

St Thomas' CofE Primary School

Parkgate Road, Stockton Heath, Warrington, Cheshire, WA4 2AP

Inspection dates

18–19 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Parents and pupils agree this is a happy and caring school, which has improved rapidly since the last inspection.
- Pupils' achievement is good. Standards have risen well in most year groups over time because the quality of the teaching has improved.
- Children make good progress in their learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage because teaching and leadership are now good.
- All groups of pupils in the school achieve well because teaching is good and at times outstanding.
- Pupils who need extra help with their work benefit greatly from the staff who are skilled at explaining work in a way that pupils fully understand. As a result, pupils make good progress from their individual starting points.
- The behaviour of pupils is good and, at times, outstanding. Pupils agree and say that 'in our school we are best friends and look after each other'.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is successful. Parents overwhelmingly agree the school cares well for the pastoral needs of the pupils.
- Clear and resolute determination to improve the quality of teaching, together with a culture of 'no excuse will do' from the headteacher, senior leaders and governors, has brought about rapid improvements to the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Senior leaders' thorough checks of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching mean that progress is good and the proportion of outstanding teaching is increasing rapidly and is set to continue.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not outstanding because work in lessons is not consistently set at a hard enough level, particularly for the most able to achieve their very best.
- The marking of pupils' work does not consistently give pupils the next steps they need to follow to improve their learning.
- Middle leaders are not fully involved in checking the quality of teaching and pupils' learning in all subjects of the curriculum.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 14 lessons or parts of lessons, two of which were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, staff, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and from the diocese, as well as with groups of pupils.
- Inspectors examined the school's own documentation relating to pupils' progress, school self-evaluation and policies relating to safeguarding. They carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books.
- The inspectors listened to pupils in Years 1, 2 and 6 read and spoke informally to pupils during playtimes and lunchtimes.
- They took account of the 57 parent responses received at the time of the inspection from the on-line questionnaire (Parent View).
- Inspectors took account of the 11 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Clare Henderson, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Stephen Docking

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- In 2013, the school met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' achievement to outstanding by making sure that:
 - work set in all lessons is consistently hard enough, particularly for the most able, to achieve their very best
 - the marking of pupils' work consistently gives them the next steps they need to follow in order to improve their learning.
- Raise the quality of leadership to outstanding, by further involving the middle leaders in checking the quality of teaching and how well pupils learn in all subjects of the curriculum.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are at least at the levels expected for their age. They make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes because they have good and rapidly improved opportunities to develop their learning through exciting play opportunities in good quality indoor and outdoor provision. As a result, all children are well prepared for Year 1.
- Standards at the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics are consistently above average. This is set to continue and inspection evidence shows that standards in Years 1 and 2 are currently above average. This represents good progress from pupils' individual starting points.
- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 were above average in 2012 and 2013. School records and pupils' work in their books show that a good proportion of pupils currently in Year 6 are securely on course to meet and exceed the progress expected of them.
- Pupils make good progress overall in Years 3 to 6. However, pupils' achievement is not outstanding because, in some lessons, work is not consistently hard enough for pupils, particularly for the most able, to achieve their very best. Furthermore, marking of pupils' work does not consistently give them enough help to improve their learning.
- Pupils in all classes show they enjoy books and reading. Daily letters and sounds (phonics) lessons are successfully giving pupils the skills to become confident when tackling new words. The 2013 Year 1 phonics check is testament to this as 93% of pupils achieved the required level.
- Older pupils read fluently and enjoy a wide and varied range of material. Their good quality reading skills and interesting book reviews extend their reading and writing skills well and support them in all the subjects they study.
- Pupils' achievement in mathematics is good. This is because of the strong focus given to extending their mathematical skills, through problem-solving activities and booster classes which extend the achievement of the most able pupils and which demand pupils use their thinking and reasoning skills.
- The standards reached by the very small proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium, including those known to be eligible for free school meals in Year 6 in 2013 were about three years below their classmates. These pupils also received extra support for specific additional learning needs. School information shows this gap is rapidly closing. Extra support enables the few pupils currently supported by the fund to progress at the same rate or in some classes faster than their classmates.
- Those pupils who need extra help with their work are fully included in all learning activities. This reflects the school's commitment to equal opportunities for all pupils. As a result, pupils make good progress and achieve well.

The quality of teaching is good

- Pupils say they enjoy everything about school and inspectors' observations show pupils generally work hard in lessons.
- Teaching across the school is good overall and an increasing proportion is outstanding. A scrutiny of the work in pupils' books and the school's records of the checks made on teaching indicate that teaching is typically good and rapidly improving. This contributes well to pupils' good achievement.
- On occasion, teaching enables pupils to learn extremely well. For example, in mathematics, pupils were fully engrossed in investigating congruent shapes and working out complex co-ordinates. In such instances, pupils are very clear about what they are learning because they are provided with relevant guidance, which challenges their individual abilities and enables them to

make outstanding progress.

