

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas' CofE Primary School

Parkgate Road, Stockton Heath, Warrington, Cheshire WA4 2AP

Inspection dates:

26 and 27 September 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and motivated to try their best. They know that their individual achievements will be celebrated. Pupils appreciate the support that they receive, which helps them to work with enthusiasm and commitment during lessons.

Pupils showcase their school rules, 'we are kind, we are ready and we are safe' in all that they do. Pupils relish the many opportunities that they have to participate in activities, such as football, drama and art club. They are proud to take on additional leadership responsibilities, such as safety officers, school councillors and play leaders.

In most subjects, pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well. However, the school has not ensured that pupils at the early stages of learning to read get the support that they need to learn letters and sounds as well as they could. This means that pupils who struggle to read do not catch up quickly.

Pupils understand the school's value of being compassionate. They demonstrate this value through their interactions with each other and staff.

Pupils are confident to report any worries. They know that teachers will support them to resolve any issues.

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

In most subjects, the school has carefully considered what they want pupils to learn. It has broken down the important knowledge that pupils should acquire over time. In most subjects, the school has identified the order in which to teach subject content, so that pupils build securely on their earlier learning. This helps pupils to achieve well.

In a few subjects, while the school has identified the essential knowledge that pupils should learn, it has not thought carefully enough about the order in which this knowledge should be acquired. Added to this, the end points that pupils need to reach are not clear. This makes it difficult for teachers to design learning that builds on what pupils already know.

Across most subjects, teachers use assessment strategies effectively to identify and address any misconceptions that pupils may have. This enables pupils to move on with their learning during lessons. In the early years, staff use their knowledge of the children to identify appropriate next steps in learning.

Children in early years enjoy looking at picture books as well as listening to adults read to them. Older pupils enjoy frequent trips to the local library and regular opportunities to read in class. However, the school's approach to teaching pupils to read is inconsistent across early years and key stage 1. Teachers do not follow the school's intended curriculum well enough. This means that pupils do not build their understanding of letters and sounds systematically. Pupils who have gaps in their reading knowledge do not catch up quickly. This is because the reading books that teachers provide for pupils to practise their reading are not accurately matched to the sounds that they know. As a result, pupils do not become fluent readers quickly enough.

The school is quick to identify pupils' additional needs early, particularly those with SEND. Staff understand how to adjust their delivery of the curriculum, so that pupils with SEND benefit from the same learning opportunities as their classmates. This helps pupils with SEND to achieve well.

The school supports pupils' personal development well. Pupils benefit from a range of opportunities to develop their talents and interests. There is a strong take up for these clubs by pupils, including those with SEND. The school ensures that there are many opportunities for pupils to learn about the special attributes which make everyone unique. Consequently, pupils understand that people should not be judged negatively because of their differences and that everyone deserves to be treated equally.

Pupils typically behave well. On occasion, there are small pockets of low-level misbehaviour or lack of engagement. This is because, at times, the learning does not fully meet the needs of all pupils. Even so, the school has established clear routines that pupils follow. This means that the school environment is calm and orderly.

Governors provide the school with an effective balance of challenge and support. They are aware of the areas within the curriculum that are priorities for improvement.

Staff are extremely proud and happy to work at the school. They feel a real sense of teamwork. Staff appreciate that the school has reviewed the use of assessment and marking to reduce unnecessary workload.

The school recognises the importance of building positive relationships with parents and carers. They provide many opportunities for parents to understand how to support their

children's learning. This begins when the children join the early years, through workshops and welcome meetings.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a small number of subjects, the school has not ordered the key knowledge that pupils should learn. This makes it difficult for teachers to design learning that builds upon what pupils already know. The school should refine its curriculum thinking, so that pupils' knowledge builds to clear end points over time.
- The early reading curriculum is not delivered well enough. Pupils with gaps in their reading knowledge are not supported to catch up quickly. This hinders pupils from building their reading knowledge and fluency. The school should make sure that staff are well equipped to deliver the early reading programme well, so that all pupils learn to read fluently.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in October 2018.

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

Unique reference number	111318
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	10294268
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	231
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Naomi Blyth
Headteacher	Ian Moss
Website	www.st-thomas.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	16 and 17 October 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Thomas' CofE Primary School is a voluntary-aided school. The school's most recent section 48 inspection took place in November 2019. The school is awaiting confirmation from the diocese about its next section 48 inspection.
- The school is part of the Diocese of Chester.
- The school does not make use of 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 that the school has received since the COVID-19 began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in her evaluation.
- The inspector conducted deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, she met with subject leaders and teachers. She visited lessons, looked at examples of pupils' work and talked with groups of pupils about their learning.

- During the inspection, the inspector held meetings with senior leaders, middle leaders and class teachers.
- The inspector observed pupils from key stage 1 and key stage 2 reading to a familiar adult. The inspector also spoke with pupils about their learning and evaluated their work in some other subjects.
- The inspector talked with staff about their workload and well-being.
- The inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority. The inspector also met with governors, including the chair of the governing body, as well as a representative from the diocese.
- The inspector considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. She also spoke to several parents at the start of the school day.
- The inspector considered the responses to Ofsted’s staff survey.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils’ interests first.
- The inspector observed pupils’ behaviour during lessons and at playtimes. She spoke with pupils about bullying, behaviour and leaders’ expectations of pupils’ behaviour.
- The inspector considered the responses to Ofsted’s pupil survey.

Inspection team

Kelly Butler, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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