

St Thomas Church of England Aided Primary School

Friars Rd, Winchelsea, East Sussex, TN36 4ED

Inspection dates 14–15 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher and the governing body, fully supported by the staff, are determined to pursue excellence across all areas of school life. The headteacher is decisive in her actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Pupils enjoy learning and make good progress in all classes. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 are above those found nationally.
- Teaching is effective in all classes. Teachers have a good understanding of how children learn and are adept at planning lessons that accurately meet pupils' needs. They are skilled at managing the mixed age ranges within each class to ensure all pupils make good progress.
- Pupils are kept safe and are well looked after. They respond by working hard and behaving well.
- Good use is made of extra government funding to support disadvantaged pupils to succeed highly. Any gaps in achievement between this group and all pupils are very small and closing.
- Parents are very supportive of the school and think their children make good progress in a safe and happy environment. As a result, attendance has improved and is now average.
- The early years provision is good. Children make good use of the inspirational classroom and outside area to explore and develop their skills. They have highly positive attitudes to learning.
- The experienced governing body provides strong support and effective challenge to the headteacher to ensure standards and progress continue to improve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The highest quality of teaching is not always shared widely enough to ensure all teachers continually improve their practice.
- Opportunities for pupils to respond to comments teachers make about their work are not consistent in all classes.
- A few parents are still not ensuring their child attends school every day.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 10 lessons, five of which were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspector talked with a group of pupils as well as with individual pupils during lessons. She heard some pupils read from Years 1, 2 and 6. The inspector looked at work in pupils' books.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, leaders responsible for English and mathematics, governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and she held a telephone call with a representative from the local authority.
- A range of documentation was examined, including documents relating to child protection and safeguarding, pupils' progress and attainment, attendance, pupil behaviour, the school's curriculum, the monitoring of the quality of teaching and the management of teachers' performance.
- There were insufficient responses to the online questionnaire for parents, Parent View. However, the inspector took account of the 63 responses to the school's own questionnaire. She also considered the nine responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Penny Spencer, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school. There are five mixed age classes.
- Almost all pupils are from a White British background.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is very small and below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils funded by the pupil premium is small and well below the national average. This is additional government funding to give extra support for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and to children who are looked after.
- The early years provision is full time.
- The headteacher is a Local Leader of Education. She is currently supporting another school.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- There have been several changes in staff since the previous inspection. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in April 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement to outstanding by making sure that:
 - all teachers give consistent opportunities for pupils to respond to their marking and feedback, to ensure pupils make the best possible progress in all subjects
 - all teachers share the good practice already in the school more widely, so every teacher makes rapid progress in developing their practice further.
- Improve attendance still further by:
 - working alongside parents to continue to raise their awareness of the importance of attending school every day.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher conveys a passion for the school's continuing success. She is determined to use every opportunity to help pupils expand their horizons and achieve well. She is supported well by her leaders and governors.
- Leaders are quick to take determined and decisive action. For instance, a dip in pupils' performance in 2013 was immediately analysed and effective measures put in place. As a result, standards and progress in 2014 are again above average. The school has good capacity to maintain this improvement.
- The headteacher takes careful consideration of the management of teachers' performance. Decisions about staff pay are linked closely to evidence of improvements in pupil progress and teaching. This is matched by good opportunities for staff to benefit from high quality training.
- Some opportunities are missed to share established good practice widely enough to ensure all teachers, but especially those who are recently qualified, make rapid progress towards excellence.
- Senior and middle leaders work well together to support the headteacher. The small nature of the school means they each take responsibility for many aspects of the school's work. However, they have an accurate understanding of the key priorities and precise action plans to ensure they succeed. These are implemented effectively.
- Leaders and managers give high priority to providing equal opportunity and eliminating discrimination. This is evident in the wide range of activities on offer to all pupils that broaden their horizons and raise aspirations. Pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs make good progress and achieve highly as a result.
- There are good links with parents and the school has been successful in encouraging parents to be more involved in their children's learning. As a result, attendance has improved. However, there are still a few parents who do not recognise this and who keep children at home for minor reasons.
- Leaders ensure that additional government funding is used very effectively to help disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as their peers. Careful analysis of their progress allows support to be carefully matched to their needs. As a result, any gaps in achievement are very small and are closing rapidly.
- There is an exciting range of learning activities available to all pupils. They strongly promote the good development of reading, writing and mathematical skills. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the way in which the subjects they cover are linked to interesting topics. The inspector was impressed with the standard of poetry being written by pupils in the mixed Year 4 and Year 5 class, which was based on the experiences of child chimney sweeps in Victorian times.
- The quality of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is strong. There is a real sense of purpose and mutual respect that encompasses the entire school community. The school works hard to develop pupils' understanding how life in many parts of modern Britain is different from their coastal environment. The curriculum provides memorable experiences including regular trips to London and other towns, plus frequent opportunities to take part in musical, cultural and theatrical events. Recent work with a large retailer has seen pupils holding web-based conversations with a pumpkin farmer in Norfolk. They have learnt how to look after the ones they are growing in their school allotment and gained an understanding of how food gets from the farm to the shop.
- The school uses the additional sport funding well. Teachers receive training working alongside specialist coaches. There is a wide range of sport on offer including archery, fencing and cross-country running. Funding has allowed the school to enter more competitions by providing transport and extra coaching. Good use is made of the outdoor pool to ensure all pupils swim competently. The uptake of early morning and after-school sports clubs is so high the school has had to add more.
- The local authority provides good support to the headteacher and governors. Following the dip in standards in 2013, it worked alongside the headteacher to ensure that these quickly returned to their previously high levels.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are fully committed to the school's improvement. They provide strong challenge to school leaders by checking that any actions taken are having a positive impact on pupil outcomes. Governors have a good understanding of how pupils' performance compares to the national picture. They were quick to challenge the reasons behind the dip in standards in 2013 and to work alongside leaders to make sure the quality of teaching and assessment was improved. Governors are diligent in meeting their statutory obligations, including the safeguarding of pupils. They visit the school regularly to gain a good understanding of the quality of teaching. They know about the school's arrangements for staff pay and progression and check these are used effectively to reward good performance. Governors manage

