



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection Report

ST THOMAS COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Unique Reference Number: 105452

LEA: Manchester

Inspection Dates: 21 – 23 June 2004

Reporting Inspector: Frank Norris HMI

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and was deemed section 12 (3) under the same act

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INTRODUCTION

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of St Thomas Primary School and of the local education authority.

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an independent lay inspector.

Key to grades:

Grade 1	Very good
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Adequate
Grade 4	Not adequate

Description of the school

St Thomas Primary is an average sized school in Lower Crumpsall, with 219 pupils, of whom 53 are in the Foundation Stage (nursery and reception). The school serves an area of deprivation and the number of pupils claiming free school meals is well above average. About two thirds of pupils speak English as an additional language and nine home-languages are spoken overall. Pupil mobility is very high. A significant number of pupils new to the school are asylum seekers and refugees. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average. Attainment on entry to the school is very low.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

Effectiveness of the school

This is a good school that has recently improved greatly. A major reason for this is the driving force of the headteacher. He has raised morale and successfully encouraged staff to consider the needs of all pupils. Other senior managers are following his example and beginning to have a strong impact on improving standards. Some curriculum leaders still remain passive in this role. Pupils have good attitudes to learning and behave well. Relationships are very strong and ensure that pupils from all ethnic groups get on well together. Pupils make good progress particularly in the Foundation Stage and in English and mathematics. Teaching is good overall but further improvement in the teaching of some foundation subjects is required. The school provides good value for money.

Grade: 2

Improvement since the last inspection

The school has made good improvement since the last inspection. Pupils are now achieving much higher standards by the time they transfer to secondary school. The quality of teaching has improved and most of the key issues raised at the time of the previous inspection have been tackled successfully.

Grade: 2

Capacity to improve

The school is well placed to continue to improve. Its self-evaluation procedures are rigorous and accurate. Staff have a strong commitment to raising standards further and have established a good team spirit. The headteacher, staff and governors are clear about what needs to be done and have a dogged determination to succeed.

Grade: 2

What the school should do to improve further

To build further on its recent successes, the school should:

- improve the partnership with parents
- develop the quality of teaching and learning in foundation subjects
- define and develop further the role of the senior management team and curriculum leaders
- ensure there are regular planned opportunities for cultural development, and literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

Standards are average and test results have risen considerably in recent years, particularly at Key Stage 2. Pupils make good progress. Children have very low standards when they start in the nursery with many having little or no English and limited social skills. The well-structured teaching programme ensures children make good progress and get off to a cracking start in the nursery and reception classes. Arabic speaking youngsters do particularly well. These good beginnings are consolidated well in most other year groups. Many pupils join the school at various times during the year. These pupils quickly embrace the ethos of the school and do well.

Standards in the national assessments at the end of Year 2 in 2003 were average when compared with similar schools in writing and mathematics, but in reading they were low. The unconfirmed results for this year show all round improvement especially in reading. The recent drive for improvement in writing across the school has produced positive outcomes for many. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported and achieve well.

A scrutiny of work of other subjects suggests that standards are not as high as they are in English, mathematics and science.

Grade: 2

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The school is a happy and harmonious place. Pupils who are new to it talk enthusiastically about their experiences and are clear that they prefer St Thomas' to previous schools. Good relationships exist between all members of the school community. A strong work ethic permeates and ensures that lessons go well and work is completed on time. Racial harmony is good. Pupils and staff are respectful of each other and of cultural differences.

Staff have high expectations of behaviour and, as a result, pupils are courteous and friendly. Pupils are keen to be 'playground buddies' so that they can help others and resolve disputes.

The school actively encourages pupils to think carefully about keeping fit and healthy eating. Pupils are aware of the need to choose a balanced meal at lunchtimes, and the food provided enables them to do this. Pupils enjoy the opportunities they receive during playtimes to be active and play sport. These activities are beneficial but are restricted by the limited playground space available.

Attendance levels are low. Unauthorised absence rates are high. The school works strenuously with outside agencies to combat these problems, but does not encourage a sufficiently strong partnership with all parents over such matters.

Pupils' personal development is good. Significant strengths lie in social and moral development. Pupils experience a wide variety of cultures within the school but these are not overtly planned for and prevent a greater understanding of others unique traditions and customs.

Grade: 2

QUALITY OF PROVISION

The quality of teaching is good. Strengths were evident throughout the school. They included: good relationships with pupils; clear explanations; effective questioning and well-planned activities which provide realistic challenge for all pupils. Assessment and the tracking of pupils' progress are rigorous and highly effective in English and mathematics. Teachers have a good understanding of pupils' needs and ensure that targets for future development are identified. A narrow range of evidence was gathered in the foundation subjects, but it indicates that teaching in these subjects is less effective because lessons are based on what the pupils have to do rather than what they need to learn.

The curriculum is adequate. All subjects receive an appropriate allocation of time, and efforts to make them interesting and enjoyable are taken seriously. The school believes that art, physical education, dance and music are strong and there is no evidence to dispute this. Care is taken to ensure that all pupils gain full access to the curriculum. A very good example of this was in an assembly where a teacher told a story in three languages. As a result, all pupils were attentive and fully involved. Opportunities to develop pupils' cultural development and to extend literacy and numeracy across the curriculum are not always taken by teachers during lessons. For example, in a lesson looking at fashion since the 1930s, the pictures used were all of western clothes and insufficient attention paid to fashion from other parts of the world. The literacy and numeracy tasks set for pupils in foundation subjects are not as challenging as those set during English and mathematics lessons. In addition, although a well-resourced information and communication technology (ICT) suite has recently been developed, the present curriculum for ICT is inadequate. Teachers do not plan for the use of ICT to support teaching and learning across the curriculum and there is limited evidence of planning to develop pupils' ICT skills.

The guidance and support given to pupils are good. The arrangements for inducting new pupils and their parents into the school are very supportive. Translators are available for parents and bi-lingual teachers provide extensive support for pupils who speak English as an additional language. However, the school provides limited information for parents about how they may be more involved in helping their children. The child protection procedures and health and safety policies are in place.

Grade: 2

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The headteacher has successfully led the school through an intense period of change. He has inspired an impressive level of commitment from staff and pupils. He has significantly raised morale and encouraged staff to work together. The newly appointed deputy headteacher shares some of the load and has begun to make a positive impact. Staff are effective in their roles of leading the Foundation Stage, English, mathematics and science. The effective monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in these areas has enabled the school to push through important developments. Other coordinators have received little time for such work and remain unclear of their role.

The school has worked closely with the local education authority link adviser in recent years. Together they have established a good process for school self-evaluation. A wide range of evidence is used, including a strong element of external challenge and validation, before judging effectiveness. Inspectors specifically analysed the school's work on assessment holding discussions with pupils and staff and scrutinised records and pupils' work. The school indicated that it had made significant improvements in this area and without doubt it has. The school's view of its own performance appears accurate and provides a secure

basis for future improvement. Information from a pupil and parent survey, along with staff development sessions, has raised awareness of issues, such as drug education, and helped the school to identify what it needs to do next.

Many aspects of management are effective. Analysis of data is strong. The careful tracking of pupil progress in core subjects enables the early identification of pupils who need extra support particularly those with English as a second language and those with special educational needs.

The governing body is strongly supportive of the school and committed to its role as a critical friend. It has encouraged significant developments in resources for ICT and has established plans for the early implementation of workload reforms.

The school has sufficient staff and resources. The school has worked hard to overcome deficiencies in accommodation by developing two new libraries, an outside play area for the youngest children and an ICT suite.

Grade: 2

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