

## St Thomas CofE Primary School, Halliwell

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	105218
<b>Local Authority</b>	Bolton
<b>Inspection number</b>	308800
<b>Inspection dates</b>	24–25 September 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Jim Crouch

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	300
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr David Pott
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Susan Pilling
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 May 2003
<b>School address</b>	Eskrick Street Bolton Lancashire BL1 3JB
<b>Telephone number</b>	01204 333193
<b>Fax number</b>	01204 333194

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This larger than average primary school serves a community which experiences high levels of social disadvantage. The demand for places exceeds supply. The number of pupils joining and leaving the school other than at the usual times is high. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well above the national average, as is the proportion for whom English is not their first language. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above the national average, as is the number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school. It is well led and managed, meets the needs of the community it serves and is highly valued by pupils and parents. When asked 'What is the best thing about the school?' the consistent response from pupils is 'the teachers.' Many comments from parents reflect this sentiment. The buildings, dating from the nineteenth century, are not well suited to the needs of modern education. The school has used great imagination to ensure that every inch of the over-crowded building is used to good effect and that the limited outside space is safe and secure and provides both useful teaching spaces, such as the school garden, and areas for creative play, which are much appreciated by pupils.

This is a happy school which values and celebrates the cultural diversity pupils bring to the school. The outstanding levels of care, guidance and support are a real strength of the school. Pupils feel safe and secure and know that the staff have their best interests at heart. Their response is shown in their good behaviour and their positive attitudes to learning. The staff enjoy working in this school and value the opportunities they have to contribute to the pupils' development, both socially and academically. The school works well in partnership with parents and a wide range of agencies to improve provision and ensure that the needs of pupils are well met.

Pupils are keen to talk about how enjoyable their lessons are and the benefits of the many after-school clubs and activities. They talk confidently about how they eat healthily and take lots of exercise. Pupils contribute to school improvement; for example, through their advice to teachers on how to make the marking of work more meaningful and their work on the school council. Therefore, pupils are making good progress in developing the skills they will need later in life. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as is pupils' contribution to the school and wider community.

A highly effective approach to monitoring pupils' progress means that pupils are set appropriately challenging learning targets. This has contributed to an improvement in standards so that in recent years standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have been close to the national average. In 2007 the larger than average number of pupils with learning difficulties meant that despite pupils making good progress, standards at Key Stage 2 were below average. Standards in English are not as good as in mathematics because progress in writing is satisfactory rather than good. Pupils for whom English is not their first language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the good support they receive.

The curriculum is good and meets the needs of learners because all subject leaders are good at evaluating the progress pupils make. The curriculum meets statutory requirements, has been extended since the last inspection to include the provision of French and is enhanced by contributions from a wide range of visitors.

Much of the success of the school is rooted in the good leadership and management at all levels. The headteacher and governing body provide clear vision and direction based on good self-evaluation. A devolved approach to management ensures that middle managers provide strong leadership in their areas of responsibility and make a significant contribution to school improvement. The school has raised standards since the last inspection. It gives good value for money and has good capacity to improve further.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

The quality of the Foundation Stage is good. Parents speak favourably about the staff. They are happy to bring their children to this safe, happy and secure environment and appreciate the sensitive way in which their children are welcomed into the school. Children begin in the Nursery with skills that are well below the level expected for their age. This is particularly so in their social and language and communication skills. Staff pay close attention to developing these skills and in providing children with the necessary resources to promote their good learning, both in and outside the classroom. Children behave well and are keen to learn. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children are assessed rigorously on entry to the Nursery and as they move through the Foundation Stage. Therefore, staff have an accurate picture of how well the children are doing and of what they need to do next to improve. The Foundation Stage coordinator provides good leadership with a strong emphasis on teamwork. This, together with well targeted teaching and support, enables children to make good progress. However, because of the children's low starting points, standards at the end of the Reception are below average.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in writing so that pupils make as much progress in English as they do in mathematics.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

