

INSPECTION REPORT

ST. THOMAS C. OF E. INFANT SCHOOL

NEWBURY, BERKSHIRE

LEA area: HAMPSHIRE

Unique reference number: 116328

Headteacher: Mrs J Bradley (Acting Head)

Reporting inspector: Mrs Gloria Hitchcock
2535

Dates of inspection: 12th – 13th December 2000

Inspection number: 224712

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: St. Thomas' Infant School

School category: Voluntary Controlled

Age range of pupils: 4 – 7 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Woolton Hill
Newbury
Berkshire

Postcode: RG20 9XF

Telephone number: 01635 253431

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Christopher Buckingham

Date of previous inspection: 18th February 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	10
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	13
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	13
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	14

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Thomas' Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School is situated in Woolton Hill, a village south west of Newbury. Most of the pupils come from the surrounding area, but a growing number of pupils choose to travel to the school from some distance away. The school has to compete with private provision in the area. There are 112 pupils aged between four and seven (64 boys and 48 girls), which is smaller than most infant schools. They are taught in five classes, four of which have pupils of different ages and one class with the youngest pupils only. At the time of the last inspection there were 124 pupils, so the school is now slightly smaller. There is a wide range of attainment when children start school, but taken as a whole their attainments are average. Four per cent of children are entitled to free school meals, which is below average. Four per cent of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and no children speak English as an additional language, which is low. Eighteen per cent of pupils are on the school's register of special educational needs, which is broadly average and no pupils have statements of special educational need, which is below average. The main areas of special needs are learning or speech difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very effective school. Pupils have good attitudes to learning and make very good progress during their time in school, so that by the time they leave, standards are well above average. This is partly due to the positive climate created in the school, where all pupils are valued, children are expected to work hard and enjoy learning. It is also the result of the good teaching they receive and the very good leadership of the school, where raising standards is a key priority. Standards are now higher than at the time of the last inspection. The school has an above average level of income and provides good value for money.

What the school does well

Standards are well above average, mainly due to the good teaching and the careful assessment of what each pupil achieves.

The leadership of the school is very good and sets high expectations of teachers and pupils.

The 'family' atmosphere, good relationships and colourful surroundings have a very good effect on pupils' personal development.

The very good partnership with parents makes a positive contribution to pupils' achievements.

What could be improved

The governing body's involvement in the life of the school.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

The strengths of the school far outweigh the areas that could be improved.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvements since the last inspection in February 1997. Standards have risen from average to well above average and the quality of teaching has improved. Trends in standards have improved steadily and the school is on course to meet the targets it has set for 2001. All of the key issues identified in the last inspection have been rectified and in addition there have been considerable improvements to the building. There is also new furniture, and light, bright colours on the walls, which all contributes to an attractive environment for children. Assessment of what pupils can do and what they should do to improve further is now a strong feature of the school. It is in a good position to improve further.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 7 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
Reading	C	A	B	C
Writing	A	A	A	B
Mathematics	C	A	A	B

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
Average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

This table shows a trend of steady improvement in standards over the last three years and they have improved since the last inspection. The school achieves well above average standards in writing and mathematics when compared with all schools nationally and above average standards in reading. Compared with similar schools, standards in reading are average, but in writing and mathematics they are above average. Results in reading dropped slightly in 2000, mainly due to the higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs in the group of pupils taking the tests this year. In particular there has been a significant improvement in mathematics, partly due the effective implementation of the numeracy strategy and partly to the way pupils are taught in groups suited to their abilities. Standards of work seen during the inspection match the test results. The school has set high targets for achievement in 2001 and is well on course to meet them. A strong feature is the proportion of pupils who achieve levels higher than those expected of pupils of a similar age, especially in mathematics, where half of the pupils taking the tests achieved this higher level. Another strength is the quality of pupils' handwriting. They are taught carefully how to join their letters from the time they start school and this has a positive impact as they move through the school. Pupils in the Foundation Stage make good progress. Given that standards are broadly average when pupils start school, inspectors found that pupils make very good progress and achieve well.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils enjoy coming to school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good.
Personal development and relationships	Very good and a strength of the school.
Attendance	Well above average.