the school's budget effectively and check that additional government funding is used efficiently to improve pupils' progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are keen to learn and they work very well together. Most pupils persevere with tasks and have very positive attitudes to their learning. For example, children in the Years 1 and 2 class were observed writing independently with considerable concentration for an extended period to ensure their work was of high quality.
- Pupils take a pride in their work and their school. They look after resources and present their work neatly.
- Teachers and teaching assistants manage behaviour very well. They have excellent strategies for supporting the very few pupils who find it more difficult to maintain good learning behaviour. As a result, there is little or no disruption to lessons.
- This is further supported by school records which show minimal incidents and no exclusions over a long period.
- Pupils' good behaviour extends outside the classroom into break times, where the pupils make excellent use of the school's extensive grounds. Pupils play well together and playground buddies work hard to involve everyone in games and activities.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and expressed positive views on how friendly and kind the staff were. The small nature of the school means pupils and staff know each other well and relationships are good
- The leadership team has worked successfully with parents to improve attendance. It recognises there is still more to be done to ensure attendance becomes better than average. As a result, behaviour is not outstanding.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Staff are diligent in implementing safeguarding procedures and have a close liaison with outside agencies. Systems for ensuring staff employed to work with children are suitable are strong. The building and grounds are secure and well maintained and procedures for visitors are implemented consistently.
- Pupils and parents wholeheartedly agree that the school looks after them well and keeps them safe.
- Pupils know about the different types of bullying and say bullying rarely happens. They are confident that staff can deal with any situation and they trust them to help them at all times. Records kept by the school confirm that there have been no incidents of any form of bullying over a long period of time.
- Pupils also talked knowledgeably about how to keep safe when using computers and when using the roads.
- Pupils are developing an understanding of life in parts of Britain other than their own because of the good teaching and opportunities available through the varied topics.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good and reflects the way in which the headteacher has checked the quality of teaching and responded rapidly to any underperformance.
- Teachers know their pupils well and relationships are strong. They plan work that is interesting and supports good behaviour and positive attitudes.
- Children who are in Reception make good progress because the teaching is typically lively and engaging. Children have access to excellent resources to support their learning.
- Teachers have a good understanding of how children learn. This enables them to teach effectively to different age groups within the class. Pupils' work is assessed carefully and adapted quickly to ensure progress remains high.
- Following an uncharacteristic dip in standards at the end of 2013, all teachers revised how often they assessed the progress of pupils. As a consequence, standards and progress have accelerated.
- Teachers use questioning effectively to check how well pupils are doing and to make adjustments when necessary. This was observed during a mathematics lesson in the Year 2 and Year 3 class where, as a result of some good questioning, several pupils were quickly given more challenging work to attempt.
- Teachers also check pupils' work effectively from their books. They give them detailed information on how to improve and, in most classes, there are regular opportunities for pupils to respond and correct any

mistakes. However, this is not consistent across all classes. Coupled with some good practice not being shared widely enough amongst staff, this means that teaching is not yet outstanding.

