

St Thomas CofE Primary School

Eskrick Street, Halliwell, Bolton, Lancashire BL1 3JB

Inspection dates 30 June – 1 July 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The outstanding drive and ambition of the headteacher is fully supported by a new and very effective senior leadership team and a purposeful governing body. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving strongly and pupils are making much faster progress.
- Pupils make at least good progress in many subjects throughout the school. They leave school at the end of Year 6 with standards that are higher than those at the time of the last inspection.
- Outstanding provision in the early years means that children make rapid progress and are very well prepared for Year 1.
- The quality of teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers have high expectations. Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to pupils' learning.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good or better progress during their time in school. This is also the case for the increasing number of pupils joining the school from abroad.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent and they feel very safe. They take pride in their work.
- The school promotes British values very effectively and pupils leave the school well prepared to become active citizens in modern Britain.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers sometimes do not plan learning well enough to meet the full range of abilities in their class or organise activities as well as they could. This slows learning for some pupils.
- Teachers do not always give pupils sufficiently clear instructions on what they are expected to achieve or useful feedback to help them improve their work and deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency and quality of teaching and raise achievement further by making sure that all teachers:
 - plan activities that provide the right level of challenge and support for the different abilities in their class so that more pupils are able to make rapid gains in their learning
 - explain clearly to pupils what they are expected to achieve and what they need to do to succeed
 - give clear and helpful feedback to pupils and make time available for them to review their work to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher's clear vision and excellent planning for school improvement are fully shared by all staff, governors and parents. A continuing pursuit of high standards in every aspect of the school's work is evident in the very high quality learning environments and public areas. The school has managed some staffing issues extremely well and the cohesive leadership team is rapidly improving teaching and learning.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher are excellent role models for all staff. They are highly skilled in collecting information about the school's performance and setting targets for others to aspire to. They are well supported by effective middle leaders. As a result, all staff quickly establish high expectations for all pupils.
- The school's use of rigorous procedures to check and measure pupils' progress is at the heart of their rapidly improving achievement. Very regular analysis of their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics ensures that pupils are often working to their maximum potential and that additional support is rapidly provided when needed. Subject leaders have developed effective systems for gathering information about pupils' achievement in other subjects across the curriculum and have a clear view of how well pupils throughout the school are doing in subjects such as science, geography and history.
- Leaders ensure that there is a culture of continual improvement in teaching through constant high-quality training delivered both in the school and in partnership with other schools. The senior staff and subject leaders take a lead role in developing the curriculum. Excellent use is made of staff with specialist skills and knowledge, including several members of the support staff.
- The local authority provided effective support for this school following the last inspection in bringing about improvement. The level of support is now more 'light-touch', but continues with an adviser having regular visits and meetings with governors.
- Staff are held fully accountable for the progress their pupils make. Pay increases are awarded only when staff fulfil stringent criteria linked to pupils' achievement.
- A key factor in the quality of learning is the school's commitment to providing varied and exciting learning opportunities that pupils engage in fully. Subjects are interwoven through central themes that are supported by a wide range of visits and visitors, providing a strong and interesting basis for pupils' enquiries. Pupils also participate in many exciting sporting, artistic and musical clubs and events.
- The school makes very good use of the primary school sport funding to improve teachers' skills in physical education and support pupils' sporting and other achievements. This has already contributed to increased participation in sports clubs.
- The school works closely with parents and keeps them fully informed through newsletters, blogs and the school's website. As a result, parents rightly hold the school in high regard.
