



St Thomas CofE Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105698
Local Authority Oldham
Inspection number 287303
Inspection dates 22–23 February 2007
Reporting inspector Jim Kidd

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	St Thomas Street
School category	Voluntary aided		Werneth, Oldham
Age range of pupils	4–11		Lancashire OL8 1SE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0161 6330539
Number on roll (school)	317	Fax number	0161 6528794
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs P Pleasant
		Headteacher	Mrs Angela Knowles
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
4–11	22–23 February 2007	287303

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This larger than average sized primary school is situated in West Oldham and serves an area of considerable social disadvantage. The number of pupils who join or leave the school other than at the beginning and end of the academic year is much higher than usually found. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is more than twice the national average. The vast majority of pupils are of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin and over 90% have English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. St Thomas Church of England Primary occupied part of the current building for 120 years and following an amalgamation in 2003, the new school was fully opened in its new premises in 2004. It is part of an Extended Schools cluster and is involved in a wide range of activities to promote community cohesion.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The phrase on a classroom wall, 'If you are tempted to say "I can't" be courageous enough to add "yet!"' sums up the high expectations St Thomas Church of England Primary School has of both pupils and staff. Indeed, it is a rapidly improving school, which provides a satisfactory quality of education and forges outstanding links with other institutions for the benefit of the pupils in its care.

Its work within the Extended Schools initiative and as part of the 'Unity in the Community' sports programme does much to instil confidence in its pupils and offers them, in their words, 'Many chances to meet other children from different backgrounds.' After a period of great upheaval following the amalgamation, it is now building upon its strengths. Standards are beginning to rise because of good and improved teaching in all key stages, which is leading to better progress in lessons. Children are motivated to learn by the many new activities they have on entry to the Nursery and they achieve well in the Foundation Stage, particularly in relation to their confidence and self-esteem. This good progress continues into Key Stages 1 and 2 and results in improved attainment, particularly in English. Standards in mathematics in Years 5 and 6 remain well below average and have not improved at the same rate as in other subjects.

Pupils enjoy their school, behave well and are delighted to welcome visitors. They feel safe, look after each other and are always willing to share their opinions as to how the school can become even better. The school council is a popular group amongst the pupils, and members support younger children by helping in the Foundation Stage and by volunteering to act as playground leaders. The curriculum is effective in raising the aspirations of pupils. The many visits and extra-curricular activities bring lessons to life, give pupils opportunities to explore beyond their immediate environment and make an outstanding contribution to their cultural development.

Teachers and teaching assistants provide the utmost care for each individual and support for those struggling with English or for those who find the work difficult. These are strengths of the school. Assessment of pupils' progress is regular and accurate, but marking does not always give pupils enough advice on how they can improve their work.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and are improving as a result of the inspirational qualities of the headteacher who has engendered a strong sense of teamwork and a commitment to improvement amongst the whole school community. The evaluation of school performance is increasingly rigorous and teaching and learning have improved rapidly as a consequence. The effectiveness of subject leaders in raising standards now needs to be developed.

Parents demonstrate high levels of support for the school and mutual respect abounds. It currently provides satisfactory value for money but is well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, particularly in mathematics, in Key Stage 2.
- Make subject coordinators more effective in raising standards.
- Improve the quality of marking so that pupils consistently receive detailed advice about how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The school is still suffering from a legacy of underachievement following the upheaval of the past three years. Pupils in Years 5 and 6, therefore, are progressing from a lower base than pupils in other areas of the school and their achievement is now improving but is satisfactory overall. Their attainment in science and mathematics is well below average but their standards in English have improved markedly.

Children's attainment on entry to the Nursery is low. They make rapid progress in the Foundation Stage, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development because of the many hands-on activities and because of the colourful and stimulating environment. They continue to make good progress in Key Stage 1 and in Key Stage 2 because of significant developments in the quality of teaching over the past two years. Standards in reading and writing, for example, have improved markedly as a result of tighter target-setting and pupils with learning difficulties are now achieving as well as others because of the effective support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are happy in school and feel valued and safe. They appreciate the ways in which staff help them, particularly in improving their behaviour and in dealing with any incidents quickly. They say, 'We enjoy our school because our teachers are fun!' and pupils take full part in activities outside lessons. Pupils behave well and most work and play together in harmony. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good overall, but the cultural aspects are outstanding. Pupils involve themselves eagerly in activities to promote community cohesion and have a keen understanding of religions and cultures that are different to their own. They act positively on teachers' strong, moral messages and establish good relationships with each other. Pupils express their feelings openly, one of their comments being, 'I like being me!'

