

The Saint Thomas' Church of England Primary School, Boston

Inspection report

Unique reference number	120546
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	393505
Inspection dates	20–21 June 2012
Lead inspector	David Martin HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	407
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Philip Barlow
Headteacher	Helen Richardson
Date of previous school inspection	18 March 2011
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Age group	4–11
Inspection date(s)	20–21 June 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

David Martin

Her Majesty's Inspector

Thelma McIntosh-Clark

Additional Inspector

Andrew Read

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. A total of 16 lessons were observed during the inspection, with 14 class teachers seen. Inspectors also made shorter visits to all classes and to observe staff supporting small groups of pupils. A number of pupils in Year 2 and Year 5 were heard reading. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. As the visit was planned as a third monitoring visit, the school was not required to send out parental, pupil or staff questionnaires. Inspectors did consider responses to the Ofsted-style questionnaires circulated to parents and carers by the school in advance of the visit. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation. These included planning and monitoring documents and minutes of meetings, including those of the governing body. They also scrutinised school assessment records and a range of pupils' work in books and on displays.

Information about the school

Saint Thomas' is larger than the average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic heritages is below average, but rising steadily, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Most of these children are from Eastern European backgrounds. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is around the average. The school has specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs who have hearing impairments which currently supports seven pupils. The school has recently started a breakfast club for pupils before school.

The school is in a soft federation with Wyberton Primary School, which shares a headteacher with Saint Thomas'. Since the previous inspection there have been substantial changes to staffing. The executive headteacher took up post in June 2011. Three assistant headteachers, two phase leaders and six class teachers have joined the school, most in September 2011 but a few during the school year.

The school meets current floor targets that prescribe the minimum standards expected by the government.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Saint Thomas' is now a good school, having improved impressively in the last year. It is not yet outstanding because the recent strong improvements in teaching, provision and leadership have not yet been sustained over time and are not completely consistent across all subjects. In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.
- Attainment is now above average in all subjects at Key Stage 1, and assessed and moderated to be above average in mathematics and reading at Key Stage 2, but around average in writing. This is a significant improvement on recent previous performance because all groups of pupils, in all year groups, are currently making at least good progress, and many better.
- Teaching is mainly good, and a significant proportion is outstanding. This is due to the appointment of talented staff, highly effective professional development opportunities and established team working. As a result, pupils are gaining skills and knowledge quickly in most subjects. Provision and outcomes in information and communication technology (ICT) are relatively weak.
- The off-task behaviour seen at the previous inspection has been eliminated. This is because expectations are high, lessons are interesting and engaging and pupils' needs are met sensitively and well, including for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and those who speak English as an additional language. Attendance has risen impressively and is now above average, due to the school's success in engaging with parents and carers.
- The key to the success this year has been the experience and drive of the executive headteacher. She has been ably assisted by a rejuvenated governing body and an ambitious and talented senior team. Rigorous performance management and the careful monitoring and evaluation of school priorities have been vital to the success of the school in the last year.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Significantly improve the provision for ICT by July 2014, through:
 - increasing the number of computers and other digital technology in the school, so that pupils can access such equipment much more regularly
 - training staff to ensure that they are skilled in using ICT across all areas of the curriculum to further enhance their teaching skills and support learning
 - ensuring that pupils have the technological and related skills that they require to be fully prepared for life in the modern world.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

At the last inspection the achievement of pupils was unsatisfactory. Many pupils were attaining well below expected levels, and had been for some time. Since September, achievement has been accelerating very quickly, as seen at each successive monitoring visit. Pupils now work very productively in all lessons. They understand their targets and next steps in learning, and work very hard and successfully to achieve them. They take great pride in the presentation of their work and show increasing independence and perseverance in their learning. They therefore make strong gains in every lesson and over time in skills, knowledge and understanding. More than this, they enjoy lessons and find learning, in their words, to be 'fun'. As a result they have already more than made up for previous underachievement in all year groups. Parents and carers, in response to the school questionnaire, overwhelmingly agree that pupils now make good progress and many comment on the improvements that they have seen this year.

This improvement begins in the Reception classes, where the environment has been totally transformed. Children here learn quickly because of the rich opportunities presented both indoors and outdoors, including observing the recently hatched chickens! They can access a wide range of materials and experiences and develop well in all areas of learning, including early writing and counting activities. Children's social skills are very well developed. They are very well prepared for the next stage in Year 1.

Pupils now achieve above-average standards in reading in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and are enthusiastic readers. For example, one group in Year 3 were excitedly questioning a pupil 'hot seated' in role as the author of a book they had read. Pupils speak enthusiastically about books that they read in and outside school, often with parents and carers, for homework. Although learning is strong in all subjects, opportunities to use ICT are limited, but improving. Pupils use computers well for research and to present work when given the opportunity, but the present

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lack of resources means that access is limited.

All groups of pupils enjoy accelerated progress in learning. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make strong progress because their needs are identified early and they are supported extremely well. This is especially true of pupils with hearing impairment. Some pupils who speak English as an additional language make particularly strong progress in learning due to intensive and effective support from when they join the school.

Quality of teaching

Because of the staffing changes this year, teaching has been totally transformed at the school and is now good and improving. The striking feature of teaching is the consistency of approach. Teachers all plan with the same thorough methods, using assessment of previous learning as a starting point. Teaching assistants are used well and their support is carefully thought through in advance so that they too can make a telling contribution in supporting individuals or groups, or in intervention sessions. All teachers use similar classroom routines so that the same high expectations and challenge are seen throughout the school. Marking and feedback follow an agreed pattern and are of high quality, with pupils required to respond to marking by improving or correcting their work. Good quality questioning encourages independent working, with pupils given regular opportunities to share ideas before answering.

