

St Thomas Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113085
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	311100
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Rowena Onions

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	184
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Wendy Rakestrow
Headteacher	David Pugh
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2003
School address	Union Street Exeter EX2 9BB
Telephone number	01392 276854
Fax number	01392 439876

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

In this average size school, almost all pupils are of White British origin. An average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Attainment on entry to the school is below that expected for children's ages. In 2005, the school changed from a first school to being designated as an all through primary. An additional year group has been added each year since then. The current year (2007–8) is the first that the school has had Year 6 pupils.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Thomas Primary School is a good school. Good leadership has ensured that the challenges presented as the school has grown from being a first school to taking the full primary age range have been successfully managed.

Good teaching means that pupils make good progress. Reception class children receive a good start, especially in learning to enjoy school and to work independently as well as with adults. School improvement work has ensured a consistent approach to teaching and learning. This has meant progress in writing and mathematics has accelerated and is good. Pupils in Years 1, 2 and 3 are making good progress in reading. However, those in Years 4, 5 and 6 are making only satisfactory progress because they do not have regular opportunity to learn and practise reading skills within a small group. Even so, standards are broadly average by the end of Year 6 and this shows good achievement from when children first start at school.

Pupils are happy and friendly. They like school and are keen to join in with whatever is provided. The vast majority behave well in lessons and around the school. The school is very successful in assisting those who find controlling their behaviour difficult, to gradually learn to do so. Pupils are well managed in class and because the curriculum is broad and stimulating, and because activities are interesting and interactive, levels of enthusiasm for learning and concentration are good. Good care is taken to ensure that pupils have good knowledge of how to keep themselves healthy and safe.

For both parents and pupils, a key success of the school is the development of a sense of community. Others agreed when one pupil commented, 'We are just like a family here'. As a result, pupils feel safe and secure. Pupils are active in working towards this sense of community by supporting each other well in class and at play. They work through their School Council to make improvements, for example suggesting a 'friendship bench' for the playground. Pupils' understanding of community outside the school and their homes is, however, less secure and they do not have sufficient knowledge of the different ways of life and cultures of others living in Great Britain.

The school gathers a great deal of information about the attainment and progress of individual pupils. This is used well to set challenging targets and to plan additional work as required. As a result, lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. Their progress is assisted by the well-targeted use in lessons of the good skills of teaching assistants. All pupils are aware of their targets and what they need to try to achieve over time. Currently, however, there is variability in the quality and consistency of marking. As a result, pupils are not always aware of the day-to-day steps they need to take to improve.

The headteacher provides good leadership. The relatively new senior leadership team has been trained and developed to enable it to successfully lead school improvement. The consistency of approach to teaching is a positive result of the actions of this team. For example, in all lessons, pupils are encouraged to develop thinking skills, for instance through problem solving, and to become reflective and self-evaluative through assessing their own learning at the end of each lesson. This, together with the emphasis on cooperative working and the development of basic skills, is setting pupils on the right path to future economic well-being. The strength of the leadership team, the impact of recent improvement work and the support of the governing body mean the school has good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children in the Reception class make good progress from a below average starting point. They benefit from a good curriculum that gives them opportunity to work with adults and with other children, with a good balance of adult direction and freedom to choose. There are good opportunities planned for children to work outdoors as well as inside. Teaching is good. Relationships are strong and children are happy and settled. Most are set to achieve the goals set for this age of child. Good leadership has ensured that relative weaknesses have been identified and addressed. For example, the school identified that some of the assessments made in the past were not as accurate as they should have been and action has been taken to remedy this. Current assessments are accurate. Although induction procedures are good, the school has correctly identified a need to develop further relationships with linked pre-school providers.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Improve progress in reading by ensuring that all pupils have regular opportunities to be taught reading skills as part of a small group.
- Improve the quality and consistency of marking so that pupils have better understanding of how to improve.
- Develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of the differing lives and cultures of others living in Great Britain.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school is working hard to raise standards. Data are used well to identify weaknesses in progress and performance. The leadership team took very seriously the dip in Year 2 standards in 2007 and took robust action to improve. In mathematics and writing, pupils are now attaining average standards in both Year 2 and Year 6, but year on year, more pupils are reaching standards expected for their age and more are exceeding them. Achievement is good. Pupils in Year 3 have made a good start in making up lost ground. Standards in reading at the end of Year 2 are average and pupils have made good progress. Older pupils, particularly those with higher attainments, have made only satisfactory progress because, although they have been taught more advanced reading skills, they have not had sufficient opportunity to work in a small group to practise these. Higher attaining pupils have made good progress in writing and mathematics. Progress in science is satisfactory throughout the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' enthusiasm for school is evident in the way they talk about what they do. 'Lessons are fun, we do things like playing games and working things out, that make you understand better'. Moral and social development is good. Pupils talk about the way people help each other and often help to sort out upsets in the playground. Friendship is greatly valued and the school is a harmonious community. Pupils realise the need to learn about the cultures and ways of life of others, 'so we understand and don't offend people', but their knowledge of a range of different ways of life is relatively slim. Although pupils know that food and exercise is important