- The school tackles any issues of discrimination well. It promotes equality of opportunity very successfully and this contributes to the harmony within the community. Standards have risen in all groups of pupils.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body is led extremely well. Governors are kept fully informed through detailed reports from the headteacher and their own frequent and systematic checks on the school's work. They regularly receive up-to-date and useful information on progress with the school's improvement plan, pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. The governing body ensures that teachers are awarded salary increases only when their performance is good and undertakes rigorous reviews of the headteacher's performance objectives. The governing body manages finances very well by ensuring that the budget is used to promote high achievement, evident in the effective use of pupil premium funding.
 - Governors have a good understanding of information about pupils' attainment and progress and the governing body makes very good use of this information to hold leaders to account. The governing body ensures that the school's aims and values are at the heart of its work and pushes for the highest standards, ensuring that pupils are provided with equality of access to additional curriculum provision.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure this aspect of the school's work is given high priority and, consequently, all staff are vigilant. They benefit from regularly updated training that takes account of all recent national legislation. Very effective partnership working with external agencies ensures that leaders can quickly identify and support pupils who may be at risk of harm.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good. Lessons capture pupils' interest and tasks are imaginatively presented. The relationships between pupils and all the staff are extremely positive and pupils want to be successful. They have a thirst for learning.
- The teaching of writing is good. Pupils have regular opportunities to write in their English lessons as well as in other subjects, helping them to develop different writing styles. Pupils say they like writing and take pride in what they produce. For example, pupils in Year 6 were really enjoying writing a narrative version of the end-of-year play that they will be performing for parents.
- Pupils enjoy reading and most regularly read at home. They use a range of approaches when they come across an unfamiliar word, such as looking for clues in the pictures and using their good phonics knowledge (the sounds letters represent) to help them. Older pupils express very positive views about the way the school promotes reading and how this helps them in their work in other subjects.
- The teaching of mathematics is good. Pupils say they enjoy the practical activities and challenges. For example, pupils in several classes in key stage 2 enthusiastically tackled timed challenges to test their multiplication skills. They have access to plenty of equipment to help them with their work.
- The stimulating learning environment and classroom displays help pupils with their learning and encourage them to be more independent when looking for information as they answer questions. This is a strong focus in classes throughout the school.
- Assessment systems are effective, including the use of data to track pupils' progress. Teachers regularly and carefully mark pupils' work and often provide helpful feedback on what the next steps in their learning are. However, some teachers give more limited feedback and do not allocate time for pupils to review their learning to help them improve their knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Regular homework activities provide pupils with the chance to strengthen their understanding and practise their reading, writing and mathematical skills in a range of different tasks. Pupils say they enjoy the homework and that it helps them understand what they have been learning in school. Evidence from homework books shows very high levels of commitment from pupils and high standards of work.
- Teaching assistants provide a good level of support. They work closely with the teachers to ensure activities meet pupils' needs and that the needs of any pupil at risk of falling behind are met. Pupils who have joined the school more recently, often from other countries, are particularly well supported.
- The quality of teaching and pupils' learning are particularly strong in Years 5 and 6, where the teachers communicate in detail what pupils are expected to learn and what they need to do to succeed. Expectations are exceptionally high in these classes and the teachers and teaching assistants provide excellent guidance to pupils. In other parts of the school, teachers ask questions to check the level of pupils' understanding, but some pupils do not understand fully what they are expected to achieve, become confused or need extra help to get started.
- Teachers sometimes do not plan activities that provide as well as they could for the full range of abilities in their class so that all groups can make rapid gains in their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils are committed to their learning, as are their teachers. They often work studiously, self-regulating any classroom noise they make as they industriously complete tasks set.
- Pupils' pride in their school is evident in their smart appearance and the generally careful presentation of their work and their tidy books. They value the care staff take in ensuring that they work in attractive and orderly classrooms with high-quality displays of their own work.
- Pupils collaborate with each other very effectively and are especially helpful in providing support for their partners when sounding out letters to form words in phonics sessions or when choosing the best word to go into their writing. The way they do this is effective because it has been very well modelled by teachers and teaching assistants.
- Pupils communicate articulately and sensibly their feelings about their learning, their school and their sense of well-being. The school places a strong emphasis on encouraging pupils to express their views.

