School report

St Thomas CofE Primary School

Hodnet Drive, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Wigan, Lancashire WN4 8PQ

Inspection dates 2–3 April 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher's high expectations, drive and enthusiasm are shared by staff and governors. The strong Christian values of truthfulness, service, respect and forgiveness permeate the school.
- Leaders' accurate and honest evaluations have identified areas for continued improvement.
- Governors use their knowledge and skills effectively to hold leaders to account and maintain the good quality of education that pupils receive.
- Leaders check the impact of the actions taken to improve outcomes for pupils. As a result, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, achieve well, particularly in reading.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge underpins the effective teaching. This contributes to the good progress that pupils make, particularly in mathematics.
- A high proportion of pupils achieve well in the phonics screening check in Year 1. Pupils use their phonic knowledge effectively and are becoming confident and competent readers.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress from their starting points. This is because of the quality of the help they receive from skilled staff.
- Leaders have designed a curriculum that engages pupils as learners. Plans to ensure that pupils' knowledge builds progressively on what they already know are not fully embedded across subjects in the wider curriculum.
- Pupils use their increasing vocabulary knowledge well in their writing. Their knowledge of technical vocabulary for other curriculum subjects other than English is not as strong.
- Children in Reception settle quickly into well-established routines. They thrive in the calm, nurturing environment leaders have created. Most children reach a good level of development and are prepared well for Year 1.
- Behaviour in school is good. Strong relationships fostered by adults, and pupils' positive attitudes to learning are promoted consistently. Pupils feel valued and cared for.
- Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain because of the range of opportunities leaders provide to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Most parents and carers would recommend the school to others. They comment positively. A typically comment was, 'I couldn't have chosen a better school for my children.'

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further embed the improvements made in pupils' vocabulary knowledge, including their technical vocabulary across the curriculum, so that pupils have a more extensive vocabulary to help them to improve their writing.
- Ensure that pupils' learning, in subjects other than English and mathematics, builds on what pupils already know and deepens their knowledge and understanding.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good

- Leaders, including governors, have maintained the good quality of education at St Thomas CofE Primary School. The headteacher's accurate evaluation of the school's strengths, and clear vision for the future, have enabled leaders to resolve successfully the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Staff morale is high. They share leaders' commitment to provide the very best education for pupils in a nurturing and supportive environment.
- Leaders' review of the way mathematics is taught accurately identified key areas for further improvement. Training for staff on how to use questions skilfully to improve pupils' ability to solve increasing complex problems, and explain their reasoning, has been very successful. Outcomes for pupils in mathematics are improving, particularly at the higher standard.
- Leaders for mathematics check that their planned actions for improvement are carried out consistently across all year groups. They provide opportunities for staff to work together and share knowledge and ideas. This has been particularly helpful for staff new to teaching.
- Leaders for English identified that pupils' vocabulary hindered their progress in writing, particularly at a greater depth. Training for staff on how to develop pupils' knowledge of more challenging vocabulary has had a positive impact on the quality of pupils writing, especially for disadvantaged pupils. Teachers are extending pupils' knowledge of technical vocabulary in other curriculum subjects, but changes are not fully embedded.
- In reading, training for staff has had a positive impact on how they use questions effectively to improve pupils inference skills when reading. These improvements have enhanced pupils' reading skills. A high proportion of pupils reach the higher standard in reading, including disadvantaged pupils.
- The special educational needs coordinator shares her expertise effectively. Leaders work with outside agencies and other professionals to provide training and additional guidance for staff. Training for staff on how to support pupils' social, emotional and mental health has been particularly effective. Programmes of support are put in place to help pupils with SEND to catch up. Leaders evaluate the impact of the help that pupils receive to ensure that skilled support staff are deployed effectively. The additional funding for SEND is used effectively. The small proportion of pupils with SEND, including pupils who are supported by an education, health and care (EHC) plan, make good progress from their individual starting points.
- Leaders have designed a curriculum that ignites pupils' passion and enthusiasm for learning. They have clearly identified the knowledge, skills and understanding they want pupils to have. The curriculum makes it clear that learning opportunities build progressively on pupils' prior knowledge, particularly in geography and art. However, the implementation of a curriculum that builds progressively on what pupils already know is not fully embedded in all of the subjects in the wider curriculum.
- Leaders work with colleagues in other schools, including secondary schools, to ensure

