

St Thomas CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105698
Local Authority	Oldham
Inspection number	336540
Inspection dates	21–22 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Kathleen McArthur

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	380
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pauline Pleasant
Headteacher	Mrs Angela Knowles
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and the local authority adviser. They observed the school's work; and looked at school documents, including policies and the development plan, safeguarding arrangements and local authority evaluations. Questionnaires were received from 57 parents and carers and considered along with questionnaires completed by pupils and staff.

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

- the attainment and progress of all groups of pupils
- the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage
- how the school works with parents and carers
- how well teaching challenges and meets the needs of all pupils.

Information about the school

The school is much larger than average and has several mixed-age classes. Almost all pupils are of Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage with a very small proportion of White British or European heritage. The great majority of pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language when they start school. In the past, a significant number entered or left the school part-way through their education but this has reduced considerably. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is almost three times the national average. The proportion with special needs and/or disabilities is higher than that found nationally. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises a part-time Nursery and two Reception classes. The school shares the Tudor Street all-weather pitch with the local community.

Considerable changes over recent years have seen the school increase dramatically in size. The number of pupils continues to rise and the building is due to be extended further early in 2010. The local authority seconded the headteacher to a local primary school for one year between 2008 and 2009. In September 2009, St Thomas was federated with that school and the headteacher is now executive headteacher of both schools. The other school was not part of this inspection.

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?**3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****3**

Main findings

St Thomas is a satisfactory school with a number of strengths. It is a very harmonious community and provides a good curriculum in an attractive, welcoming environment for learning. Pupils are well cared for, so they feel happy, safe and secure and show positive attitudes to everything they do. Pupils get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Parents and carers are happy with their children's experience at the school.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. The great majority of children enter the Nursery with little knowledge of English so they have to make a long journey in their learning as they move through the school. Recent developments in the Early Years Foundation Stage mean that children make good progress there now; the new programme for teaching letters and sounds really appeals to children so they make rapid progress. Higher up the school pupils' limited language skills impact negatively on their work in all subjects, and, although their understanding and ability to use English steadily improves, standards are nevertheless low at the end of Year 6. All groups of pupils make satisfactory progress, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those at an early stage of learning English as an additional language.

Pupils like their teachers; a typical comment was, 'The teachers come up with different ways to make lessons fun.' Teaching is satisfactory overall. Although some teaching is of better quality, there is too much variation. Good-quality tracking systems provide accurate information about pupils' prior attainment. This information is not always used to plan the next steps in learning and provide work that challenges all groups of pupils. Pupils know their class and group targets but are not aware of their personal targets so they are not sure what they are working towards achieving.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils behave well and move around the building and playground sensibly, taking care about their own and others' safety. They particularly enjoy the rich range of experiences that enhance the curriculum, including visits, visitors, after-school clubs and sports activities. High-quality displays, particularly of art work, celebrate pupils' achievements and support the curriculum.

Focused development plans show leaders' unambiguous ambition to raise standards, accelerate progress and improve provision for every pupil. Actions implemented since the last inspection have accelerated progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and have raised standards in Key Stage 1. Middle leaders and subject coordinators now monitor standards. The inspection agreed with the school's evaluation of its strengths and areas for improvement overall, but found teaching to be satisfactory rather than the

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school's judgement of good. Despite many and ongoing changes standards have not fallen; indeed they are rising. However, they are still low at the end of Year 6 and the quality of teaching varies, so the capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards by improving the quality of teaching so it is consistently good.
- Accelerate achievement by ensuring assessment information about pupils is used to plan the next steps required in learning for all pupils and to ensure that work challenges them all appropriately.
- Ensure that pupils understand their personal learning targets and what they have to do to reach them so know what they are expected to achieve.
- About 40% of the 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

Although standards across the school are considerably lower than the national average, they are rising, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. A whole-school focus on developing mathematical skills has raised attainment and improved pupils' confidence in the subject. All groups of pupils are achieving satisfactorily from their low starting points. In the lessons observed, pupils were usually enthusiastic and interested. Pupils in the oldest classes work hard, both independently and collaboratively, take increasing responsibility for their learning and often make good or better progress. Book scrutiny and lesson observations show that, overall, progress is satisfactory but pupils are not always confident about improving their work.

