



St Thomas the Martyr Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119495
Local Authority Lancashire
Inspection number 291439
Inspection dates 30 November –1 December 2006
Reporting inspector Jennie Platt

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Mill Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Up Holland, Skelmersdale
Age range of pupils	3–11		Lancashire, WN8 0HH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01695 622970
Number on roll (school)	172	Fax number	01695 622970
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	The Venerable Peter Bradley
		Headteacher	Mrs Zoe Turner
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average size school, although the number on roll has fallen over recent years. The decline in numbers means the nursery is only open in the morning, providing education for 18 children. A slightly higher than average number of pupils is entitled to a free school meal. Most of the pupils come from the immediate locality and are from White British backgrounds. The number of pupils assessed as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school has experienced four terms without a permanent headteacher. There have been three associate headteachers and the current headteacher has been in school for one term. A new headteacher has been appointed and will take up the post shortly.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with some good features. Personal development is a strength and pupils enjoy school, care for each other and attend regularly. One pupil said, 'Pupils have good manners here and if someone falls out help always comes.' Safeguarding procedures are in place and pupils know how to keep safe and healthy. Staff have high expectations of behaviour which is good. Pupils take responsibility well by reliably carrying out small duties in school and raising funds for charities in the local and wider community. Handwriting in the school is very good and exemplifies pupils' good attitudes to work. They confidently work independently and with their secure basic skills this prepares them well for life ahead.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress, due mainly to a stimulating curriculum and good teaching. From a starting point typical of many pupils of their ages many reach, and a good number exceed, the level expected by the end of the Reception year. Good progress in Key Stage 1 is maintained by challenging teaching. The national assessments for seven-year-olds show standards are above average. Although overall progress in Key Stage 2 is satisfactory, it is not consistent between years because of variability in the quality of teaching. National test results for 11-year-olds show standards are broadly average, with the vast majority reaching the level expected for their age. However, over several years girls have not achieved as well as boys in mathematics. Higher attaining pupils generally do well except in writing, where they do not write with sufficient flair to achieve a high standard.

Teaching and learning and the curriculum are satisfactory. Teaching is good in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 because it is varied and sustains an excitement in learning. This tails off in Key Stage 2 because teaching lacks similar enthusiasm and pace. Pupils start to lose interest in some lessons because their work is not challenging enough. Limited resources for information and communication technology (ICT) mean that pupils have insufficient opportunity to practise their skills. The curriculum is strengthened by a wide range of visits and visitors which enhances pupils' learning.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The associate headteachers, supported by staff and governors, have sustained the smooth running of the school but some important changes have not been put in place, slowing the satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. The role of subject leaders continues to be underdeveloped and assessment information is not used well enough to help pupils make better progress and raise standards. The school provides sound value for money. With a permanent headteacher now appointed, it has satisfactory capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make teaching and the curriculum more stimulating in Key Stage 2 in order to raise standards, especially for girls in mathematics and for higher attaining pupils in writing.

- Make better use of assessment information to monitor pupils' progress and to share with them more effectively how they can improve.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to extend their ICT skills.
- Ensure that subject leaders focus on raising quality and standards in their areas of responsibility.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. From a starting point typical of their age, children make good progress in all areas of learning in the Foundation Stage. The majority reach and an increasing number exceed, the goals expected of them by the end of the stage. They develop independence and self-confidence effectively, which are useful assets for their future learning.

