

# St Thomas' CofE (A) Primary School

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 124380        |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | Staffordshire |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 314910        |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 2 July 2008   |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | Graham Sims   |

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>                | 4-11   |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                   | Mixed  |
| <b>Number on roll</b>                     |  |
| School                                    | 189  |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>              | The governing body                                     |
| <b>Chair</b>                              | David Shemilt  |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                        | Lynne Williamson                                       |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b> | 30 June 2003   |
| <b>School address</b>                     | Poplar Drive<br>Kidsgrove<br>Stoke-on-Trent<br>ST7 4HT |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                   | 01782 787099   |
| <b>Fax number</b>                         | 01782 783540   |

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|--------------------------|-------------|
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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 quality of teaching and learning, particularly at Key Stage 1

the development of pupils' writing skills

the academic guidance provided for pupils through assessment, the setting of targets and the marking of pupils' work

the planning of the curriculum and the use of information and communication technology

the leadership and management of subject coordinators.

Evidence was gathered from observations of pupils at work and play, discussions with staff, governors and pupils, scrutiny of pupils' work and an analysis of parents' views. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

St Thomas CE Primary School is an average size school. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school has a small unit for hearing impaired pupils from North Staffordshire. At the time of the inspection, the unit was catering for four pupils. A new headteacher joined the school in January 2008.

## 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 CE Primary School is a good school. Walking through the doors, it is easy to see why parents like the school so much. Bright, stimulating and creative displays in the corridors and classrooms give the message that learning is fun. Some of the three-dimensional artwork on display is exceptional. The pupils are polite and welcoming and clearly enjoy being at school. The parent who wrote, 'The school has a very encouraging and stimulating environment' was certainly correct in her evaluation. The pupils also achieve well academically. Children enter the school with a range of skills that are fairly typical for their age and leave school with above average standards in English, mathematics and science.

The quality of teaching and learning, the range of curricular opportunities and the care, guidance and support are all good. But there is significant variation in the quality of the provision, ranging from practice which has clearly identifiable areas for improvement to outstanding practice which enthuses the pupils and enables them to make excellent progress. In the best practice, the teaching is brought alive through fast-paced lessons, challenging tasks and stimulating activities. Subject boundaries are blurred so that key literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills are consolidated through topics. These topics engage pupils' interest, broaden their general knowledge, lead to high quality work and enable pupils to make great strides in their learning. At the other end of the spectrum, the pace of lessons is too slow, not enough attention is given to the differing abilities of pupils and too much time is spent completing worksheets which offer little challenge or interest for the pupils. Similar variations apply to the curriculum and to the academic guidance given to pupils. Staff have embraced the decision to develop a cross-curricular approach to teaching and this is achieved very successfully in the majority of classes, with pupils completing a wide range of work in all subjects. In some classes, the marking of pupils' work is regular, detailed and helpful, and pupils have a clear idea of what they need to do to improve in every subject. Elsewhere, pupils are given insufficient feedback on the quality of their work and too many mistakes are left uncorrected.

This unevenness in provision results in differing rates of progress as pupils move through the school. After a good start in the Reception class, pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 1. Standards for the current Year 2 are just above average in reading and mathematics, but they are below average in writing. At Key Stage 2, the 2007 results were above average, but lower than the previous three years when standards were exceptionally high in mathematics and science. Standards have risen again in 2008 and are well above average in science and mathematics and above average in English. Pupils' writing skills have improved significantly from Key Stage 1, but are still weaker than their reading skills. In other areas of the curriculum, pupils' involvement in extra art activities leads to some high-quality work. A large number of pupils enjoy musical activities, such as singing in the choir or playing a musical instrument, and many enjoy the range of sporting activities which are on offer. Pupils also really enjoy the wide variety of school trips which take place each term for each year group. The school provides good support for hearing-impaired pupils and those with learning difficulties which enables them to make good progress along with their peers.

