

INSPECTION REPORT

ST THOMAS' CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Heaton Chapel, Stockport

LEA area: Stockport

Unique reference number: 106128

Headteacher: Mrs J Garner

Reporting inspector: Mr D A Hill
3692

Dates of inspection: 2nd – 4th October 2000

Inspection number: 225160

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant and junior
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	4 to 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Wellington Road North Heaton Chapel Stockport Cheshire
Postcode:	SK4 4QG
Telephone number:	0161 432 6809
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr A Kent
Date of previous inspection:	October 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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Inspection Quality Division
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school, which is of average size, serves the parish of St.Thomas and the surrounding district of Heaton Chapel in Stockport. The number of boys and girls aged four to eleven has remained at about the current level of 238 since the last inspection. Ten per cent of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, most of whom speak English as an additional language but none of whom are at an early stage of English language acquisition. The percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs, including statements, is well below the national average. Ten per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, about half the national average. Thirty-five pupils are under six and provision for them is in a reception class and in a mixed-age reception/Year 1 class. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is broadly above average. There has been a change of headteacher since the last inspection.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

By the ages of seven and eleven pupils achieve standards in English, mathematics and science which are well above the national average. Standards in mathematics are very high at eleven. The quality of teaching is good overall with very good teaching across the whole curriculum in Years 2 and 6. Literacy and numeracy are well taught. Pupils have very positive attitudes and behave well both in and out of lessons. Personal relationships are excellent. The headteacher provides strong, firm and purposeful leadership and is supported well by governors and staff. The school has recently been granted Beacon Status in recognition of its achievements. This is a very effective, improving school that provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Literacy and numeracy are taught thoroughly and well resulting in very good standards at ages seven and eleven; standards are particularly high in numeracy by the time pupils leave the school.
- Pupils show interest in their work, are keen to learn and have high levels of concentration.
- The change of leadership has been managed well, enabling the school to further improve its effectiveness.

What could be improved

- Aspects of the curriculum for information and communication technology receive insufficient emphasis.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in October 1996 and was judged to be a successful school. Since then there has been a change of headteacher and some change in staff responsibilities. In 1998, at the time of the appointment of the present headteacher, attainment at eleven had declined from its previously high levels to round about the average. Since then standards have risen strongly and are now well above those achieved at the time of the previous report. The quality of teaching has improved and eight out of ten lessons are now good or very good with no unsatisfactory teaching. The headteacher manages change well. The key issues of the last report have been very effectively dealt with; standards in design and technology and art are now good, the curriculum for physical education and geography is much improved, monitoring and evaluating the work of the school is now a shared responsibility and there is an excellent partnership with parents and the community.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
English	B	D	B	A
mathematics	A	C	A*	A*
science	A	D	A	A

Key

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

A* very high

In 1999 in mathematics the school was among the top five per cent compared with all schools and with similar schools. Overall, standards were very high compared with similar schools. Test results for 2000 are higher than for 1999. Inspection evidence confirms the high standards indicated by the test results. In 1999, pupils aged seven attained well above average results in reading and writing while in mathematics results were broadly in line with the national average. In 2000 mathematics test results for seven-year-olds are considerably higher. In 1999 the school exceeded its targets for pupils aged eleven.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils are very positive, work hard and are keen to learn.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	There is a very good standard of behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are excellent and the personal development of pupils is good.
Attendance	The attendance rate is above the national average.

Pupils' attitudes and values are a strength of the school and these have a very positive impact on the learning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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.

The overall teaching is good and in 40 per cent of lessons it is very good and occasionally excellent. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Literacy and numeracy are taught well and this helps pupils to make very good progress, especially in Years 2 and 6. Particularly strong features of the best teaching are the effective use of assessment to set individual targets, high expectations and careful planning to meet the needs of all pupils. English is taught well as an additional language. Support staff make a valuable contribution. Occasionally the pace of the lesson is not sufficiently brisk with too much time spent on instruction.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced with literacy and numeracy well integrated into other subjects.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision is good and pupils make very good progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Pupils are taught well and make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall, with social and moral development being especially strong.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The welfare, health and safety of pupils are supported well through the provision of a caring environment.

The curriculum fully meets statutory requirements. The school provides a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils are listened to and respected by all adults in the school. They are known well by all members of staff who give effective support, guidance and care.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership by the headteacher and senior management team is very effective.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors fulfil their responsibilities but wider participation in the life of the school by all governors would further strengthen the support they give to the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Monitoring and evaluation are effectively carried out by all staff and have been successful in targeting areas for development.
The strategic use of resources	Expenditure is well planned and efficiently controlled. School day-to-day administration is of a high order. Principles of best value are well applied.

The headteacher has developed a strongly supportive team. She provides clear direction and purposeful leadership in the drive for further improvement.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behaviour is good and their children like school. The school is well led and managed and staff are approachable. The teaching is good and their children make good progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of parents would like there to be a wider range of extra-curricular activities. Greater consultation when major changes are to take place, for example the formation of two mixed-age classes.