- Teachers and teaching assistants form very effective teams. Good use is made of individual skills and expertise to ensure all pupils receive good support.
- Good guidance is given to disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Work is planned carefully and any extra support is given quickly to maintain good levels of progress. As a result their achievement is consistently good.
- Teaching of reading is highly effective and pupils learn to read well. They quickly learn how to match sounds to letters, and frequent opportunities to read from a good selection of books enable them to practise their skills. Pupils who read to the inspector used these skills well and showed real enjoyment for reading.
- There are very few pupils in the school who receive support from additional government funds. However, teachers track their progress very carefully and ensure that support is given when needed.

The achievement of pupils is good

- The children achieve well throughout the school, including children in the Reception class. Many exceed expectations.
- In 2014, pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics is above average. This reverses a dip in 2013 when attainment, especially in writing, fell from previous high levels. Assessment information for pupils in the current Year 6 and Year 2 classes shows this improvement is being maintained. This is confirmed by work seen in books that shows consistently good progress made by all groups of pupils.
- Pupils' knowledge of phonics (the sounds that letters make) is good. The proportion of children achieving the national standard at the end of Year 1 is above national expectations and has improved over time.
- Pupils at the end of Year 2 are making good progress and standards are above average. More pupils than average achieved the higher Level 3 than nationally, and this is an improving trend.
- Progress is good. In 2014, all pupils at the end of Year 6 made expected progress in reading and writing and most in mathematics. More able pupils went on to exceed nationally expected rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Most able pupils achieve well. The number of pupils achieving at the highest level is increasing. This is because specific support, such as the more able writing group, gives pupils extra opportunities to refine their skills and succeed.
- Work in books examined by the inspector supported test evidence that progress is good. Work is interesting, of high quality and shows rapid development in all areas. Achievement is not yet outstanding because some pupils do not have regular opportunities to respond to the marking and feedback in their books. This slows their progress.
- National tests and the school's own tracking information show very little difference between the small number of disadvantaged pupils eligible for support through extra funding and others. In 2014, the number of pupils who were eligible was too small to compare with national expectations. Pupils in the rest of the school are working in line with all pupils, except in writing where they are behind by less than a term.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress. Their achievement is above similar pupils nationally and in line with all pupils, because support is of a high quality.
- Concerns in 2013 over the quality of pupils' written work at the end of Year 6 have proved to be short lived. Progress and standards in 2014 exceeded national expectations. This is a result of precise and accurate monitoring by the headteacher and improvements in the quality of teaching.

The early years provision is good

- All adults have high expectations for children's success. They provide the resources and setting that children need to develop their understanding and challenge their thinking.
- Since the previous inspection the outdoor area has been transformed. It provides a stimulating, exciting and safe space in which children can develop their skills across all subjects. Activities engage children fully and, as a result, they concentrate and persevere for considerable periods of time.
- The majority of children make good progress from their starting points and are ready to start more formal

work in Year 1. Children quickly settle into the routine of school because staff are experienced and skilled in creating a welcoming and interesting place to learn.

- The Reception children are mixed with Year 1 pupils because of the small nature of the school. However, the early years leader and teacher is experienced and highly skilled at providing activities that are suitable for both year groups, to ensure all children make good progress. She is supported effectively by equally skilled teaching assistants.
- Checks on children's progress and assessments are regular and comprehensive. Parents are equally involved in the process and children's learning journals reflect the varied interests from home and school. Observations inform future planning and activities are designed to maximise learning experiences.
- The early years leader has formed good relationships with the pre-school settings, the local authority and other professionals. She uses the evidence she gathers well to make accurate assessments of children's achievements when the children enter school.
- Provision is not outstanding because, whilst children make good progress and develop their early reading, counting and writing skills, there is still room for improvement in the areas of writing and mathematics.

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	114563
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	444023

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	153
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Page
Headteacher	Mary Westhead
Date of previous school inspection	16–17 March 2010
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