

St Thomas CE Junior and Infant School

Church Street, Golborne, Warrington, Cheshire, WA3 3TH

Inspection dates 13–14 November 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		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The school is well led. The headteacher provides energetic and conscientious leadership. With the support of governors and effective senior and middle leaders, she is driving improvements forward briskly.
- The appointment of new staff members, including a learning mentor, has strengthened the staff team and has had a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Pupils feel safe and secure in school. They are taught well about the dangers of everyday life and how to deal with them. They behave well in lessons and at playtimes and older pupils carry out responsibilities sensibly, reflecting the school's strong 'family' ethos.
- There are effective systems in place for checking on the quality of teaching and its impact on the progress that pupils are making throughout the year. Teaching is now good, overall, with some outstanding elements.
- As a result, pupils are achieving increasingly well. They make good progress across Key Stages 1 and 2 and reach nationally expected standards by the end of Year 6, often from low starting points.
- Reading is a particular strength of the school, with pupils achieving very well in building on their reading skills in all of the year groups.
- Any gaps that remain between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils in the school are being addressed and are closing rapidly.
- Parents express their confidence in the school's leaders and staff. Greatly improved attendance figures testify to a strengthened partnership between home and school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A small amount of teaching requires further improvement.
- Pupils are not always given opportunities to respond to the advice they are given in marking to improve or correct their work.
- Work is not always hard enough to challenge and stretch the most able pupils and this sometimes limits their progress.
- Teaching and assessment in the Reception class require improvement to enable children to make more rapid progress from their starting points during their first year in school.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of lessons, across all of the year groups in school. Four observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher. The inspectors listened to pupils read in Years 2 and 6 and discussed with them the books they have enjoyed and those they are currently reading.
- The inspectors met with a group of governors, with senior and middle leaders, with a group of pupils and with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors took into account 13 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). An inspector met a group of parents and spoke by telephone to an individual parent to hear their views about the school. The inspectors also took account of the school's most recent survey of parents' views.
- The views that staff expressed in the questionnaires they returned were also taken into account.
- In observing the school's work, inspectors looked at and evaluated the work in pupils' books. They also reviewed a wide range of documentation, including safeguarding documents, the school development plan, records of pupils' attainment and progress and documents relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Diane Auton, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jennifer Platt

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than most other primary schools. Numbers have risen since the time of the last inspection.
- Almost all pupils are White British, with a very small number of pupils from a range of other ethnic backgrounds. Currently, no pupils are at an early stage of learning to speak English.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above 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.
- A new headteacher took up her post in September 2013. A new deputy headteacher was appointed this term.
- The school experienced some staffing turbulence during the last school year, arising from causes which included long-term sickness absences as well as retirements and promotions. Five new appointments to the teaching staff were made, in order to fill the resulting vacancies.
- A learning mentor post was created at the start of the summer term in 2014.
- The school operates a breakfast club every day.
- An above-average proportion of pupils join or leave the school at times other than those usual for the beginning or end of primary education.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching is good or better in every class, so that pupils' progress in English and mathematics continues to accelerate, by:
 - continuing to guide and support improvements through sharing expertise and good practice
 - ensuring that the most able pupils are always given the challenge they need to achieve the high standards they are capable of reaching
 - ensuring that pupils are always given opportunities to respond to the advice they are given by teachers when they mark their work.
- Improve the quality of early years provision so that it prepares children well for Key Stage 1 and enables them to make more rapid progress in their first year in school, by:
 - ensuring that the quality of teaching is consistently good or better
 - ensuring that activities are planned well enough to enable children of all abilities to learn and progress quickly and successfully and that planning is based on clear and accurate assessment of children's progress.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher has set a clear agenda for ongoing improvement. Leadership team restructuring and new staff appointments have reinvigorated the school and staff morale is high. Everyone shares the headteacher's vision for taking the school forward.
- Support for teaching is effective, with systems in place to check on the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress. The deputy headteacher, the special educational needs co-ordinator and middle leaders all contribute strongly to this process through lesson observations, regular analysis of pupils' work and through sharing good practice with colleagues. All of this has ensured good or better teaching in most classes. Leaders know there is more to do to eliminate a small residue of less effective teaching in the school. They are also aware of the need to continue the work they have already started to improve the effectiveness of the school's early years provision.
- Additional funding to support the learning of disadvantaged pupils and of those who are vulnerable has been used very wisely, as shown by their good and improving achievement. This illustrates the school's successful promotion of equal opportunities for all of its pupils.
- Challenging staff performance targets are linked to the school's priorities, which are set out clearly in its development plan. Staff development is supported by a good-quality training programme for staff at all levels in the school.
- The curriculum takes a full account of the skills and knowledge pupils need to learn, with a clear focus on developing their basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Activities to promote pupils' personal, social and health education are of good quality. All of this results in a positive impact on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepares them well for their future lives in modern Britain.
- The school uses its additional funding for school sports well. A good range of activities are on offer for all age groups; there are many opportunities for pupils to enjoy sport and physical education after school and to take part in competitive events. The school's analysis of the impact of this shows enhanced staff skills and good levels of pupils' participation and enjoyment.
- The local authority has worked closely with the headteacher and governors over the last year and has provided consultant support to assist with ongoing improvements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have made some astute appointments to leadership and staffing over recent times, and have helped to ensure and sustain the school's good overall effectiveness. They have helped to check and review the quality and impact of teaching and have taken effective actions to challenge and address areas of underperformance. Appropriate plans are now in place for the next steps that need to be taken in order to secure full consistency in teaching quality. Governors are also currently in the process of recruiting a permanent appointment for the Reception class.
 - Governors visit classrooms regularly and they also receive regular, accurate and detailed reports on pupils' progress and the quality of teaching from senior and middle leaders. This means they are well informed and able to hold the school rigorously to account.
 - Governors make sure that checks on staff performance are thorough and that leaders and staff are set challenging targets linked to pupils' progress and school priorities.
 - Governors make sure that safeguarding policy and procedures are fully in place. They are fully aware of how the pupil premium funding is spent and the difference it is making to disadvantaged pupils. They ensure that the primary school sport funding is spent wisely and make regular checks of the impact of this expenditure.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well in lessons, around the school and at playtimes. They say how much they enjoy coming to school because, as one of the older pupils observed, 'We are encouraged to be ourselves'. They speak enthusiastically about the good range of extra activities that they can access after school.
- Pupils of all ages show positive attitudes to learning and this contributes well to the progress they make. In most lessons they organise themselves well, listen to instructions and work productively with a partner or in a group.