The inspection team strongly endorses parents' positive views. Evidence during the inspection of extra-curricular activities including residential experiences, sport, music, choir and French clubs suggest parents'

concerns are unfounded. The headteacher feels that the issue of the formation of mixed-age classes was contentious but was fully discussed at governors' meetings.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Literacy and numeracy are taught thoroughly and well resulting in very good standards at ages seven and eleven; standards are particularly high in numeracy by the time pupils leave the school.

1. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests, pupils aged eleven attained above average standards in English, well above average standards in science and very high standards in mathematics compared to all schools. When compared to similar schools, very high standards were attained in mathematics and well above average standards in the other two subjects. In the 2000 National Curriculum tests for eleven-year-olds unconfirmed results indicate a considerable improvement on the 1999 scores in English, especially in reading. Mathematics and science scores continue at a very high level. These high standards are broadly mirrored in the results for seven-year-olds. In reading and writing, results in 1999 were well above the national average, though in mathematics results were at an average level. In 2000 mathematics results at seven have improved strongly with twice as many pupils attaining the higher level 3 than in the previous year.
2. These results illustrate the attention the school pays to careful analysis and evaluation of results with well-planned work to correct deficiencies or to further improve already good standards. Inspection evidence of lessons and in the scrutiny of work shows that pupils make good progress over time and that this progress quickens in Years 5 and 6. Younger children make good progress in their reading and, by the age of seven, are able to read simple stories. They have acquired good word building skills and have developed a range of strategies to read unfamiliar words. All enjoy reading, can use dictionaries efficiently, have a good understanding of initial letter blends and accurately retell stories. By the time they are eleven, pupils have acquired a love of books, almost all having their own collections. They still read regularly to an adult at home and almost all belong to a public library, which they visit regularly. These factors illustrate the success the school has in its reading programme.
3. High priority is given to the teaching of literacy and numeracy and the teaching is well planned. Teaching is very good in Years 2 and 6. The literacy and numeracy strategies are planned to include all elements of the programmes and use is made of them in other subjects to reinforce the learning. In a lesson on personal and social education, the teacher encouraged pupils to speak to different audiences, encouraged careful listening by posing well thought-out questions and invited pupils to pose their own questions. In a history lesson relating to the Greeks, pupils used the CD-ROM well when searching for relevant information. They were then encouraged to look for connections on how Greek society, sport and religious gods were connected. Pupils finally had to order the information to write a coherent account. This was a good lesson with well taken opportunities for language extension. Teachers have high expectations of pupils, encouraging them through the quality of marking, which often suggests ways in which future work can be improved. Lessons usually proceed at a good pace with appropriate time given to the introduction, core activities for groups of differing abilities with well-planned extension activities and a plenary session, which is used by teachers to assess the learning that has taken place. Through careful analysis of assessments, the school has restructured the literacy strategy to include more time for extended writing and this is proving effective in raising standards.
4. Teachers have a very good knowledge of literacy and numeracy and this helps them to set work that is not only interesting but which also consistently extends pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding and meets their range of needs. In a lesson with Year 6 pupils, the teacher introduced the Robert Bridges poem 'London Snow'. Pupils then compared this with work previously covered on Kipling. Work was then set at appropriate levels to extend pupils' word power through careful questioning and understanding of structure in poetry, with the result that all pupils in the class made very good progress. Pupils with English as an additional language make good progress in their acquisition of language skills through the very careful attention they are given by classroom support teachers and assistants. This is also the case with pupils who have special educational needs. Collaborative planning by all concerned helps to ensure that good progress is made. The policy of inclusion of all pupils in the full curriculum helps pupils' self-esteem and assists in their learning from others.
5. Through the increased attention the school is paying to writing, pupils are making good progress. The National Literacy Strategy now takes place four days a week with the fifth day being given over to focused work on aspects of writing. Pupils have their own drafting books, which are used to aid their construction of writing accounts and stories for different audiences. A new handwriting scheme has been

adopted and there are sessions solely devoted to improving handwriting. This is making a definite improvement.

6. In mathematics, infant pupils are making good progress. Work seen was well above average and consistently across the ability range. It is neat and accurate and covers all areas of the numeracy strategy and the National Curriculum. Particularly good attention is paid to the practical application of number. By the time pupils are eleven, all are at average levels or above, with a few pupils working well towards gaining the average levels of pupils aged fourteen (Level 6). Throughout the school, there is an insistence on neat, accurate working with pupils being set challenging problems to solve in class and at home. Homework is used well to advance standards, particularly in mental mathematics. The adoption of the numeracy strategy, very good attention being paid to practical applications, high expectations of pupils' mental abilities and teachers' very good knowledge and understanding, have ensured that pupils are gaining the highest levels of attainment.

