

St Thomas Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105452
Local Authority	Manchester
Inspection number	308858
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Sarah Drake

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	243
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Nick Harris
Headteacher	Mr Gary Schofield
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2004
School address	Hazelbottom Road Lower Crumpsall Manchester Greater Manchester M8 5UX
Telephone number	0161 2051916
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average size school serves an ethnically diverse community that faces significant economic and social disadvantage. Its population is highly mobile, with many pupils joining or leaving the school at other than the usual times. The vast majority of pupils speak English as an additional language and over 16 home languages are spoken. The proportion of pupils that has learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average but varies greatly from year group to year group. Around twice the average proportion is eligible to receive a free school meal. The school is housed in Victorian buildings but will move to new, purpose-built accommodation by September 2009. It has achieved the local authority Silver Healthy School award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This popular school makes a very strong contribution to uniting its local community. It provides a satisfactory quality of education overall and satisfactory value for money. Its greatest strength is the way in which it welcomes pupils belonging to many cultures, with a very wide range of experiences and helps them to settle swiftly into school. As parents comment, it is the individual child that comes first. Pupils are happy in school and their personal development is good. They form good relationships and learn to respect others. They understand the importance of contributing to the community. For example, they work with local gardeners, sing for their elderly neighbours and participate in the local carnival. An impressive project with a city-wide trust involves Year 2 pupils and their parents developing their communication and creative skills to produce books promoting racial equality and harmony. The school works well with parents, other schools, outside agencies and local authority personnel to improve its provision for pupils.

When children join the Nursery many speak little or no English and are not used to sharing with others. Some can do less than is typically expected for their age. By the end of Year 2 pupils make satisfactory progress. Their reading and writing skills are well below average although in mathematics they do better and standards are broadly average. Although standards are well below average at the end of Year 6 pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Many pupils join the school directly from overseas. Those pupils that join the school late make good progress in acquiring spoken English but do not progress as well with written English and this has a negative impact on standards. Pupils who spend a number of years at the school make satisfactory progress but few reach the higher levels expected for their age. This is because until this year the school has not had systems in place to track pupils' progress closely. Consequently the school has not been able to identify and take action to improve areas of weakness.

The quality of teaching and the curriculum are satisfactory. Pupils are eager learners because teachers plan interesting lessons. Teachers usually cater for most pupils' different abilities and preferred ways of learning but they do not always make full use of assessment information to challenge the most able pupils. Good quality support assists those who are at an early stage of learning English or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities to join in lessons successfully and make satisfactory progress. While teachers tell pupils what they are supposed to learn in lessons, they do not always tell them exactly what they need to do to succeed or how they can improve their work.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The enthusiastic headteacher and other senior leaders are very approachable and provide a clear direction for the school. They are very sensitive to the needs of pupils. For example, the school has made changes to the activities for Year 1 pupils to ensure that children who have not yet gained the expected skills for their age continue to have opportunities to learn through play. Leaders have a realistic view of the school's strengths and areas for development and have the capacity to improve it further. Since the last inspection, the partnership with parents has improved as have the roles of senior leaders and the opportunities to promote pupils' cultural and literacy skills across the curriculum. Staff work well together and are clear about what needs to be done. However, the plans made to improve the school do not focus sufficiently on raising standards and achievement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision and leadership in the Foundation Stage are satisfactory. Children's skills when they join the Nursery are very limited with few being able to speak English with any fluency. They settle well into school routines, helped by the very good induction arrangements. Both classrooms provide interesting, purposeful environments with plenty of activities that foster children's desire to experiment and practise their skills. Adults engage children suitably in conversation to develop their learning and promote their understanding of how letters link to sounds. Access to the outside area is limited by the constraints of the accommodation. While staff observe and record individuals' skills development and adapt their daily provision accordingly, the school cannot provide an overview of their progress from joining the school to the end of their Reception year and some aspects of assessment are inaccurate. By the time children join Year 1, their skills vary widely but many are still well below average in their communication skills. Good progress in their personal development ensures that many are ready to begin learning more formally.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of data about pupils' progress to raise standards and ensure that all pupils, especially the more able, achieve well.
- Improve the clarity and precision with which teachers identify what pupils should concentrate on in lessons and how they can improve their work.
- Improve school development planning so that it clearly identifies priorities and impacts directly on raising pupils' standards and achievement.

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.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory but standards are well below average. By the end of Year 2 pupils make satisfactory progress overall, although their reading and writing skills are well below average. In 2007 standards by the end of Year 6 were well below average overall and were particularly low in English. However these pupils, made at least satisfactory progress given their starting points. A high proportion of pupils are at an early stage of learning English and many join the school midway through the year. In addition, some year groups, including the Year 6 group that took the tests in 2007, have above average numbers of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Evidence seen during the inspection indicates that pupils make at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress in both key stages especially in their acquisition of English. The school understandably places a clear emphasis on supporting those pupils who face significant barriers to learning. However, it recognises that too few pupils reach the higher levels in English, mathematics and science

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils describe their school as 'fun, interesting and exciting'. They enjoy lessons and greatly appreciate the way that all staff show interest in them as individuals. Their good spiritual, moral,

social and cultural development helps to create a lively, harmonious community in which good quality relationships abound. Pupils are proud of their own culture and interested in that of others. They are confident when talking to adults and very pleased that suggestions made by the school council lead to improvements, such as the games club for Year 2 pupils. Pupils have had a big input to the designs for the new building. Older 'buddies' take their responsibilities seriously and are clearly respected and trusted by others to help sort out problems. Pupils behave well overall so playtimes are happy and lessons proceed without interruption. Pupils are well aware of how to stay healthy but do not always act with due regard for others, for example when climbing stairs or dropping food on the floor. Attendance levels have risen since the last inspection and are broadly in line with the national average, despite some pupils taking extended term-time holidays. Standards are well below average but pupils' positive attitudes to learning and understanding of the importance of acquiring English and mathematical skills have a satisfactory impact on their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers usually plan lessons in detail and provide work that is suitably matched to pupils' needs. They generally gauge the progress and pace of lessons well, modifying their plans if necessary, but occasionally there is insufficient challenge for the more able pupils. Teachers use a good range of different activities that engage pupils' interest and promote their speaking and listening skills. In response, pupils are enthusiastic learners. Other adults in the classroom provide good support for those who need it, using home languages to ensure that pupils understand the new ideas. Teachers share the purpose of lessons with pupils so they know what they are going to learn but teachers do not always make sufficiently clear what pupils need to do to succeed. Marking does not always tell pupils how to improve and teachers do not always check that any advice which is given has been acted upon in later work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets the needs of pupils at an early stage of learning English well. Consequently these pupils make good progress in their understanding and fluency in speaking English. The supportive curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities helps them to make satisfactory progress. The school is beginning to ensure that the curriculum for the higher ability pupils meets their needs more fully but it is too early to judge the impact of this. Some links are made between subjects although pupils do not always transfer the skills learnt in English to their work in other areas. The curriculum effectively promotes pupils' personal and cultural development. They learn how to lead healthy lifestyles and how to stay safe. Pupils' enjoyment and achievement is enhanced through a good range of clubs, visitors into school and visits to places of educational interest.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Many start at St Thomas with no experience of education in this country. The school's detailed programme to welcome and help them and their parents familiarise themselves with what to expect also provides opportunities to assess their particular needs. This means that from the

Nursery upwards, pupils settle swiftly and those at an early stage of learning English get off to a flying start. Early identification of the needs of those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities leads to good quality support, including the use of outside agencies when necessary. As a result, these pupils make similar progress to their peers. Pupils are aware of their academic targets but are not always clear about how to reach them. They feel safe in school and many mention the friendliness and helpfulness of staff as one of its greatest strengths. Procedures are in place to promote child protection, health and safety.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The strong leadership of the headteacher and senior leaders have created a vibrant school that runs smoothly. Parents and pupils much appreciate the headteacher's willingness to listen and take action if they have concerns. The school uses data about pupils' progress to highlight the need for extra support but until recently has not used this to identify those pupils who need extra challenge. Data collected in the Foundation Stage is not always accurate and the use of this is not yet fully embedded into everyday practice. The school's improvement plan does not provide a clear overview of priorities and the activities it outlines are not always directly related to raising standards. Governors are very supportive but have also challenged school leaders about standards and achievement. They have backed up their concerns by strengthening the roles of the leadership team because planning for the new building is taking up much of the headteacher's time.

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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?	3
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	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
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
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	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?	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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

My colleague and I thoroughly enjoyed our recent visit to St Thomas. Thank you very much for your warm and friendly welcome. Particular thanks should go to those of you who gave up some of your lunchtime to help us understand what it is like to be a pupil at your school. It was great to hear you describe it as 'fun and exciting.'

Your school provides a satisfactory quality of education and there are many things to celebrate. One of the things that many of you and your parents are really pleased about is the friendliness and helpfulness of staff. We agree that they provide you with good quality care and support. This is particularly important since so many of you arrive at different times throughout the year, some of you at a very early stage of learning English. We were impressed by how well you all help each other to settle in and get along with each other. This means you have a very happy community in which to learn. You make the expected rate of progress with your learning. You enjoy your lessons because teachers give you interesting things to do. They make the point of each lesson clear but we have suggested that they should also make sure that the WILF relates closely to the WALT. We have also asked them to make sure that their marking helps you understand more clearly how to improve your work.

Your headteacher and other staff work very hard to make sure that you feel settled and happy in school. To help them make sure that you also achieve well with your work, we have asked them to use the information they are building up about your progress to plan lessons and activities that offer you enough of a challenge for you to reach higher standards. We have also suggested that when they plan for school improvement, they make sure that what they plan is likely to help you achieve more highly.

Your jobs will be to continue to enjoy your time at school and to try to attend as regularly as possible so you don't miss out on the fun or important bits of learning.