

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas C of E Primary School, Halliwell

Eskrick Street, Bolton, Lancashire BL1 3JB

Inspection dates:

30 November and 1 December 2021

Outcome

St Thomas C of E Primary School, Halliwell continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have enormous pride in their school. They enjoy learning alongside each other, keenly exploring and celebrating cultures and lifestyles which are different from their own. This is a school where everyone feels included.

Adults expect the highest standards of behaviour in lessons and at social times. Pupils respond by conducting themselves extremely well. They treat everyone with kindness and respect.

Pupils feel safe and happy in school. They know that any form of bullying is unacceptable, and they report it immediately if it occurs. Pupils are confident that teachers deal with bullying swiftly.

Pupils are pleased that they can once again participate in the many clubs, sports and excursions which were paused because of the restrictions in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. They eagerly take on responsibilities such as being part of the school's ethos group. They proudly wear their badges for their responsibilities and achievements.

Positive changes to the school's curriculum have increased teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve. The school's motto, 'Let Your Light Shine', captures leaders' ambition for all pupils to reach their full potential, academically, socially and emotionally. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well across the curriculum.

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

Leaders have thought carefully about the way that the curriculum is organised. They have made significant changes since September 2019. As a result, pupils progress well through the curriculum, including in English and mathematics.

Before starting any new work, teachers skilfully remind pupils of what they have learned previously. This is so that pupils can successfully add new knowledge to what they already know. Teachers use effective strategies to help pupils to remember their work. For example, there is a 'wow experience' in every topic, designed to capture pupils' imagination and to make sure that they do not forget what they have learned.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge. As curriculum changes were introduced, leaders ensured that teachers received appropriate training. Teachers have the skills and knowledge necessary to deliver the curriculum effectively.

The way that teachers plan for learning has improved the richness of pupils' knowledge and understanding. For example, in mathematics, pupils learn how to use more than one method to solve a problem. They are also required to explain why they would choose one method rather than another.

Leaders have ensured that reading is central to the life of the school. Teachers read to pupils every day. Pupils value this time. Staff ensure that pupils read widely. Each year, pupils read a variety of books by a wide range of authors. Pupils told the inspector that they enjoy reading and that their teachers do too.

Leaders have made successful changes to the phonics and reading programmes. These changes have increased teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve. The teaching of early reading is well planned. Staff teach letters and sounds skilfully. They give extra help to those pupils who are not keeping up.

From Year 2, pupils have opportunities to develop a wider range of vocabulary and to understand more complex texts. As a result, most pupils can read accurately and fluently by the end of key stage 2.

Following the impact of the COVID-19 national lockdowns, some pupils have fallen further behind in their reading. As a result, some of these pupils are struggling to access the wider curriculum. Leaders have put into place the support needed to help these pupils to catch up quickly with their classmates. However, it is too early to see the full impact of their actions.

Most children join the school with speaking and listening skills which are lower than those typical for their age. Some children who speak English an additional language join the school with no knowledge of the English language. Teachers ensure that these pupils benefit from rich language experiences. This enables them to improve their English rapidly so that they can learn alongside their peers and join in with all aspects of school life.

Teachers quickly identify pupils with SEND. They make sure that they can join in with everything. Adults create an environment in which these pupils can settle and thrive. They give them help to follow the same programmes of learning as their classmates. Pupils with SEND progress well through the curriculum.

Staff in the early years make sure that all children settle in quickly, feel confident and enjoy learning. The early years curriculum is well planned. Children in the early years are well prepared for the demands of key stage 1.

The wider curriculum develops pupils' social skills, cultural awareness and emotional growth. The school gives pupils the opportunity to experience a range of extra-curricular social and cultural activities before moving on to secondary school.

Pupils behave well in lessons and during social times. They can learn without disruption. Teachers have created a calm and purposeful environment based on mutual respect.

Staff are proud to work at this school. They feel valued. They told the inspector that leaders consider staff's workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that the culture of safeguarding is strong. For example, all staff understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Teachers make sure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet.

Leaders ensure that all adults in the school undertake regular training so that they can recognise signs of abuse or neglect. Staff report concerns about pupils who may be at risk of harm immediately and leaders act swiftly. Leaders work well with outside agencies to help pupils and their families.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, some pupils have fallen further behind with their reading. This means that some of these pupils are unable to progress through the wider curriculum as effectively as they should. Leaders should ensure that they continue to help these pupils to catch up quickly with their classmates so that they can read fluently and accurately, and so that they can successfully access the wider curriculum.

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 or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or

lower grade, 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 deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in June 2016.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 the school and 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	105218
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10199903
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	346
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	David Pott
Headteacher	Abigail Fielden
Website	www.st-thomas-halliwell.bolton.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 June 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher of a local primary school was acting as interim headteacher at the time of the inspection, as the substantive headteacher was on maternity leave. The substantive headteacher made herself available for the two days of the inspection.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- St. Thomas C of E Primary School is a Church of England voluntary-aided primary school. The previous section 48 inspection took place in March 2016.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation.
- The inspector held discussions with the substantive headteacher and the interim headteacher, the deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers and the special educational needs coordinator.
- The inspector spoke to members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics and physical education. This involved discussions with subject leaders and teachers, as well as talking to pupils about their work. The inspector visited lessons in these subjects and scrutinised curriculum plans and pupils' work. She heard individual pupils reading to their teachers.
- The inspector analysed the school's records of recruitment checks on staff. She spoke to staff and leaders about the school's procedures and systems for safeguarding pupils. She also discussed with staff and pupils how the school teaches pupils to keep themselves safe, including when on the internet.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and at social times.
- The inspector considered the responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. This included the free-text comments. She also reviewed the responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys, and the school's own surveys of the views of parents.

Inspection team

Liz Kelly, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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