

St Thomas' Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105824
Local Authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	287341
Inspection date	16 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Delia Hiscock

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	135
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Lee Bagshaw
Headteacher	Mr A Martin
Date of previous school inspection	3 March 2003
School address	Huddersfield Road Newhey Rochdale Lancashire OL16 3QZ
Telephone number	01706 847093
Fax number	01706 847093

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school serves a tightly knit urban community. A below average proportion of pupils take up free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, but the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is higher. The school is smaller than average. The number of pupils in each year varies from 12 to a maximum of 24. A very small proportion of pupils are of minority ethnic heritage. The headteacher was appointed in 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This good school is infused with renewed energy and motivation, and is forging ahead with planned improvements. As one pupil said, 'All the new things are making it better.' The school's climate of kindness and trust fosters really good relationships and good behaviour, and ensures that pupils develop high levels of confidence. Pupils feel safe and are alert to the needs of others. They mature into tolerant and sensible individuals who work very well together and want to learn. This is because personal development and well-being are good. The new school council's key role is involvement in making decisions that matter to pupils; its members have learned quickly the ropes of organisation and democracy. Older pupils in the school take on responsibilities such as being 'playground pals' with ease and maturity. This is because they know that the contribution they make to the school is valued. The school provides good value for money.

In the Foundation Stage, provision is good. Although most children start school with skills that are typical for their age, language development is a weaker area. In particular, a high proportion of boys start with limited communication skills. The school ensures a strong focus on this area and consequently most children attain expected standards for their age at the end of the Reception year. Small and highly effective teaching groups are a prime contributor to the progress pupils make. The school agrees that improved outdoor provision for the Foundation Stage is needed to help it build on the good start children receive.

Successful development work has ensured that for the second consecutive year, standards are above average in reading and writing at the end of Key Stage 1. In 2006 performance peaked at the end of Key Stage 2 to an all-time high in English and mathematics. This is because the needs of most pupils are met well. This is particularly so for lower-attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These pupils often achieve exceptionally well. Successes in reading shine through but the more able pupils do not achieve as well as they could in writing. With guidance from the leadership team, standards are improving in mathematics in Key Stage 1, and pupils' work shows that most attain the levels expected for their age. The successes are part of the reason why pupils see school as an enjoyable place to be. It is also why their parents have great confidence in the staff and the leadership of the school.

The quality of care, support and guidance is good. The care and support for development and learning are particularly strong throughout the school. Any pupil who falters in any way is supported by highly effective organisation, consistently good teaching and high quality support from the team of very capable teaching assistants. All the pupils listen really well to their teachers and are interested learners who are now learning the skills to appraise their own work.

Leadership is good. The powerful vision of the new headteacher centres on enabling pupils to gain a breadth of skills and qualities to equip them for life. Recent improvements in resources for information and communication technology (ICT) and partnership work with outside agencies, the church, the local library and the high school all widen the range of activities the school provides. The school knows itself particularly well and has very high aspirations for its pupils.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop outdoor provision for the Foundation Stage.
- Develop the writing skills of the more able pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well and often exceed the challenging targets set for their performance. Results in the national tests for Year 6 pupils have been above average by some margin for four out of the last five years. In 2006, they were the highest the school had ever achieved. Children make good progress to reach average standards at the end of their Reception year, from their starting points on entry. They do particularly well in their language development. Progress in Key Stage 1 has improved in the past two years because developments have addressed below average standards in writing, in particular. This has resulted in almost all of the pupils now attaining average standards, although few of the more able pupils attain the higher level in writing at the end of Key Stage 2.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and their attendance is good. They grow into happy, well behaved and tolerant individuals who understand the differences, needs and talents of their classmates and others in the school. They are not afraid to air their views, and they do this constructively. They have a good understanding of what makes a healthy diet and are able to discuss sensibly the ups and downs of the choices they might make to keep themselves safe and fit. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Links with the church and the local community foster their cultural development well, keep the local traditions alive and nurture a sense of empathy for those in need. These qualities are the reasons why the pupils are able to collaborate so well, become team players and take on responsibility well. The skills pupils gain in literacy and numeracy prepare them well for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers use assessment information well, particularly in Key Stage 2. They check the progress pupils make very regularly and use the information gained to plan lessons effectively. There are high expectations and very good relationships. This forges a thoroughly positive learning culture. Pupils want to learn. The organisational arrangements for the teaching of literacy and numeracy each morning make exemplary use of resources. This is a powerful factor in ensuring that teaching is specific to learning needs in Key Stage 2. Learning support assistants make an excellent contribution in their support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and expectations are equally high for these pupils. Marking is good. It tells older pupils in particular what they are to learn, and more recently, how they might judge their work. These strengths are filtering into Key Stage 1, where there is now a closer match of activities to the learning needs for the more able pupils, but some variability persists.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils are prepared well for the future through the wide range of activities provided, many of which help them to make informed choices for themselves. Learning and enjoyment are spiced with lots of additional activities after school, and good links with the high school enhance

