

St Thomas's CofE Primary School

Kendal Green, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 5PP

Inspection dates

13–14 December 2016

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils do not make good enough progress across key stage 2 in reading and mathematics.
- Teaching is not consistently good across key stage 2.
- Teachers do not consistently plan lessons, set tasks and ensure that lessons move at a pace that challenges all pupils to achieve their potential at key stage 2.
- Pupils, including the most able, do not get enough opportunity to develop reasoning skills and apply their thinking in a range of subjects.
- Reading skills are not taught effectively at key stage 2. Pupils who are disadvantaged, including those who are also most able, are not achieving their potential and reaching the standards of which they are capable.

The school has the following strengths

- Early years provision is good and the children reach a good level of development by the end of Reception Year.
- Standards at key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics are good.
- The standards of pupils' writing are above average throughout the school.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of the effective support they receive for their learning.
- There is some strong teaching, particularly at key stage 1, which helps pupils to achieve above-average standards.
- This is a happy school in which all pupils are valued. Pupils behave well and have very good attitudes to learning. They enjoy school and feel safe. They are cared for well.
- Since the last inspection, a new leadership team has developed a clear view of how successful the school can be and what needs to be done to achieve this. Together leaders have improved the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. They understand that there is still some inconsistency in outcomes for pupils at key stage 2.
- Parents are very positive about the work of the school. Leaders offer strong support to help parents make a positive contribution to children's learning.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning at key stage 2, particularly in mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that expectations of what pupils can achieve are consistently high, particularly for the most able pupils
 - teachers setting work that enables pupils to reach higher standards, particularly middle-attaining and the most able pupils
 - ensuring that pupils are provided with more opportunities to develop reasoning skills in mathematics and opportunities to explain and justify their thinking
 - increasing the opportunities for pupils to develop and apply key skills across a wide range of subjects.
- Improve pupils' outcomes in reading at the end of key stage 2 by:
 - ensuring that more pupils, particularly the disadvantaged and the most able disadvantaged, attain expected levels and higher levels by the end of Year 6
 - providing consistently engaging and high-quality reading and comprehension activities in all key stage 2 classes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management **Good**

- The headteacher is a determined and effective leader who ensures that all members of the school community are working together to provide a good-quality education for the pupils. She has established a positive team culture that is driving continuous improvement in all areas of school life. Since the last inspection, the school has faced a number of challenges. The headteacher, with her senior team, has worked hard to improve pupils' progress. Parents are supportive of the school's leaders and confident that they are doing the best for their children.
- The members of the new leadership team work well together. There is an increasing effectiveness in rectifying the school's weaknesses. For example, writing has been improved since the last inspection due to a whole-school approach that has led to consistently effective teaching in all classes.
- The senior leaders and governors have secured improvements in teaching and learning through support and training and by robustly tackling weaknesses. The new leadership team, including middle leaders, checks the quality of teaching systematically. Leaders know that there is still some inconsistency in teaching and show determination to ensure that there is high-quality teaching across the school. However, their checks have not, as yet, had an impact on all teaching. In mathematics and reading, the quality of teaching remains inconsistent at key stage 2.
- The headteacher has strengthened systems for managing the performance of staff through regular checks on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning throughout the school. Leaders ensure that newly qualified teachers and those in the early stages of their career are well supported.
- The curriculum interests pupils and is designed to meet their needs. Pupils are able to pose their questions about topics before learning begins and teachers adapt the topics to meet pupils' interests. Leaders understand that pupils need more opportunities to develop and practise their reading and mathematical skills across a range of subjects. The school offers a large number of additional activities. For example, pupils enjoy playing a wide range of musical instruments, and they participate in sporting and residential activities. Pupils appreciate the opportunities they have to develop independence and resilience when learning outdoors.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Pupils have good opportunities for reflection, as seen in a Year 6 assembly based on their learning about the first world war. The Year 6 pupils used some very thoughtful language when composing their 'warhorse rap'. Their work was appreciated and valued by the other key stage 2 pupils. Links with schools of different cultures and regular learning about British values mean that the children are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The pupil premium funding is used very effectively to support children working in small groups to provide speech and language support and subsidise the cost of educational visits for disadvantaged pupils. The funding has also been used to develop significant pastoral support. This includes a member of the pastoral staff who ensures high-quality engagement and links with parents. Parents are exceptionally positive about leaders' work to ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils and families.