- Pupils' books show that they are taking an increasing pride in their work and that they usually try their best to present it neatly.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils say they feel confident that there is always someone to turn to if they need help. Parents express confidence in the care the school provides for their children.
- Pupils show a good, developing understanding of different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying. They say bullying is not an issue for their school and that when pupils fall out with each other, staff always help them to sort matters out.
- There are many opportunities for older pupils to take on responsibility. The school council, for example, is influential, with its own weekly newsletter keeping everyone well informed.
- All necessary checks on adults are carried out and staff training in child protection is updated regularly.
- The school provides good support for its potentially vulnerable pupils and their families. The school works well with outside agencies to ensure that support is targeted appropriately for children and families who require it.
- The school's popular breakfast club provides a warm and nurturing start to the day.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Improvements in the quality of teaching are having a very positive impact on pupils' learning and progress in Key Stages 1 and 2, where teaching is predominantly good and sometimes outstanding. In the early years, staffing is now more stable than in the previous year and better teaching is beginning to improve children's learning.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers are skilled at introducing difficult new work by engaging pupils' attention and interest in the lesson. In a literacy lesson in Year 2, for example, pupils took part in a 'hot seat' activity based on the story of *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. They thought of questions to ask the Troll, who was in the hot seat, played by a pupil who supplied the answers in a suitably growly voice. Because this was fun, pupils were keen to go on to write what they had heard, first in speech bubbles and subsequently using speech marks in their writing, with increasing accuracy and success.
- Reading is taught well. Year 2 pupils who read to an inspector used their knowledge of letters and sounds to work out unfamiliar words and read with interest and expression.
- The work in pupils' books shows that they are given frequent opportunities to write within a range of subjects and for different purposes. This has contributed well to the school's successful drive to raise standards in writing.
- Teachers mark pupils' books regularly, often giving good advice on how to improve. However, pupils are not always given the time and opportunities necessary for acting on what their teachers tell them and so sometimes repeat the same mistakes.
- Teaching often supports the learning and progress of the most able pupils by ensuring high levels of challenge in the activities that are planned for them. Occasionally, however, work is too easy for the most able and this means that their progress in the lesson is not as rapid as it could otherwise be.
- Pupils who need extra help, such as those with special educational needs and some disadvantaged pupils, are supported well by teachers and teaching assistants. Additional small-group or individual support is provided by well-trained staff for those who need it and this ensures they make good progress.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Most pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 are working at the expected standards for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Standards were broadly average at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2014, but were generally lower than those of the previous year. School data and inspection evidence show that this dip was largely related to particular issues for that cohort of pupils. For example, the proportion of pupils with special educational needs was greater than both the national and the school's average proportions. The proportion of pupils in the year group who had joined the school at later points during Key Stage 2 was also above average.

- In the current year, an above-average proportion of pupils in Year 6 are on track to reach nationally expected standards by the end of the year in all of the three subjects. The proportion on track to reach the higher level in reading is above average; it is broadly average in writing and mathematics.
- Pupils' achievement is improving well in Key Stage 1. In Year 1, pupils are progressing well from relatively low starting points and are now working at standards that are much closer to expectations for their age group in reading, writing and mathematics. An above-average proportion of pupils in Year 2 are on track to reach nationally expected standards by the end of the year, representing a considerable improvement on 2014 outcomes. The proportion reaching the higher levels has also increased and is now much closer to national expectations in all of the three subjects.
- Evidence from across the year groups shows that pupils of all ages are making good progress, with an increased proportion achieving more than expected progress.
- By the end of Key Stage 2 in 2014, the majority of pupils in Year 6 had made expected progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics and most had made more than expected progress in writing. School tracking records and inspection evidence show that pupils in the current Year 6 are progressing at a brisk rate in all three subjects and have already made impressive gains in their first term, representing a significant improvement on the previous year's outcomes.
- At the end of Key Stage 2 in the last school year, there were some gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils in the year group and nationally. Disadvantaged pupils were about two terms below national standards in mathematics, although they were less than a term below the rest of their class. In reading they were a term below national standards, but a term above the others in the class. In writing, they were less than a term below national standards but around half a year above the others in the class. This demonstrates that the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in the school are either closed or closing rapidly over time. Inspection evidence and the school's data for disadvantaged pupils across the school confirm that this continues to be the case in the current year.
- The school has sharpened its focus on raising the achievement of its most able pupils and, as a result, increasing numbers across the school are now working at levels above those expected for their age. The school's data for the current year and inspection evidence confirm that standards are rising rapidly for this group of pupils.
- Pupils achieve well in reading. A majority of pupils achieved the required standard in the Year 1 national phonics check in 2014, but the proportion was smaller than in 2013. The school has now revised and overhauled its approaches to teaching sounds and letters and a programme of staff training took place last year. All of this is having a very positive impact across the school, with pupils making rapid progress in reading across the year groups. Pupils of all ages show a genuine interest in books and enjoy reading. By Year 6 most can read at the expected standard for their age, with an increasing number of mature and capable readers.
- Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in relation to their individual starting points, as a result of the good provision the school makes for them.
- Those pupils who join the school at various points during the key stages are helped to settle in quickly and achieve well.

The early years provision

requires improvement

- Most children join the Reception class with weak skills in many of the areas of learning, but especially in language and communication. A few children also have immature personal, social and emotional development.
- Children settle in well and are happy and secure in the class, because staff are caring and supportive.
- Behaviour is good. Children enjoy playing together and learning to share and take turns. They know the routines of the classroom; they are learning to follow instructions and to work with a partner.
- Staffing changes across the year in the Reception class in the last school year meant that children's overall progress was not quite as rapid as it might otherwise have been. As a result, less than half reached a good level of development by the end of the year. This year group is now making accelerated progress in Year 1.
- Staff have worked hard this year to create an appropriate learning environment in reduced accommodation, with limited indoor and outdoor space, while the school is waiting for a refurbishment programme to start in January. Staff also ensure that children are safe and give their welfare a high priority.
- Staff plan and provide a variety of learning activities for the children which usually engage their interest

and attention. Activities are too easy for the most able children, however, on some occasions.

- Letters and sounds are taught well and children in the current term are making a good start in establishing early reading skills.
- Staff have created an increasing number of opportunities for parents to become involved in their children's learning, including activities to support learning at home through the school website, where the class has its own blog.
- Some aspects of leadership and management require improvement. Although staff assess children's progress regularly, assessment systems are not fully developed or sufficiently detailed. The information gained from assessments is not always used well enough to ensure that activities are matched as closely as possible to children's individual needs.

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	106487
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	448320

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	203
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Gleave
Headteacher	Michelle Brindle
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2010
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