Pupils love coming to school. They respond well to the opportunities for them to take responsibilities, such as taking around the Christmas post and turning off the class computers. Most behaviour is very good although a small minority of pupils have difficulty in behaving well. However they respond positively to the teachers' good management of behaviour. This is helped by the very good relationships in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years	Aged 7-11 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	N/A

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Teaching was good in 63 per cent of lessons observed and very good in a further 25 per cent. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. This good teaching has a positive impact on the high standards pupils achieve. Pupils with special educational needs are supported well and all pupils are challenged to do as well as they possibly can, which accounts for the high proportion of pupils gaining good test results. A particular strength is the way teachers make clear at the start of every lesson exactly what pupils are going to learn and then remind pupils at intervals through the lesson. This helps pupils focus on their learning as when they learned how to construct stars inside a polygon in mathematics. English and mathematics are taught well and the literacy and numeracy strategies have been implemented very effectively. An occasional weakness is the very small minority of lessons where children are allowed to call out, which interrupts the flow of the lesson, but this a rare occurrence. Teachers are particularly good at matching work to the needs of the pupils, so that although many pupils are in classes with different ages, they work at the right level for their ability, which has a very good impact on pupils' very good progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils receive effective help based on their individual needs.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good and a strength of the school.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good procedures for ensuring pupils' welfare.

This is a very caring school. Staff work hard to ensure that pupils are taught right from wrong and this makes a major contribution to the atmosphere in the school. In particular there is constant emphasis on consideration for others and what is expected of pupils within the school community. Together with the many planned opportunities for pupils to develop independence, this makes a very positive contribution to pupils' personal development. Pupils have a wide range of learning experiences in school, including art, drama and music. Parents think highly of the school and the very good partnership between the two has a positive impact on pupils' learning.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors meet their legal requirements, are supportive of the school and perform their duties satisfactorily.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good.
The strategic use of resources	Good.

The headteacher provides very strong leadership and is supported very effectively by the acting headteacher who has led the school very well for the last two terms while the head supported another school. The governing body recognises the strength of headteacher, but although they fulfil the requirements of their role satisfactorily and influence the direction of the school, they do not play a sufficiently active part in the life of the school. However there is a new policy in place to help improve this element in the future. The school applies the principles of best value well, especially in relation to purchasing goods and services.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards are high. • Teaching is good. • The school is well led and managed. • Their children like school. • Behaviour is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about how their child is getting on. • The amount of homework. • The extent to which the school works with parents.

The inspection team agrees with parents' positive views. Some parents want more homework and some want less. The amount of homework is similar to that of other infant schools, is consistent with government guidelines and is judged to be appropriate. Parents receive a written report of their child's progress every term, as well as being offered an open evening each term where they can talk to teachers. Teachers are always happy to answer informal queries. The inspection team judged that parents receive very good information about how their child is getting on. Some parents felt that the school did not work sufficiently closely with parents, while others were strong in their praise for this element. It was judged that the partnership between parents and the school was very strong and plays an important part in the atmosphere in the school and the progress pupils make.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards are high, mainly due to the good teaching and the careful assessment of what each pupil achieves.

1. Pupils' performance in the 2000 National Curriculum tests for seven-year-olds was well above average in writing and mathematics and above average in reading in comparison with all schools nationally. In comparison with similar schools standards were average in reading but above average in writing and mathematics. Teachers' assessments show that standards were above average in science. There was a higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs in the group of pupils taking the 2000 tests, which accounts for the fact that reading and science, although still above average, were slightly below standards in writing and mathematics. The school predicts that every pupil will reach the standard expected of seven-year-olds in all subjects in 2001. Standards have improved since the last inspection in 1997, mainly due to the improved teaching. Mathematics has shown a big rise, moving from below average at the last inspection to well above average now. This is partly due to the effectiveness of the numeracy strategy and teachers' confidence in their approach to teaching mathematics and partly to the decision to teach pupils in groups according to their abilities in mathematics.
2. A particularly strong feature of the standards the school achieves is the high proportion of pupils gaining levels above those expected of seven-year olds, which is a tribute to the way teachers ensure that each child does as well as they possibly can. Pupils of all abilities make very good progress; those with special educational needs are supported very effectively, while middle ability and high attaining pupils are stretched and challenged to continually improve.
3. The good standards pupils achieve owe much to the good teaching they receive. A strength is the way teachers explain clearly at the start of every lesson what the pupils will be expected to learn. This means that pupils focus on what they need to learn and make very good progress, as in a lesson in a mixed Year1/2 mathematics lesson where pupils were reminded throughout the lesson what they were trying to achieve. Consequently they made very good progress in producing a range of star shapes inside a polygon.
4. Teachers take great care to allocate the work to match pupils' abilities and this is particularly successful in managing the mixed age classes. The challenge presented by teaching pupils of different age in the same class is turned into a bonus; because the work is matched to ability and not age, younger, more able pupils are inspired to achieve more and those who need extra help receive well targeted support.
5. Teachers manage the pupils very well and make it clear what is expected in terms of effort and behaviour. The great majority of pupils behave very well, but there is a small minority of pupils who find it difficult to conform. The behaviour policy is used in a consistent way by all staff and this has a positive impact on the level of constructive learning that takes place.
6. Literacy and numeracy are taught well and every opportunity is taken to build on what pupils have learned. For example in one English lesson with pupils in reception and Year 1, while the teacher effectively conveyed a sense of wonder when reading the Christmas Story, she interjected questions such as 'what does astonished mean?' which led pupils to respond with 'amazed' and 'I can't believe it'. They then