The pastoral care, the Christian ethos of the school and the good partnership with parents are significant strengths which contribute strongly to pupils' good personal development and well-being and their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Christian worship and opportunities to express the Christian faith through dance, music and prayer are clearly important aspects of school life. There are differences, however, in the quality of pupils' personal

development, reflecting the uneven quality of teaching and curricular provision. Where the teaching is most engaging, pupils' attitudes to school, their response to learning and their behaviour are excellent. They work hard and collaborate with each other. One girl explained how her teacher moves pupils around so that they have to work with people who are not their closest friends. In this way, she explained, 'We all learn how to work together and to get on with each other. It's really good.' Pupils undertake a wide range of responsibilities which they fulfil conscientiously, but there is scope for these responsive and mature young people to be trusted with even greater responsibility and to have more opportunities to exercise their initiative. Where the teaching is not so engaging, the pupils still behave well, but they are less attentive and do not display the same enthusiasm for their work as others. The school provides a wide range of learning opportunities which enable pupils to develop an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe. There is also a good emphasis on developing pupils' understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles, but not all pupils make healthy food choices at lunch or break times. With their very good social skills and above average academic standards, pupils are well prepared for their future education and the later world of work.

The school is led and managed well. The transition from the previous headteacher to the new incumbent has been managed smoothly. The good teamwork of the staff and their willingness to try out new ideas continue to be strong features of the school. Governors are supportive and lend important expertise in areas such as financial management. The new headteacher has very quickly gained a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development, and sensible priorities have been agreed for the future. The focus for this year has been to develop the quality of pupils' writing and to implement a more creative curriculum. Whilst good progress has been made in some classes, implementation has not been monitored closely enough resulting in the uneven practice. Nevertheless, all of the positive features of the school, the continued quest for improvement and the expertise which is clearly evident amongst the staff indicate that there is good capacity for the school to continue improving.

## **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

Children receive a good start to their education in the Reception class. They make good progress in their first year in school, so that standards are above average by the time they enter Year 1. They make particularly good progress in their personal, social and emotional development, quickly developing their self-confidence and a very good awareness of how to behave appropriately within the school setting. For a few children, however, their skills in communication, language and literacy are weak when they start school and, despite improvements, remain the weakest area of learning when they start Year 1. The children benefit from good teaching from an experienced teacher and capable support staff. The colourful and varied displays in the classroom and the wide range of resources bear testimony to the rich curriculum provided for the children. The attractive outdoor environment is used well as an integral part of the curriculum. Children's progress is monitored carefully. The Foundation Stage provision is led and managed well, and parents appreciate the good links which are forged between home and school.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve the quality of teaching in the few areas where it does not match that seen in most classes, paying particular attention to the pace of lessons, the level of challenge provided for all pupils and ensuring that planned activities engage pupils' interest and attention.

- Raise pupils' achievement in writing, particularly in Key Stage 1, improving, where necessary, the use of cross-curricular work to consolidate pupils' writing skills and the feedback given to pupils when marking their work.

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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 |
|---|----------------|

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

<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

Dear Children

Inspection of St Thomas CE Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST7 4HT

I really enjoyed my visit to your school the other day. I would particularly like to thank those of you who took the time to talk to me and tell me what it is like to be a pupil at St Thomas. You said that yours is a good school, and I agree with you. These are the main findings of my visit.

- You make good progress in English, mathematics and science, and the standards you reach towards the top end of the school are better than in many schools.
- You are polite, friendly and considerate, and you behave well.
- Much of the teaching you receive is good and some of the teaching is outstanding. You really enjoy this sort of teaching.
- Some of the teaching is not quite as good. Some lessons move too slowly and do not interest you or challenge you enough.
- The school is very good at helping you understand how to keep yourselves safe.
- The school is also trying to show you how to lead healthy lifestyles, although not all of you choose to eat healthily at lunch or break times.
- The range of learning activities and extra-curricular clubs is good, and you particularly enjoy the school trips which you have each term.
- There is some wonderful artwork on display around the school, and it is good to see so many of you participating in musical activities.
- The staff take care of you well.
- Under your new headteacher, the staff are working together well and trying hard to make your school even better than it is at present.

In order to help the school improve, I have asked the headteacher to make sure that you are challenged and given interesting work in every lesson. I have also asked the staff to help you to improve your writing as, for many of you, this is still the weakest aspect of your work.

I hope that you will continue to play your part in making St Thomas even better by working hard and striving to reach the highest possible standards in your work.

Yours sincerely

Mr Graham Sims Lead inspector

3 July 2008



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Lead inspector