

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas C of E Primary School

Hodnet Drive, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Wigan, Lancashire WN4 8PQ

Inspection dates: 20 and 21 June 2024

Outcome

St Thomas C of E Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy learning and playing at this caring school. They work hard, knowing that staff have high expectations of their achievement. Most pupils achieve well in most subjects.

Pupils benefit from the very positive relationships that staff have developed with them. They enjoy learning, which staff make sure is interesting and full of fun. From the Reception Year through to Year 6, they routinely discuss learning in pairs and use these opportunities well to clarify their ideas and help each other.

Pupils talked knowledgeably about what they have learned from the many educational visits that the school organises to enhance the curriculum. For example, Year 1 excitedly recounted their experience of a school trip to Manchester Airport when they were learning about the history of flight.

Pupils understand and appreciate the school's new clear and simple rules, rewards and sanctions to encourage the best behaviour. They enjoy well-established routines. Most behave very well.

Most pupils attend activities, particularly sports, which staff arrange for them outside lesson time. They proudly take on responsibilities, such as being house captains and playground buddies.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has given a lot of thought to the design of the curriculum. Pupils, including those with SEND, follow ambitious and well-devised programmes of work. Teachers know exactly what pupils should learn in all subjects. They order learning logically to build on what pupils already know.

This year, the school made some curriculum changes which raised expectations of what pupils should know and remember, particularly in relation to vocabulary. For the most part, teachers have embraced these heightened expectations and have improved pupils' achievement. In a minority of subjects, the school has only implemented changes this term. In these subjects, the difference between the previous and current curriculums has resulted in some gaps in learning. This is particularly true in relation to pupils' understanding of the connections between topics.

The school has made sure that teachers benefit from a wide range of training, including opportunities to observe and share good practice in this school and beyond. These opportunities contribute to teachers' strong knowledge of the subjects that they teach.

Teachers usually explain subject content very clearly, using well-chosen resources. They choose or devise interesting activities which help pupils to learn well and remember what they have learned over time. However, at times, how teachers and teaching assistants explain and give examples of the new and more challenging words required by the new curriculums is not clear enough. This means that pupils' misconceptions about the meaning of some words sometimes limits their knowledge and understanding.

Teachers and teaching assistants implement the very well-structured phonics programme with skill. Staff ensure that books match the sounds that pupils know. Teachers regularly check how well pupils are learning. They quickly identify pupils who are struggling and give them the help that they need. By the end of key stage 1, pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), become fluent and accurate readers ready to make a flying start to key stage 2.

Starting at the beginning of the early years, teachers foster in pupils a love of reading. Throughout the school, pupils enjoy listening to the stories that teachers read to them. The school ensures that pupils read a wide variety of books for pleasure.

The school quickly and accurately identifies the needs of pupils with SEND, with help from external specialist services if necessary. Staff give these pupils all the help that they need to follow the school's ambitious curriculum alongside their peers. The school enables pupils with SEND to participate successfully in everything that this highly inclusive school has to offer.

The school is an orderly community. The majority of pupils behave very well in lessons and at social times. Patient and skilled teachers and teaching assistants help the small number of pupils who struggle to meet the school's high expectations of behaviour. These pupils quickly return to learning and playing positively with their peers.

The school offers pupils many opportunities for wider personal development. Staff organise a range of social and cultural visits, including to museums and farms. Visitors come to the school to talk about topics, such as staying physically and emotionally safe and healthy. Pupils learn about equality and respecting people who are different from themselves.

By far the majority of staff feel valued and proud to work at the school. They have embraced the changes which the school has made this year. The school's governors bring a wide range of expertise to their roles and contribute strongly to school improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has introduced some subject curriculums very recently. In these subjects, the transition between old and new curriculums has resulted in gaps in pupils' learning, including how topics relate to each other. The school should embed new curriculums to address gaps in pupils' knowledge and help them to make appropriate links.
- At times, the way that teachers explain and exemplify the meaning of new and challenging vocabulary is not clear enough. As a result, pupils' misconceptions about what some words mean sometimes have a negative impact on their understanding. In this respect, the school's increased curriculum expectations sometimes are not realised. The school should review how teachers explain and exemplify more sophisticated vocabulary so that the implementation of new curriculums realises their heightened ambition.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in April 2019.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with SEND; pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	106465
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10348035
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	189
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Carol Whiting
Headteacher	Leanne Crompton
Website	www.ashtonsaintthomas.wigan.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	2 and 3 April 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Diocese of Liverpool. The most recent section 48 inspection, for schools of a religious character, took place in November 2019.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision for pupils.
- The new headteacher took up post in September 2023.

Information about this inspection

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in her evaluation of the school.
- The inspector completed deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. As part of the deep dives, she met with subject leaders to discuss the curriculum, visited lessons, met with teachers and looked at pupils' work.

She also looked at the curriculum and pupils' work in some other subjects. She observed some pupils read to a familiar adult.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector reviewed the single central record and took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils. She also considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture of safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector spoke with the headteacher, other school leaders and members of staff.
- The inspector spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. She also spoke, via video conferencing, with two representatives of the local authority. She spoke on the telephone with a representative of the Diocese of Liverpool.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in and outside lessons. She spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at school. As there were no responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey, she scrutinised the school's own gathering of pupils' views.
- The inspector spoke with staff about their workload and well-being. She also considered the responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.
- The inspector considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View. These included the free-text comments.

Inspection team

Liz Kelly, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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