went on to identify what letter 'sheep' begins with, building on their earlier work on the sounds of different combinations of letters. This had a very positive impact on pupils' progress in literacy. The school is working hard to include information and communication technology as a natural part of all subjects and, for example, computers are used effectively to aid pupils in literacy and numeracy.

7. Pupils' skills in speaking are a strength. They speak confidently in small and large groups, as when many pupils contributed their thoughts and ideas about angels during a whole school assembly. This confidence grows as they move through the school, due to the constant encouragement from staff to offer their ideas without fear of being wrong, safe in the knowledge that all contributions are respected. Standards of handwriting are very good because they are taught to join their letters carefully from the time they start school and they continue to improve their skills as they grow older.

The leadership of the school is very good and sets high expectations of teachers and pupils.

8. The leadership and management of the headteacher and key staff are very good. At the time of the inspection the headteacher had been seconded to support another school for almost two terms and the deputy headteacher had taken over as acting head during that period. The success with which this transition worked is a tribute to the systems already established by the headteacher, the close working partnership between the headteacher and deputy head in the time before the secondment and the effective leadership of the acting headteacher. Several parents described the change as 'seamless'.
9. There is a clear sense of purpose and commitment to provide a high standard of education, which has had a marked effect on the standards pupils achieve. Two areas of particular strength are the methodical system of checking what is happening in classrooms and the meticulous tracking of the progress of each child. These were both key issues for improvement in the last inspection and now make a significant impact on the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make.
10. The headteacher, acting headteacher and staff with subject responsibilities undertake a systematic programme of watching lessons, identifying strengths and weaknesses in the teaching and setting targets for improvement for teachers. This is valued by the whole school community and has led to clear improvements, for example several of the records of observations suggested that teachers should make it clear to pupils what they were going to learn in a lesson. This has been acted upon and is now one of the strengths of the teaching.
11. The headteacher's decision to introduce a system of tracking the progress of each child has led to an improvement in the day to day assessment of what pupils can understand, both by teachers and by classroom assistants who assess pupils progress within lessons, as when one classroom assistant checked on each child's skills in using a ruler to measure centimetres. In addition the very thorough record keeping provides teachers with a view of what each child can do and the standard they are expected to reach both by the end of the year and by the time they leave school. This chart is compiled after discussions between teachers and the headteacher and provides staff with an instant picture of how an individual is progressing. It also highlights if there is a slow down in progress, and staff take action to put this right. This has a significant impact on the progress pupils make and the standards they achieve.

12. There is a clear school improvement plan that sets out priorities for the school's development, together with costs, the people responsible and ways in which the success of each priority can be measured. This provides a useful tool for deciding spending priorities.

The 'family' atmosphere, good relationships and colourful surroundings have a very good effect on pupils' personal development.

13. The strong teamwork that operates between all teaching and support staff has a major impact on the development of pupils as happy, confident individuals. The good relationships are apparent throughout the school, and while the headteacher, acting headteacher, governors and staff create a climate for learning where hard work and success is expected, this is not at the expense of a happy atmosphere. The positive inclusion of fun in the activities pupils experience contributes to this, as when pupils in Year R/1 played a game of looking for 'lost' keys at the end of the day, which pupils enjoyed and the task helped to develop co-operation and good relationships within the group.
14. The school places great emphasis on providing opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and this is evident throughout the day to day life of the school. The Christian focus of the school is a strong influence in what happens in school and there are also planned opportunities for pupils to experience a sense of awe and wonder. For example, when the teacher had a collection of special 'secret' boxes hidden under a cloth, the pupils gasped in awe and anticipation when they saw what had been hidden. There is constant emphasis on consideration for others and teaching right from wrong.
15. Pupils gain increasing independence as they move through the school as a result of the very good opportunities provided by the school. This self-reliance starts from the earliest days as when Reception children take responsibility for registering themselves in the morning. They move their name from one side of a felt board to the other to show that they are in. They are also encouraged to take responsibility for their activities and when they have finished what the teacher allocates them, they go to a display showing a range of activities they can do next. This has a very good effect on their ability to take initiative for their own learning and is developed further as they move up the school; for example they use the library independently, act as monitors or see that all the computers are switched off at the end of the day.
16. The very good atmosphere for learning in the school is helped by the bright and attractive surroundings. The headteacher and governors have improved the buildings and the way they are decorated so that the surroundings now have a positive effect on pupils' learning. There is a high standard of display throughout the school, which stimulates pupils' interest. For example two pupils were looking at a display of wooden games used in Victorian times with great interest as they moved along the corridor.

