

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas Primary School

Union Street, Exeter, Devon EX2 9BB

Inspection dates:

26–27 November 2019

Outcome

St Thomas Primary School continues to be a good school.

However, the inspector had some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school is a happy and friendly place. Parents and carers value how welcoming the school is and how well teachers know the children. Pupils feel well cared for and they are.

Pupils enjoy the special visits and events organised for them, particularly the residential visits. Year 6, who recently returned from a visit, were excited by opportunities to abseil and canoe. Children in the early years get out and about in the community and enjoy being with older residents through their project with Age UK.

Pupils say teachers make learning fun. The vast majority of pupils behave exceptionally well and concentrate on their work. However, at times, a small number of pupils annoy others by calling out or not paying attention. Pupils would like this to stop. Pupils agree there is no bullying. If friends fall out, adults are very good at helping them to solve their problems quickly and calmly.

Leaders know that standards have slipped. They are working hard to ensure that pupils catch up on lost learning. As a result, pupils are learning more now. However, pupils have gaps in their knowledge and skills, particularly in their reading and writing.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

New leaders, including the trust, are working productively on the right things. Leaders know that some subjects are not clearly planned out and it is a priority to resolve this quickly. Some subject leaders are new to their roles. Teachers' subject knowledge is not sufficiently strong. As yet, teachers do not have enough guidance on how to teach some subjects. As a result, pupils do not know or remember as much as they should. In geography, for example, pupils do not know enough about where places are. Some of their map work is not carefully presented.

Well-planned phonics teaching gets children off to a positive start in Reception. Children read from books that give them practice in the sounds they are learning. Staff encourage children to speak clearly and in sentences. They prompt children to use the sounds they know to spell simple words when writing.

However, in key stage 1, pupils do not have enough time to practise their reading. Too many pupils move into key stage 2 not reading as well as they should. Pupils who struggle, some of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are given additional help. However, these pupils are not catching up swiftly enough.

Pupils enjoy the stories that adults read to them. They regularly choose and read books from the school's well-stocked library. However, teachers do not guide pupils in making book choices which widen their reading.

Teachers give pupils interesting things to write about, for example poems in response to Remembrance Day. However, many pupils do not write as well as they should. They have not fully grasped or remembered what they should know about grammar and punctuation. Consequently, pupils repeat basic errors. Pupils in key stage 1 struggle with handwriting. This slows their ability to get their good ideas down on paper.

Science is taught well across the school. Pupils are enthused by their interesting science lessons. The leader for science has planned out the curriculum clearly. Teachers know what to teach, when to teach it, and how to check that pupils remember their learning. Pupils can explain the experiments they have carried out and they record their work carefully and accurately. Children in the early years are also confident. This term, children have been taught the correct names for parts of the body.

The welfare of pupils with SEND is a top priority for all staff. Specialist advice to support pupils is sought and followed. Pupils make particularly good progress in developing social and language skills. However, targets to improve pupils' reading and writing are not always set and checked as effectively.

The school develops pupils' personal skills to help them cope well in life, including their mental health. Teachers build pupils' determination to deal with challenge. Pupils say that when they are 'stuck in the pit of learning', they have to keep going and climb out. The school council members, and pupils with other roles of responsibility, are proud of what they do to help the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are well trained, experienced and know their community. Staff quickly spot when a pupil is at risk of harm. The school has well-managed systems which enable staff to promptly pass concerns to a leader. Leaders are confident to seek advice from external agencies. The school offers help to many parents and pupils through its extensive pastoral and family support programme.

All required checks are made on adults working in school and records are well maintained. Governors make regular visits themselves to make sure that safeguarding procedures meet requirements.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Not all subjects in the curriculum are planned coherently. Teachers' knowledge of the curriculum is underdeveloped in some subjects, for example geography. As a result, pupils do not know or remember as much as they should. Leaders need to complete the planning and sequencing of the curriculum in all subjects. They need to ensure that all teachers have the subject knowledge to teach the curriculum successfully.
- The curriculum for reading is not implemented sufficiently well. Too few pupils, including those pupils with SEND, leave key stage 1 being able to read as well as they should. They do not catch up quickly in key stage 2 because teaching is not well adapted to take account of their needs. Additional help for pupils to improve their reading is not well planned or assessed. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum for reading is strengthened and implemented fully, so that all pupils across the school learn to read well.
- The curriculum for writing has been improved recently. However, many pupils repeat errors of punctuation, grammar and spelling. They do not remember what they have been taught or do not apply it. In addition, pupils in key stage 1 struggle with handwriting. Teachers need to develop the accuracy of pupils' writing. Leaders should bring coherence to the school's curriculum for handwriting across the early years and key stage 1.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Thomas Primary School, to be good in October 2012.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	143191
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10111591
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	180
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Brian Cook
Headteacher	Justin Stone
Website	www.stthomasprimaryschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- On 1 January 2017, St Thomas Primary school converted to an academy and joined the Exeter Learning Academy Trust.
- When the trust was formed in 2017, the headteacher became the chief executive officer. He continued to lead the school in a part-time capacity. The school had the support of a deputy headteacher. In September 2019, a new chief executive officer joined the trust and the headteacher returned to leading the school full time. The deputy headteacher left the school in July 2019 and has not been replaced.

Information about this inspection

- I met with the headteacher and with the leaders of the new phase teams.
- I did deep dives in reading, writing, science and geography. I visited lessons and looked at pupils' work. I met with leaders of those subjects and met with teachers. I also met with the special educational needs coordinators and the leader for the early years.
- I talked with the chair of the trustees of the Exeter Learning Academy Trust on the telephone and met with the chief executive officer. I also met with a group of governors from the local governing board, including the chair.

- I scrutinised the school’s safeguarding records and discussed safeguarding with the headteacher and the parent support adviser.
- I spoke to pupils in lessons and in small groups to discuss their learning and their views of the school. I also met with the school council. I took account of the views of other pupils through the 38 responses to the pupil survey.
- I took account of the views of staff through two meetings and through the 12 responses to the staff survey.
- I spoke to parents as they collected their children from school and reviewed the 28 responses to Ofsted’s Parent View.

Inspection team

Wendy Marriott, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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