This is underpinned by the very strong value system that gives the pupils confidence in expressing themselves. This was typified by the comment of one pupil, 'Our school motto is 'Let your light shine' – that means that you should always aim to be the best you can be.'

- The school has worked very closely with pupils and parents to ensure that messages about how to stay safe when online are driven home. The importance of being safe when online is emphasised in induction meetings held with parents. The headteacher and other staff have been trained in the 'Prevent' duty and consequently use the information from these sessions effectively to alert all members of the school community to the dangers of children being radicalised.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. This is because teachers and assistants set very high standards, which they enforce very well by reminding pupils of their expectations and rewarding good behaviour.
- Teachers and teaching assistants make explicit links between pupils' good conduct and the values cherished by the school, which include wisdom, respect, trust, cooperation and humility. These values are effectively reinforced by displays in central areas of the school and by teachers in lessons. The pupils who excel in these values are rewarded with 'chance cards' and recognised in whole-school assemblies. The pupils' aspiration to uphold the school values is very strong.
- Attendance is just a little below average overall, although well above average for many groups of pupils because they enjoy coming to school and find learning exciting. Older pupils' attendance is often much better than that of younger pupils and staff are working effectively with parents to ensure that the younger pupils attend school regularly.
- Incidents of bullying are extremely rare because the playground and outdoor spaces have been very well organised and redesigned so there are plenty of safe, quiet spaces. Leaders take rigorous action to ensure that incidents of any kind are resolved immediately. Members of the school council are on hand to give support to their peers and there is a reflection room available for any pupil who is concerned about playtime. Pupils are well supported if they feel unwell or unhappy.
- The school supports pupils well who have additional social and emotional needs. Teachers and assistants work with these pupils very effectively to help them develop strategies to cope with their emotions. These strategies have really helped and the school is a calm and nurturing community where all pupils' needs are effectively met.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Leaders and teachers are raising standards effectively and ensuring that all pupils make good progress. This is seen in the assessment information, work in pupils' books over time, visits to lessons and in the school's records of pupils' progress.
- Many children enter the school with skills, knowledge and understanding below those that are typical for their ages, particularly in communication, language and literacy. Because of very effective teaching they make rapid progress and, in 2015, the proportion of children in the Reception Year who achieved a good level of development was broadly average. They made at least the progress expected of them in all areas of learning and many made more progress than this. A large proportion of children are on course to reach a good level of development this year. As a result, they are well prepared for Year 1.
- In 2015, the proportion of pupils in Year 1 who reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check was in line with the national average. By the end of Year 2, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in phonics was above average. The school's data shows that current pupils in Year 1 are continuing to make strong progress in phonics. The majority are on course to reach the required standard this year.
- Pupils in Year 2 reached above-average standards in 2015, particularly in writing. From their low starting points, the school's information shows that they made good and often outstanding progress. Currently, the large majority of pupils are on track to reach the expectations for their ages in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2.
- Although the standards reached by pupils in Year 6 in 2015 were below average, standards were higher than at the time of the last inspection. Inconsistencies in that year group's previous teaching contributed to their slower progress. These inconsistencies have now been resolved and current pupils in key stage 2 are working within the expectations for their ages across all subjects, including English and mathematics, and making consistently good progress. The school's information shows that a significant number of

pupils are currently working above the expectations for their age.

- Effective additional support is helping disadvantaged pupils to make good progress. In 2015, these pupils made similar progress to others in school. Current assessment information shows that any gaps in attainment for these pupils in school now are being closed in reading, writing and mathematics. They make strongest progress in reading and writing.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points because they benefit from good support for their learning. Particularly strong progress is made by new arrivals from abroad, who often join the school with little or no English and no experience of attending school. The personalised support provided for these pupils enables them to make good and often outstanding progress within a caring and nurturing environment.
- The school's information and work in pupils' books show that the most able pupils are making good progress and sometimes outstanding progress from their higher starting points across the curriculum.
- Pupils are making good progress throughout the school in other subjects. Pupils produce effective pieces of work in their topic work, particularly including science and history, and a range of very high-quality work is on display around the school.