The school council is active and is influential in improving playtimes for all. Pupils take part in fundraising competitions, celebrating Eid and Christmas. They also advise visitors on how to make healthy food choices and on the importance of physical fitness. Attendance is satisfactory. Though still below average, it is improving significantly as a result of recent, effective initiatives. Preparation for pupils' future economic well-being is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good, with some outstanding aspects. Relationships are warm; pupils behave well and are generally fully engaged in their learning. Teachers plan lessons in detail and spend considerable time with support assistants preparing activities to meet the needs of pupils of all levels of ability. In an outstanding lesson on 'Rainbow Writing,' for example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 were challenged appropriately and all were fascinated by the subject-matter. Those new to English have impressive support from bilingual staff and take full advantage of what lessons have to offer as a result. Teachers use electronic whiteboards very effectively as a teaching tool and pupils enjoy the many opportunities they have to link their work in numeracy with that in literacy. On occasions, teachers direct learning too much and there are minor problems with pupils' concentration levels.

Marking is satisfactory overall. The best is regular, celebrates success and offers specific advice on how pupils can improve their work. However, this is not consistently the case in all areas of the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and the exciting activities in the Foundation Stage whet children's appetites to learn. Planning effectively takes into account the needs and aspirations of the school's diverse population. All pupils, including those with additional learning difficulties, or who are at an early stage of learning English, receive the curriculum to which they are entitled. The effective deployment of bilingual staff helps these pupils to grow in confidence and does much to foster their personal development. A focus on information and communication technology has boosted learning and is beginning to strengthen links between subjects. Visiting artists and specialist teaching in French in Years 3, 4 and 6 enrich learning. A wide range of visits contributes to pupils' enjoyment, gives meaning and relevance to class work and contributes to their outstanding cultural development. Pupils speak positively about their trip to the Manchester Museum to see Egyptian mummies and they take part in a wide variety of after-school clubs, many of which are over-subscribed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The good levels of care, support and guidance provided have a marked impact on children's personal development and well-being. Procedures for child protection and risk assessment are in place and the strong teamwork of staff, including the home/school liaison officer and support assistants, promotes the safeguarding of pupils very well. Children settle into the Nursery quickly and, at the end of Year 6, staff help pupils make a smooth transfer to their new secondary schools.

Teachers analyse pupils' work carefully. Through continual assessment and target-setting, most pupils are aware of how well they are doing, but they do not always receive detailed enough advice on how to improve. The school is very responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable children and of those with learning difficulties. Staff meet regularly with members of external agencies and parents to review progress and to plan further support. For example, parents are invited into school to discuss issues in relation to pupils' achievement and also healthy lifestyles.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The dedicated headteacher, effectively supported by the deputy headteacher, gives clear direction for development and provides impressive leadership for the whole school community. The relatively new senior leadership team has precise priorities and monitors the work of the school closely. It has already made effective changes to the internal organisation and deployment of staff and sets high expectations for everyone in school. These are embraced by all staff, who appreciate the way the headteacher values their expertise and skills and how their classroom practice is developed and supported. Collectively, there is a strong commitment to improving performance in all areas of school life.

The school's self-evaluation is thorough, reflective and honestly identifies success and continuing challenges; it understands where it needs to improve. The inspection team did not agree with some of the school's judgements on its performance, but this is because the school does not rest on its laurels and is always aware that improvements can be made. The monitoring role of subject leaders is at an early stage and has not made a significant impact on raising standards in all areas.

Governors are knowledgeable about the school's performance, are willing to be involved in school life and challenge the school leadership where appropriate. Resources are satisfactorily deployed and the recruitment and retention of staff are well managed. The growing strengths in leadership, the significant improvements in teaching and learning and the outstanding links with other schools, demonstrate that the school has good capacity to improve further.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you all for being so kind and friendly to us when we visited your school last week. It is providing you with a satisfactory standard of education.. Everyone gave us a lovely welcome and we enjoyed being with you. We would now like to tell you some of the good things about your school.

You are very proud of St Thomas Church of England Primary and we understand why! You have so many links with other primary and secondary schools for sport and other things, and we saw just how good your dancers are, when they showed us what they did for children from other backgrounds. You behave well and get on so well with your classmates, teachers and teaching assistants. The school council does a lot to make your school even better and the 'playground buddies' make sure that no one is lonely at break or at lunchtime. You are taught well and now make good progress in your lessons. You have many activities after school and you have a wide range of visits and visitors. Your successes in sport are very good and we know the girls were delighted when they won the local football competition. There is so much good work displayed on the corridors and in your classrooms: your school really is a very colourful place to be! The adults in school care for you well and your headteacher and all the other staff are trying hard to make your school even better.

We know that you want to help your teachers too and we would like you to work hard to improve your standards, especially in mathematics. You can help even more by improving your attendance! We have asked your teachers when they are marking your work to give you more advice on how you can do better. We have also asked them to visit other classrooms more so that they can see how you are doing in all your subjects.

Thank you once again for being so kind and friendly and for helping us so much with the inspection. We enjoyed watching you learn.