

# St Thomas CofE Primary School, Leigh

Astley Street, Leigh, Lancashire, WN7 2AS

**Inspection dates** 16–17 June 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
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.

- This is an extremely caring and nurturing school, where the needs of pupils are at the heart of all the school does.
- Skilled, determined and wholehearted leadership by the headteacher, very ably supported by the deputy headteacher and governors, has successfully improved teaching and pupils' achievement. Morale is high because staff feel valued.
- Governors provide rigorous challenge and support. They constantly review their effectiveness and are fully committed to continuous improvement.
- All groups of pupils in all key stages make at least good progress from their starting points. As a result, standards across the school are rising.
- Teaching is at least good and is improving. Staff eagerly respond to the challenge to make their teaching the best it can be. Reading skills are taught particularly well.
- Pupils' highly positive and trusting relationships with staff boost their self-esteem and confidence in learning as well as their willingness to try their best.
- Provision in the early years is good. Due to good teaching and skilled support, children achieve well and sometimes outstandingly so from their different starting points.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and sometimes outstanding. Pupils feel safe and enjoy learning. Their eagerness to learn is reflected in their broadly average and improving attendance.
- Exciting and stimulating learning experiences promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils have a good understanding of British values. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school maintains strong and positive relationships exist with parents, external agencies and partners.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A lower proportion of pupils than average reach the higher levels of attainment in writing and mathematics. Pupils' achievement in these subjects is not as strong as it is in reading.
- A few teachers do not always pitch work at the right level to challenge the varying abilities of pupils, particularly the most able.
- Teachers' marking does not always make it clear to pupils how to improve their work.
- Pupils are not always encouraged to apply their writing and mathematical skills in different contexts. This hinders the progress they make.
- It is not always crystal clear how the success of actions planned by leaders to improve teaching and achievement will be measured.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed the learning of pupils in all classes across the school.
- They looked closely at pupils’ work in lessons, in a wide range of books and on display around the school. They also made careful checks on records of the progress of pupils, their behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors spoke often to pupils during the inspection and met with groups of pupils to discuss their views of school. They also listened to some pupils read.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior and middle leaders. Inspectors met with governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation, including the school’s own view of its performance, plans for improvement and policies and procedures.
- Inspectors also checked closely on the work of governors and a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents through checking the 20 responses to the online Parent View survey and the 327 responses to the school’s own survey of parental opinion.
- The inspectors took account of the views of staff expressed in the 19 responses to the voluntary inspection questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Chris Maloney, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Terry Bond	Additional Inspector
Kevin Boyle	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- A new Chair of the Governing Body has been appointed since the last inspection.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A very small proportion of pupils are from other ethnic backgrounds and cultural traditions and speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or those with special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those supported through the pupil premium funding, is above the national average. This additional government funding is provided for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- Children attend the Reception classes full time.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' achievement in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school works in close partnership with the Leigh, Lowton and Golborne Schools' Partnership.
- The school has been awarded the Wigan Council and NHS Gold Award for Mental Health Standards.
- The school shares its site with St Thomas Pre-School, a private nursery. This is subject to separate inspection arrangements. Reports for this setting may be viewed at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>