- The primary school physical education and sports grant is used very effectively and has increased pupils' participation in sport, strengthened competitive sport and widened the range of sports on offer.
- The local authority has provided good training to support the development of the new governing body.
- The school has good relationships with St Thomas' Church. There are regular joint services and the church provides a range of support for families. The school has well-established links with neighbouring Church of England schools and, as part of the Kendal Collaborative Partnership, engages in a range of collaborative developments, including subject leadership.

Governance of the school

- Governance of the school is good.
- Governors are very committed to the school. Along with the headteacher, governors are passionate about making a significant contribution to the community and raising aspirations for all children.
- Governors are regular visitors and take an active part in the life of the school. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors have a good range of skills from industry, business and education. They audit these skills regularly to ascertain what might be required from new governors.
- Governors are clear about how pupils' outcomes compare with those nationally and they hold leaders to account for the work that is being done to diminish differences in performance of different groups of pupils. They are determined to raise the outcomes achieved at key stage 2.
- Governors take decisive action to improve the overall quality of teaching. They keep a check on the finances of the school. They know how the pupil premium and sports grant are used and the overall impact of the extra funding.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The governing body and headteacher are committed to the safeguarding of children and work hard to establish a school culture of vigilance. The governors ensure that arrangements for safeguarding meet current guidance, including relevant checks on all adults working with pupils. Risk assessments are completed to cover key aspects of school life such as educational visits.
- The school's investment in the pastoral mentor and successful work with its key partners makes a significant contribution to ensuring that children are safe and cared for.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because too many of the pupils currently in the school have not achieved well enough over their time in key stage 2. There have been significant changes to teaching staff since the previous inspection. Although there are signs of improvement in pupils' progress, the quality of teaching is not consistently

good across Years 3 to 6. Teaching does not build on the good-quality learning the children experience from Reception to Year 2.

- Some activities are not planned to match the learning needs of all groups of pupils. Consequently, this affects the amount of progress pupils make. The most able pupils are often given work that is too easy for them and not enough is done to extend their learning. In some of the key stage 2 classes, the pace of learning is too slow because teachers do not pay enough attention to how the pupils engage with and tackle the activities that they are set.
- In mathematics, pupils spend valuable time in learning calculation skills but do not then have the opportunity to use this knowledge to solve problems. Pupils' mathematical skills are, on occasions, used in a range of subjects. However there are too few of these opportunities to effectively develop pupils' application of mathematics.
- The teaching of reading is good in early years and key stage 1. At key stage 2, pupils are asked to do activities that lack challenge and do not allow them to think deeply about different texts they are studying.
- Teaching has improved recently and some is good, but there are still too many inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.
- As part of their professional development all staff are involved in research projects and this ensures that improving teaching and learning remains a key priority.
- Teaching of writing is a particular strength. For example, teachers' good subject knowledge helped Year 1 pupils to develop well-structured and interesting sentences. Across the school, pupils are given ample opportunities to write for different purposes. Pupils are appreciative of these opportunities and this is reflected in their positive attitudes and the good progress they make.
- Teaching assistants are deployed very well to support individual pupils or small groups. They have a positive effect on pupils' learning. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities enjoy learning and make good progress.
- All staff, including teaching assistants, have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and as a result, the pupils are respectful and work well together.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **Good**

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- All members of the school community are committed to working together within a welcoming and caring ethos. Central to the work of the school community is the welfare and safety of pupils. Pupils and parents are very appreciative of the work of the staff. Parents agree that the school keeps their children safe and a number expressed their gratitude for how their children had been made to feel welcome, having arrived during the school year. Others said that the pastoral work was outstanding.
- Pupils are adamant that bullying rarely happens. They know that bullying can take different forms, including physical bullying, name-calling and cyber bullying. They have

strong relationships with adults in school and are confident that they can share any concerns with them. They say that there is no name-calling or unpleasantness in the school and everyone is friendly.