Good progress in Key Stage 1 is reflected in pupils' above average standards in national assessments. Overall progress in Key Stage 2 is satisfactory but is uneven between years and subjects. Standards are broadly average in national tests in English, mathematics and science, meeting the school's targets. However, the higher attaining pupils are not being sufficiently challenged to write imaginatively as they move through Key Stage 2. Over several years, girls have not achieved as well as boys in mathematics. This is because some girls lose enthusiasm for the subject as teaching approaches are not varied enough. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. Their individual learning plans are adequate, but do not guide teachers clearly enough to match work closely to pupils' needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy school and learning and their behaviour is good. Parents comment that the children are supportive of each other and they appreciate the happy foundations laid down in the nursery. The school provides good guidance on healthy lifestyles. Teachers give clear advice about keeping safe and pupils report that they feel secure at school. They appreciate the option of placing their concerns in the class worry box. Pupils are pleased to be members of the school council, for instance, playing a useful part in the new headteacher's recruitment interview. Pupils have a strong sense of belonging to the community because of their charitable work. These responsibilities and the good basic skills prepare them well for their future role in society. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. Pupils are polite and enjoy learning cooperatively. Links with the church extend their spiritual development, as does the celebration of the natural world.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall with some good lessons, especially in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. In these lessons, the pace is brisk and the focus is more on learning through practical activities and exploration to ensure effective learning. Teaching in Key Stage 2 does not always have these features and the use of work sheets and isolated exercises fails to interest pupils. Girls especially say they do not enjoy mathematics. Some lesson activities are not challenging enough to meet all pupils' needs, particularly in imaginative writing. ICT is taught well by a specialist once a week. However, the computer suite only provides for a small group of pupils to be taught at one time, which limits their progress. Throughout the school, teachers manage pupils well so that learning takes place in a calm atmosphere. Teaching assistants provide good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that they play a full part in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum fulfils statutory requirements. It is good in the Foundation Stage and includes a wide variety of stimulating activities. All pupils benefit from a weekly lesson which allows them to discuss relationships and raise any concerns. They say this helps them to feel safe in school. In Key Stage 2, teachers rely too much on commercial schemes of work which can limit the breadth of activity offered to pupils and insufficiently capture their interest. The curriculum is enriched satisfactorily by extra-curricular activities and a good number of sporting opportunities promote healthy lifestyles well. Visits are varied and bring learning to life; for instance, pupils recall enthusiastically visits which involved dressing up as historical characters. There are good links with parents and other services and educational institutions that contribute well to pupils' learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Staff ensure that all safety and safeguarding procedures are in place, including when pupils go on school visits. Vulnerable pupils are well cared for and links with external agencies to support their needs are good. All pupils benefit from the knowledge that staff have a genuine concern for their welfare. Assessment procedures are new but the school has only recently analysed the information gained to pinpoint where pupils are not making enough progress. This has led to slower than expected progress for some pupils in Key Stage 2. Currently, assessment information is not shared sufficiently with pupils in order to accelerate their progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff and governors have responded well to the recent difficulties from having no substantive headteacher. They have sustained a smooth running school with no significant decline in pupils' personal development or academic achievement. Nevertheless, it has been a period of marking time rather than moving forward. The quick succession of temporary headteachers has made it difficult to identify and implement change. For example, the role of subject leaders continues to require attention. They do not monitor progress well enough to have a clear insight into how best to improve quality and raise standards.

The school's self-evaluation is based on consultation and is generally satisfactory. Governance is good. The governing body responded well to the need to take key decisions, especially regarding finance and the difficulties caused by falling rolls. They have delayed appointing a new headteacher until they felt sure they had found the correct person for the job. Governors are regular visitors to school but are not involved enough in the initial setting of school priorities.

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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?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
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	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	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
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	2

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.

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	3
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	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

St Thomas the Martyr Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

Mill Lane

Up Holland

Skelmersdale

Lancashire

WN8 0HH

5 December 2006

Dear Pupils

Thank you for making me and my colleague so welcome in your school. It was lovely seeing you all prepare for Christmas. We appreciated the way you chatted to us and your comments have helped in the writing of this report. You are correct that yours is a happy school and you contribute to this by your good behaviour and the way you help each other. We were pleased to find out that you know a lot about keeping healthy and enjoy being energetic, especially on the playground.

You work hard and take great pride in your handwriting. Some pupils still need to get higher standards in writing and we have asked for lessons in mathematics to be made more interesting for older pupils. Your computer suite is very small and this restricts the amount of time you have to practise your ICT skills. In some lessons that we saw you were thinking about how you could assess your own work. We think this is a good idea and could be used throughout the school to help you understand how to get even better.

I hope the Christmas celebrations went well and you enjoyed yourselves.

Yours sincerely

J E Platt

Lead Inspector