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

- Further improve teaching, speed up progress and so raise attainment, particularly in writing and mathematics, by ensuring that:
  - all teachers consistently plan work that challenges the abilities of all pupils, particularly the most able
  - teachers' marking consistently reflects the school's marking policy so that all pupils are clear how to improve their work
  - more opportunities are provided for pupils to use and extend their writing skills and to solve mathematical problems in different contexts.
- Strengthen leadership and management further, by ensuring that actions taken by leaders at all levels are always clear and measurable in how they will improve the quality of teaching and achievement of pupils.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, well supported by the deputy headteacher, shows a passionate determination to continuously improve the school and ensure pupils thrive in a highly nurturing learning environment. As a result, the quality of teaching and achievement of pupils are good and improving.
- Staff morale is high because individuals feel valued and supported. A typical staff comment was, 'I feel fully supported by senior leaders and have been given many opportunities to further my career.'
- Senior leaders have a firm and accurate grasp of what is going well in school and what needs to improve further. They use this knowledge to draw up effective plans for further improvements. However, these plans and those of other leaders in school sometimes lack clarity in precisely how their impact on improving teaching and achievement of pupils is to be measured. This is hindering their effectiveness.
- Senior leaders regularly check how well all groups of pupils are learning and focus a great deal of time on discussing individual pupils with teachers. Pupils in danger of underachieving are given any additional support they need. Senior leaders have ensured that the pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils is having the impact it should; additional support is helping eligible pupils to achieve well.
- The school's promotion of equal opportunities is good. Leaders at all levels are fully committed to helping all pupils reach their potential by ensuring all pupils have effective support and equal access to learning. The school's recent mental health award reflects the highly effective commitment to pupils' well-being.
- Discrimination is not tolerated and there is a strong promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Positive relationships are fostered through the provision of a wealth of opportunities for pupils to appreciate cultural differences and traditions. Staff promote British values well, including tolerance and respect for the rule of law. This prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- There is a clear focus by senior leaders on continually improving the quality of teaching and ensuring pupils make at least good progress. Regular checks on teaching are made and the quality of teaching is improving. Staff have good opportunities to share their practice in school and in other schools.
- Middle leaders are enthusiastic and fully share the vision of senior leaders for continuous improvement. They are committed to improving the quality of teaching and achievement of pupils. However, their effectiveness is being hindered because it is not always apparent just how the success of their actions will be evaluated.
- The curriculum has many strengths, including the creative ways subjects are linked together. It is enriched with visits, visitors and residential. Pupils have good opportunities to learn French and attend a great wealth of after-school clubs.
- Additional primary school funding for physical education and sport has been used very effectively. Pupils' well-being is improving through their adoption of increasingly healthy lifestyles. The employment of specialist sports coaches to work alongside staff has led to clear improvements in staff confidence and competence. Additional opportunities have been created for pupils to develop skills and increase their participation in clubs such as judo, dodge ball and street dance.
- Positive links exist with parents. Although there were a few negative responses on Parent View, discussions with many parents during the inspection and the school's own surveys showed no evidence to explain these.
- Close links with other local primary schools in the Leigh, Lowton and Golborne Schools' Partnership have led to sharing of practice and development of assessment of pupils' progress in writing.
- The school has a strong working relationship with the local authority, particularly regarding recruitment and training of staff.
- Arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements. Clear policies and procedures are in place. Regular checks by senior leaders and governors ensure these are effective.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors are well led and provide increasingly effective challenge and support to school leaders. They share a passionate commitment to make the school the best it can be. Governors have strengthened their range of skills, experience and expertise and this is increasing the rigour with which they challenge the school's performance. They know the school well and visit regularly. They have a good understanding of the school's data about the progress of all groups of pupils and how it compares to the progress of pupils nationally. They rigorously check on teaching to ensure teachers' pay progression and pay rewards link closely to pupils making at least good progress.
  - Governors regularly check school finances and ensure that extra funding for physical education and sport, as well as that for disadvantaged pupils, is having the positive impact it should. Robust checks

are made to ensure safeguarding arrangements effectively meet statutory requirements.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are proud of their school and enjoy learning. They typically say that 'teachers are always kind and make lessons fun and interesting'. Pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning contribute well to their improving progress. Punctuality is good, and attendance is broadly average and improving.
- Pupils' highly positive relationships with staff help to boost pupils' confidence, self-esteem and 'have-a-go' attitude. Pupils typically say, 'Teachers help us to be more confident'.
- Pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors. They eagerly told inspectors how much they enjoy school and have lots of friends. They get on well with each other, play sensibly and behave well in lessons and around the school. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are sometimes outstanding. This is when work excites them, captures their interests and imagination and challenges their abilities. However, when tasks are too easy or too hard, a very few pupils drift off task, hindering the progress they make.
- Pupils enjoy the wide range of responsibilities on offer, such as being a school councillor. They relish the chance to attend a wide range of exciting clubs such as street dance, gymnastics, tag rugby, cheerleading and judo. They also enjoy learning French.
- Pupils have a clear understanding about the rights of people to hold different beliefs and enjoy opportunities to celebrate cultural differences.

### Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel safe, know how to keep themselves and others safe and understand the potential dangers of using the internet.
- Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the different forms that bullying can take, such as cyber-bullying and bullying as a result of prejudice. They say that the school learning mentor is a great help to pupils in dealing with any concerns or worries. Pupils also say that there is a 'no bullying' culture in school and that bullying does not happen. However, they are confident staff would deal effectively with any that did occur. Ninety-one per cent of the 327 responses to the school's own survey of parental views indicated that parents agreed their children were not bullied or harassed at school.
- Parents are confident their children are kept safe. This is reflected in their highly positive discussions with inspectors. It is also supported by the response to the online Parent View questionnaire.
- The school has extremely robust systems in place to ensure that pupils are safe and that the site is both safe and secure. Adults who work with pupils are rigorously vetted as being suitable to work with children.

## The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers and teaching assistants promote highly nurturing and trusting relationships with pupils by taking a pride in getting to know them well as individuals. Their skilled management of pupils' behaviour and attitudes is making a strong contribution to pupils' achievement.
- Teachers make regular checks on how well pupils are learning so tasks can be planned and adjusted to meet pupils' different learning needs. Most teachers are rising to the challenge of ensuring pupils make as much progress as possible. However, a few teachers do not always demonstrate high enough expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving and planned tasks are too easy for pupils. As a result, some of the most able pupils in particular do not make the progress they are capable of, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Some teachers provide pupils with skilled and precise guidance through marking on how to make improvements to their work and then check that they have done so correctly. However, not all marking consistently reflects the school's marking policy; this hinders the progress of some pupils.
- Reading is skilfully and systematically taught through the school, helping pupils to build the skills, confidence and love of reading they need to succeed. Pupils receive a strong foundation in phonics (the sounds that letters make). Skilled teaching assistants provide regular additional support to help pupils catch up.
- Pupils enjoy some exciting opportunities to write. They have lots of occasions to talk about, share their ideas and re-draft their work after identifying improvements.

- Staff regularly consolidate and strengthen pupils' basic mathematical skills. Pupils are encouraged to talk about their ideas and explain their reasons for choosing the most efficient strategies. This is helping pupils to consolidate and improve their mastery of mathematical concepts.
- Teachers do not always encourage pupils to use and develop their writing skills or to solve mathematical problems in different contexts. This sometimes means those pupils do not make the best possible progress in applying these skills.

### **The achievement of pupils** is good

- Overall, all groups of pupils, including children in the early years, are making at least good progress from their starting points.
- Standards by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 are usually above or significantly above the national average overall. Although standards fell to broadly average in 2014 in both Year 2 and Year 6, pupils made at least good progress relative to their particular starting points and learning needs.
- Achievement across the school is good in writing and mathematics. However, it is not as consistently strong as in reading, with fewer pupils reaching the higher levels. Senior leaders and governors have recognised this and actions to improve rates of progress are succeeding. The proportion of pupils currently exceeding the rate of progress expected of them in writing and mathematics is increasing across the school, especially in the current Years 2 and 6.
- Highly skilled, systematic teaching of reading skills throughout the school ensures pupils achieve particularly well in reading. High-quality support is given to those in danger of underachieving. In 2014, the results in the Year 1 national screening check on reading were above average. This reflects pupils' confidence in phonics. Pupils continue to progress well; they develop an increasingly secure set of skills and a love of reading as they move through school. Pupils talked eagerly about their favourite authors that 'paint a picture in your mind' with their books.
- Pupils' progress in writing is rising due to more opportunities for them to talk about their ideas and re-drafting their work to improve punctuation, grammar and choice of vocabulary. Pupils are gaining confidence in structuring their ideas and choosing rich vocabulary to enhance their writing.
- Pupils are becoming increasingly secure in basic skills in mathematics, due to regular consolidation and the use of games to engage their interests. Their mastery of mathematical concepts is improving as a result of increased opportunities to explore the most efficient strategies to use when solving problems. They also benefit from opportunities to explain their reasoning and choice of strategies.
- The most able pupils are usually given harder work that challenges their thinking and deepens their understanding. As a result, the progress of the most able pupils is good overall and improving. However, this approach to supporting and challenging the most able is not consistent in all classes.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are identified quickly and given the support they need. This support meets effectively their individual needs and ensures these pupils make good and, sometimes, outstanding progress. The small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups make good progress due to the skilled support they receive.
- In 2014, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 was similar to that of other pupils in the school in reading and broadly a term behind in writing and mathematics. Compared to other pupils nationally, disadvantaged pupils were half-a-term behind in reading and writing and two terms behind in mathematics. The progress of disadvantaged pupils was slower than that of other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. However, inspection evidence shows that the gaps in attainment between current disadvantaged pupils and others in school are narrowing rapidly. They are now achieving as well as, and sometimes better than, others in class.

### **The early years provision** is good

- Although there are some variations year-on-year, the vast majority of children usually start the Reception Year with skills below those typical for their age, with particular weaknesses in language and communication skills. Due to good and sometimes outstanding teaching, all groups of children, including the most able and those with special educational needs, make at least good progress. Indeed, the progress of some children is outstanding from their individual starting points.
- In 2014, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year was well above the national average with children making at least good and sometimes outstanding progress from their starting points. Most children in the Reception class this year are currently on track to

reach a good level of development, above the national average for 2014; consequently, they are well prepared for Year 1.

- Children settle quickly and thrive. This is due to high expectations, the highly nurturing environment, well-established routines and strong links with parents and pre-school settings. Parents feel welcome and appreciate the opportunities they have to contribute evidence from home to the school's ongoing progress-tracking system. Parents told inspectors how they felt 'fully involved and informed on a regular basis'.
- Exciting and stimulating learning experiences are well planned and there is a good mixture of learning activities led by adults or chosen by children themselves. Staff use what they know about children's interests and abilities to help them learn and develop as individuals. Each child's progress is closely monitored and learning opportunities grasped to move children on in their learning. Children in need of additional support are identified quickly and given the help they need.
- The school employs a speech therapist who provides just the right help pupils require.
- All adults effectively support children's curiosity and stimulate learning in both the indoor and outdoor areas. Children enthusiastically follow their interests, such as investigating various farm animals and buying different fruits and vegetables in the farm shop created in the outdoor area.
- Children are enthusiastic in their learning, cooperate well and play sensibly. They eagerly chatted to inspectors about their work and what they knew about keeping safe. They quickly follow instructions and guidance from staff. Their behaviour is good and sometimes outstanding, as seen when children were engrossed in a high-quality phonics session.
- The development of children's reading is very well promoted. Highly skilled teaching of phonics helps children to make good progress in their reading. They accurately identify letters in sentences they read or write.
- Children write their names and eagerly write about dinosaurs or farm animals linked to class themes. Staff skilfully ensure children are forming letters correctly and choosing words that improve the descriptive sentences they write.
- Children's mathematical skills are promoted well. Staff reinforce number work with counting backwards and forwards or challenging children's thinking with questions such as 'What is one more/one less?'
- Children have good opportunities to explore their learning through a wide range of visits and visitors.
- The leadership and management in the early years are good. The leader knows exactly what the strengths are and what needs to improve further. She has ensured all staff share the drive for improvement.
- Robust risk assessments help keep children safe. Regular checks by governors keep safeguarding under rigorous review. These checks ensure that safeguarding effectively meets 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	106448
<b>Local authority</b>	Wigan
<b>Inspection number</b>	461915

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>	420
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Steve Tipton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Barry Foster
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 June 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01942 672730
<b>Fax number</b>	01942 262238
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@admin.leighsaintthomas.wigan.sch.uk

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