

St Thomas' Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114563
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	338401
Inspection dates	16–17 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Michael Barron

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	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Katharine Manning
Headteacher	Mary Westhead
Date of previous school inspection	12 December 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons and observed five teachers. They also held meetings with the headteacher and members of the school's senior leadership team, members of the governing body, school staff, groups of pupils and parents and carers. They observed the school's work and looked at school development planning, minutes of governors' meetings, school policies, including those associated with safeguarding procedures, assessment and tracking documentation, pupil records and samples of pupils' work. Inspectors analysed the views of parents and carers in the 35 Ofsted questionnaires returned and the views of staff in 12 returned questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the impact of the school's initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning, especially in Key Stage 1
- the effectiveness of leadership and management, especially that of the headteacher in her dual role as headteacher of another school, and also of the governing body in bringing about school improvement
- the effectiveness of the school's work in promoting community cohesion, especially regarding cultural diversity in modern British society.

Information about the school

This is a smaller-than-average school serving the town of Winchelsea and surrounding areas. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage and very few come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average and the majority of these have moderate learning difficulties. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language is low. There is Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the school's mixed Reception and Year 1 class.

The headteacher is presently leading and managing another primary school on a temporary basis for three days a week.

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

2

Main findings

This is a good school. Parents and carers are positive in their views of the school. One said that she was 'extremely pleased with the school' while others commented about the improved quality of teaching since the arrival of the present headteacher. Inspectors agree with these views. The very effective headteacher, together with her dedicated staff, have focused well on improving the quality of the school's work since the last inspection, especially improving the quality of teaching in Year 1 and Year 2. All staff been effectively backed by the school's governing body. Governors play a full and active part in school affairs and provide a good degree of challenge and support when required. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's work are meticulous and used well to set clear priorities for improvement. As a result, pupils' progress has improved and attainment has risen. The school is well placed to build on its strengths and displays a good capacity for sustained improvement.

Children join the mixed Reception/Year1 class with average skill levels, although aspects of their language development are often below expectations. Children make good progress during their first year in school even though the Early Years Foundation Stage outdoor learning environment is in need of redevelopment and therefore has a limited impact on children's learning. This good start is built on effectively throughout the rest of the school because teaching is good and thoroughly meets pupils' needs. Pupils work hard and achieve well because teachers make lessons interesting and this adds to their enjoyment of learning. As a result, attainment is above average in Year 6 and inspection evidence, supported by school data, confirms that pupils are on target to attain above-average standards in the forthcoming national tests.

Staff are enthusiastic and work together as a team to ensure the school reaches the challenging targets it sets itself. Pupils' attitudes to school are good and this is reflected in their good behaviour but not in their average attendance rates, which are adversely affected by a very small number of pupils taking holidays in term time. The school has implemented several initiatives to improve this situation but these have yet to have the desired effect.

Pupils are keen to talk about the good range of popular extra-curricular activities provided by the school and about school trips to places of interest, such as the British Museum and Battle Abbey. However, although pupils have developed some understanding of the different cultures in other countries, they have little understanding of the multicultural nature of society in the United Kingdom. Pupils find joining in conversations about this difficult through lack of experience. This remains a gap in their learning and affects their understanding of one aspect of community cohesion.

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The school is committed to working in effective partnerships with several outside organisations, including the local cluster of schools. It uses these partnerships well to increase the range of opportunities for pupils to develop socially and academically.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the promotion of community cohesion. In particular, increase pupils' awareness and understanding of cultural diversity in the United Kingdom by providing pupils with regular opportunities to increase their knowledge in this area. (Timescale: end of autumn term 2010)
- Improve pupils' attendance rates by implementing strategies to successfully ensure that the number of pupils taking holidays in term time decreases. (Timescale: autumn term 2010)
- Improve the quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage outdoor learning environment, including providing children with a covered area which can be used in all weather situations. (Timescale: autumn term 2010)

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

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They are keen to learn and say that information and communication technology is their favourite subject. They also say they feel very safe 'especially with that tall black fence round the school' and behave well both in and out of the classroom. They know that sometimes a very small number of pupils find behaving acceptably difficult. However, they are confident that adults will always deal with any rare instances of unkind behaviour quickly and fairly. The quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. However, while aspects of their cultural development are in need of improvement, their spiritual, moral and social development is strong and this is reflected in the way pupils respect and care for others.