Well-planned and organised support for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those who speak English as an additional language, enable them to make satisfactory progress. The inspection found that any other variations in performance relate to particular groups of pupils and do not indicate a trend.

Pupils enjoy school, clearly evident in their smiling faces, and their written comments. They wear the school uniform with pride and are unfailingly polite and friendly to adults and visitors. Good behaviour and attitudes add to the calm atmosphere seen in lessons and around school. Pupils adopt positive attitudes of tolerance, fairness and respect based on the good role models provided by all adults in school. They clearly know the difference between right and wrong, are considerate to others and keen to raise funds for local and international charities. They have good understanding of health matters, eating the right foods and taking plenty of exercise. Pupils are sure they are safe in school, and know about internet safety and how to avoid any dangers they might meet. They can be trusted to act sensibly, and willingly undertake responsibilities such as school councillors or as 'buddies'. Pupils' multi-cultural awareness is effectively raised through topic-based work, visits to places of worship and visitors to school. Pupils contribute to the community, for example contributing to the local mosque's monthly

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newsletter. All pupils are gaining the skills they need in their future lives and are satisfactorily prepared for the next stage of their education. Their attendance is average.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory, albeit with variations in effectiveness. Common strengths are that good relationships between pupils and staff promote cooperation and good behaviour, and effective deployment of the teaching assistants makes good use of their particular skills. The most effective lessons are based on clear plans, with pupils being told what they are expected to learn, and a good pace is maintained. Well-targeted, open questions keep pupils of all abilities on their toes and fully involved. Sometimes, however, teachers do not make full use of assessment information when planning lessons so pupils of all abilities are given the same tasks, which means that not all make the progress they are capable of. Group and class targets are shared with pupils, but older pupils in particular are not fully aware of their individual targets or what they are aiming to reach.

The well-planned curriculum places appropriate emphasis on literacy and numeracy and

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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is carefully adapted to meet pupils' additional and specific learning needs. Pupils enjoy using information and communication technology. The regular curriculum review has led to the development of a more creative, topic-based approach in an endeavour to capture pupils' interests and accelerate their progress. The good personal development programme and cross-curricular themes, for example that on 'feelings', provide valuable opportunities for pupils to reflect on emotions and issues. Very strong enrichment activities provide many opportunities for pupils to develop their interests and talents, through the arts, playing instruments and participating in sports. This work is being further extended by activities in conjunction with the federation partner school.

Well-organised care, support and guidance arrangements make a strong contribution to pupils' well-being, sense of security and to their learning. Good induction and transition arrangements involve parents and carers and help pupils start school happily and move confidently to the next stage of education. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, vulnerable pupils and those with specific additional needs receive particularly good care and support, and the school involves all external agencies to benefit pupils and families. Consequently, these pupils progress at a similar rate to their classmates. The school does all it can and works hard with parents and carers to encourage regular, punctual attendance.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Good leadership and management have established an ambitious vision for improvement to steer the school through the ongoing period of change and growth and raise standards. Leadership and management roles are clear and well structured. Regular monitoring of teaching and learning has led to improvements, for example in the Early Years Foundation Stage, although some inconsistencies remain across the school. Governance is satisfactory. Governors bring strong local community and church links that benefit pupils and their families, but do not challenge the school sufficiently rigorously. Good community cohesion is central to this school. Consequently, pupils mix very harmoniously and respect different faiths and lifestyles. More parents and carers attend school events than previously, the school participates in many local faith and community activities and is forging global links with Africa. There are staff with specific responsibilities for liaising and developing relationships with parents and carers and this underlines the school's highly positive relationships with them and the commitment to

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helping them support their children's education. Other valuable partnerships, including with the local authority, support learning and well-being and widen the opportunities available for pupils.