The very good partnership with parents makes a positive contribution to pupils' achievements.

17. The partnership between parents and the school is very good and has a positive impact on the happy atmosphere in the school and the way pupils progress. Eleven

parents have undertaken training to help in the Better Reading Partnership. They commit three sessions a week for ten weeks to coming into school and helping a particular child with their reading. This has a very good impact on pupils' progress in reading.

18. Parents provide regular, well-organised and effective help in classrooms. They also help in other ways, including two who help twice a week in the library, others who have helped at lunchtime and many parents help when the school goes on visits. The Parents and Friends Association is very active in raising funds for the school and in 1999 donated £6598.00 to the school's funds, which has helped to improve the resources and facilities for the children.
19. Parents particularly like the open, friendly atmosphere of the school and the way the school is led and managed. This openness is part of the two-way partnership between parents and the school. Some parents feel that they do not receive enough information about how their child is getting on, but the inspection team judged that they receive a very good level of information, with three written reports and three parents' evenings per year, plus the informal contact with teachers.
20. The number of parents who are involved in the school is growing steadily. They are welcomed by the school; their help is appreciated and makes a positive contribution to pupils' progress and the standards they achieve.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The governing body's involvement in the life of the school.

21. Governors are conscientious, supportive of the school and perform their duties satisfactorily. They influence the future direction of the school. Some help in classrooms and the rector takes assembly and some religious education lessons. However, they do not visit the school sufficiently regularly to gain first hand experience of how policies are working in practice or to observe how the National Curriculum is being implemented.
22. The headteacher and chair of governors have recognised this as an area for development and a good policy for governors' visits to classrooms has recently been finalised, which identifies the purposes of visits and protocols to be observed. There is also a useful aide memoire to assist governors who may not be familiar with infant classrooms. This has not yet been implemented, but should be a very positive step to strengthening this aspect of the governing body's role.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

23. The headteacher, staff and governors should :
 - Increase the level of governors' involvement in the life of the school by implementing the useful policy that has already been developed.
(*paragraphs 21 and 22*)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	16
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	15

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
	25	63	12			

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Nursery	YR – Y2
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	N/A	112
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	N/A	5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

	Nursery	YR – Y2
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	N/A	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	N/A	20

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	7
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	7

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.1
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	15	17	32

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	13	14	14
	Girls	13	15	16
	Total	26	29	30
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	81(88)	91 (90)	94 (90)
	National	83(82)	84(83)	90(86)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	13	14	15
	Girls	15	16	16
	Total	28	30	31
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	88(93)	94(95)	97(100)
	National	84(82)	88(85)	88(87)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	77
Any other minority ethnic group	1

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	1	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions of pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y2

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.3
Average class size	21.4

Education support staff: YR – Y2

Total number of education support staff	5
Total aggregate hours worked per week	110

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	N/A
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	N/A

Total number of education support staff	N/A
Total aggregate hours worked per week	N/A

Number of pupils per FTE adult	N/A
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	274,915
Total expenditure	275,923
Expenditure per pupil	2,464
Balance brought forward from previous year	22,136
Balance carried forward to next year	21,128

Results of the survey of parents and carers NB THIS NEEDS REPLACING

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	107
Number of questionnaires returned	57

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	72	26	2	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	39	53	0	0	9
Behaviour in the school is good.	37	58	2	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	33	53	7	2	5
The teaching is good.	56	39	0	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	37	51	11	0	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	53	46	0	0	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	49	47	2	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	37	53	7	0	4
The school is well led and managed.	47	51	2	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	44	44	7	0	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	30	60	2	0	9