to be taken. However, they do not make crystal clear how leaders are going to judge whether actions have resulted in improved progress for pupils.
- Regular checks are being made on the quality of teaching and any underperformance is now being tackled more rigorously so that it can improve quickly. However, teachers are not yet fully held to account for pupils making good progress.
- The school works very closely with the local authority and receives support from Brandwood Community Primary School. These strong partnerships have successfully helped to bring about improvements to leadership and management, to the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. Teachers respond well to this support and so their practise is improving. However, inconsistencies still remain, particularly in Key Stage 2.
- The progress of pupils is now closely tracked reflecting the school's commitment to giving every pupil an equal opportunity to learn. However, variances in pupils' achievement across the school and between groups of pupils show that their efforts are not yet fully effective. Pupils' progress is not always precisely recorded on the school's tracking system and this hinders senior leaders understanding of exactly how well pupils are learning. This means that pupils at risk of underachieving are not always identified and supported quickly enough.
- The range of subjects is creatively planned which brings much enjoyment of learning for pupils. It is well enriched by, for example, activities such as learning French. The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Although sufficient curriculum time is allocated to English and mathematics, not enough opportunities are planned for pupils to practise and extend their pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills in other subjects.
- Good links exist with parents and the local community. A typical parent comment was, 'The school has changed a lot; the new headteacher is really approachable.'
- Good use has been made of primary school sports funding to improve the quality of sports coaching and improvements in the range of sports for pupils to try. Pupils' participation is

increasing and this is impacting positively on their well being.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance is good. Governors, including those new to role, know the school well and support the headteacher’s vision for improvement. They have improved their ability to challenge school leaders because they have added greater rigour to the way they check on the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils. They have an accurate view of the school’s performance. They ensure that teachers’ pay rewards are linked with the progress pupils make but are yet to ensure that leaders hold them to account for pupils making good progress.
- Governors monitor the school’s budget carefully. They know how the pupil premium is being spent and know that that progress of eligible pupils is starting to improve because the funds are targeted effectively so that these pupils achieve well. Governors ensure that arrangements to safeguard pupils meet requirements.

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	105218
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	440715

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	321
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Pott
Headteacher	Abigail Wright
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2010
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