

St Thomas Church of England Junior and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106487
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	287525
Inspection dates	15 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Sonja Øyen HMI

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	165
Day care	20
Funded nursery education	5
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Acting chair	Mr Paul Gleave
Headteacher	Dr Jean Forward
Date of previous school inspection	February 2003
School address	Church Street Golbourne Warrington WA3 3TH
Telephone number	01942 728153
Fax number	01942 728169

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school is in a former mining area where there is significant social and economic deprivation. Most of the pupils live in rented accommodation. A small number of pupils are of minority ethnic heritage; two are asylum seekers. Three pupils have English as an additional language and one receives specialist language support. A higher proportion of pupils than average is eligible for free school meals. Just under a third has been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly language, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, and moderate learning difficulties. This is higher than in most schools. Seven pupils have a statement of special educational need. When pupils start in the Reception class, their knowledge and skills are lower than expected for their age, especially in speech and social development. Some of the pupils attended the playgroup at the school run by social services.

Since the previous inspection in 2003, the number of pupils on roll has fallen. Following a reorganisation of staffing and classes for the current school year, the younger pupils are in classes of single year groups and pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6 are in two classes of mixed year groups. The headteacher was appointed from September 2005.

The report following the inspection of the day care (playgroup), which was conducted at the same time as the inspection of the school, will be published separately.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Thomas provides a satisfactory quality of education; it is an improving school that is setting its sights higher. It has particular strength in the good care and support for pupils who feel safe, valued and ready to learn. The school's self-evaluation painted too rosy a picture of its effectiveness, but was generally accurate in identifying what is done well and where improvement is needed. The headteacher has steered the school successfully through a period of change and has sparked moves to widen the curriculum and to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning. While this places the school on a sound general footing, not enough has been done to pinpoint exactly why standards are not higher. As a result, staff's expectations of what the pupils can do are too low. Although there are patches of good practice, and teaching is satisfactory overall, it is not consistently driving on the pupils' learning.

Standards have risen since the last inspection, but are below the national and local average. Too many pupils hover just below the level expected for their age and very few excel, although there are signs that some infant and junior pupils are producing work that reflects their good potential. Over time, many pupils make good progress from a low start, but their learning is inconsistent. Not all achieve as well as they should. A typical example is in mathematics, where many pupils are tentative in solving number problems because they find it hard to recall number facts. The emphasis on practical activities in the Reception Year has contributed much to the good progress made by the pupils in conversing and getting on with others. They are slow, however, to make a start in reading and writing, and then do not catch up enough in Years 1 and 2. This is partly because the pupils do not always have resources to hand to help them. The school is making effective use of additional programmes to help pupils; the work to boost Year 6 boys' writing skills paid off handsomely in the school's improved performance in English in the national tests in 2006. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally thrive and achieve well, especially in the junior years, because of the support and encouragement from adults in school and from other agencies.

The school rightly judges the pupils' personal development to be good. Parents have high regard for the school; many went there themselves. They commented that their children are happy, generally doing well and, in several cases, growing in confidence after coming from other schools. Pupils said that St Thomas is a safe school where occasional arguments are quickly settled 'and we are all friends again'. School councillors were proud of their part in helping to gain the Healthy School Award. Pupils were very enthusiastic about going on visits and playing sport, particularly as part of treat-time on Fridays. They were less certain about how well they were doing, their targets, or what they needed to do to improve. This reflects the variable quality of the teachers' marking; there were few specific comments in pupils' books on what pupils needed to do to make their work better. Teachers are tracking pupils' progress and setting challenging targets, and subject managers check aspects of teaching and learning. However, the analysis of the information gained lacks the sharpness needed for the headteacher, subject managers and governors to decide if pupils' achievement and the quality of provision are good enough. In turn, this limits their capacity to decide where resources and efforts would be best placed to make a difference.

The school was visited by one HMI for one day. The HMI evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: pupils' achievement, the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the effectiveness of the governors and senior managers in moving the school on. This was done by gathering evidence from observing lessons, scrutinising school documentation and questionnaires completed by parents, and by talking with pupils, parents, governors, the inclusion manager and the headteacher.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the HMI found evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given its self-evaluation, were not all justified, and this has been included where appropriate in this report.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can do.
- Develop the range and quality of provision for pupils in the Reception Year.
- Ensure that teachers' marking tells pupils how they can improve their work.
- Sharpen the analysis of information about the school's performance so that school improvement planning is rooted in specific intended outcomes for pupils.

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Annex B

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
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3

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
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 learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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

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.

16 May 2007



Dear school councillors

**Inspection of St Thomas CE Junior and Infant School, Golbourne,
WA 3 3TH**

Thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school to see how well you are learning. It was good to have your views and to hear about life at St Thomas School, especially your recent success in gaining the Healthy School Award.

I agree with you that St Thomas is a 'safe school'. Your school is good in how it takes care of you all – especially those who find learning hard and those who find it hard to get on with others all the time. I was pleased to hear that you know the school rules and know what to do when you have a concern. It was also good to see you having fun in the playground and working hard in lessons. I enjoyed reading your spells and Easter eggstravaganza! Not all of you, however, do as well as you could and you were not sure of your targets. Your teachers have been making some changes. Reception children now have lots of space to do different things, but there is not enough to help them especially when they want to write. You certainly enjoy your visits to special places – Tatton Park really made you think about evacuees!

To help St Thomas to be a good school, and to help you to do even better, this is what I have asked the governors, headteacher and teachers to do.

- Expect even more from you in your work. You can tell them which work is hard and which is easy!
- Make it really exciting for the Reception class. I'm sure you have some ideas
- Tell you, when they look at and mark your work, how well you have done and what you can do next time to make it better. You may like to add your comments
- Be sure that when they plan changes, they know how it will benefit you, especially in how well you do in reading, writing, mathematics and science.

I know you will want to do your bit!

Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector