

St Thomas's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 105322 |
| Local Authority | Bury |
| Inspection number | 324201 |
| Inspection date | 27 January 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Kathleen McArthur |

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of pupils | 5–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 249 |
| Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS | 0 |
| Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years | 0 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Judith Jones |
| Headteacher | Mrs S Farnworth |
| Date of previous school inspection | 28 June 2006 |
| Date of previous funded early education inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Date of previous childcare inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | Pimhole Road Bury Lancashire BL9 7EY |
| Telephone number | 0161 764 7565 |

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|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Age group | 5–11 |
| Inspection date | 27 January 2009 |
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Fax number

0161 763 6269

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement, the quality of teaching and learning and provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, national published and school assessment data and classroom observations. Discussions were held with staff, pupils and governors, and parents' questionnaires were scrutinised. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, given in its self-evaluation were not justified.

Description of the school

The school is of average size and serves an area significantly affected by social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is higher than average. The number of pupils has increased since the previous inspection and almost all are of Pakistani heritage: a very high proportion is at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average, and the number with a statement of special need is very high. The Early Years Foundation Stage provides a Nursery and Reception class. Four new staff have recently been appointed.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with outstanding features in pupils' personal development, the care, guidance and support provided, the curriculum and the Early Years Foundation Stage. Many parents made very positive comments about the school saying, 'Staff are open, friendly and approachable'. Excellent relationships between the school, faith groups and external agencies form a strong, supportive framework for pupils so they live and learn happily together in a harmonious community.

Achievement is good: from typically well below expected levels on entry into school, standards are broadly average when pupils leave school in Year 6. Even so, there are inconsistencies in pupils' progress. Achievement is consistently good in science, but variable in English and mathematics. Limited language skills hinder progress in English, particularly in writing; pupils do not have a broad knowledge of vocabulary or sentence structure. In Key Stage 1, standards are below average, representing satisfactory progress given pupils' starting points. They have a lot of ground to cover to gain vital language skills: an increasing proportion have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Progress accelerates rapidly in Year 6 due to strong teaching. School data shows signs of improved progress, especially in mathematics, but actions to improve writing have not yet made a full impact throughout the school. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress well because they receive skilled support and are fully included in all activities.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. All faith groups worship and celebrate major festivals together. Pupils fully understand the difference between right and wrong, know well how to look after their health and eagerly participate in physical activities. They feel safe at school, and one said, 'The teachers don't let us out of their sight', and 'there is always an adult to talk to'. Excellent behaviour supports class work and pupils appreciate the school rules. Pupils have a voice in this school and contribute very strongly to their community. They apply and are interviewed for responsibility posts and are proud to be appointed. School councillors consider pupils' suggestions and say, 'We see if we can make them happen'. Visits and projects widen pupils' experiences and cultural development very effectively. The school prepares pupils well for their future.

The quality of teaching is good overall, ranging from satisfactory to outstanding. Pupils enjoy their lessons and most learn well. Examples of outstanding teaching were seen, where pupils progressed rapidly. In an outstanding literacy lesson, imaginative use of film really grabbed pupils' attention as they became detectives, investigating a missing class member, successfully extending their skills in reading and writing. Most lessons are well planned, encourage pupils to aim high and use resources effectively. Skilled teaching assistants provide valuable support. The outstandingly rich curriculum provides an excellent programme for personal development and is very responsive to local needs. Priority is given to basic skills, especially in English, but other subjects are not neglected. Staff often link subjects together so learning is active and interesting. For example, in a literacy lesson pupils used computers to research animal habitats. Excellent attention to equal opportunities enables all pupils to participate fully. Adapted work, bi-lingual staff and additional support helps pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those learning English as an additional language. Themed weeks and very productive links with other schools and the local community add enrichment. For example, sharing the Harvest Festival at a village school, sports facilities in the adjoining park and the community farm. Pupils

and parents commented favourably on the many clubs, some of which are held at lunchtime for pupils who cannot stay after school.

Pupils are very well cared for and they show high levels of care and respect towards others. Safeguarding meets current requirements. Language classes involve parents in their children's learning. Academic progress is very thoroughly tracked and monitored to pinpoint where extra help is needed and to set challenging, yet achievable targets. Pupils know their targets and say teachers' marking shows them how to improve their work.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's excellent leadership is dedicated to providing the best education for every pupil. Good support from senior leaders and governors helps to bring about the school's success. The governing body fully represents the local community and has a good working knowledge of the school which is used well to challenge and question. Strategic improvement plans and careful budget management ensure that value for money is good. The good practice in teaching is shared and provides valuable support for new members of staff. The promotion of community cohesion is good, particularly at local level. Robust actions successfully tackled the issue from the previous inspection; attendance rates have risen and are now average, with fewer requests for term-time absence. The leadership team evaluates performance rigorously and accurately. This results in a clear view of the school's strengths and areas for development. Consequently, capacity for further improvement is good.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Over two thirds of the children do not speak English when they enter the Nursery. Children achieve outstandingly well, but by the end of the Reception class, language skills still lag behind and attainment is mostly below the expected levels for their age. Excellent care and welfare arrangements ensure children feel very secure and happy and make excellent progress, especially in their personal development. Outstanding leadership develops children's learning across all areas at the same time. Children enhance their speaking, listening, reading and writing, understanding of number and personal development through all their play experiences. Exemplary teaching is based on excellent knowledge of the individual child. Staff plan activities and use materials that have instant appeal and that challenge children to investigate and learn rapidly. Very well structured lessons boost children's speaking and listening skills supported by imaginative, practical activities. Children often initiate themes, which capture their interest, increase their motivation and promote enjoyment. The bilingual assistant skilfully interprets when needed. Children's behaviour is very good. In the Nursery children sit quietly, listen intently, cooperate and share happily. In the Reception class, the busy atmosphere shows they have made big gains in confidence, independence and friendships. A special focus on writing for boys comes directly from their interests and really motivates them to do better. Learning is seamless between the indoor and outdoor areas so activities commenced inside are fully extended outside.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, particularly in writing.
- Raise the quality of teaching to the best in the school to ensure pupils make consistently good progress.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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? | 1 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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|---|---|
| How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS? | 1 |
| How well do children in the EYFS achieve? | 1 |
| How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS? | 1 |
| How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop? | 1 |
| How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted? | 1 |
| How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed? | 1 |

Achievement and standards

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| 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/or disabilities make progress | 2 |

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| How good are 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 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 3 |
| The behaviour of learners | 1 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 1 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 |

The quality of provision

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| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs? | 2 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 1 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 1 |

Leadership and management

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| 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 eliminated | 1 |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 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**

On behalf of the inspectors I would like to thank you for welcoming us to your school. We really enjoyed meeting you and seeing you enjoying lessons, working hard and playing happily. The head boy and head girl gave us a very interesting tour of the school and Year 4 produced a really good assembly about caring for others. I know you visit the community farm; not many schools are so close to a farm!

I am sending this letter to tell you what we found.

You go to a good school with good leaders and governors. The school has some excellent features.

- The Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Your personal development and well-being.
- The exceedingly rich curriculum.
- The care, guidance and support you receive.
- The way the headteacher leads your school.

You are taught well so you make good progress and attain standards that are about right for your age by the time you leave. You always do well in science. I have asked the school to help you do just as well in English and especially in your writing. Your progress varies from year to year so I have also asked the school to make sure you are always taught well and make good progress through the school.

You told us how much you like school and your parents told us they are pleased with the education and care you receive. You can all be proud of your excellent behaviour and the way you always try to help others.