

Inspection of St Thomas Church of England Primary School

Pimhole Road, Bury, Lancashire BL9 7EY

Inspection dates: 11 and 12 June 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Martin Van Hecke. This school is part of the Roch Valley Church of England Multi-Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Sheryl Farnworth, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Robert Haigh.

Ofsted has not previously inspected St Thomas Church of England Primary School as an academy under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 as, until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection of the predecessor school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at this welcoming and caring school. They enjoy learning new information and appreciate the many worthwhile learning opportunities that the school provides. Pupils are happy. They feel loved and accepted.

The school's values of trust, friendship, respect and kindness are embedded throughout its curriculum. These values underpin the harmonious relationships that exist between everyone at the school. Pupils are thoughtful and well mannered. They cheerfully welcome visitors.

The school has high expectations of pupils' academic success across each curriculum subject. Most pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well. Children in the early years are well prepared for key stage 1 and pupils in Year 6 are ready for their secondary education.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They understand the school rules and relish the array of rewards that they receive for working hard and trying their best. Over time, pupils become confident and resilient learners. They learn that even in the face of adversity, anything is possible.

Pupils learn to care for living things, including the school's therapy dog. Pupils value the opportunities that they have to take on responsibilities such as being a peer mediator or a catering manager. Such experiences teach them about the importance of communication and responsibility.

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

The school has developed an ambitious curriculum that flows logically from the beginning of the Nursery Year to the end of Year 6. Staff are clear about the important subject content that they want pupils to learn and when they need to learn it. Through regular training, staff are equipped with high levels of expertise across a broad range of subjects.

The curriculum is typically delivered well. In the main, staff choose appropriate activities to help pupils to make connections with what they know already and to deepen their knowledge. However, in one or two subjects, staff provide pupils with insufficient opportunities to recap and consolidate their learning. Occasionally, this hinders how well some pupils, including those with SEND, learn.

Generally, staff are adept at checking that pupils have learned all that they should. They skilfully identify and address misconceptions that would otherwise hinder pupils' learning. At times, gaps in pupils' knowledge and subject-specific vocabulary go unchecked. This sometimes makes it difficult for some pupils to make connections between their existing knowledge and new learning.

The school fosters a love of reading as soon as children start in the early years. In the Nursery and Reception classes, children enjoy listening to well-chosen stories. Older pupils enjoy reading engaging texts from the well-stocked library. Pupils understand the importance of reading. Most staff deliver the phonics programme effectively from the moment that children enter the Reception Year. Staff routinely check pupils' phonics knowledge and make sure that less confident readers receive effective support. As a result, most pupils learn to read with fluency and accuracy.

The school is aspirational for the achievement of all its pupils. Staff are trained to quickly identify the additional needs that pupils may have, including SEND. The school makes sure that pupils with SEND receive the support that they need to achieve well. Typically, pupils with SEND thrive in all aspects of their development.

From the start of the Nursery Year, children are taught to play cooperatively and to follow school routines by skilled staff. Children are well prepared for the next stage of their learning and develop confidence throughout their time at the school. Pupils in all year groups are remarkably keen to learn and to take part in activities. These positive attitudes contribute considerably to pupils' achievement.

The school places great importance on pupils' high attendance. Pupils know that they need to be in school in order to learn. For those pupils who do not attend school regularly, the school offers highly effective support to families to reduce absence levels.

The school supports pupils' personal development successfully. It takes every opportunity to ensure that pupils respect diversity. Pupils are clear that everyone is welcome at their school. Pupils learn about the differences between people, including religion and the make-up of different families. They understand the concepts of tolerance and democracy. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online and how to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy. This knowledge prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.

Members of the local governing body know the school well. Governors ensure that leaders focus on improving the curriculum. Governors check that staff have the training and resources that they need to do their jobs well. As a result, staff feel well supported to hone and develop their expertise. There are effective systems in place to ensure smooth working between the local governing body and the trust. Trustees check that pupils across the school achieve well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Occasionally, some staff do not provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to apply what they have learned previously to new learning. This hinders some pupils from deepening their knowledge as effectively as they could. The school should support staff in designing learning activities that enable pupils to acquire and remember knowledge securely over time.
- In a small number of subjects, staff do not identify and address gaps in pupils' subject-specific vocabulary and essential knowledge well enough. This hinders some pupils from building securely on what they know already in these subjects. The school should strengthen staff's strategies to check pupils' prior learning. This is to ensure that pupils know more and remember more over time.

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	146156
Local authority	Bury
Inspection number	10290341
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	431
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Robert Haigh
CEO of the trust	Sheryl Farnworth
Headteacher	Martin Van Hecke
Website	www.stthomascep.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Roch Valley Church of England Multi-Academy Trust.
- This Church of England school is in the Diocese of Manchester. The school's most recent section 48 inspection, for schools of a religious character, took place in October 2016. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place from September 2024.
- St Thomas Church of England Primary School converted to become an academy school in September 2018. When its predecessor school, St Thomas Church of England Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding overall.
- A new headteacher took up post in September 2021.
- A number of local governors are new in post, including the chair of governors.
- The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provision for a small number of pupils.
- The school runs a breakfast club.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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 the headteacher and senior leadership team. The lead inspector met with governors and trustees, including the chief executive officer. The lead inspector also spoke with representatives of the local authority and of the diocese.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, physical education, design technology and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also observed some pupils from Years 1 to 3 read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects. They spoke to pupils about their learning in some of these subjects and looked at samples of their work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: 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.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in meetings and around school at lunchtimes and breaktimes.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at break times.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and documents relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors met with parents and carers at the start of the school day. They took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors also considered parental emails sent for their attention.
- Inspectors reviewed the online surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Victoria Burnside, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Claire Hollister	Ofsted Inspector
Nicky Parkinson	Ofsted Inspector

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