

St Thomas's CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111318
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	310563
Inspection date	22 February 2008
Reporting inspector	John Ashton

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	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	232
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Michael Ridley
Headteacher	Mrs Diana Rainey
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	Parkgate Road Stockton Heath Warrington Cheshire WA4 2AP
Telephone number	01925 268722
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the effectiveness of teaching and learning; the reasons for the relative decline in achievement in some areas in recent years; and the effectiveness of leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, national assessment data and the school's own assessment records. School policies and the headteacher's reports to governors were examined, along with a range of pupils' written work. There were interviews with senior and middle leaders, pupils, governors and an officer from the local authority. Lessons were observed in each class and returns from the parents' questionnaire were analysed. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but were explored sufficiently with the school to enable agreement over the remaining judgements in the report.

Description of the school

St Thomas's is a broadly average sized primary school with a separate Nursery class.

It draws its pupils from a mixed but generally above average socio-economic catchment area. An average proportion of the pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A well below average proportion is eligible for free school meals. The large majority of the pupils are White British and there are no pupils for whom English is not their first language. The school has the National Healthy Schools Award, the Basic Skills Quality Mark 2 and Activemark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The friendly staff and lively, cheerful and well behaved children are the first impressions the visitor receives of this school, which provides a good level of education for its pupils and good value for money overall.

Progress is generally good from the children's starting points on entry to the school to the time they leave in Year 6, when standards are above average overall. In recent years, standards have usually been significantly above average at the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2. There was a temporary dip in standards in writing and mathematics, though not in reading, in Key Stage 1 in 2006 before standards bounced back again in 2007. Standards in Key Stage 2 have fluctuated a little, but were significantly above average overall from 2003 through to 2006, before dipping to an average level in 2007, largely due to weaker performance in science. Science results have been declining steadily for the past three years and in 2007, they dipped below the national average. Reasons for this include the use of inappropriate resources and weaknesses in the approach to teaching and learning in science with the older pupils in Key Stage 2. The school is aware of this and is taking steps to rectify it.

This said, the quality of teaching and learning is generally good and some of it is outstanding, in every section in the school. The work is almost always well matched to pupils' individual needs, except in science lessons for the older pupils. The assessment of pupils' work is a strength of the school. It is generally positive and supportive and, at its best, gives reasons why the standard of pupils' work is good and ways in which it could be even better.

The pupils interviewed spoke of how much they love the teaching they receive and of how their teachers make the work interesting and enjoyable, especially since the arrival of the electronic 'smart' boards in the classrooms. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in the well above average levels of attendance. Pupils also say that they feel safe and think their school is healthier than it used to be and has more activities than it used to have. Relationships are excellent. Attitudes to learning are very positive. Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is a considerable strength. The pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education and their contribution to the school community is good. For example, older children help the younger ones in all kinds of ways.

Parents are very supportive of the school. Typical comments include praise for the welcoming approach from staff, the vibrant community spirit and the way some of the teaching makes learning such fun. Additional comments make reference to the school turning children into caring and responsible young people.

The school's curriculum has breadth and its balance has recently been improved by adding a further learning session to the morning timetable, effectively increasing the time devoted to subjects beyond English, mathematics and science. Modern foreign languages are being taught to more and more pupils. Information and communication technology was seen being used to very good effect in a numeracy session, making excellent use of some very flexible software and of the school's impressive computer provision.

Pupils are well cared for. They know who to turn to if they need help. They are well supervised at break-times. Staff safeguarding checks fulfil government guidelines. The monitoring of pupils' academic progress is well established and generally working well.

The school is well led by a perceptive and positive partnership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher. School self-evaluation is generally accurate, if a little too generous in some respects. Monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and of pupils' progress across the school has not been frequent or sharp enough to pick up the need for a more effective approach in science towards the end of Key Stage 2. The school has a good capacity to improve and this is demonstrated clearly by recent developments in the Nursery and by the success of the whole school drive to improve the quality of pupils' writing.

Governors are knowledgeable, well aware of the strengths and weaknesses across the school and hence recognise the significance of the headteacher's drive to bring about the changes needed to reverse the recent downturn in results at the end of Key Stage 2. Along with the school's new senior leadership, the governors are aware that teachers specialising for too long with particular year groups is a mixed blessing and not always to the benefit of pupils in the long term. The school's finances are relatively healthy and surpluses have been spent wisely on, for example, improving the school's internal provision and external environment.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage has improved since the last inspection and is now developing into a significant strength following a short period of instability. It is notable for the effective teamwork of its staff, its splendid environment and its warm, child-centred approach. This is giving the children a tremendous boost to the development of their self-confidence and a thoroughly good start to their school career. Children enter with slightly better than expected skill levels for their age. By the time they join Year 1 they have achieved their early learning goals, particularly in communication, language and literacy and in mathematical development. Worthy of particular note is the integration of some Nursery and Reception children during sessions when learning how to link letters and sounds, which is working particularly well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' standards and achievement in science at Key Stage 2.
- Increase the frequency and rigour of the monitoring of the teaching and learning across the school.

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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 ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	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?	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	3
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

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

Thank you for making me so welcome on my recent visit when I came to inspect your school. As I dipped in to each classroom in turn, I was impressed by how easy it was to discuss your work with so many of you. I particularly enjoyed the assembly the Mayor took part in, especially the quality of your singing.

A very special thank you should go to the interesting group of children who gave up part of their lunchtime to talk to me and tell me how happy they were at St Thomas's and of some of the interesting changes since they came to the school. They mentioned, especially, the new classroom layout in the juniors and the good effect the new electronic 'smart' boards are having upon lessons, making so much of the learning even more interesting.

I can see why you are so pleased to attend St Thomas's. It is giving you a good all round education. You are all well cared for and receive such effective teaching. It was pleasing to see how hard you work, how good your overall attendance is and the good progress you are making in almost every area of your work.

Standards in science have fallen in recent years, especially in 2007, and so I have asked your headteacher and teachers to do all they can to raise them again. I have also asked your headteacher to check more often and more closely on lessons to see that you are doing as well as you can in all aspects of your work.

You can play your part by continuing to work as hard and always taking your learning as seriously as I saw you doing.

I wish you all continued success in the future.