

St Thomas's CE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112322
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	289245
Inspection dates	6–7 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Stephen Isherwood 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	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Canon Tim Montgomery
Headteacher	Mr Tim Westwood
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2001
School address	Kendal Green Kendal Cumbria LA9 5PP
Telephone number	01539 737373
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Thomas's is situated on the northern edge of Kendal. It is larger than average and serves an area of mixed housing. Pupils are drawn from a wide range of social backgrounds and nearly all are White British. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. Seven pupils have a statement of special educational need. When children start school, their attainment is broadly in line with that expected for their age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

The overall effectiveness of the school has declined since the last inspection in 2001; it is now inadequate. Inspectors agree with the school's judgement. Many of the positive features highlighted in the previous report are no longer strengths. Standards have fallen, as has the quality of their learning. This is because the leadership of the school is inadequate and has had too little effect on bringing about sustained improvement. As a result, standards are too low and pupils do not achieve as well as they should, particularly in Years 3 to 6. The school therefore does not give satisfactory value for money.

The school lags behind many other primaries in the quality and range of procedures to check how well it is doing. Systems to pinpoint weaknesses in the school's provision are inconsistent and the views of staff and governors are rarely sought. As a consequence, there is no shared vision on how to improve the school and morale is low. Many staff and governors are disenchanted and lack confidence in the leadership. In addition, a significant number of parents voiced justifiable concerns about important aspects of the school's work.

Children enter the school with knowledge and skills typical for their age. They get off to a promising start and achieve well to the beginning of Year 1. Progress is not as strong across Years 1 and 2 so that, by age seven, many pupils could have achieved more. Most pupils achieve the expected levels for their age by the end of Year 2. However, given their starting points, the school is adding little value. Too many pupils aged seven to 11 underachieve, as standards in all core subjects at the end of Year 6 are well below average. This is because of the variable quality of teaching and because the school does not meet the needs of the pupils well enough. Teachers lack clear support and direction in their work. As a result there is inconsistency in the understanding of what many pupils can do and what they need to learn next. For example, whole-school systems for identifying and rectifying weaknesses in pupils' progress are only beginning to emerge across all year groups.

The quality of teaching ranges from satisfactory to good. It has some strengths, especially when tasks are exciting and pupils are motivated learn. In the stronger lessons, teachers manage their classes well through praise and encouragement and activities are well chosen. Too many lessons, however, lack spark and energy. Activities are sometimes mundane and do not always possess the pace and challenge to push the pupils on in their learning. Not all teachers expect enough from each pupil. Pupils from different year groups commented that they could work harder and that some of the work was too easy.

Despite its overall ineffectiveness, the school has some foundations on which to build. The pupils behave well, have positive attitudes to school and get on well with each other. They feel safe, have a strong understanding of what is right and wrong and have a good awareness of how to keep themselves fit and healthy. They make a positive contribution to the community. There is a steely determination amongst staff and governors to put the problems of the past behind them, pull together and move the school forward. Strategies to improve leadership and management have already begun, with support from the local authority.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science.
- Strengthen leadership and management, particularly the capacity to check on the school's performance and secure rapid and sustained improvement.
- Improve teaching by using the information from tracking pupils' progress and making lessons more exciting and challenging.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

The pupils' current work and the school's national test results for 2006 show that standards and achievement are inadequate. Too many pupils, particularly in Years 3 to 6, are not achieving as well as they should because of inconsistencies in the teaching and gaps in their learning. As a result, the overall rate of progress made by pupils is not good enough.

When children enter the school their attainment is typical for their age. They achieve well and by the beginning of Year 1 many reach and exceed the expected levels. Progress in Years 1 and 2 dips. As a result, in the 2006 assessments, Year 2 pupils reached standards which were close to the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. An above-average proportion achieved the higher level in writing, but fewer achieved this in reading and mathematics.

Work in lessons and pupils' books confirms that achievement for those aged seven to 11 is inadequate. In the national tests for Year 6 pupils in 2006, standards in English, mathematics and science were well below average. Progress slows markedly in Years 3 to 6. Too many pupils are not reaching the potential they showed at the end of Year 2 and lose ground. This is because the work presented to them, particularly the more able, lacks interest and challenge. As a result, the school failed to reach all but one of its targets for Year 6 in 2006. Too few pupils reached the higher levels of attainment in all subjects.

The progress made by pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is similar to that of their peers, with progress stronger in Reception and Key Stage 1. Progress in Years 3 to 6 is unsatisfactory because of the lack of challenge for them to do better.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school has maintained its strength in this aspect of its work and has correctly judged its good quality.

In the Foundation Stage teachers plan interesting activities to increase children's speaking and listening skills and extend their personal and social development. In all classes pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The pupils show courtesy and respect for others and share in stimulating activities outside lessons. In lessons pupils concentrate well. They rarely find the work difficult and some could do more. Pupils like school and behave well. Attendance is about average; pupils understand the need to come to school regularly and punctually. They know why a healthy lifestyle, such as regular exercise and a balanced diet, is important. Pupils play together safely; they have a clear idea of what is right and wrong.