pupils' skills in ICT. Partnerships and links with external agencies, and governor expertise, contribute very well to the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The close family and community links are long-standing strengths which contribute to the good range of traditional cultural activities. The school's huge investment in ICT is delighting pupils and widening the range of skills they might develop in the future, but has yet to pay dividends. Provision for the Foundation Stage has developed recently so children are able to explore for themselves. They continue to be dependent on adults when outdoors because there is no dedicated area to support their independence and achievement.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and support that pupils receive are excellent. This is why many lower-attaining pupils achieve so well. Flexible, very well planned small groups, mainly in Key Stage 2, are the school's answer to having mixed age classes and different numbers of pupils in each year group. This system works like a well-oiled machine; assessment information is used very effectively to ensure work is well matched to pupils' needs. Good examples of this are the work the school has undertaken to raise standards for the less academically able pupils, and to improve standards in reading across the school. Academic guidance is good. Pupils are beginning to take a greater role in appraising their own work and that of their classmates, but this is in the early stages of development. Required arrangements for child protection and the care and safety of pupils are in place, including those for risk assessment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are characterised by the vision and energy of the new headteacher and deputy headteacher, the work of some very experienced staff, and the strong governing body. The school has transformed resources for ICT, raised standards and broadened the base for future developments. These attributes give the school good capacity to move forward. Staffing strengths are harnessed well. Organisation and management systems work smoothly because staff give generously of their time. The staff are developing further their leadership skills to help monitor the subjects they lead. Monitoring and tracking of progress and very high aspirations for the pupils are key features at the heart of leadership. To bring about improvement, particularly strong self-evaluation leaves few stones unturned when determining what makes a positive difference for each pupil. It involves everyone. However, there has not yet been enough time for the senior team to fulfil all their aims for the school.

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Annex A

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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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	1

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	2
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	2

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

Inspection of St Thomas' C of E Primary School, Rochdale, OL16 3QZ

Thank you for being so helpful to me in the conversations we had. I really enjoyed my visit to your school. I found that your school is good and is improving lots of things. In fact, I am not sure whether it was you or your teachers who were the more excited by the new interactive whiteboard that was delivered. Perhaps both!

I found that the school listens to what you have to say and is helping you to improve things that matter to you. I agree with you that the school takes really good care of you all. All the adults work hard to help you to do well and help you to learn how to keep healthy and safe. I found that you grow up to become sensible and caring young citizens.

I noticed that you are learning how to check what you have learned and that many of you know how to improve your work. This is a valuable skill that will serve you well in the future. Perhaps some of the older pupils could spend a little time thinking about what would make some of your writing even better? I could see that you are using lots of interesting words now. To help you all to learn even better, I have asked the school to:

- develop an outside space for children in Reception class to help them learn even more
- help those of you who are quite good at writing to do even better.

Don't forget to give the school council your ideas so that they can be discussed! This is a great way for you to improve things that are important to you. Perhaps you might think how you can help to improve the library as well. I seem to remember that someone in the school is keen to get started!