Early years provision

is outstanding

- When children join the school in the early years, their skills and knowledge are often below those typical for their age and sometimes significantly so. Thoughtful and very well-planned activities and support provided by staff help children make a rapid start to their learning. They make outstanding progress from their starting points and are extremely well prepared for the move to Year 1.
- Children settle extremely well because of the strong relationships they form with the adults working with them. A focus on reading, writing and number within a lively curriculum means that many learn to read very quickly. Children are encouraged to explore their environment and engage with one another purposefully at all times. Children are enthusiastic and work well together, and clearly enjoy the activities that take place, both indoors and outside.
- Children have many opportunities to learn what outstanding behaviour looks like and how to play together cooperatively. They are exceptionally considerate and behave very well. Teachers and other staff set a friendly tone for the early years in which children are happy, safe and settled.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Staff take into account children's interests well and inspire a bright-eyed enthusiasm both in the Nursery and Reception classes. For example, they have developed areas with small-world toys and appropriate books to promote a love of reading.
- Children develop much-improved communication skills and are taught to think carefully about stories and to express their views clearly. For example, during a reading session in the Nursery focusing on the story of 'Jonah and the Whale', children were encouraged to give very clear views and feelings about how Jonah would have felt when he was spat out onto the beach. Staff show high levels of interest in children's responses. They use questioning extremely well to extend children's learning and draw on their own experiences.
- The early years staff have developed effective and purposeful partnerships with parents. Parents are welcomed into school and many support their children's learning at home. This partnership working contributes to children's excellent achievement.
- Teachers make very effective use of assessment information, which is compiled into 'learning journey' books. These provide an attractive, informative summary of progress made over the year. Parents are also able to contribute to these books throughout the year. Teachers make excellent use of these assessments to keep a careful check on the progress children are making and use this information in their planning.
- The indoor classrooms are spacious, appealing, well organised and extremely well resourced. All the rooms have easy access to an outside space, which offers a very inviting and lively learning space that is used well by children throughout the year. The school has plans to develop this area even further.
- Leadership of the early years provision is outstanding. This has had considerable impact on improving the quality of provision. The early years leader has worked very effectively over time to create a rich learning culture that places the needs of the children at its heart. Children want to do well and please their teachers by doing their very best work.

School details

Unique reference number	105218
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10012094

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	358
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Pott
Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge	Abigail Wright
Telephone number	01204 333193
Website	www.st-thomas-halliwell.bolton.sch.uk
Email address	office@st-thomas-halliwell.bolton.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 March 2014

Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportions of pupils from ethnic backgrounds other than White British are much higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is over three times the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding which supports pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is higher than the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The early years provision consists of full-time classes in the Reception Year and part-time classes in the Nursery.
- Most pupils are taught in single-age classes, with the exception of three mixed-age classes (Year 1/2, Year 3/4, Year 5/6).
- The school runs a daily breakfast club.
- In 2015, the school increased its admission number from 40 to 45 pupils. The number of pupils admitted each year also increased to 45 pupils in each year group to accommodate in-year requests for admission.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes. One lesson was observed jointly with the headteacher. Inspectors also looked at a wide range of pupils' work, discussed it with them informally and heard some pupils read.
- The inspectors observed behaviour around the school, including at breaktimes, in assembly and in the lunch hall.
- Discussions were held with members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and members of staff.
- The inspectors analysed the 18 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View). Discussions were held with parents.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documents, including information on pupils' current and recent achievement, the school's plans for improvement, the management of teachers' performance, the use of pupil premium funding, and documentation and records relating to pupils' behaviour and safety.

Inspection team

Adrian Francis, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Rigby	Ofsted Inspector
Doreen Davenport	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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