that they have clearly identified the knowledge and understanding pupils need to be successful in the next stage of their education, for example in design and technology.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through the range of opportunities provided by leaders. Visits to museums and public performances enrich the curriculum for pupils. Leaders provide pupils with opportunities to work with members of other faiths to develop an understanding of how we are all the same, yet are unique. Pupils in Year 5, working on a project to 'kick racism out of sport', are beginning to understand how what we say, and how we treat other people, is important. They recognise that their words can affect the feelings of others. Pupils gain an appreciation of the community in which they live. They contribute positively to helping people less fortunate than themselves through working with local charities. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders accurately identify disadvantaged pupils' individual barriers to learning. Leaders know such pupils and their families well. They ensure that they receive the help and guidance that they need, including for their social and emotional needs. The additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively and pupils currently in school are making good progress.
- The additional funding for physical education and sport is used to good effect. Pupils benefit from the high-quality training that they receive to hone their own skills. The trophies displayed in school are a testament to pupils' success in local competitions, for example in orienteering, football and athletics.
- Parents speak highly of the care, guidance and support their children receive. They feel well informed about the progress their children are making and how they can support their children at home. The school is held in high regard within the local community. Events and celebrations are well attended.

Governance of the school

- Governors have the experience and knowledge needed to allow them to challenge leaders effectively and hold them to account. They have a secure understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas for further improvement. Training ensures that governors keep up to date with new initiatives, including safeguarding.
- Governors are kept well informed through the detailed reports they receive from leaders. They know how well pupils are doing compared to other pupils nationally. Governors check the accuracy of information they are given. They review the impact of actions taken to improve outcomes for pupils by talking to staff and talking to pupils about their learning.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Checks are in place to ensure that adults are suitable to work with children, and this includes students, visitors and volunteers who help in school regularly. All records examined during the inspection relating to safeguarding were maintained thoroughly.
- Leaders identify the potential risks that could affect pupils. Teachers have a good

understanding of how to identify potential signs of abuse and neglect because of the good quality training they receive. Staff work effectively with agencies and other professionals, including the police and children's social care. They ensure that families receive the help, guidance and support they need.

- The curriculum is carefully planned, so that pupils know how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations, including when using the internet. Pupils thrive in a safe and nurturing environment. They feel cared for and valued.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment — Good

- Teachers have created an environment that supports pupils' learning and social and emotional needs well. Good relationships are promoted effectively by staff. These contribute to pupils' positive attitudes to learning and the good progress they make. Teachers' high expectations encourage pupils to take pride in their work. Pupils focus on their learning and work hard because teachers make learning interesting.
- The good quality of teaching has been maintained because of the training teachers receive. Teachers appreciate the opportunity to work with other colleagues, including colleagues in other schools, to share knowledge and expertise. This is particularly helpful for staff new to teaching. Staff feel valued and supported.
- Teachers have a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics from the start of Reception. Pupils successfully read unfamiliar words on their own. They apply their phonic knowledge with improving accuracy in their own writing. Support staff work with pupils who are struggling so that they catch up swiftly.
- The teaching of reading is effective. Teachers foster a love of reading through the quality of texts they choose. Children who read with inspectors talked confidently about the types of books they choose from the well-resourced school library. Changes to the way reading is taught have given more attention to ensuring that pupils understand what they have read. This has improved pupils' understanding of inference and skills in retrieving information from the text. Carefully selected texts expose pupils to more challenging vocabulary and are improving their vocabulary knowledge well. However, pupils' technical vocabulary in curriculum subjects other than English is less well developed.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to plan activities that capture pupils' imagination and meet their needs well. For example, in English, pupils in Year 4 were enthusiastic about the letters they were composing, inspired by the story 'The day the crayons quit' by Drew Daywalt. Teachers use questions effectively to encourage pupils to refine their ideas and provide examples to explain how they could improve their work. Pupils respond positively. An increasing proportion of pupils are working at a greater depth in their writing.
- The teaching of mathematics is effective. Activities build progressively on pupils' knowledge and basic calculation skills. Teachers have benefited from training in the use of assessment information. As a result, they effectively identify the next steps in pupils' learning. For example, in Year 2, teachers quickly identified pupils who were struggling to solve problems so that they could provide focused help. Teachers use questions well to probe further pupils' understanding and encourage them to recall what they already

know so that they apply their knowledge effectively. Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they enjoy the challenges teachers provide because it makes them think.