- When learning is rapid, staff frequently check pupils' understanding through high-quality marking and verbal feedback during the lesson. Teachers' skilled questioning based on excellent subject knowledge gets pupils thinking hard, with time to reflect and explain their answers. This was observed in English when pupils were asked to use a range of adverbs in subordinate clauses to improve the quality of their writing about the rainforest. They persevered well and made rapid progress.
- When pupils' learning is not outstanding, the work set is not always hard enough, particularly for the most able, to achieve their very best. Furthermore, work in pupils' books is not marked in a way that consistently provides them with helpful advice to extend their learning further.
- Teaching assistants work in close partnership with teachers. They provide extremely sensitive and helpful advice and support for pupils who need extra help.
- Children learn well in the Early Years Foundation Stage because the new leader has ensured adults now plan activities that capture pupils' imagination, appeal to their interests and provide opportunities to find out and understand more about the world in which they live.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage happily talked about, designed and made buildings as part of their topic on the local area. Discussions took them further afield to find out about buildings, such as the Tower of London and the Taj Mahal. This advanced their mathematical and design skills extremely well.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is extended well. For example, visits from local clergy extend pupils' interest, knowledge and understanding of the need to share with others.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Behaviour observed by the inspectors in lessons was good and at times outstanding. This has a strong influence on their good achievement. School records show that behaviour is typically good in classes, around the school and over time.
- Pupils are caring, respectful and polite and behave well, whether on the playground, along the corridors or in the dining hall. Those groups of pupils inspectors spoke with in formal meetings, or informally while they were walking along corridors, playing outside or in the dining hall, say that they feel safe and secure in school.
- Pupils have good opportunities to take responsibility. Some are lunchtime leaders on hand to help the younger pupils. Other pupils lead the Fair Trade work and welcome the increasing number of opportunities provided for them to express their views such as when improved playground facilities are being considered. These roles help them to learn to act responsibly and develop leadership skills.
- Pupils' high regard for sharing what they have is extended well and they speak confidently about how Fair Trade helps in this work. Such work extends skills of respect and acceptance of others and prepares them well for their future lives.
- The school has clear expectations of behaviour which most pupils willingly follow. Pupils say that occasionally a few pupils do not listen to adults straight away but, overall, they say behaviour is good. Parents' views indicate that they are overwhelmingly positive about behaviour and safety of pupils in the school.
- Pupils say bullying and racism is non-existent in their school and that they trust staff to sort out any concerns that may arise. The school's records also confirm this. Pupils have a good understanding of different forms of bullying, including cyber bullying and that based on prejudice.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are safe and cared for well. They rapidly learn to share and to get along with each other. Reception-aged children take their responsibilities seriously, as they help the children who are new to the nursery to quickly learn the routines.
- Pupils say, and their parents agree, that they feel safe and well supported at school. They know

how to keep themselves safe from everyday hazards, including e-safety and road safety.

- Pupils attend school regularly and say 'we are encouraged to learn and play'. They benefit from a wide range of after-school clubs, including sports, drama and music. These contribute well to their personal development.

The leadership and management are good

- Since the last inspection, senior leaders and governors have worked quickly and with determination to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement by creating a strong team who share their values, support them well and play a vital part in raising standards. As a result, a culture of good teaching, behaviour and achievement for all groups of pupils flourishes.
- The procedures in place for checking the school's work, which includes making sure that targets set for teachers are met and that teachers are helping pupils to achieve the best they can, are thorough and exacting.
- The area of care for those groups at risk of not doing as well as they could is very well managed. This ensures all groups of pupils have the same chances of success, everyone is respected and discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- Leadership and management are not outstanding because middle leaders are not fully involved in checking pupils are achieving as well as they can in all subjects of the curriculum.
- The subjects pupils study promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the wide range of artistic, sporting and cultural activities provided.
- Arrangements for safeguarding and child protection meet all statutory requirements.
- The primary school sport funding has increased pupils' participation in physical education and sport and is contributing well to developing better physical well-being for pupils under the strong leadership of the subject leader.
- The local authority provides effective support for the teaching of mathematics and English, which has improved the quality of teaching and pupils' learning in these subjects. Since the last inspection, the local authority has provided effective support to help the school improve the quality of governance and of teaching and children's achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Parents say they are well informed about the work of the school because staff are very approachable and welcome them to help in the school.
- The strong partnerships which exist with the diocese and local schools provide good opportunities for staff to learn from each other.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body provides strong support for the school and has improved rapidly since the last inspection. Governors know the school well because they regularly and systematically link with teachers in classes. This enables them to have first-hand and clear information about how well pupils are learning. They meticulously check the information available on how well pupils are learning and regularly check how well the school is doing with senior leaders. The governing body keeps a close watch on the achievement of pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding and check on the impact this and the additional sport funding has on pupils' learning. They check on the performance of staff in order to check the on the quality of teaching and link performance carefully to pay and professional progression.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	111318
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	432139

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	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Speed
Headteacher	Ian Moss
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2013
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