

# St Thomas's CofE Primary School

Kendal Green, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 5PP

**Inspection dates** 26–27 November 2014

| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>   | Previous inspection: | Good                        | 2        |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
|                                | This inspection:     | <b>Requires improvement</b> | <b>3</b> |
| Leadership and management      |                      | Requires improvement        | 3        |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils |                      | Good                        | 2        |
| Quality of teaching            |                      | Requires improvement        | 3        |
| Achievement of pupils          |                      | Requires improvement        | 3        |
| Early years provision          |                      | Good                        | 2        |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Teaching is not good enough to ensure that pupils achieve well. The actions of leaders, managers and governors have not been effective in bringing about improvement quickly enough.
- The standards overall that pupils attain by the end of Year 6 have been declining for a number of years. They have started to rise, but only recently.
- Too few pupils make the progress they are capable of, particularly in mathematics.
- The quality of teaching is variable and not enough is consistently good or better. As a consequence, learning and progress are not yet good.
- Teachers do not always make good use of information about what pupils can and cannot do and do not always plan lessons that match their needs well enough.
- Teachers do not always have high enough expectations or pass these on to pupils. Sometimes the work does not provide enough challenge, particularly for the most able pupils.
- Teachers' marking is not of a consistently high quality, especially in mathematics. There are not enough comments on how pupils can improve their work. When such comments are made, pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to respond to them.
- Checks on the school's improvement plans are not made often enough to gauge how well improvements are happening.
- Teachers with subject responsibilities do not check effectively how well pupils are learning and progressing in their areas. They do not hold teachers to account sufficiently for the quality of their teaching and learning.
- Leaders do not have a clear enough overview of the progress of different groups of pupils. As a result governors have not always been well placed to hold the school to account for the progress that pupils make.

### The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher is determined to improve the school and has a clear vision of what needs to be done. An effective focus on improving writing has already improved the standards pupils are achieving in this subject.
- The school's promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good and this has a very positive effect on the pupils' development.
- Pupils' behaviour and the school's work to ensure their safety are both good. Most pupils show respect for others and are eager to learn. They have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe.
- The effectiveness of the early years is good and children make good progress there.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 12 lessons taught by eight members of staff, one of which was a joint observation with the headteacher. In addition, the inspectors also made short visits to lessons and listened to pupils read.
- The inspectors examined information provided by the school about the progress of pupils in the previous year. The inspectors looked at a wide range of work in pupils' books and in displays around the school.
- The inspectors met with two groups of pupils at lunchtime on day one and talked to many other pupils in class and around the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, assistant headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team, teachers in charge of subjects, four governors and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection and the school's development plans.
- The inspectors scrutinised records on attendance and behaviour, as well as information about the quality of teaching and the performance of staff.
- The inspectors took account of the 36 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the 26 responses from members of staff.