Through the work of the school council, pupils share ideas about preparing to be good citizens. They make good contributions to school and take pride in their school and the community. They are sure that teachers respond to their needs and ambitions. There are new strategies

aimed at further developing pupils' basic skills in mathematics and literacy. These should ensure the pupils are better prepared for future schooling and the world of work. In personal, social and health education lessons and assemblies, the pupils reflect on a wide range of moral and social issues.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. However, the trend in falling standards suggests that teaching has been less strong in the past. There are examples of good practice, especially in the Reception class and in targeted subject lessons in classes for older pupils. Teachers share a good knowledge and understanding of all subjects. Teaching assistants are used to support the work of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. Whilst most work is well planned and matched to previous learning, teachers do not have sufficient precise data to monitor where pupils are falling behind and need to accelerate their learning. This means that some pupils capable of attaining higher standards are not sufficiently challenged. In mathematics and in English, work to raise standards and support reading and writing is just starting to lift pupils' achievement. The lack of whole-school assessment, monitoring and tracking procedures until very recently has meant that specific intervention has been restricted and much remains to be done.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. The Foundation Stage curriculum is good; it is based on practical experiences and a secure understanding of how young children learn. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. In other classes planning for learning is thorough. Work to enable pupils to acquire basic skills in English and mathematics is now firmly in place. However, many activities are uninspiring and lack challenge. Pupils are not given enough opportunities to plan their own learning through independent research and enquiry. Teachers are aware that, although they have made a start in linking subjects, such as English with work in history or geography, more still needs to be done to extend these opportunities for learning. For instance, they do not always plan to use skills learned in mathematics to extend learning in science and design and technology. Pupils have regular teaching in information and communication technology but do not practise their skills sufficiently to enhance their work in other subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school accurately grades this part of its work as satisfactory. Pastoral care is good. In the Foundation Stage children are assessed effectively on entry and are helped to settle well into routines. Adults are committed to promoting safe practices. The school has gained accreditation as a healthy school, and teachers work well with parents and other agencies. Child protection procedures are in place and risk assessments are carried out rigorously. Systems to track the progress of individuals and groups are just beginning to inform teachers about where to increase support and where to drive pupils to higher levels. Across the school pupils understand the newly established targets for mathematics and English. Older pupils know what they need to do to improve their work.

Pupils report that previous issues over bullying have been resolved. Those instances that now arise are dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils with learning, behavioural or emotional difficulties receive good care and support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

The leadership and management of the school are inadequate and underlie the reason why standards are not high enough and pupils are underachieving. Senior leaders have not demonstrated the ability to improve provision and raise standards quickly enough. Action taken to halt the decline in standards over the last three years has been insufficient and has fragmented the agenda for improvement. Changes introduced by the headteacher have not been appropriate to the needs of the school, have unsettled the staff and have undermined their confidence. As a result many staff and governors are disenchanted and lack confidence in the leadership of the school. Several members of the governing body are relatively new. Nonetheless, they are providing satisfactory support. They have a sound understanding of their role and are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about what is happening in the school and how it might improve.

Systems for identifying weaknesses in teaching and pupils' work are just emerging. At present they are not leading to sufficient improvements in the rate of pupils' progress. The quality of teaching is too inconsistent, progress is slow and pupils are capable of achieving much more by the time they leave the school.

The school is facing a large agenda for improvement. With help from the local authority, it is beginning to gain a realistic view of its weaknesses and the action required to bring about what is needed. Governors and staff are committed to tackle underachievement and are keen to move forward but are dependent on external support to guide them in key aspects of work, such as monitoring progress and setting a clear agenda for change. Subject leaders, for example, have a general awareness of standards in their subjects and are beginning to check more closely on how pupils are learning. They are less certain on the action required to secure improvements and at present are not held sufficiently to account for the school's performance. As a result, the capacity to make the necessary improvements is inadequate. Nevertheless, the steps taken recently with good support from the local authority are paving the way for things to improve

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

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?	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

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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

St Thomas's CE Primary School

Kendal Green

Kendal

Cumbria

LA9 5PP

6 March 2007

Dear Children

As you know Mrs Evans and I visited your school recently to find out how well you are learning. We enjoyed our two days with you and thank you for being so polite and friendly. We were made to feel very welcome. This is what we found.

You behave well and get on well with one another. You care for each other and show concern for others less fortunate than yourselves through your fund-raising. Those of you in Reception make a good start. We are glad to hear that you feel safe and have the confidence in your teachers to help you with any problems. You have a good understanding of how to keep fit and eat healthily.

However, the standards you reach by Year 6 and your test results are not as good as they should be. We think your school needs 'special measures'. This means it will receive extra help, and inspectors will return to check that things are improving. We have asked your headteacher, governors and teachers to make St Thomas's more effective.

Some of you said that you could work harder and we agree. So we have asked if they could make sure that you think more in lessons with more challenging and exciting activities. This way, we are sure that you will make lots more progress in your work. You can help them by continuing to work hard and doing your best. We have also asked them to check more closely on how well you are learning.

Thank you for helping us with the inspection.

Yours sincerely

Steve Isherwood

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools.