

St Thomas's C of E Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112322
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	318530
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Gillian Salter-Smith

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	212
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Canon Tim Montgomery
Headteacher	Mr Paul Brown
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2007
School address	Kendal Green Kendal Cumbria LA9 5PP
Telephone number	01539 737373
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Pupils in this average sized school are mostly from White British backgrounds. Of the very small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, a few are in the early stages of learning English. An average proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. A well above average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A new, experienced headteacher was appointed in September 2007.

When this school was inspected in March 2007 it was judged to require special measures and since then it has been monitored regularly by inspectors.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

St Thomas's C of E is a good school. Improvements made since the Section 5 inspection, particularly in the quality of teaching, leadership and governance, have resulted in significant acceleration of pupils' progress. The new headteacher's strong and experienced leadership increased the rate of improvement considerably. Staff and governors now share a common purpose and are fully committed to ensuring that every child's needs are met and that pupils are well supported in their learning and personal development. The local authority has provided effective support which has decreased in line with the school's increasing capability to manage its own improvement. Skilled and capable senior staff, well supported by all other staff, ensure that the school has good capacity to improve further. Not all subject leaders have fully developed the skills needed to check on and bring about improved achievement.

Good teaching, care and support, together with an effective curriculum, help pupils to make good progress and to achieve well. A wide range of new and successful teaching approaches is used with good effect throughout the school. Improved systems to assess and track progress, and to set challenging targets to guide learning result in high expectations of pupils and well targeted support. Greater emphasis on developing pupils' speaking, spelling and writing skills is supporting the good progress. Consequently, pupils are on track to exceed their challenging targets by the end of Year 6 and standards are set to rise from the average levels in 2007. Progress is slower for some pupils at the beginning of Key Stage 1 who sometimes struggle with work that is pitched at a level that is too high for them.

Parents are supportive of the school and in particular appreciate the care and support the school provides. Strong Christian values underpin the school's work and help to provide an environment in which every child, whatever their circumstances, are nurtured and helped to do their best. Pupils enjoy school and are eager to learn. They feel valued, safe and happy in school. They understand how to stay safe and healthy and many make the most of the host of extra activities, especially to pursue their interests in sport and the performing arts. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and the wider community. They take their jobs and responsibilities seriously. They enjoy raising funds for charities and understand how this can help others less fortunate than themselves. Pupils' increasingly mature approach to their studies and their secure skills in literacy and numeracy prepare them well for the next stage of their education.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The well managed Reception class ensures children settle into school quickly and make good progress. Children join the school with levels of development that are broadly typical for their age. However, many have weaknesses in their language and mathematical skills that are successfully remedied in this class. By the time they enter Year 1, children's overall standards are in line with those expected for their age. Staff work enthusiastically and successfully to give children a welcoming environment that encourages them to learn. Teachers' planning and assessment make good use of national guidance about how children of this age develop. This ensures enjoyable and purposeful tasks, carefully adapted to enable all children to develop

well. Children respond well to good teaching, care and support and soon show confidence in following established routines. They feel safe and secure as they develop their personal and social skills and are well prepared for the next stage of their learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the skills of more subject leaders to enable them to take greater responsibility for improving pupils' achievement.
- Ensure that learning activities are matched carefully to pupils' individual needs as they move from Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Well focused action taken by a highly committed team of staff has brought about rapid improvements in the rate of pupils' progress and overall standards in English, mathematics and science. Inspection evidence confirms the school's secure view that pupils are on track to exceed their challenging targets by end of Year 6. Pupils' progress is good overall, though slower for some pupils at the start of Key Stage 1 who sometimes struggle with work that is pitched at a level that is too high for them.

The 2007 Year 2 and Year 6 test results were significantly better than in the previous year and were broadly average. Year 6 test results in mathematics and science were stronger than in English. Standards in Year 6 are securely on course to rise further this year, especially in writing, and in the proportion of pupils reaching above average levels.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those in the early stages of learning English make equally good progress as others because they receive well planned additional support from teachers and well qualified teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy learning because teachers make it fun. They particularly enjoy the special times when they concentrate on their writing, the 'Big Writing' time, saying it helps them to do their best work. Pupils feel happy in school and they know they can get help from adults if they have any worries. Behaviour is good overall, though occasional squabbles in the playground are not always sorted out quickly enough. Many pupils enjoy the good range of extra-curricular activities. The large group preparing to dance at a local festival were excited about the event and working very hard to polish their performance. Pupils know how to stay safe and healthy, and talk about how to be active at playtime and eat sensible lunches and snacks.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils appreciate the quiet times during school and class assemblies, and are eager to contribute to them. Many activities help pupils to understand different cultures and help them to contribute to the school community. However, pupils have little opportunity to communicate and form friendships with children from different cultures. Pupils are eager to suggest and bring about changes through the school council. Pupils' developing maturity and sense of responsibility prepare them well for the next stage of their education. Rates of attendance are broadly average and are adversely affected by holidays taken in term time and a small number of pupils with long-term illness.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers' positive relationships with pupils encourage good learning. Good routines and organisation in lessons ensure that little time is wasted. Improved assessment systems give a clear picture of how well individual pupils are doing. This information is usually used well to take account of pupils' different abilities and different ways of learning in lessons. Occasionally, the information is not used well enough to promote good learning for all pupils. Teachers make clear to pupils what they will be learning and frequent checks on progress mean that the pace of learning in most lessons is brisk. The marking of pupils' work is detailed and helpful, although pupils do not always have the chance to respond and make improvements to their work.

New and successful teaching approaches are used with good effect. For example, pupils' speaking and listening skills are developed through more opportunities to discuss with partners. Consequently, pupils gain confidence in explaining their thinking and sharing their ideas. Teaching assistants work closely with teachers and have a positive effect on the rate of pupils' learning. This is particularly so in phonics lessons where pupils of different ages but similar needs are taught together.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum supports pupils' good progress. Innovations, such as the short daily sessions to develop all pupils' phonic skills, are developing confidence in spelling and reading, and are really enjoyed by pupils. More opportunities for pupils to use their writing skills in other subjects are helping to raise standards. The needs of pupils of different abilities are generally met well. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are carefully and successfully supported. Effective links with the local secondary school provide extension and support for higher attaining pupils, especially in mathematics. Some pupils in Key Stage 1 are less well supported because their work does not build well enough on their progress in the Reception class.

Visits and visitors enrich learning experiences and a wide range of extra activities assist pupils' good personal development. Pupils have lots of chances to take part in sports, music and dance activities, often in competition or in performances.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Effective arrangements are in place to ensure the health and safety of pupils and a high standard of care and support. The school works very well with outside agencies and parents to maintain pupils' well-being. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and child protection are in place. The school's support for pupils' personal and social development is very effective and underpins the strong pastoral care for each individual. Revised and improved systems to track pupils' progress provide accurate records of how well pupils are doing through the school. Teachers use this information to identify and support any underachievement quickly, and to provide challenging targets to guide learning. Strong systems to support pupils' academic and emotional development are well established and effective. Pupils appreciate the many adults to whom they can turn if they have problems.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors, well supported by staff across the school, have been successful in bringing about improvements. The commitment and drive of the new and experienced headteacher have helped to improve the rate of improvement significantly. The good support from the local authority has decreased as staff and leaders have gained confidence in their ability to maintain good teaching and sustain good progress.

The school set itself challenging academic targets to ensure that pupils catch up on previous underachievement and it is well on the way to achieving them. Improved systems to assess and track progress and well focused targets to guide learning have been key ingredients in increasing the expectations of teachers and the rate of pupils' progress. The improved monitoring of progress and teaching has contributed to increasingly accurate self-evaluation and identification of the right priorities for improvement. However, not all subject leaders have fully developed the skills needed to take on responsibility for monitoring and improving achievement. Governors have strengthened their monitoring role considerably and are increasingly effective in holding the school to account and supporting improvements. Financial management is secure and value for money is good.

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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	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?	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	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

14 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas's C of E Primary School, Cumbria, LA9 5PP

Thank you so much for your friendliness and welcome on the three occasions that the inspectors and I have visited your school. It is important that you know what we have found out about your school and what we shall be reporting to your parents.

All the staff in your school have worked very hard to improve your school over the past year. They have succeeded and St Thomas's is now a good school. You are now making good progress because you are well taught, you enjoy learning and the staff make sure that all of you get the care, support and extra help you need to do well. You are now achieving well

All of you are a credit to the school. You are developing into mature and responsible young people who want to help out around the school and enjoy supporting others. It was good to hear about the fundraising you have been doing for people less fortunate than yourselves. Many of you enjoy the wide range of extra activities, especially those in sport that help you to keep healthy. I thoroughly enjoyed watching the dancers rehearsing for their performance. I do hope that it went well.

Everybody, including governors, want to do all that they can to help you to enjoy school and to do well. They have agreed with us that some pupils struggle to do as well as they could do when they move from the Reception class into Key Stage 1. The school is going to look at ways to help these children to build on the good start they made in the Reception class.

In order to improve as quickly as your school has, some of the senior teachers and leaders have become very good at spotting what could be better and what needs to be done about it. The school is going to help more of the staff to be able to do this so that things get better for you in every part of the school.

You can help by continuing to work hard in lessons. Do carry on making the most of the extra activities in sport, dance and especially music! I wish you well for the future and hope you enjoy the rest of your time at St Thomas's.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Salter Smith

Lead inspector