



St Thomas CofE Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 106465
LEA Wigan
Inspection number 277566
Inspection dates 5 June 2006 to 6 June 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Colin Smith CfBT Lead Inspector

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary	School address	Hodnet Drive
School category	Voluntary aided		Ashton-in-Makerfield
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Wigan, Lancashire WN4 8PQ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01942 201107
Number on roll	245	Fax number	01942 717824
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Rev M Greenwood
Date of previous inspection	27 November 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Judy Jones

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Thomas' Church of England is an aided primary school of average size. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Only a very small number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and even fewer are at an early stage of learning English. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2004.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that provides good value for money. The new headteacher quickly established good leadership across the school and injected a sense of purpose, which staff, governors and parents appreciate. The strengths of the school, including the good provision and standards in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, have been maintained. Pupils' slow progress through Key Stage 2 has been tackled forthrightly. This has been helped by the appointment of three effective teachers. Pupils' achievement in junior classes has started to improve. Standards in Year 6 reached average levels in English and science and above average in mathematics in 2005. However, given another year of focused leadership, pupils' achievement has improved further. Teaching and learning are now good in all parts of the school. Most pupils are achieving well and standards are rising. That said, some of the more able pupils in junior classes are still not achieving their potential in all subjects and pupils' investigation skills in science do not develop as systematically as they should. The leadership team has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are correct in evaluating most aspects of the school's work to be good. Pupils' personal development has continued to improve and is now outstanding. A good level of care is provided to ensure that pupils are safeguarded. Although there had been a little improvement in the years immediately following the previous inspection, developments have accelerated over the last two years, illustrating the school's good capacity for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of the more able pupils at Key Stage 2 in all subjects.
- Improve the teaching of science to ensure that pupils' skills of investigation develop effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well. Most pupils enter school with attainment typical for their age. Virtually all Reception children reach the goals expected in all areas of learning and many exceed them. This good achievement continues into Key Stage 1. Assessments in 2005 showed that standards in Year 2 were well above average in reading, writing and mathematics and had remained high for five years. In contrast, the 2005 Year 6 assessments showed that standards were only average in English and science, although above average in mathematics. Much of pupils' good achievement lower down the school was lost as they moved through the junior classes. Trends in Key Stage 2 had been declining until 2005 when there was a significant upturn. These improvements reflected the stronger teaching provided by new members of staff. The more challenging targets now being set are paving the way to higher standards. Junior pupils are now achieving as well as infants. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress throughout the school. The underachievement of gifted and talented