There are good procedures to promote equal opportunities, for example support for bilingual pupils; there is no discrimination. Safeguarding arrangements are good and meet all requirements, successfully ensuring that the school is a safe, secure environment. Careful budget management ensures that funds are directed appropriately to support development plans. Value for money is satisfactory.

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	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

The great majority of children are at a very early stage of learning English as an additional language when they start school and their skills are at much lower levels than expected for their age. When they come to the Nursery it is often the first time they have been away from their home setting. The warm, welcoming and secure environment gives them confidence to leave their parents and carers and settle happily. The bilingual staff do a good job here, ensuring that early school experiences are positive for children and their parents and carers. Children quickly gain a sense of belonging and cooperate happily. They show increasing responsibility and independence, choosing equipment and tidying up, and know how to care for their health by washing their hands.

Good teaching ensures good progress in all areas of learning, especially language and communication. Staff place great emphasis on helping children build the language skills

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they need as the basis for learning in all areas. Nursery children enjoy stories and the bilingual staff help them understand so they soon begin to acquire words. The letters and sounds project has proved very successful in accelerating progress for children in the Reception classes. They really enjoy the daily activities, eagerly performing the actions that go with each sound and letter blend. Staff really emphasise careful listening to ensure that children distinguish different sounds, ready for building and reading simple words. A good range of practical activities is well balanced between those led by staff and those children choose themselves. They love being outside and enjoy running about in the fresh air. However, the area is not always organised to provide a full range of learning activities outside. Good leadership ensures that children's progress is carefully tracked, with good regard for their care and welfare. Recent improvements mean that the children are now making good progress and most reach the learning goals expected for their age when they move to Year 1.

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

Parents and carers who returned questionnaires indicated very positive and supportive views. They indicate that they think their children enjoy school, make enough progress and are well prepared for the future. Pupils, and parents and carers, are positive about the information they receive regarding progress, targets and details of school activities. Most parents and carers feel that children are taught well and that they are helped to support their children's learning. The inspection found that parents and carers are well informed about progress and that the school works effectively to help them support their children. Teaching and progress were judged to be satisfactory. Pupils know their group and class learning targets but are less sure of their personal targets. Two questionnaires indicated concerns over safety: the inspection investigated and found no evidence to support these concerns.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas C of E 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 57 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 380 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	40	77	10	19	2	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	22	42	27	52	3	6	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	20	38	29	56	2	4	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	23	44	26	50	1	2	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	21	40	28	54	2	4	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	37	30	58	2	4	1	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	16	31	33	63	3	6	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)	17	33	32	62	2	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	27	34	65	2	4	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	38	26	50	3	6	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	31	29	56	4	8	2	4
The school is led and managed effectively	17	33	32	62	2	4	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	26	50	21	40	4	8	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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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:	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. ■ 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.



23 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas C of E Primary School, Oldham, OL8 1SE

I would like to thank you for your help when we inspected your school. Many pupils came to talk to us. You told us that you like school and your teachers and it was very good to hear that you enjoy your lessons. You feel safe because the staff always listen to you and help you. Your parents and carers are happy with the school, too.

We found your school is satisfactory, with a lot of good things. It is well led and leaders are very keen to improve the school. They make sure you are safe and well cared for and they welcome your parents and carers to school. They provide a good curriculum with lots of exciting extra activities, including singing at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, learning Spanish and meeting pupils from other schools. Children get a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes.

You certainly know how to look after your health. You behave well, and are gaining useful skills, such as being good team members and being able to work independently. You are always keen to help the school and the local community, and raise money for charity.

Although some teaching is good, we found it is satisfactory overall and you make satisfactory progress in your work. So we have asked the leaders and governors to help you make good progress and reach higher standards by making sure that you are always taught well, ensuring that the lessons challenge everyone and that you know your personal learning targets.

More exciting things are planned for next year when the building is extended. We are sure you will do all you can to help the staff by working hard, coming to school on time every day and continuing to enjoy being at St Thomas School.

The inspection team send their very best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Kathleen McArthur

Lead inspector

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