- Skilled support staff are deployed well to support pupils' learning, including for disadvantaged pupils. This is particularly successful for pupils with SEND and those supported by an EHC plan. Consequently, such pupils make good progress from their starting points
- In curriculum subjects other than English and mathematics, teachers work collaboratively to plan opportunities which build progressively on what pupils already know. For example, in art, pupils in key stage 1 develop the skills and knowledge they need to sketch portraits. In key stage 2, pupils refine these skills further so that at the end of key stage 2 they are able to sketch moving figures with increasing accuracy. In history, teachers build on pupils' understanding of chronology. For example, by introducing the timeline of events that led to the gunpowder plot and progressing to the time line of civilisations that have inhabited the British Isles. However, plans which build progressively on what pupils already know are not fully embedded across all subjects in the wider curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare — Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils flourish in a caring and nurturing environment which values each pupil's individuality. Positive relationships fostered within school are strong. Pupils feel cared for and valued. They are confident that there will always be someone to share their concerns if they have any worries.
- Pupils understand the different forms bullying can take. They are confident that if bullying did happen, it would be dealt with quickly. Teachers develop pupils' respect, tolerance and understanding effectively. Visits from national charities and representatives from support programmes, such as Operation Encompass, enhance pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations, including when using the internet. This understanding prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils appreciate the many responsibilities they have in school, including the opportunity to be members of committees, house captains or school monitors. Members of the school council pose a question each week for pupils to discuss, for example, 'Is it ever OK to copy someone else?' Pupils share their thoughts and opinions with others and then cast their votes. The outcome is discussed during assemblies, where pupils listen with respect to the opinions and views of others. Pupils are prepared well to be responsible citizens.
- Pupils are rightly proud of the work that they do to support people in the local and wider community who face challenging circumstances. They organise and run stalls to raise funds during Christian Aid Week and make collections of goods for the local food bank. They are developing an understanding of other faiths and cultures from the many visitors they have in school, including visitors from the local Jewish community

and from charities that work with asylum seekers new to the area.

- Leaders provide a range of enrichment experiences for pupils to broaden their horizons and raise aspirations, especially for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils say that they want to be builders, researchers, and to represent the community in Parliament. Pupils appreciate the range of opportunities they have to visit museums, the cathedral and places in the local community. Residential trips provide pupils with the opportunity to develop resilience and face new challenges. The wide variety of clubs during lunchtimes and after school are well attended, including clubs where pupils play together with construction toys or use tablet computers, choir, dance club and, especially, the sports clubs. Parents appreciate the opportunities leaders provide for their children.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils speak confidently that any inappropriate behaviour is dealt with appropriately. Pupils understand that actions have consequences. Most pupils make the right choices about their own behaviour and have a good understanding of how their behaviour affects others.
- Pupils are polite and well mannered. They show respect for each other and to adults in the school. They chat happily with their friends at lunchtime and play well together. Older pupils take seriously their responsibilities as playleaders for the younger pupils at lunchtimes.
- Pupils' good behaviour in classrooms is reinforced consistently by staff. Pupils are attentive, eager to please, respond well to instructions and work hard. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning contributes to the good progress they make.
- Pupils take pride in their work and it is neatly presented, reflecting the high expectations that teachers set.
- Pupils' attendance has been consistently above the national average for the past three years. Few pupils are persistently absent from school. Staff follow up quickly when pupils are absent, particularly the most vulnerable pupils.

Outcomes for pupils — Good

- The results of the national tests show that attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 has improved steadily over the past three years. Following a slight dip in progress in 2017, particularly in mathematics and writing, pupils' progress improved in 2018. The proportion of pupils working at a greater depth in writing, and at the higher standard in mathematics, was broadly in line with the national average. Attainment for disadvantaged pupils in reading was above the national average in 2018, including at the higher standard.
- The results of national assessments for pupils at the end of key stage 1 have improved steadily in writing and mathematics for the past three years, remaining above the national average, including at the higher standard. In 2018 reading was above the national average at the higher standard, following a dip in 2017.
- Phonics is taught consistently from Reception. Pupils decode unfamiliar words with

increasing confidence. Pupils who are struggling are given the help that they need to catch up quickly in Year 2. Pupils apply their phonetic knowledge effectively in their reading and writing. This is having a positive impact on pupils' good progress in key stage 1. The proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in the phonics screening check has remained above national average.