- Good procedures ensure that pupils are safe. Staff are well trained in how to identify any concerns that suggest children might be at risk of harm. There are systems in place to enable swift action to be taken when necessary. The staff work well with a range of external agencies to support pupils and their families.
- There are good opportunities for pupils to accept posts of responsibility. Older pupils show maturity in their roles as playground leaders and buddies to the Reception children. The younger children are very grateful for the friendship and support of the older ones. Pupils vote for their school council and have to apply for roles, such as playground leaders. These, along with other activities, provide a good introduction to understanding responsibility and democracy.
- The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is at the heart of the school's work; their empathy for others and tolerance mean that they get on very well together. They listen attentively to one another in class and cooperate extremely well.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are very happy and contribute to the school as a calm and welcoming place. Pupils are very polite and talk confidently to teachers and visitors. They are friendly, helpful and thoughtful. For example, pupils move to the side of corridors to let others pass or wait at the door without being asked.
- The school environment is well cared for. Pupils are interested in each other's work that is displayed around the school.
- Behaviour in the playground and outdoor area at playtimes is lively and managed well by staff. The dining hall is a calm environment and pupils enjoy talking to their friends over lunch. They are respectful of adults and respond to their high expectations of good manners and calm routines.
- Pupils' attendance is above average for primary schools. The breakfast club is popular and this helps to ensure that pupils get to school on time. Pupils benefit from socialising with their friends and joining in activities before school. They say that they really enjoy coming to school and their parents support this view.
- The vast majority of parents and all staff who expressed a view consider that behaviour is good and that children are safe in the school. Pupils say that they feel safe because adults will act quickly to stop any misbehaviour. They say that they are happy to talk to adults and that adults care for them.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because pupils' progress in reading and mathematics is not consistently good across key stage 2.
- The children make a good start to their school life and enter Year 1 with a good foundation in all the areas of learning. At key stage 1, pupils are confident and

continue to progress in their learning. Pupils attain above-average standards in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 1. However, this good progress is not consistently maintained at key stage 2.

- The rates of progress of pupils at lower key stage 2 show some variation, particularly in their reading and mathematics skills and knowledge. Pupils, particularly the most able, do not always work to their potential and work produced is not consistently at the standard of which they are capable.
- Pupils' progress in reading is too variable. In the 2016 standardised assessment tests, the proportion of pupils who achieved the national standard was well below the national average.
- Pupils get off to a good start in developing their reading skills. Teachers' increased focus on the teaching of phonics is resulting in improvements in standards of reading at key stage 1. In the Year 1 phonics check the percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard has increased year on year and was above the national average in 2016. At key stage 1, pupils continue to enjoy reading and make good progress. Parents are encouraged to share books and read with their children.
- In key stage 2, pupils' progress in reading slows. While pupils say that they enjoy reading and appreciate the opportunity to use the well-resourced library, they do not consistently engage in high-level comprehension work at the level of which they are capable.
- In mathematics, the pupils develop numerical skills well. However, they are not given enough opportunities to deepen their understanding of mathematical concepts and apply them to a variety of problems and across other subjects. As a result, some pupils are not making good progress in mathematics. In 2016, the proportion of the pupils who achieved the national standard was well below the national average.
- Since the previous inspection, improving writing has been a priority. Pupils now make consistently good progress in writing across the school. Pupils enjoy writing and are proud of their work. Most pupils present their work well and try to ensure that grammar and punctuation are correct. In 2016, pupils' attainment in writing was above the national average. Current data and work in pupils' books show that the overwhelming majority of pupils, including the disadvantaged and most-able disadvantaged, make good progress in writing across all classes.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Leaders identify the needs of these pupils well and provide good support for them to make effective progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to other pupils across the school. There are examples, particularly in writing, where disadvantaged children make better progress than others because of very effective support for their learning. At the end of key stage 2 in 2016, the overall progress of disadvantaged pupils was similar to that of other pupils in school but there was a difference in this group's attainment compared to other pupils nationally. The progress of current disadvantaged pupils in reading, writing and mathematics shows strong signs of improvement. As a result, the difference in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is set to diminish in 2017.
- The school has worked hard to improve the performance of the most able pupils,