From skills which are well below national expectations when they enter the Nursery, pupils make good progress across the school and, as a result, standards are close to average when they leave at the end of Year 6. All groups of pupils make good progress and the standards of pupils of Indian heritage are significantly better than their peers nationally. The school's comprehensive tracking system enables the school to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement. For example, it has established that more able pupils are not making good progress in writing. They are not crafting sentences well enough or extending their vocabulary. As a consequence, this has been identified as a key priority for development.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils enjoy coming to this racially harmonious and welcoming school. They are well behaved both in and out of lessons and are welcoming, polite and friendly. They show consistently good attitudes towards each other and the adults who care for them and this has a positive impact upon their learning. Attendance has improved in recent years and this is now broadly in line with the national average. Spiritual development is good. Pupils are given the opportunity to reflect individually and in groups and the peer mentoring, mediation and buddy systems enable pupils to support each other and to make a positive contribution to the school. Pupils support a wide range of local, national and global charities and have a strong sense of social and moral responsibility. Cultural development is fostered well through exposure to a wide range of visitors such as Asian dancers. Joint school productions involving the Octagon theatre and visits out of school to places such as the Halle and local museums are also beneficial. Pupils are regularly asked for their views and have

contributed to school improvement through, for example, their suggestions on how to extend the extra-curricular provision.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Lessons are well planned to meet the needs of different learners. In the best lessons teachers use their knowledge of how children learn to lead children towards developing their own learning strategies; teachers support this with relevant and enjoyable practical activities. However, in a very small minority of lessons there is an over-emphasis on teacher-led activities and as a result opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for and contribute to their own learning can be missed. Teaching assistants are well deployed and show good skills in supporting groups and individuals. Teachers use displays well to create a positive learning environment and celebrate pupils' achievements. Marking is used well to inform pupils of the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve. Teachers are developing their use of interactive whiteboards and are making good use of the school computer suite to develop pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills. However, the limited number of computers available for use in classrooms means that some opportunities to use ICT to enhance learning may be missed.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum places a strong emphasis on developing numeracy and literacy skills. The school has worked hard to raise standards in writing, including providing support for targeted individuals, running writing workshops for parents, and encouraging pupils to produce a quality school and community magazine, the 'Thomas Times'. While these actions have led to some improvements, the school acknowledges that more needs to be done. Subjects beyond English, mathematics and science are now studied in greater depth, which has increased pupils' enjoyment. The teaching of religious education is given a high priority and is used to celebrate the diversity of the religious groups present in the school. A well-structured personal education programme gives pupils good opportunities to discuss issues relating to their health and safety. Many pupils participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities and visits and in particular, look forward to the annual residential trip to the Lake District. The school is keen to work alongside other schools and has led joint initiatives in drama and steel drum playing which have resulted in community productions.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 1**

The inspectors found the school too modest in its assessment of the care, guidance and support it provides, which is clearly outstanding. The school is at the heart of the community, working alongside the church and other local organisations to meet the needs of pupils and their parents. Pupils benefit from very well established induction and transition arrangements, and strong links with partner high schools ensure that pupils approach their next phase of learning with confidence. Very good monitoring procedures mean that pupils and their parents are well informed of the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve. Vulnerable pupils are identified at an early stage and the use of child-friendly individual education plans

means that even very young children are able to contribute to planning their own support arrangements. The school takes its statutory responsibilities for safeguarding pupils very seriously and despite its physical limitations, the school building is well maintained, bright and welcoming. The school is very successful in meeting its aim to give pupils a safe, calm and secure haven in which they can concentrate on learning.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher and governors have established a school that serves its community well. School leaders are acutely aware of the barriers to learning that many of their pupils face and have created an inclusive school in which pupils, whatever their skills, ethnicity or learning difficulties, develop confidence and an enthusiasm for learning. Parents are strongly supportive and are aware of how much their children enjoy school. As one parent said, 'My children couldn't wait to return to school after the holidays.' A team approach to school improvement means that there is a common sense of purpose amongst the staff. Managers at all levels have clear roles and responsibilities and have developed the skills needed to raise standards within their areas of responsibility. Close cooperation between staff and governors means that good procedures for self-evaluation are in place. This has led to improvements in provision and has raised standards. The skilful governing body knows how good the school is and what it needs to do to improve because it is so well involved in school life.

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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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?	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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	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**

I would like to thank you for being so friendly and helpful. I enjoyed talking with you and hearing all the things you like about your school.

St Thomas is a good school and I know you and your parents are very proud of it.

Here are some of the things I think are particularly good about your school:

- the outstanding care everyone takes of you and how hard all the staff and governors work to do their best for you
- your good behaviour and how well you all get on together
- the good progress you make in lessons
- the way your headteacher works so hard with lots of people and groups to help you in your education.

There is one important thing I think could be better and so I have asked your headteacher and teachers to improve the standard of your writing.

Of course, you also have an important part to play in helping your school to carry on improving. You can do this by continuing to be as positive about learning as you are now and keep trying to improve your writing.

Thanks again for making me feel so welcome.