## Inspection team

Alison Thomson, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sheila Mawer

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- St Thomas's is an average-sized primary school.
- Almost all pupils are from a White British background and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is average. (The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.)
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- Since the previous inspection there have been significant changes in staffing. This includes the headteacher who took up her post in January 2014.
- The governing body has recently undergone significant changes, including the chair of governors.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good or better to raise achievement, particularly in mathematics, by:
  - using information about what pupils can and cannot do to plan lessons that meet pupils' learning needs as effectively as possible
  - raising teachers' expectations and giving work that stretches pupils, particularly the most able pupils
  - using marking to provide advice to pupils about how they can improve their work
  - giving pupils sufficient opportunities to respond to guidance about how they can improve their work.
- Improve leadership and management to bring about improvements more quickly by:
  - developing the skills of subject leaders to enable them to hold the staff in their areas to account more effectively for teaching and learning and for the progress that pupils make
  - focussing more clearly on learning and progress, including that in pupils' work, when making judgements about the quality of teaching and follow up teachers' areas for development rigorously
  - obtaining a clear overview of the progress of different groups of pupils across the school
  - providing governors with clear, succinct information about the quality of teaching and pupils' progress to enable them to hold the school to account more effectively
  - checking regularly that the school's plans for improvement undertaken by the school are having the desired impact.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management, including governance, requires improvement because actions taken to improve teaching have not had sufficient impact on pupils' achievement. This is particularly true of mathematics, especially in Key Stage 2. Leaders and managers have, however, created a culture where good behaviour supports pupils' learning.
- The new headteacher has a vision of where the school should be and a determination to get there. Already she has accurately identified areas to develop and is addressing these with some urgency. The decline in attainment has been halted, writing has improved considerably, governance has been strengthened and attendance has risen.
- The leadership and management of teaching and learning requires improvement. Currently, observations are not focused well enough on pupils' learning and progress and there is not enough scrutiny of pupils' work. Teachers are given areas for improvement, but these are not followed up rigorously enough.
- Currently, leaders in charge of subjects do not hold teachers to account well enough for the progress that pupils make in their area of responsibility. They do not monitor the quality of teaching and do not have a clear overview of the progress that pupils make. They do not all have the expertise to do this as effectively as possible. As a result the quality of teaching and achievement are not rising quickly enough.
- The staff questionnaire demonstrated that almost all staff are happy with all aspects of the school. However, some staff, including some subject leaders, have an over-optimistic view of how good the school is.
- Senior leaders track the progress that pupils make, but this is not done regularly enough and summary evaluations of groups of pupils across the school are not carried out sufficiently well. This means that key information about the progress of pupils is not communicated well enough, for example to governors.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used in many ways, including paying for additional teaching support. The spending is not yet fully effective, as it is not used well enough to improve the performance of the pupils for whom it is intended. However, the gaps between the performance of disadvantaged and the other pupils in school are beginning to close. This reflects the improving equality of opportunity and tackling of discrimination.
- Safeguarding meets statutory requirements. Pupils and their parents agree strongly that the school keeps its pupils safe.
- The curriculum is increasingly meeting the needs of the pupils, through the introduction of interesting topics. Literacy is embedded well in to other areas, but numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) less well so. The school is aware of this and already has a training programme in place to boost staff expertise and confidence in using ICT as a teaching tool. Staff expertise and confidence is also being boosted in physical education through the use of primary sports funding to provide training by specialist staff.
- The school's spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision is very strong and impacts well on pupils' development in these areas. Music has a high profile and one rarely sees boys performing in the school choir so enthusiastically.
- Support from the local authority in the past has not been effective. Attainment at the end of Year 6 had declined over a number of years during which time the local authority provided only light touch support. Now, targeted support has been provided since September 2014, after attainment had started to rise, and is only now beginning to have some impact.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The governing body has recently undergone significant changes, including the chair of governors. There is a renewed determination to improve the school and the governing body has put in place strategies to ensure this. Each class now has a link governor to glean better information first hand. The governing body has already asked for help from the local authority regarding training and the inspectors endorse the view that a review is appropriate. Governors in the past have not been given clear, succinct information about the progress that different groups of pupils make in order for them to hold the school to account well enough in this area. In addition, they have not had an accurate view of the quality of teaching and have not been involved in linking teachers' pay to their performance. They have played a role in the allocation of the budget, including that for disadvantaged pupils, but they are not aware of just how far behind disadvantaged pupils in the school are compared to all pupils nationally. It is impressive that the new governing body has not only recognised the need for change but has taken so many steps to achieve this in such a short period of time.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils are good****Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. School records and adults who have looked after the pupils at lunchtimes for a number of years confirmed this. All staff who returned the questionnaire agreed that behaviour is good.
- The pupils themselves rated behaviour as eight or nine out of 10. They told the inspectors that most people behave well, but a few can be silly at times.
- The inspectors found the pupils to be polite and courteous and the school has many letters from visitors complimenting it on the behaviour of its pupils.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility, such as the school council or helping in the dining hall.
- Most pupils have a positive attitude to learning, work hard and take a pride in their work. When there are comments about how to improve their work, most pupils respond to them when they are given the opportunity to do so. A few pupils are more difficult to engage, especially when they find the work less interesting or too easy.
- Attendance is above average and improving. Pupils enjoy being at school and say that they like the school the way it is.

**Safety**

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say that they feel very safe and that adults look after them well.
- The school has effective systems in place to ensure that pupils are kept safe, such as appropriate risk assessment for visits out of school.
- Pupils told the inspectors that the school keeps them safe when they use computers because there are rules to follow and they are denied access to some websites.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the different forms of bullying, including racist and homophobic bullying. They know that calling someone 'gay' is wrong and say that 'people do not do that here'.
- Parents agree that their children feel safe and that the school looks after them well.