Pupils enjoy lessons, especially when teachers use interactive whiteboards to make learning interesting. They work well, both independently and in small groups. Their good attitudes to learning enable teachers to concentrate on helping pupils who are experiencing difficulties. This was the case in a well-taught lesson to Year 3 pupils when the class teacher and teaching assistants had the time to help individual pupils complete poems about Chinese dragons because all the other pupils were working well independently.

Pupils say they really like their teachers because they are 'fun' and 'kind'. They respond well to the friendly and caring approach taken by the school and this adds to their enjoyment of learning. They say that teachers try to make sure that the work pupils are asked to complete in lessons is not too hard or too easy. Inspectors agree that pupils are provided with a suitable level of challenge and this ensures that all, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress.

Pupils are well aware of the importance of exercising regularly and eating healthy foods and understand the reasons why the school is proud to have been awarded Healthy School status. Pupils feel the school council gives them a voice in school affairs and

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older pupils talk with pride about their roles as prefects and as 'buddies' to younger pupils. They believe that they make a good contribution to the school and the wider community by, for example, raising money for good causes. Pupils' developing skills in literacy and numeracy, their good attitudes to learning and their good collaborative and independent skills are preparing them well for their future economic well-being.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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	2

How effective is the provision?

The school has developed a topic-based curriculum which links different subjects together in order to ensure learning is relevant, purposeful and enjoyable for pupils. It covers all subjects effectively and is enhanced by a good range of additional activities. It is well delivered through good teaching and supports pupils' good progress. Teachers display good subject knowledge and effective class management skills. High expectations of pupils are evident in all lessons.

The school has developed comprehensive assessment systems and uses these well to monitor pupils' individual progress. Pupils say they look forward to lessons, especially when the work they are asked to complete offers them just the right level of challenge.

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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This was evident in an outstanding Year 6 lesson when the teacher matched tasks very well to pupils' previous learning. However, in the very small number of observed lessons where teaching was no better than satisfactory, opportunities were sometimes missed to set appropriate work for pupils of differing abilities. The school's strategies to improve the quality of teaching, particularly in Key Stage 1, have been successful.

The school promotes a good level of care, guidance and support for pupils. Parents and carers value the way in which the school cares for pupils and treats them as individuals. Pupils say they always feel welcome at school and are confident they will always be well looked after. Effective induction and transfer arrangements help pupils settle quickly into new routines and all pupils receive good levels of targeted care and support in order to help them make the best use of the opportunities provided for them by the school. The school works closely with several outside agencies in order to offer a good level of care and support to families and pupils who are hard to reach or who are facing challenging circumstances.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides the school with a very clear vision for improvement and has high expectations of what pupils can achieve. She has worked well with staff and governors to ensure that significant progress has been made in many areas since the last inspection. Parents and carers comment that the headteacher has worked hard to improve the effectiveness of the school and to ensure that any discrimination is not tolerated. They are confident that their children are safe and that they are all provided with equal opportunities to succeed. She has dealt with difficult issues very effectively, for example, the need for changes in staffing in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Her success in raising pupils achievement and attainment has not gone unnoticed and, at present, she is also leading and managing another school on a temporary basis. However, the headteacher's absence has not altered the overall effectiveness of the school because her senior leadership team have risen to the challenge and are presently leading and managing the school effectively when the headteacher is absent.

The school has worked hard to build and maintain good links with parents and carers, who value the work the school does in ensuring their children are safe and well cared for and make good progress in learning. Safeguarding procedures are good and meet all

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requirements. This is reflected in the good quality of staff vetting checks and the way in which the school regularly monitors and evaluates its policies and practices. Both staff and governors receive regular training about safeguarding issues and are aware of the importance of their role in ensuring the safety of pupils.

