

St Thomas the Martyr Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119495
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	339456
Inspection dates	4–5 November 2009
Reporting inspector	David Law

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	164
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	The Venerable Peter Bradley
Headteacher	Mrs Julie Butcher
Date of previous school inspection	0 November 2006
School address	Mill Lane Up Holland Skelmersdale WN8 0HH
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited six lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, spending time in classes to look at samples of pupils' books and to talk to pupils about their learning. They took account of teachers' assessments of pupils' progress and looked at the school improvement plan and information from school self-evaluation. Inspectors received 49 parental questionnaires and looked at 73 questionnaires completed by pupils.

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

- current evidence of pupils' learning, progress and achievement
- the quality of teaching and how it promotes learning and progress
- the effectiveness of leadership and management in enabling improvement.

Information about the school

This smaller than average size school has very few pupils from minority ethnic groups or who are learning to speak English as an additional language. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, but the number with a statement of special educational need is above. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for a free school meal is above average. The school has achieved the Healthy Schools Award and the Active Mark.

The headteacher took up post in January of this year and there have been other changes of headship since the last inspection three years ago. Early Years Foundation Stage provision consists of a unit for children of Nursery and Reception age. Some of the Nursery children stay throughout the day to receive what the school calls 'wrap around care,' but the majority are part time. Parents with Nursery age children can elect to have them stay for a school lunch and a few take this option. The school also provides a breakfast club at the start of the day.

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St Thomas the Martyr provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Most make the progress expected of them and some make good progress. There has been a rise in attainment in the most recent national tests for Year 6 pupils and such improvements are being maintained. Pupils are proud of their achievements and are eager to learn. They feel safe in school and are fully confident that adults will listen to them if they have a problem. Pupils have many opportunities to take responsibility and are keen to do so. This enables them to make a good contribution to the school as a community. All staff work hard and show high levels of commitment to the school. They provide good care, guidance and support for all pupils but particularly those who are potentially the most vulnerable. Effective links with parents and a wide range of partners support pupils' learning and well-being. One parent said, 'The head and teachers are very approachable, informative and helpful.'

The recently appointed headteacher has quickly won the confidence of staff. She is enabling them to work effectively together with a sharp focus on raising achievement further. The impact of this is that pupils are making more rapid progress, for example, more are reaching the higher levels in mathematics. Teachers too are acquiring further skills and are eager to learn. Teaching is satisfactory with strengths in a number of respects, including the effective use of marking in some classes and the targeting of support for pupils at risk of falling behind. Teaching assistants play a vital role and are adept at meeting individual pupils' needs. The whole school has a firm emphasis on improving pupils' abilities in literacy and is showing great energy in tackling this. This is a relevant priority because achievement in English, although improving, is not as strong as in other areas. Pupils have too few planned opportunities to apply their reading and writing skills to other areas of learning. In the Early Years Foundation Stage children enjoy learning but the outdoor provision is not always used effectively to develop their knowledge and skills. The school is putting effective strategies in place to improve provision but there is a need to develop the role of subject leaders in monitoring and evaluating the impact of these developments. The satisfactory capacity to improve is seen in the rise in mathematics standards, the enjoyment of pupils when using their information and communication technology skills and the more effective use of assessment to monitor pupils' progress. All of these were areas for improvement at the last inspection and have been fully addressed. Governors have a clear strategic grasp and are effective in supporting improvements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement in English by giving them more opportunities to apply their reading and writing skills across the curriculum.
- Develop the role of subject leaders by extending their opportunity to monitor and evaluate the impact of improvement strategies on outcomes for pupils.
- Make better use of outdoor learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage by enhancing provision to develop children's knowledge, understanding and creative abilities.
- About 40% of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils show positive attitudes to learning and display good behaviour in class and around the school. Achievement is satisfactory as is the learning and progress of all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has implemented a number of strategies to identify and support pupils at risk of underachieving. This is targeted at Key Stage 2. In the past, at this key stage, pupils' progress had not built well on the good learning at Key Stage 1. Evidence from the school's assessment, and that seen by inspectors, is that the improvement strategies are making a difference. The majority of pupils are on track to reach their targets. Attainment at the end of Year 6 has been broadly average for the last three years. It rose in 2009 to above average in mathematics, when more pupils reached the higher level, but remained average in English. The ability of pupils to use their literacy skills in a range of subjects, which would contribute to their future economic well-being, is satisfactory. The application of information and communication technology skills is good. Pupils have a good knowledge of how to live healthily and are keen to take part in exercise. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have a firm grasp of right and wrong and are considerate of the needs of others, particularly those less fortunate than themselves. They work and play exceptionally well together. Attendance is above average and pupils are eager to come to school.

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.

