

St Thomas's CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112322
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	337902
Inspection dates	22–23 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Andrew Scott

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	198
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Maureen Wilson
Headteacher	Mr Paul Brown
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 11 lessons, taught by eight teachers. They observed other activities, including assemblies and play times, and held meetings with governors, staff and pupils. They analysed the school's documentation, data on pupils' progress, welfare arrangements and the 64 questionnaires that were returned by parents and carers, as well as those from pupils in Key Stage 2 and from staff.

- the quality of provision for writing
- the reasons why teaching appears be less effective than other aspects of provision
- the balance of the curriculum and the impact of extra activities and partnerships on pupils' learning and personal development
- the key attributes of aspects that are judged by the school to be outstanding.

Information about the school

This is an average sized school. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Almost all pupils are from White British families. A high percentage has special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school holds a number of awards including the Artsmark, the Healthy Schools Award, the Woodland Trust Gold Award and Forest School status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is a good school. It has a number of outstanding features, especially the quality of care and the supportive ethos that permeate the school. Outstanding leadership, spearheaded by the headteacher, has improved the school rapidly in a comparatively short time. Staff have become highly motivated, skilfully trained and empowered to develop their skills in management and in teaching. As a result, pupils' academic progress has improved distinctly. The school also places great store by developing pupils as rounded personalities. The many activities on offer, the strong community spirit and camaraderie are excellent influences on pupils' personal development and boost their self-esteem emphatically. Parents and carers are delighted with the school.

Standards are now above average by Year 6 and pupils achieve well. Weaknesses in writing have been identified and overcome to a large extent. Teaching is good throughout the school and occasionally even better. Teachers use a good range of strategies to engage and motivate pupils. They use assessment information well to ensure that most learning is progressive and at the right level for the different ability groups. However, their planning is at times somewhat rigid and does not allow pupils to work at their own pace or take enough responsibility for their own learning. There is a good curriculum that focuses tightly on the teaching of basic skills. Teachers are increasingly using all subjects as a platform to improve skills, such as writing, but there is scope to do more of this. The impressive after-school clubs, the excellent links with parents and carers, the local community and with partners further afield, combine to broaden pupils' horizons markedly and develop their individual talents.

The headteacher, very well supported by the deputy headteacher and other senior staff, has sensitively created a feeling of well-being and confidence among everyone connected with the school. He has established an ethos of mutual respect and a strong focus on inclusion and school improvement. Much has been achieved by the school in recent years. For example, actions to bring consistency to teaching and variety to the curriculum have been very effective. All the development plans are comprehensive and clearly very successful, although not all are refined enough to highlight the key priorities. The school is aware of the need to streamline its plans for the future.

Governors are supportive and hardworking but do not monitor the impact of the school's actions enough. The clear improvements to pupils' achievement and quality of care, and the development of excellence in a range of outcomes show that the school has outstanding capacity to sustain further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Improve pupils' standards in English and mathematics by ensuring greater flexibility in teachers' planning in order to:
 - - offer more scope for different ability groups to work at their own pace
 - - encourage all pupils to be more independent in their learning
 - - maximise opportunities to develop basic skills through all subjects.
- Improve the efficiency of the school's improvement process, by:
 - - undertaking more detailed evaluation of the impact of actions taken
 - - ensuring that the governing body is more rigorous in its monitoring of the school's work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils thoroughly enjoy their school and are thrilled by the range of exciting learning experiences they are given. They are very attentive in lessons, are keen to learn and behave well at all times. Sometimes, though, they are too passive and do not take enough of a lead in their own learning. Nevertheless, their positive mentality helps them all to make good progress in their work. Attainment is improving by the end of both key stages, especially in Key Stage 2. Here, standards were average two years ago. In 2009 they improved to above average overall, although English remained average because of issues in writing. Current pupils' work is of a similar standard overall, and attainment levels in English have improved. All pupils achieve equally well, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The high take-up of after-school sports is indicative of pupils' attitudes to leading a healthy lifestyle. They are clear about what constitutes a healthy diet, although not all find it easy to adopt one. Pupils feel extremely safe. They have complete trust in staff and know that any problems are addressed swiftly and decisively. They develop excellent social skills. Through outstanding links with the church, other schools and other cultures, pupils are very thoughtful and aware of the situations of others, in different circumstances from themselves. For example, there is an exchange with a school in Halifax where the majority of the pupils are of Pakistani, Muslim heritage. Pupils fundraise and join in with local community events with great commitment. They have an excellent sense of citizenship especially; their opinions help to influence the development of the school. Their attendance has been steadily improving and is now average.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teachers are clear in their expectations of pupils, explain new concepts well, often with helpful resources and support pupils effectively when they are struggling or uncertain. They usually pitch new work at the right level to match the different abilities of pupils, linked to their prior learning. They generate a positive atmosphere in classrooms and value all contributions, so pupils are relaxed yet focused. Teachers make good use of technology, such as interactive white boards, to explain new learning, but do not routinely enable pupils to develop their own computer skills. Lessons do not always have enough opportunities for pupils to develop their own ideas or allow the different ability groups to work at their own pace.