- The school's assessment information for current pupils shows that most pupils are working at least at the standard required of them by the school, including disadvantaged pupils. An increasing proportion of pupils are working at a higher standard. This finding is supported by the work that inspectors saw in pupils' books and in lesson observations.
- Pupils' improving vocabulary knowledge and inference skills have a positive impact on the good progress that they make in reading. Pupils enjoy reading and are confident and competent readers. Their knowledge and understanding of technical vocabulary in other curriculum subjects are improving other aspects, for example pupils' work on interpreting maps in Year 5. However, this is not seen consistently across all subjects.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics is strengthening. Teachers' assessment during lessons is effectively identifying pupils who are struggling or pupils who need further challenge. Pupils know how to improve their work further. Pupils' work shows that they are able to use their basic mathematical skills appropriately to solve increasingly challenging problems and explain their reasoning clearly.
- Pupils currently in the school are making good and improving progress in writing, including a higher proportion working at a greater depth. They apply their grammar, spelling and punctuation with increasing accuracy. Their improving vocabulary knowledge is reflected in the poetry work displayed in the Year 4 classroom to describe sounds taken by the sound catcher: 'the slurping of the drinks, the clanging of the bell, the drumming of the rain'.

Early years provision — Good

- Leaders in the early years have a good understanding of how young children learn. They have created a calm and focused environment in which children thrive. Good relationships are modelled by the knowledgeable staff team. These contribute to children's positive attitudes to learning. The majority of children attend one of a number of local nursery providers before starting school. Most children enter school with skills and knowledge typical for their age.
- Staff establish strong relationships with parents before children start school. Children meet the Reception staff and join in with activities during the term before they start school. Information sessions for parents are well attended. Parents know how to help their children at home. Parents who spoke to inspectors commented positively about how happy their children are at school and how approachable and reassuring the staff are if they have any concerns.
- Leaders effectively gather assessment information from a range of activities, including from parents. Teachers use this information effectively to identify the next steps in children's learning. The quality of teaching is good because of the training leaders provide. Staff work collaboratively with colleagues, including colleagues in other

schools, to share knowledge and expertise. They check their judgements about how well children are learning are accurate.

- Leaders work effectively with other agencies and professionals to support children with SEND. The early-years environment is planned well to support purposeful learning effectively for children with SEND. Additional training for staff ensures that they have the knowledge and understanding to meet children's individual needs. As a result, children with SEND make good progress from their starting points.
- Staff ensure that activities and resources support children's independent learning. Resources are carefully selected to capture children's interest. Children work cooperatively together and help each other. They sustain their concentration when activities capture their imagination. For example, a small group of children were working together with the building blocks. They were recreating an impressive model of the Houses of Parliament from a photograph. The confidently explained to the inspector that the characters in the story about the big red bus had passed the Houses of Parliament. They were able to retell the sequence of the story using the story map that was on display.
- Staff engage effectively with children. They use conversations and questions skilfully to develop and expand children's spoken vocabulary. For example, in the café, adults modelled the role of waitress to record the customer's order for coffee and cake, add up the bill and give the correct change. Children were eager to join in and take turns to be the café staff and customer.
- The outdoor space is organised effectively to enhance children's learning. Activities are carefully planned and supported by adults. High levels of cooperation are encouraged, for example as children worked together to build a den and solve the problem of how to attach the fabric to form the roof.
- Phonics is taught effectively from the start of Reception. Teachers model vocabulary and sensitively correct any mispronunciation. Children apply their phonic knowledge with increasing accuracy in their own writing. Leaders provide opportunities for children to practise and refine their writing in a range of areas, for example writing orders in the café area.
- Children are safe and risk assessments are carried out daily. All statutory requirements are met. Staff have all received the appropriate training.
- Teachers' high expectations have ensured that the proportion of children who reach a good level of development by the end of Reception has remained consistently above the national average figures for the past three years. Children make good progress and are prepared well for Year 1.

School details

Unique reference number	106465
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10054361

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	208
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Malcolm Taylor
Headteacher	Judith Jones
Telephone number	01942 201107
Website	www.ashtonsaintthomas.wigan.sch.uk
Email address	enquiries@admin.ashtonsaintthomas.wigan.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 March 2018

Information about this school

- The school is similar in size to most other primary schools.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage, with a very small number of pupils from a range of minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by an EHC plan is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is below the national average.
- This is Church of England voluntary aided school. The most recent Section 48 inspection of the religious aspects of the school was conducted in October 2014.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and behaviour. The headteacher joined inspectors on several of these classroom visits.
- Inspectors observed and spoke to pupils during lessons and at playtimes. They met formally with two groups of pupils and listened to pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders and other members of staff. Inspectors also met with four members of the governing body and held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in books and on display jointly with leaders. They also looked at a range of documentation, including about the arrangements for safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke with parents at the start of the school day. They took account of the 33 responses to Parent View, including 23 text comments. Inspectors also took account of the 18 responses to the staff questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Amanda Stringer, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lesley Curtis	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: http://eepurl.com/iTrDn.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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

© Crown copyright 2019