including those who are disadvantaged. While there is some good progress evident in some pupils' books, particularly in writing, overall the progress of these pupils is too variable to be good.

- In pupils' current work across a range of subjects other than reading and mathematics, there was evidence of some good progress being made.
- Pupils' writing skills are developed well across a range of subjects; there is less evidence of this being the case for their reading and mathematical skills.

Early years provision

Good

- Children enter school with skills and abilities that are broadly typical for their age. They make good progress and the proportion achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception Year is above average. This success reflects on the determination, commitment and high expectations of the early years team.
- Children are happy and settle very quickly into school life because leaders carefully plan their induction. There are excellent links with local nurseries. Home visits and meetings ensure that parents are fully involved in the start of their children's school life. Children soon become confident and their behaviour and personal development are good.
- The early years leader ensures that adults accurately assess the children's progress across all aspects of early years learning and quickly identifies any who need extra help. 'Learning journey' records, including children's work and photographic evidence, show clearly how much progress children have made. Next steps in learning are identified and followed up to ensure that the children improve as intended.
- There is a calm, purposeful environment in the early years. Adults know children well and teachers plan interesting work that covers all of the areas of learning and links carefully to children's interests and imaginations. The children develop good attitudes to learning as they listen well and concentrate well on what they are asked to do. For example, during the inspection a group of children were able to work independently of their teacher in writing letters to Santa. The children developed some good language in the hairdressing corner, while the teacher worked with a group on their reading. Outdoor activities provide stimulating opportunities for children to develop their curiosity and independence.
- Leaders have strengthened the links between Reception and Year 1. Teachers work together regularly to make sure that transition to Year 1 is built on a strong understanding of children's skills. This has had a strong impact on the development of reading skills in Year 1.
- School leaders check on the quality of teaching in the early years and support teachers and teaching assistants to improve their work through professional development and coaching.
- Good links exist with external agencies whose roles are to support children in their early development. Children's welfare and safety are well catered for, with security given a high priority. The early years is a very safe and secure environment.

School details

Unique reference number	112322
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10019807

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	196
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mick Brookes
Headteacher	Maggie Cole
Telephone number	01539 737373
Website	www.stthomasschool.org.uk
Email address	admin@stthomas.cumbria.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 November 2014

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school meets the government's floor standard, which is the minimum requirement for pupils' progress and attainment.
- St Thomas's CofE Primary School is an average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The number of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who receive special educational needs support is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The school offers a breakfast club which is managed by the governing body.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning and made a number of short visits to classrooms and watched sessions where pupils were taught in small groups.
- Meetings were held with staff and a representative from the local authority.
- A meeting was held with six governors.
- The inspectors talked to pupils informally in class and at breaks, and listened to pupils read.
- A number of documents were scrutinised, including the school's own information about pupils' learning and progress, planning and monitoring documents, minutes of governor meetings, the development plan, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and safeguarding information.
- The inspector took account of the 40 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View), as well as consulting informally with parents at the start of the school day. The inspector also took account of the views of staff and pupils gained from formal and informal discussions, including 14 staff responses to the online questionnaire.

Inspection team

Andrew Morley, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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