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

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
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	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory and inspectors saw some good features. In particular, teaching engenders positive attitudes and pupils apply themselves with concentration. There are good relationships between pupils and teachers and resources are well organised. The new marking policy is used effectively by some teachers to show pupils what they should improve, but it is not yet consistently well used across the school. In the best lessons, there is good pace and pupils are actively involved. Sometimes pupils do not have enough opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning and have to listen for too long. The curriculum provides a broad and balanced experience that meets the needs of all pupils. They are motivated by the interesting topics they study. For example, they have enjoyed learning about the Tudors and the chance to dress in costumes of the time. Inspectors saw pupils enjoying visual arts as they worked with a visiting artist. The curriculum enables pupils to develop their skills well in sport and the performing arts. There is a wide programme of visits with special events, such as book weeks, planned through the year. The school promotes inclusion well and is very caring in its well targeted support for potentially vulnerable pupils. There are good transition arrangements for all pupils as they move to secondary school. The school takes effective measures to ensure the environment is bright and welcoming for all pupils. Those who attend the breakfast club benefit from the provision.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership team is effective in focussing attention on relevant priorities to improve learning and to raise achievement. Staff morale is good and there is a strong will to continuously improve. The governing body is influential in determining strategies, tenacious in seeing through policy and fully involved in planning and evaluating improvement. School leaders and governors set realistic targets for improvement based on accurate information from a range of monitoring activities. The school reached most of its targets last year although it just missed one in English. Expectations are sufficiently high to bring about improvement in pupils' achievement. There is a trend of improvement in pupils' progress, particularly at Key Stage 2, and a determination exists to ensure any underachievement there is eradicated. There is judicious use of staff training and performance management. There are regular meetings to review pupils' progress and to provide additional support where required. Suitable plans are being put into effect to develop subject leadership roles. Pupils' personal needs are well understood and there are appropriate systems to tackle discrimination to ensure equal opportunity for everyone to learn. Safeguarding procedures are satisfactory and all regulations and duties are met and in line with government requirements. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. All pupils get along well together and there are effective strategies to engage with the immediate community and those further afield.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
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	3

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

The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Nursery with skills broadly at expected levels for their age although a small proportion is operating below this, especially in speech and language. Progress is satisfactory and by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage children's skills are in line with those expected. Children are provided with a bright and welcoming environment. They are encouraged to develop their skills and grow in confidence. Provision for their welfare is good and they feel safe and enjoy warm relationships with the caring adults. The staff team work together well and the setting is led and managed satisfactorily. Induction arrangements are effective in helping children to settle and staff form positive relations with parents but there is more that could be done to involve them further, for example, in contributing to the assessment of children's progress. Nursery children who stay through the day, or for lunch, are well looked after. The outdoor environment is appropriate to children's learning needs, but there is scope to use it more effectively, for example, to develop children's investigation skills.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents feel that their children enjoy school and are kept safe when they are there. Inspectors found this to be the case. A very large majority feel well informed about the progress their children make and also think they are making enough progress. Most say they are happy with their child's experience. Five parents said they were not happy with the arrangement of mixed-age classes. One parent felt behaviour was not dealt with well. Inspectors saw that there was good behaviour. They did not see the mixed-age classes having any negative impact on pupils because teachers are organising learning to meet their needs appropriately.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas the Martyr Voluntary Aided 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 inspector received 49 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 164 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	26	57	20	43	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	29	63	17	37	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	20	43	23	50	2	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	22	48	20	43	2	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	24	52	18	39	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	20	43	18	39	2	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	48	20	43	1	2	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)	19	41	15	33	2	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	43	20	43	2	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	39	22	48	2	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	39	21	46	2	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	22	48	18	39	4	9	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	21	46	22	48	3	7	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 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.



6 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas the Martyr Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School,
Skelmersdale WN8 0HH

Thank you for giving a warm welcome to all the inspectors. You contributed to the inspection really well by being eager to talk to us and we enjoyed our visit.

Your school is providing you with a satisfactory education. You told us that you enjoy learning and feel safe when you are in school. One of you said, 'I like to do my art and literacy and all the children are good and well behaved.' We agree and were impressed by the pride you show in your school and the way you all get on so well. We were impressed by the art Year 2 and Year 3 did with the visiting artist. You work hard in lessons, always try your best and are making satisfactory progress in your learning. You have a good understanding of the importance of healthy eating and regular exercise. The teachers and other adults take good care of you. The teachers work hard for you and want you to achieve your best. The leaders of your school are helping all the adults to work as a team. They are keen to do all they can to make the school even better.

We have three recommendations to help you improve. We want you to improve your English skills such as reading and writing because these are important for your future. We would also like the teachers who lead various subjects to find out more about how well the school is doing and to use the information to make things even better. Finally, we want the outdoor learning in the Nursery and Reception to provide even more exciting chances for children to learn.

I hope you will play your part in bringing about these improvements by continuing to work hard to achieve your targets.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mr David Law

Lead inspector

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