**The quality of teaching requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching is not consistently good enough to result in pupils' achievement being good.
- Teachers do not always use information about what pupils can and cannot do to plan lessons with work that meets pupils' needs well enough. As a result, this slows the progress that pupils make.
- The expectations that staff have of pupils are sometimes not high enough, and so the work provided does not always stretch pupils sufficiently. This is particularly true of the most able pupils, who tend to find the work too easy.
- Marking is not consistently effective in letting pupils know how they can improve their work. In addition, when such comments are present, teachers do not give pupils sufficient opportunities to respond to their advice. That said, there is some marking that does help pupils to improve. This is especially true in writing, which improved greatly in Key Stage 2 last year, compared to the previous year.
- The impact of the work of teaching assistants is variable. Whilst teachers deploy and guide them well lower down the school, this is not always the case higher up the school, especially in mathematics and with the most able pupils.
- There is evidence that some teaching is consistently good, especially in the early years. This has resulted in the children making good progress there. Teaching is currently resulting in good progress in Key Stage 1, particularly in reading and writing. This was confirmed during the inspection by visits to lessons and the work in pupils' books.
- The teaching of reading is generally good, particularly for the younger pupils. Listening to Year 2 pupils read confirmed their love of reading. Strategies to encourage younger readers are reaping benefits and are now being rolled out higher up the school.
- The teaching of writing has improved. Topics such as volcanoes and famous people from Brazil, such as the footballer Pele, have generated a renewed interest especially from the boys who were underachieving previously.
- Parents generally feel that teaching is good, as determined from the online questionnaire. However, the inspectors judged that teaching requires improvement as too few pupils are achieving as highly as they

should.

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because too few pupils make the progress they are capable of, especially in mathematics. This is true for all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those who are disabled, those who have special educational needs and the most able pupils.
- Attainment overall at the end of Year 6 has been declining since the previous inspection. In 2013 nationally published data showed that attainment was below average in mathematics and reading and significantly below in writing. Attainment in writing rose in 2014 to be broadly in line with that found nationally as a result of a whole-school focus on writing. However, attainment in mathematics declined further and was significantly below average.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils requires improvement. Published data for 2014 show that disadvantaged pupils in school were about two terms behind in reading and writing and nearly five terms behind in mathematics compared to all pupils nationally. Gaps between disadvantaged pupils and the other pupils in school are beginning to close, with disadvantaged pupils about two terms behind in writing and about three terms behind in reading and mathematics.
- The achievement of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs also requires improvement, particularly in mathematics. The work they are given does not always match their needs well enough. Sometimes it is too difficult for them, despite the efforts of teaching assistants to help them.
- The progress of the most able pupils requires improvement. Too few of them reach the higher levels that they are capable of. This is because they are not always given work that offers them sufficient challenge. Therefore their thinking is not deepened well enough.
- Pupils tend to make better progress in the early years and in Key Stage 1 because the quality of teaching is stronger there.
- Special coaching paid through the primary sports funding has increased pupils' enjoyment and participation in sport, as well as increasing the level of performance. Last year, for example, pupils played cricket at county level.
- Pupils read widely and often, particularly the younger pupils. This was confirmed by listening to some Year 2 pupils read. The school's successful reading challenge in Year 2 is now being extended into Key Stage 2.
- Literacy is reinforced well throughout the curriculum and accounts for pupils' higher performance in reading. Numeracy is reinforced less well. The school is in the process of developing ICT, through providing teachers with more training in its delivery.

### The early years provision

### is good

- Children settle successfully into school life through strong links with parents, the feeder Nursery provision and the local children's centre. Parents appreciate particularly the home visits that are made and the valuable information that is shared about their child's progress in the home/school diaries.
- Most children start school with skills and knowledge that allow them to start learning straightaway in the Reception Year, although aspects of language development and some social skills are sometimes weak.
- The quality of provision in the early years is good and children make good progress. Many children reach a good level of development by the end of Reception and some children exceed this level, but not in mathematics or writing.
- Teaching is good. The indoor classroom and outdoor area provide a good balance of teacher-led tasks and tasks children choose for themselves. Activities are well organised and help children to be confident, engaged and active in their learning.
- Writing is being incorporated well into many tasks. For example, in the story of Rama and Sita the teacher successfully helped children to learn initial letter sounds and to transfer their knowledge to writing a simple sentence about the story. The topic of this activity is one example of how children learn about other religions and cultures.
- Usually adults intervene and move learning on by careful questioning. However, sometimes the questions from adults do not always enable the children to think hard in a more challenging way.
- The early years provides good quality care. Parents are very appreciative of the opportunities children have to experience interesting activities in the outdoor learning areas. For example, as well as learning how to follow a trail safely, children also learn how to build their own shelter.

- Children behave sensibly at all times and respect each other when working together on tasks.
- The early years is well led. The leader has a very clear picture of how to make the learning even more effective. For example, she has developed well-focused and regular phonics sessions, which are impacting positively on the good progress that children are making in their writing.

## 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

|                                |         |
|--------------------------------|---------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b> | 112322  |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Cumbria |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 448420  |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

|  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>                      | Primary                       |
| <b>School category</b>                     | Voluntary aided               |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                 | 4–11                          |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                    | Mixed                         |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b> | 213                           |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>               | The governing body            |
| <b>Chair</b>                               | Mick Brookes                  |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                         | Maggie Cole                   |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>  | 22 June 2010                  |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                    | 01539 737373                  |
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