Relationships in the classroom are warm and supportive. There is a shared enjoyment and enthusiasm for learning, with teachers showing very good subject knowledge, for instance in the strength of literacy and numeracy teaching through other subjects. In one Year 5 lesson the use of scientific terms and specialist vocabulary, when recounting pupil-based research into the human digestive system, exemplified the high expectations placed on children in their use of English in other subjects.

Teachers also plan to promote pupils' personal development very well. The 'core values' underpin everything that the school does. The worship group leads assemblies and works with staff to promote the school ethos. Pupils are taught important moral and social values and given regular opportunities for reflection. The school focuses on relevant issues, such as those covered in the 'Safety week', where pupils learn a great deal about personal safety and bullying.

Good practice begins in the Reception classes, where adults find an ideal balance between teacher-led and child-initiated activities; adults are always ready to work alongside the children to help them gain the maximum amount of learning from all activities. They develop children's language and wider vocabulary very well. In Year 1, writing has improved by tapping in to the interests and enthusiasms of pupils, particularly boys. Similarly, interesting homework tasks have led to topic activities of high quality. Pupils who have a hearing impairment are very well supported and are enabled to play a full part in classroom activities and school life. Disabled pupils and

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those who have special educational needs enjoy a good level of support that promotes maximum independence in learning and behaviour.

This has been achieved because the school has invested strongly in developing teaching. Above all, teaching is a collegiate enterprise where teams plan together, learn from and inspire each other and reflect carefully on pupils' learning in lessons. However, the shortage of ICT equipment does inhibit the development of higher-level teaching skills in the use of technology.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour was good, and often exemplary, in classrooms during the inspection. School records indicate that this is typically the case, and pupils were quick to point out that the 'core values' of the school help them to understand why care for others, tolerance and respect are important. Most parents and carers agree that children behave well and that learning is rarely disrupted. The atmosphere in the playground has been transformed through changes planned by the school council and with the support of pupil 'play leaders'. Pupils are given increased opportunity for responsibility in the school, which they take eagerly.

Pupils and their parents and carers feel that children are safe in school, and inspectors agree. Pupils know who to see if they have problems, and have confidence in the school to resolve them quickly. They are made aware of different types of bullying, including that connected with modern technology or due to prejudice or differences. They say that there is little bullying in the school and that staff act quickly if problems arise. The support of the learning mentor was mentioned by pupils as someone available to help with any difficulties.

School systems to keep children safe are of a very high quality, and child protection procedures reflect very good practice. The school is secure yet parents and carers feel welcomed. Pupils who are potentially more vulnerable are well catered for, including by the breakfast club, where the food and conversation provide a great start to the day. Pupils' enjoyment and sense of security are reflected in their above-average attendance.

Leadership and management

The drive, determination and expertise of the executive headteacher are at the heart of the school's improvement. She has built a highly successful team of dynamic but relatively inexperienced senior leaders who are now highly effective. Phase and subject leaders have become increasingly accountable for their areas of the school or subjects. Through effective performance management and high-quality professional development, all staff have accepted responsibility for teaching and progress in their classrooms. Because of the talent within the current school staff, support and development are now provided internally or by the partner school. In this way, the school demonstrates a strong capacity to improve further towards being outstanding.

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The governing body has good collective experience and high ambition. It now effectively holds the school to account; visits are sharply focused and followed up with actions and questions for managers. Safeguarding arrangements are given a high priority and are very strong. Senior leaders and members of the governing body monitor, evaluate and review progress against ambitious key milestones for performance; the school regularly exceeds them. This is exemplified in the rapid revitalisation of the Reception facilities and provision earlier in the year. The school works relentlessly to prevent any discrimination and to be welcoming to all pupils, irrespective of their circumstances or backgrounds, so that all can access the many opportunities that the school has to offer.

The curriculum is already rich, not only in ensuring that pupils access all areas of learning, but in providing for their wider spiritual and cultural development. The curriculum will be reviewed and developed further as a priority in the coming year, with the continuing development of ICT one of the main priorities.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



21 June 2012

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Saint Thomas' Church of England Primary School,
Boston PE21 7RL**

I am delighted to tell you that the recent visit by inspectors confirmed that your school continues to do well, and is now a good school. We will therefore not need to visit every term as we are confident that the executive headteacher and her staff can continue to improve your school without this support. I would like to thank you all for the pleasure of seeing you at work and play, and talking with so many of you about life at the school over my three visits.

You are all making good progress and are working very hard, so that you now leave the school achieving at least as well as pupils in most schools, if not better. Writing has improved a lot in Year 2, and Year 6 pupils have done particularly well in mathematics this year. Well done! You are taught very well by a committed and talented staff team. They work hard to improve learning for you and make work relevant, interesting and fun. We think that there should be more computers and other technology in the school, and have asked the governing body and senior staff to make sure that this is the case.

Your behaviour is very good, both in class and around the school. Inspectors were very impressed by the work of the school council to improve the playground. The play leaders certainly make the playground a safe and interesting place to play. You clearly understand and know the importance of your 'core values' as a school. Your care and consideration are evident in your good relationships with each other and with adults.

The headteacher, school governors and all the staff have worked hard for you this year. They could not have achieved so much without your superb attitude and effort in every single lesson. I wish you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

David Martin
Her Majesty's Inspector

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