The school's work in promoting community cohesion is satisfactory. It has built up constructive links with the local community, which it uses effectively to develop pupils' understanding of the world around them. However, pupils have only a limited appreciation of the diversity of cultures and beliefs in the wider national community.

The school has developed good links with a number of outside agencies, including a group called the 'local partnership for children' which it uses to good effect to support vulnerable pupils and ensure those who may be experiencing emotional, social or learning difficulties play a full and active role in school life. Resources are good and used effectively to enhance learning for pupils.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The words of one parent and carer summed up the good quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage: 'My child has come on in leaps and bounds in his first year. He can't wait to come to school every day.'

Children achieve well in their first year at school because good teaching caters effectively for their needs, regardless of children's abilities or previous experiences. Good leadership and management ensure a high priority is given to children's welfare and to building up their skills in all areas of learning. As a result, children are presently

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on course to at least meet, and probably exceed, expectations in all areas of learning by the time they enter Year 1.

The classroom is bright and colourful and provides children with a safe and interesting environment. The teacher works well with her teaching assistants to ensure that learning is interesting for children. Recording of children's progress is thorough and is put to good use when planning future work. Lessons capture children's imaginations and effectively blend opportunities for children to work independently and with adult direction. Children are happy, feel safe and behave well. Progress in personal, social and emotional development is good. However, the Early Years Foundation Stage outdoor environment is drab and lacks any covered area. This sometimes prevents children from building up the skills associated with outdoor learning and play during periods of inclement weather.

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

The very large majority of the parents and carers who returned the questionnaires or who were spoken to by inspectors held positive views about the school. Several who responded agreed with all the statements on the questionnaire. Nearly all were happy with their children's experiences at the school. Most believed their children enjoyed school and several commented favourably about how safe they felt their children were. However, a very small minority of parents and carers expressed concerns about the school. Some felt the school did not take their views into account while others felt that the school did not meet their child's particular needs. A few felt that their children did not enjoy school and that the school did not inform them about their child's progress or deal acceptably with unacceptable behaviour. Very few had any other concerns.

Inspectors considered these comments and judged that the school takes parents' and carers' views into account and meets pupils' individual needs well. Inspectors also judged that pupils enjoy school, that the school deals with unacceptable behaviour effectively and also regularly informs parents and carers of their children's progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas' Church of England 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 35 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 130 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	18	51	14	40	2	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	21	60	12	34	0	0	1	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	11	31	20	57	2	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	54	13	37	0	0	1	3
The teaching is good at this school	17	49	15	43	1	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	12	34	19	54	0	0	1	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	13	37	20	57	0	0	1	3
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)	12	34	17	49	0	0	1	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	40	17	49	2	6	1	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	37	14	40	1	3	1	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	43	14	40	4	11	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	17	49	14	40	0	0	1	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	20	57	13	37	0	0	1	3

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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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.



18 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas' Church of England Primary School, Winchelsea TN36 4ED

Thank you for welcoming myself and the other inspector to your school. Everyone was very friendly and we enjoyed talking to you about what you like the most about school as well as seeing you working hard in lessons and singing so well in assembly.

We believe your school has improved since the last time it was inspected and is now a good school.

Here are some of the highlights of your school.

- Children get off to a good start in the Reception class.
- You enjoy school and are making good progress in your work.
- The quality of care, guidance and support you receive from your school is good and you are well looked after.
- You feel safe at school and know how to be healthy.
- Your behaviour is good and you all get on well together.
- The governors, together with the headteacher and her staff, have worked hard to improve the school and want to make the school even better.

Here are some of the things we have asked your school to do to help it to improve.

- We have asked the school to help you to find out more about the customs and traditions of people living in this country who are from different cultural backgrounds than yourselves.
- We have also asked the school to improve pupils' attendance by making sure far fewer pupils go on holiday in term time.
- Finally, we have asked the school to improve the quality of the outdoor area used by children in the Reception year.

Once again, thank you for making us feel so welcome in your school and remember you can help your school to get even better by attending school regularly and continuing to work hard.

Yours sincerely

Michael Barron

Lead inspector

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