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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Joanne Woods
Headteacher
St Thomas CofE Junior and Infant School
Church Street
Golborne
Warrington
WA3 3TH

Dear Mrs Woods

Short inspection of St Thomas CofE Junior and Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 27 June 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in November 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

As the new headteacher, you have set a clear vision for the development of the school. You and your new deputy headteacher are beginning to work well to move the school forward.

You identified quickly that the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement at St Thomas declined in the years following the previous inspection. Pupils' outcomes in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2 were not good enough. Not all of leaders' work to implement the recommendations set at the previous inspection developed well. For example, leaders' increased work to share expertise between staff and to improve teaching for the most able pupils did not make enough difference to pupils' learning. Governors told me that these weaknesses negatively affected the views of staff and the local community about the school at that time. This situation has now changed for the better.

Parents and carers responding to the Ofsted survey are positive about the school. Parents and pupils with whom I spoke were very complimentary in their comments. For example, the view of one parent was typical of many: 'My children love coming to school here. They are learning and progressing well, yet do not feel under pressure in doing so. They have good relationships with staff and other pupils and I can relax knowing they are safe and well cared for.' Due to the determination and

skilful work of leaders and staff, the quality of education is now improving again. Staff morale is high. They feel well supported in their work. Their better teaching is leading to an improvement in pupils' achievement across subjects. Even so, leaders recognise that more pupils need to meet and exceed the standards expected for their age. Gaps remain in the achievement of girls and boys in some classes in key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics.

Leaders have set mathematics as a current priority for their work. As the result of leaders' recent actions, the quality of leadership, teaching and learning in this subject is improving. However, not all pupils achieve as strongly as they should. Some pupils lack the self-confidence they need so they can succeed as mathematicians.

At the previous inspection, inspectors recommended that leaders and staff improve the quality of teaching and assessment in the early years. Staff's teaching is now much more skilful and successful. Their assessments of children are accurate and they use information carefully to plan for children's next steps. Current children make good progress. Leaders and staff have transformed the quality of the classroom. Children regularly access the new, large and well-resourced outdoor area as part of their learning. Children gain from the wide range of planned activities that staff provide across different subjects. Even so, leaders do not have a comprehensive view of what aspects of the curriculum to now develop even further.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils said that they feel safe at school. Some pupils specifically told me that they consider the high level of attention from staff to their safety to be a distinct strength of St Thomas's. Parents are happy that their children are safe. Leaders and staff address well the infrequent issues about pupils' behaviour and bullying. Leaders know the biggest safeguarding risks to pupils in the local area and how the school is helping to protect pupils. They double-check that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders and staff work with pupils regularly to help them understand how to stay safe, for example when online. Leaders make sure that they and all staff complete regular training on safeguarding. Staff and leaders are vigilant about possible issues affecting the care and protection of pupils. Leaders act quickly and appropriately whenever possible safeguarding issues arise. They link successfully with other agencies to protect pupils. The school site is kept secure and safe by staff. Office staff check the credentials of visitors carefully. They make sure that visitors are informed clearly about safeguarding procedures at the school.

Inspection findings

- A main focus for this inspection was to consider whether the actions of leaders demonstrate that they have the ability to keep on improving the school. Leaders are giving staff more of the training and support that they need to refine the quality of their work. Leaders of different subjects are starting to form helpful links with staff in other schools to enhance developments at St Thomas's. The quality of teaching is improving. Pupils' outcomes in the early years, key stage 1

and key stage 2 are rising. These improvements demonstrate that leaders are well placed to continue to improve the school. Leaders are honest and realistic in their reviews of the school. They understand that not enough pupils meet and exceed the expectations for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders recognise that the differences between girls' and boys' achievement in some classes are too great.

- Leaders and staff are developing an increasingly positive culture in the school. For example, pupils in all year groups have opportunities to participate in competitive sport against other schools. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are involved in external sporting events, suited to their individual needs. Staff and leaders celebrate pupils' efforts and contributions, as well as their achievement through high-quality displays on the walls of classrooms and corridors. For example, staff display prominently the increased work of pupils to raise funds for charities. Pupils dress smartly and represent their school well when meeting visitors. They said that they gain from an increasingly diverse range of extra activities, including visiting Speke Hall to learn about the Tudors. They also said that they learn much through opportunities for teamwork, such as through raft-building and rope-climbing. This positive culture contributes well to pupils' personal development, behaviour and learning.
- The proportion of key stage 2 pupils attaining at least the expected standard in mathematics was below the national average in 2016 and 2017. Leaders have set mathematics as a key priority for their work. Therefore, I wanted to understand how well this aspect of the curriculum is improving. The skilful support of leaders is helping staff's teaching in mathematics to be more challenging and varied for pupils. Pupils' work demonstrates that they are learning to reason and to solve problems with much greater precision. Leaders have clear plans in place to continue raising the quality of teaching of mathematics. They recognise that not enough pupils achieve well in this subject. Some pupils have a negative view of their own abilities in mathematics. Pupils said that they would like even more help from staff in lessons, so they understand their work better.
- Given that the quality of the early years was judged to require improvement at the previous inspection, we agreed that I would look at how well this aspect of the school is improving. Leaders have fully addressed the issue highlighted by previous inspectors about the quality and suitability of the school premises. Children in Reception now have a modern, attractive and well-resourced classroom. The new, large outdoor area is enticing and presents children with many worthwhile opportunities for learning. That said, improvement in the quality of staff's teaching and assessment has been slower. As a result, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has remained below the national average. This means that some children were not ready for Year 1. However, recent changes in staffing are resulting in much better teaching and assessments of children's needs. Current children are learning successfully and making good progress. The proportion of children attaining well is rising this year. Leaders are beginning to make much better use of information to plan for children's learning, for example in writing and mathematics. However, they do not identify clearly enough how other weaker areas of the curriculum should improve.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- even more pupils achieve and exceed expectations for their age in reading, writing and mathematics
- leaders and staff diminish the differences between girls and boys in different subjects and classes in key stage 2
- staff improve the self-confidence of those pupils who struggle with mathematics
- children's attainment in the early years rises further and leaders identify clearly how they will improve all weaker areas of learning.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Liverpool, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wigan. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, all classes were participating in special activities in place of their usual timetable. One class was away from school on a trip. I met with you to discuss your self-evaluation and your plans for improvement. We reviewed school information about the achievement of current pupils. We looked at samples of pupils' work in mathematics in key stage 2. We visited the Reception class to observe children's learning and to discuss improvement since the previous inspection. I met with the leaders for mathematics and for the early years. I met with three governors, including the chair of governors. I met with the director of the local school consortium. I spoke with parents as they dropped their children off at school. I reviewed 12 responses and 11 free-text responses from parents to Ofsted's online Parent View survey. I considered leaders' analysis of a recent school survey of 125 parents. I spoke with a random sample of six pupils from key stage 2 about their learning. I considered the responses from 23 pupils and 21 staff to Ofsted surveys. I reviewed leaders' records of checks on the suitability of staff, governors and volunteers to work with pupils.