pupils in Key Stage 2 was identified and the level of challenge significantly increased. Consequently, these pupils are now making satisfactory progress in English and mathematics. However, there is more to do in other subjects, such as science, particularly in improving pupils' investigation skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. The school's pronounced Christian ethos plays a major part in pupils' very good spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Pupils' above average attendance, excellent behaviour and keen interest in learning are clear indicators of their enjoyment of school. Pupils say with certainty, 'This is a happy, friendly school. There is no bullying and learning is fun.' Parents fully agree. This is why the school is so popular. Pupils' delight in achievement is nowhere more striking than in Reception where they proudly show their independent writing to staff and visitors. Pupils' understanding of citizenship and social responsibility is outstanding. The two very well organised school councils offer older and younger pupils excellent opportunities to devise rules and participate in decision making. All Year 6 pupils have additional responsibilities, involving helping teachers and other pupils. Citizenship, environmental and multicultural weeks have very successfully raised pupils' awareness of important community issues such as conservation, taking care of others and combating racism. Their good economic awareness is attributable to learning about the world of work, involving activities such as applying for jobs in school. Pupils are very health conscious and well equipped to stay safe.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. The three new teachers in junior classes are substantially improving pupils' learning. There are examples of outstanding teaching in the mixed Reception/Year 1 class and in Years 4 and 5. Teaching is mainly good elsewhere. Only one unsatisfactory lesson was observed. This was in science where weak management allowed pupils to become over excited in the practical activity and not participate fully in the discussion that followed. This is very uncharacteristic. Regular class teachers have established excellent relationships with their pupils. Lessons usually move along swiftly. Pupils try their best and do not have time to become bored. Where teaching is outstanding, pupils are inspired, for example, to write with feeling and conviction. As one child wrote, 'He scrambled out of the ship on hearing an ear splitting scream.' Assessment has improved over the last year and is now good. Teachers are increasingly using the information in English and mathematics to extend the learning of the more able pupils and to provide excellent support for those who find learning difficult. However, assessment is not used sufficiently in science to extend the learning of the more able pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum that fully meets statutory requirements. The very rich and stimulating Foundation Stage curriculum makes a major contribution to children's enjoyment of school. Excellent provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enables many of them to achieve the levels expected nationally. The provision for able and talented pupils is improving, for example, by making it possible for gifted pupils to participate in lessons at the high school. However, there is still more to do, particularly in science, before the more able pupils fulfil their potential. The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is good in most respects, although pupils' experiences of control technology are insufficient. A strong element of personal, social and health education ensures that pupils develop a keen awareness of healthy lifestyles and keeping safe. Pupils' wider interests are significantly enhanced through a very good selection of additional activities, ranging from music to sport.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All pupils benefit from the good level of care, guidance and support provided. Their entry to school and transfer to high school are managed sensitively to dispel any anxieties. Effective day-to-day child protection and health and safety arrangements ensure pupils' safety, although risk assessments are not as well documented as they could be. The needs of the most vulnerable pupils are extremely well met. As one parent commented, 'Sending my child here instead of a special school has proved a wonderful decision.' By harnessing the school's resources and those of outside agencies, any barriers to learning and personal development are very successfully removed and the safeguarding of pupils is assured. Pupils' academic progress is monitored carefully. Where progress appears to falter, swift action, involving additional support, is proving successful in putting them back on track. Setting clear targets for improvement is raising achievement in writing, although this good practice has not yet been extended to other subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher has evaluated the school's work accurately. The strong features, such as safeguarding pupils, the excellent work of classroom assistants and the effective learning in the Reception and infant classes, have been preserved. Pupils' slow progress through Key Stage 2 has been investigated and openly shared. Governors appreciate the increased information and meaningful opportunities to make decisions. They are eager to play a greater part in holding the school to account. Much has been done to raise achievement, for example, by assessing pupils' learning more rigorously, setting ambitious targets and measuring each child's progress every term. This has helped the school to use its

resources wisely and target support to where it is most needed. However, there is scope to develop the tracking of pupils' progress further by using the information to evaluate the quality of teaching, for example, in science. The underperformance of the more able pupils is being radically improved by planning more challenging activities in English and mathematics. Subject leaders make a valuable contribution by checking the impact changes have on pupils' achievement. They know that it is time to extend the higher challenge to other subjects. Parents and pupils welcome the greater involvement. As one parent commented, 'In such a short time many very beneficial improvements have taken place.' Parents' and pupils' views are an integral part of the school's strategic planning. These factors demonstrate the school's good capacity to move forward.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for answering our questions and showing us your best work. We thoroughly enjoyed our visit because you and your teachers were so friendly and helpful. Your school is good in almost every way and you are right to be proud of it.

There are many things we like about your school. In particular, we appreciate how well you are cared for and looked after. Perhaps that is why you are so interested in learning and your behaviour is excellent.

We enjoyed observing lessons because the good, and sometimes excellent, teaching makes it easy for you to learn. We also noticed how carefully teachers assess your work to make sure that you understand.

We can tell that your school is improving. The headteacher and staff are constantly bringing in new ideas, such as measuring your progress and setting higher targets to help you to improve. The good leadership is really making a difference and we can see that standards are beginning to rise.

We have only two recommendations to make, which we feel will make your school even better. Firstly, we can see how teachers are trying to provide more difficult work to make sure that the most able pupils reach higher levels. This is very noticeable in English and mathematics. We think this should now be extended to other subjects. Secondly, we feel that teaching in science, in some classes, could be better if teachers concentrated more on improving your investigation skills.