

# Inspection of a good school: St Thomas' Church of England Aided Primary School

Friars Road, Winchelsea, East Sussex TN36 4ED

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Inspection date: 3 October 2023

## Outcome

St Thomas' Church of England Aided Primary School continues to be a good school.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are positive about their experiences and opportunities at St Thomas'. The school makes the most of what is on offer in the local area. This includes visits to learn about the nearby coast and to explore the history of Winchelsea. There is a strong focus on creativity and a range of opportunities to enhance this. For instance, pupils take part in activities such as songwriting workshops and performances at Glyndebourne.

The school has high aims for its pupils. In early years, staff challenge children to explore sounds and develop their communication skills. This helps them to make a positive start to their education. Staff make sure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are included fully through careful adaptation of what the school offers.

Pupils have a clear sense of community in the school. By taking on roles such as buddies and young librarians, they help and support one another. Pupils share and enjoy the playground spaces, including the garden and the climbing wall. They behave in line with the school's values, such as friendship and thankfulness. Pupils are excited to come to school and explore what they will learn next.

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

The school has put together a detailed programme for what pupils will learn. Leaders ensure that pupils encounter and build knowledge in a clear sequence. Reading and language are at the heart of what the school provides. Across the curriculum, there is an emphasis on developing pupils' vocabulary. Children in early years encounter new words and concepts through the stimulating learning environment. The books that pupils read are chosen carefully to match the sounds they have learned. Pupils develop strategies to read unfamiliar words with accuracy. All pupils, including weaker readers, develop their confidence and fluency in reading.

Teachers help pupils to retain important knowledge over the long term. Pupils revisit ideas and topics, and teachers help them to recall what they studied previously. Many of the

tasks set for pupils help them to know more and remember more. In music, pupils appraise and refine their work through structured performances. However, some of the tasks that pupils complete do not enable them to learn as effectively as they could. In mathematics, pupils are sometimes unclear about number concepts. This is a result of teachers' choice of activities and supporting materials.

Teachers question and check how much pupils understand as they are learning. Where this is done most effectively, such as in phonics, teachers make sure that all pupils are ready to move on. However, there are times when teachers do not confirm whether all pupils have grasped the most important ideas. As a result, they do not ensure that gaps in pupils' knowledge are closed swiftly. The school uses termly assessments to identify topics that need revisiting. This also helps leaders to identify and refine their support for pupils with SEND.

Overall, pupils achieve well. As a result of strong teaching, children in early years build knowledge and skills effectively. Older pupils are prepared well for the transition to secondary school. Their time at St Thomas' develops their confidence as well as academic readiness. Pupils with SEND learn in line with their peers. Their development in reading enables them to access the full curriculum.

The school sets out clear routines for children as soon as they start at school. This helps to foster focused and attentive behaviour throughout the school. Pupils report that the school has a kind and helpful atmosphere. They aspire to and enjoy taking on leadership roles. This extends beyond school, as pupils devise their own fundraising activities for local charities. Leaders broaden the scope of pupils' moral and spiritual understanding. For example, pupils visit a diverse range of places of worship and use video links to ask questions of different faith leaders. The school seeks to strengthen pupils' understanding of the wider world. Pupils go on local 'welly walks' and on visits to learn about the emergency services. Leaders make sure that pupils with SEND get the most out of these experiences too.

The school provides helpful support for parents. Information about online safety is shared, as well as guidance on helping children who are learning to read. Leaders are also considerate of the views of staff. They provide purposeful and effective training to support the delivery of the curriculum. Leaders are also mindful of workload when introducing new developments, such as around assessment.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- The tasks that teachers set do not enable all pupils to access the curriculum as effectively as they could. This results in some pupils not fully developing the knowledge

and skills defined in the curriculum. Leaders need to ensure that the design of tasks consistently enables all pupils to achieve the ambitions of the curriculum.

- There are variations in how effectively teachers identify and follow up on pupils' misconceptions. This means that gaps in understanding persist for some pupils. Leaders need to ensure that teachers address misunderstandings and consolidate pupils' learning with greater precision.

## 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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in October 2014.

## 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.

## Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	114563
<b>Local authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10287865
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	135
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Jonathan Murphy
<b>Headteacher</b>	Carol Gardiner
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.st-thomas-winchelsea.e-sussex.sch.uk">www.st-thomas-winchelsea.e-sussex.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	20 March 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- St Thomas' Church of England Aided Primary School is a Church of England voluntary-aided school. The school's most recent section 48 Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools took place in June 2016. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place before June 2024.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with senior and middle leaders, including the headteacher. Inspectors also spoke with a representative from East Sussex local authority and a representative from the Diocese of Chichester.

- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and music. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspectors also discussed the curriculum and provision for pupils with SEND.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, governors, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts the pupils' interests first.

### **Inspection team**

Daniel Botting, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Emma Law

Ofsted Inspector

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