

Inspection of a good school: Thornham St James CofE Primary School

Castleton Road, Thornham, Royton, Oldham, Lancashire OL2 6XT

Inspection dates:

1 and 2 November 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 at this caring and supportive school. They said that the kindness that they show to each other is one of the best things about Thornham St James. They know that the staff take good care of them and will listen to any worries that they might have.

Pupils understand the school's ethos of respect, love and tolerance. They typically demonstrate these values in the way that they act. Pupils do their best to meet the school's high expectations of their behaviour. Pupils are delighted when their hard work or positive conduct are rewarded with marbles in the class jar. This encourages pupils to share in each other's successes and work together as part of a community.

The school is ambitious for pupils' achievement. However, weaknesses in the curriculum have hindered pupils' learning in some subjects. The school is in the process of strengthening the curriculum to ensure that it supports all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to learn well. However, this work is at an early stage.

Many pupils spoke enthusiastically about the trips and activities that they have enjoyed. For example, a recent visit to a local Roman site helped to bring their history learning to life.

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

This school is in a process of transition. Leaders and governors are making many positive changes to the school. They are redesigning the curriculum to reflect their strong ambition for all pupils to benefit from a broad and balanced education.

In the core subjects of reading and mathematics, pupils typically achieve well. The curriculum in these subjects has been carefully designed. It is clear what pupils, including children in the Reception Year, need to learn and by when. However, in other subjects, the school has not finished identifying the essential knowledge that pupils should learn. As a result, staff are not always sure what to emphasise in lessons. Pupils do not learn as well as they should in these subjects.

Many staff have secure subject knowledge. They explain new ideas clearly. However, in many subjects, the strategies that staff use to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge are less effective. Sometimes, staff do not know whether pupils need to revisit learning that they have missed or forgotten. Some pupils learn unevenly as a result.

The school is prioritising reading. By the time they reach key stage 2, many pupils are confident and enthusiastic readers. For example, pupils in Year 6 were keen to speak about their favourite authors and the novels that they had recently enjoyed.

As soon as they arrive in the Reception class, children begin learning the phonics programme. Throughout key stage 1, this programme helps many pupils to learn to read accurately and fluently. Nevertheless, some pupils who fall behind do not catch up quickly enough. At times, the strategies that staff use to support these pupils are not effective. Added to this, staff are occasionally unaware of the gaps in these pupils' phonics knowledge. This delays pupils' reading fluency.

The school has strengthened its systems to identify the needs of pupils with SEND. This ensures that pupils receive the help that they need as early as possible. Staff understand how to adapt their delivery of the curriculum so that these pupils learn alongside their peers.

Pupils' conduct reflects their positive attitudes to school. In lessons, they are attentive and contribute with enthusiasm. Staff are alert to occasions where pupils' attention may wander and gently help them get back on track. This means that learning is rarely disrupted by poor behaviour.

There is an increasing number of opportunities for pupils to be involved in school life. Pupils are proud to be chosen for the leadership responsibilities that staff provide. These include leading worship in church, encouraging their classmates to be more environmentally conscious and training as peer mentors to support each other's well-being. These experiences prepare pupils to be confident and responsible citizens.

In the past, governors did not have a thorough enough oversight of the quality of education that the school provided. This is no longer the case. Governors have strengthened their understanding of the school. They now provide effective support and appropriate challenge. All levels of leadership are sharply focused on improving the quality of education at the school.

Staff are proud of their school. They recognise that improvements are needed and that this may temporarily increase their workload. However, they appreciate how leaders have

taken account of this. For instance, staff value the time that they are given to work together on curriculum design.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school is in the process of refining its curriculum. In most subjects, teachers lack clarity about the exact knowledge that pupils should learn and by when. This hinders teachers in designing learning activities that enable pupils to build knowledge securely. The school should finalise its curriculum thinking and ensure that teachers have the expertise to deliver these subject curriculums effectively.
- In many subjects, staff do not have a thorough enough understanding of how well pupils are learning the curriculum. This includes the phonics programme. Some pupils develop gaps in their knowledge that teachers are unaware of. The school should roll out its plans to ensure that assessment strategies are well matched to the key content of the curriculum, so that staff can accurately identify where pupils need to revisit previous learning.
- At times, some staff do not implement the phonics programme as effectively as it is intended. The strategies that staff use to support pupils who find reading difficult are sometimes unhelpful. This hinders some pupils in becoming accurate, fluent readers as quickly as they should. The school should ensure that these staff receive the support that they need to deliver the phonics programme faithfully.

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	105692
Local authority	Oldham
Inspection number	10294228
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	203
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Darren Thomas
Headteacher	Felicity Wainwright
Website	www.stjamesthornham.oldham.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	16 and 17 October 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Diocese of Manchester. Its most recent section 48 inspection for schools of a religious character was in January 2018. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place by 2025.
- The current headteacher has been in post since September 2023.
- There have been several recent changes to the governing body, including a new chair of governors.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative provision for pupils.

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 had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.

- The inspector completed deep dives in early reading, mathematics and history. He met with subject leaders, visited some lessons, reviewed pupils' work and spoke with teachers and pupils. The inspector also listened to pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documentation. He spoke to the headteacher and senior leaders throughout the inspection. He also met with the SEND coordinator.
- The inspector met with governors, including the chair of the governing body. He also met with a representative of the local authority and spoke to a diocesan representative by telephone.
- 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 considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. He also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for pupils and for staff.

Inspection team

Ben Hill, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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