Pupils show interest in their work and are keen to learn

7. Pupils have very positive attitudes towards the school. They concentrate well in lessons, working hard to obtain pleasing results for themselves, their teachers and parents. These very good learning habits are built on throughout the school. An advantage is that most children have acquired a thirst for knowledge and skills when they arrive in the reception class. Pupils who had only been in school for four weeks were able to talk interestingly about autumn colours, patterns in leaves, and to use clay and paint with a good level of control. Usually pupils concentrate well throughout the lesson and work quietly with a sense of purpose.
8. Relationships between pupils, and between pupils and adults, are excellent and there is a very good standard of behaviour, both in lessons and in the playground. Pupils enter the hall for assembly in a quiet, orderly fashion listening closely to the music. They sing together well and listen intently to the story, being able to recall events later with accuracy. Older pupils show respect towards each other, to younger pupils and to their environment. All play happily together in the playground, with older junior pupils taking care of infant pupils.

The change of headship has been managed well, and the school has continued to improve its effectiveness

9. The firm and purposeful leadership by the headteacher of the school has led to the attainment of higher standards in an atmosphere of co-operation and mutual support. By careful analysis of the needs of pupils and staff she has established a clear framework of priorities for the further advancement of the school's aims and values. This has been recognised by the recent granting of Beacon status by the Department for Education and Employment. Pupils, and the work of adults within the school, are highly valued and this engenders a very positive ethos.
10. The senior management team is highly effective in its contribution to developments and in its support to the headteacher. The weekly full staff meeting is a forum where open debate is encouraged, enabling all staff to feel part of the decision-making process. It aids the establishment of a corporate identity, with all staff working together in a coherent and agreed manner. The careful distribution of responsibilities within the staff, and clearly defined job descriptions, have led to all being involved in monitoring, evaluating and reporting back regularly on their areas of responsibility. In this way all staff have a clear understanding of where developments are required.
11. The current school development plan is a substantial and well-constructed document, which reviews the effectiveness of the previous year's plans and states clearly what is to be developed in the future. Priorities are well chosen and carefully costed. Key issues from the last inspection have all been well attended to. The school is now well on the way to successfully introducing a performance management system that is primarily designed to increase performance in the classrooms. Other priorities relate to maintaining the impetus towards higher standards.
12. Recently there have been a number of changes within the governing body and over half the governors are new. Governors are well led by the chairman and the regular meetings of the sub-committees help ensure that issues are discussed before decisions are taken. As many of the governors are new, efforts are being made to involve them all fully into the life of the school. The class-governor liaison scheme, recently introduced, is designed to ensure governors are familiar to everyone in the school and that they have greater knowledge of the teaching and learning.

13. Principles of best value are well applied. Identified priorities within the school development plan are carefully costed and purchasing of large items is by tender or through the local education authority. Standards Fund money has been well applied to support work in information technology, additional support in literacy and numeracy and to enable curriculum co-ordinators time for monitoring their subject responsibilities. The school provides very good value for money.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

14. Aspects of the curriculum for information and communication technology receive insufficient attention. Modelling and control do not feature sufficiently prominently in the curriculum for information and control technology (ICT). Though expertise among most members of staff is sufficiently well developed in most aspects of the subject there is a need to review and improve expertise of some staff in these aspects of the subject. This issue is not of sufficient importance to constitute a key issue for action

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

There are no key issues.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

25

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

16

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4	40	40	16	0	0	0

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

	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	238
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	22

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	41

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	25

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	8
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	95.6
National comparative data	94.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.9
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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	1999	19	16	35

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	17	18	17
	Girls	15	15	14
	Total	32	33	31
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	91 (100)	94 (100)	89 (98)
	National	82 (77)	83 (81)	87 (84)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	17	17	17
	Girls	16	16	16
	Total	33	33	33
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	94 (100)	94 (100)	94 (92)
	National	82 (81)	86 (85)	87 (86)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	15	16	31

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	14	15	15
	Girls	13	16	15
	Total	27	31	30
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	87 (58)	100 (57)	97 (67)
	National	70 (65)	69 (65)	78 (69)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	14	15	15
	Girls	14	15	15
	Total	28	30	30
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	90 (66)	97 (66)	97 (69)
	National	68 (65)	69 (65)	75 (71)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	2
Pakistani	7
Bangladeshi	7
Chinese	1
White	177
Any other minority ethnic group	

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

There were no fixed or permanent exclusions

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	10
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	24
Average class size	29

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	5
Total aggregate hours worked per week	85

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	357,897
Total expenditure	364,048
Expenditure per pupil	1,576
Balance brought forward from previous year	23,170
Balance carried forward to next year	17,019

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	232
Number of questionnaires returned	96

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	67	32	1	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	60	38	2	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	57	43	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	35	55	7	2	0
The teaching is good.	55	42	2	0	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	54	40	6	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	74	25	1	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	57	39	2	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	43	51	4	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	71	29	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	58	39	2	0	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	15	49	21	2	14

Other issues raised by parents

Parents who were affected by the formation of the two mixed-age classes would have wished for more consultation on this issue.