The overall impact of the curriculum is good, and it has some excellent aspects. In recent years, there has been a big increase of activities, clubs and visits. Most pupils attend residential courses; on average, pupils attend one and half hours of activities after school each week. These range from cookery and choir to meditation and street dance; the Forest School activities add an extra dimension. Outstanding support for pupils' personal and health education is just intrinsic to school life and not only found in special lessons. Lesson planning focuses strongly on English and mathematics and increasingly promotes cross-curricular links to improve these subjects; however, there is clear scope for further improvement. There is very good support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

A sense of care and respect for pupils is everywhere. The formal systems of care that include, for example, the security of the building, are rigorous. Equally importantly, staff are vigilant in identifying individual problems and swift in tackling them, especially those

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involving vulnerable pupils or those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has fostered very close links with families in order to give pupils the best possible support and there are some real success stories. The school has worked hard and successfully to improve attendance and is already considering some good ideas to increase it further next year.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The sharply focused, compassionate yet quietly determined leadership of the headteacher has been crucial to the success of this school. He has raised staff morale significantly, developed their skills apace and encouraged them to play a full role in the school's development. He has been well supported by the local authority. As a result, leadership has become very cohesive and highly effective. Senior staff and teachers with specific responsibilities provide a consistency of approach, with a readiness to adopt new, pertinent initiatives. The resultant benefits in pupils' achievement and personal development are very evident. A wholehearted commitment to equality means that discrimination is non-existent in the school; all pupils are enabled to have the same opportunities to succeed.

The governing body meets its statutory requirements well, including the procedures for safeguarding pupils. Systems for vetting the suitability of staff, for example, and for assessing risks around school are very thorough. The governors regularly monitor the school's activities but do not always evaluate the outcomes enough. Through its development plans, the leadership has introduced many positive changes in recent years. The school recognises that it is time to reflect on which of its actions have had the best impact in order to build on these, rather than consider more initiatives.

Highly beneficial links with parents and carers have resulted in improved home-based learning and considerable support for the most vulnerable pupils. Workshops to improve parents' and carers' own skills to support their children have been popular and very successful. Excellent links beyond the school are typified by its liaison with schools in Ghana, Japan and Ethiopia. The school promotes all strands of community cohesion well. Good links with local organisations, such as an arts centre and agricultural show, for example, improve pupils' social and creative skills. The school's action plan for community cohesion is well focused but not fully linked to analyses of existing provision.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress in the Reception class. They mostly begin school with skills and abilities typical of four-year-olds, although sometimes they are lower than this. Usually, their language skills are underdeveloped for their age. They achieve well and reach levels at least in line with age-related expectations by the end of the Reception Year. Children do especially well in their language development which catches up on the other areas of learning. They make the swiftest progress when the activities and resources combine to stimulate their imagination and give them free rein to experiment; some children made an impressive den in the outdoor area. Teaching is good because staff are aware of how well children are learning and mostly adapt learning opportunities accordingly. However, staff do not always make the most of opportunities to boost basic skills through discussion and timely advice. Children are happy to learn and work well with others. Their behaviour is good; they interact well with one another and keep themselves safe. The excellent quality of care and focus on the welfare of children are on a par with the rest of the school. The skilful leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage ensures that the provision is well organised and has been positively influenced by the adoption of fresh, new ideas.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Through the questionnaires, parents and carers show considerable satisfaction with the school. They say that their children are happy and flourishing in an atmosphere of harmony, trust and empathy. Many are fulsome in their appreciation. In a typical comment, one parent wrote: 'The school is a real family, a community in every sense. It always goes that little bit further than you would expect.' Parents and carers also praise the progress their children make in their academic and personal development, the impact of the headteacher in the improvement of the school, the approachability and commitment of staff and the pupils' interaction with the local community. The inspectors agree with all these views. A very few parents and carers expressed individual concerns, but there were no significant common themes.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas's CofE Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 64 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 198 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	34	74	11	24	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	30	65	16	35	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	26	57	18	39	2	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	57	18	39	2	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	35	76	10	22	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	32	70	13	28	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	54	18	39	3	7	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	31	67	13	28	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	30	65	12	26	4	9	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	27	59	16	35	3	7	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	54	18	39	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	33	72	13	28	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	33	72	12	26	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



24 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas's CofE Primary School, Kendal, LA9 5PP

I am writing to thank you for the part you played in the recent inspection of your school. The other inspectors and I enjoyed our time at St Thomas'. I would like to tell you what we found out.

In short, we think yours is a good school. It has some special qualities that are outstanding. These include the excellent care that all staff take of you. We think your understanding of being safe, your sense of community within school and beyond, and your self-confidence are excellent too. You thoroughly enjoy work, behave well and lead healthy lives. All this is possible because the leaders of your school have done a great job in improving it, especially your headteacher. They have worked very hard to give you lots of benefits, and I know you are very happy with all the different and exciting activities that you do outside lessons.

We are pleased that your progress and the standards of your work have improved, especially in writing. Lessons are interesting; teachers make new learning clear for you and have good expectations of you. Sometimes, they do a bit too much for you and do not allow you to be responsible for your own work or work at your own speed. We would like them to give you more opportunity to improve your basic skills in literacy and numeracy even more in all subjects.

The headteacher, staff and governors have your best interests at heart. They have introduced lots of improvements but know the time is right to think about what has worked best in order to make their future plans even better. We have asked the governors to make doubly sure that all plans are successful. We feel that your school has a bright future and we hope that you will continue to work hard, behave well and become more independent in your learning.

I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mr Andrew Scott

Lead Inspector

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