to their health, many admit that they do not always apply what they know to their everyday lives. The school is continuing to work on this weaker aspect of personal development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The most significant positive aspect of teaching is the consistency that is evident between teachers and classes. Lessons are interactive and interesting, often requiring pupils to think deeply. Because work is often practical, pupils see the relevance of what they are learning and so are prepared to try hard and concentrate well. Teachers plan well for the differing needs of pupils in their class and deploy other adults well to assist with this. Teaching assistants are trained well and contribute significantly to pupils' progress. Pupils are managed effectively. A consistency of approach helps them behave well and this has a particularly positive effect on those with more difficulty controlling themselves. A very good start has been made in helping pupils to assess the quality of their own work, meaning they are increasingly self-critical. Work is regularly marked but teachers do not always make clear to pupils where they have successes and what they could do to make improvements. Parents are given good information about how they can support their child but not all play as full a part as they might.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and stimulating. The school has been successful in developing the curriculum to meet the needs of the additional year groups. Structures effectively underpin the teaching of literacy and numeracy and the school has begun to move to a curriculum that looks more closely at developing pupils' skills across all subjects. Teachers already link learning in one subject with that in others, making the whole more interesting to pupils. Pupils greatly appreciate the first-hand learning they get through visits and from visitors into school. This enriches their experiences, as do the opportunity to learn French and the good range of after-school clubs. The curriculum to support pupils' personal development is good and has good effect.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils receive good quality personal care and support and this feature of the school is held in high regard by parents. Every care is taken to ensure pupils' safety and well-being. More troubled pupils are supported well. Good procedures for the identification of additional needs and good relationships with outside agencies help pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make good progress. Academic guidance is effective. Pupils' progress is tracked and the information used well in designing additional programmes of work as well as to set challenging targets. The school is rapidly developing links with the secondary school where the majority of the pupils will transfer this year. These links are, however, very new and the school is rightly seeking to develop them further.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and senior staff are effective leaders. The headteacher has supported staff well during the significant ongoing changes and has strengthened the role undertaken by senior staff, thus maintaining school stability. The school's self-evaluation processes, including robust ongoing checking of teaching and learning and the good use of data, are accurate. Consequently, the school knows its own strengths and weaknesses and takes effective action to improve. Progress data is comprehensive and used well. However, it is somewhat complex and lacks a simple overview. This makes its use, for example by governors, more difficult than it might be. Overall governance is satisfactory and there is strong governance provided by some more experienced governors. However, a number of new governors have been appointed very recently, and the school has identified a need to provide them with training to enable them to fulfil their role in holding the school to account. Parents are highly supportive of 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?	3
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	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	3
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	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	3
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

27 June 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St Thomas Primary School, Exeter, EX2 9BB

We really enjoyed our two days at your school and would like to thank you for your help and friendly conversations. I know you will be pleased to know that we think yours is a good school.

This is what we liked most about your school.

- Reception class children are helped to enjoy being in school.
- Most of you make good progress in learning to write and in mathematics.
- You learn to get on well with each other.
- Your teachers and helpers work hard to help you to learn.
- There is a good range of exciting and interesting activities provided for you by your teachers and helpers that help you enjoy your time in school.
- Everyone in your school is working together to make it even better.
- Adults take good care to make sure you are happy, safe and well.

To make things even better, this is what we have asked your school to do now.

- Help the older pupils to make better progress in reading by giving them more opportunities to read in a group.
- Make sure that marking is clear in telling you how you can improve your work.
- Increase your knowledge of the way of life and cultures of different groups of people in Great Britain.

Through your School Council, you can help the teachers to do this.

Once again, thank you. I know that you will continue to try hard to do well.

Best Wishes

Yours sincerely

Rowena Onions Lead inspector