

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas CofE Primary School

Molyneux Road, Westhoughton, Bolton, Lancashire BL5 3HP

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 March 2022

Outcome

St Thomas CofE Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to be members of the school community. They have positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils have a deep sense of social justice. They care about the environment. For example, they recently developed a new waste-paper recycling system for the school. Members of the ethos group, sports captains and members of the school council work well with their peers to ensure that the school is calm and purposeful.

Pupils told the inspector that they feel safe in school. They know that they can talk to any member of staff if they are worried or concerned. Pupils said that when bullying happens, it is dealt with immediately by staff.

Pupils know that staff have high expectations of their behaviour and achievement and they listen attentively during lessons. This helps to ensure that most pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well in a range of subjects.

The array of extra-curricular opportunities available mean that all pupils can develop their talents and pursue their interests. Pupils enjoy honing their drumming, guitar, clarinet, saxophone, cello and violin-playing skills, and singing in the school choir. Year 6 pupils enjoy their memorable annual residential trip. Pupils are fond of the school visits to museums, zoos, the pantomime and different places of worship.

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

Leaders and governors have designed a broad and well-ordered curriculum that is ambitious for most pupils, including those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders are determined that pupils become active citizens and confident readers. Leaders are clear about the important knowledge and skills that they want pupils, and children in the early years, to know and remember. As a result, pupils achieve well.

Leaders provide ongoing training for staff. Assessment information is used well in most subjects to identify what pupils know and can do. However, in a small number of subjects, the systems to check on pupils' learning are not as well-developed. This means that, in some areas of the curriculum, leaders do not have a clear understanding of pupils' knowledge and skills. In addition, some pupils have not gained secure knowledge about certain aspects of the curriculum. Staff's strategies to help pupils to know and remember more of their learning are not as effective as they could be. This hampers pupils' ability to build on what they know.

Leaders place a high priority on reading. As a result, there is a strong culture of reading across the school. Pupils, and children in the early years, love to read, which they do daily. Pupils readily recall their favourite books and poems. For example, pupils read the work of modern and classic writers and poets with confidence and fluency. Staff are trained well. They make sure that the books that pupils and children read contain the letters and sounds that they have learned. This helps to ensure that pupils and children learn phonics successfully and develop their reading knowledge quickly.

Effective systems are in place that help staff to quickly identify pupils with SEND. Staff are trained well to monitor pupils' learning and identify the support that pupils need. When required, leaders work closely with alternative providers and other professionals to help pupils to settle into learning and access the curriculum. This ensures that pupils with SEND achieve well in a range of subjects.

Lessons are rarely disrupted by poor behaviour, which means that pupils across the school, including children in the Nursery and Reception classes, can learn effectively. Staff receive high-quality training to support any pupils who may find it difficult to manage their behaviour.

Central to the school's ambition is leaders' wide-ranging and well-considered personal development curriculum, that enhances pupils' social, moral and cultural development. They like to keep healthy and engage in different sporting activities including cross country, netball, dodgeball and football.

Pupils are kind-hearted and responsible citizens. They regularly support good causes. Recently they held a 'Santa dash' to raise funds to support a local hospice. Pupils like to air their views on how to make the school better. For example, members of the school council are currently working with leaders to improve the school grounds and are utilising a decommissioned bus to support the creation of a nature sanctuary.

Parents and carers are highly positive about the school. Typically, they said that staff are friendly and approachable. They also said that their children are happy, safe and progress well.

Staff believe that leaders and governors are mindful of their well-being, mental health and workload. They describe the school as having an 'open and caring culture'. Staff, including those new to teaching, appreciate the training and support they receive from senior leaders. They said that this helps them to deliver the curriculum well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff are vigilant in adhering to the school's safeguarding procedures. They are trained well to spot the potential signs of neglect, abuse and exploitation. Staff understand pupils' vulnerabilities and know exactly what to do if they are concerned about the safety or welfare of a pupil.

When required, leaders make sure that families get the help they need from appropriate external agencies.

Pupils know what they need to do to keep themselves safe. Staff provide learning opportunities to help pupils to identify any potential risks. This includes lessons on how to stay safe online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, pupils have not gained the knowledge and skills they need to deepen their understanding of concepts over time. In these subjects, the strategies to help pupils to remember more of their learning are not as effective as they could be. Leaders should ensure that staff receive the necessary training to help them to support pupils to know and remember more of the intended curriculum in these subjects.
- In some subjects, the checks on pupils' learning are not fully effective. This means that teachers are unclear how well pupils have learned and remembered key knowledge. Leaders should ensure that staff are well equipped to assess pupils' learning so that they can identify what pupils know and what further support they may need to grasp important knowledge.

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 second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in February 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 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	105234
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10211219
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	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Graham Andrews
Headteacher	Rob Dean
Website	www.st-thomas.bolton.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	18 January 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a voluntary aided Church of England school. The last section 48 inspection was carried out in February 2017.
- Leaders use one alternative provider to support a small number of pupils.

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 leaders and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator. The inspector held a meeting with five governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- The inspector held a meeting with a representative from the local authority and held a telephone conversation with the head of education from the Diocese of Manchester.
- The inspector carried out deep dives into these subjects: English, including early reading, mathematics and art and design. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed

the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The inspector spoke with leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects. The inspector spoke with staff about their workload and well-being.
- The inspector spoke with parents to gather their views about the school. He considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. The inspector also reviewed responses from staff and pupils to Ofsted surveys.
- The inspector examined a range of policies and documents. He also scrutinised safeguarding information, including the school's safeguarding policy. The inspector spoke to safeguarding leaders about the reporting and recording of any safeguarding incidents. He also talked with pupils about their safety and welfare.

Inspection team

Lenford White, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
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M1 2WD

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