

St Thomas' Church of England Primary School

Mattox Road, Wednesfield, Wolverhampton, WV11 3TG

Inspection dates 18–19 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- Most teaching is at least good across the school. Teachers provide detailed, high-quality guidance to help pupils improve their work.
- Pupils achieve well because their teachers give them a high level of challenge and provide them with engaging lessons.
- Boys achieve highly in mathematics and do well in reading and writing.
- Leaders, including governors, have ensured that good teaching and achievement have been sustained and improvements made.
- Pupils enjoy learning and take pride in their work. They behave well, are courteous and look after the school and each other. The school cares for its pupils well and keeps them safe.
- Leaders provide effective training programmes for teachers to improve their skills, and some staff work together well to support the partner school.
- Governors are supportive of the school. They know it well and the next steps it has to take to improve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Girls' achievement in reading and mathematics, although above average, is not as high as that of boys.
- When leaders check on the quality of teaching, they do not always record their findings and therefore key messages are sometimes lost.
- Occasionally, the teaching of letters and sounds (phonics) in some classes is not matched well enough to pupils' ability levels.
- Accurate, regular assessments are carried out to track pupils' progress but the level of detail provided is too complex for some staff and governors to interpret quickly, and sometimes key points are missed.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 16 lessons or parts of lessons, five of which were jointly observed with the executive headteacher and looked at pupils' written work in their books and on display.
- Meetings were held with the Chair and two members of the Governing Body, the executive headteacher and other school leaders, and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke formally to two groups of pupils and informally with other pupils in lessons and around the school, and listened to other pupils reading.
- A number of the school's documents were examined. These included the school's information about pupils' progress, the support given to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, the school's own checks on its performance and its improvement plan, evidence about monitoring and evaluating teaching, and records relating to behaviour, safeguarding and attendance.
- Inspectors took account of 24 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), and analysed 16 questionnaires returned by staff.
- During this inspection, inspectors asked additional questions designed to ascertain the school's view of the impact and effectiveness of local authority services to support school improvement. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the use, quality and impact of those services.

Inspection team

Jacqueline Wordsworth, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Douglas Folan

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Thomas' Church of England primary school is a smaller-than-average sized primary school.
- The very large majority of pupils are White British. There are more girls than boys in the school.
- It does not have a nursery. The school attracts children from over 16 pre-school settings.
- The executive headteacher was asked to support another school, St Alban's Primary School, which is currently giving cause for concern. As a result of this support, both schools are now part of a hard federation and have a joint governing body.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium funding is considerably lower than that found nationally. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or those with special educational needs who are supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement by making sure that:
 - the most-able children in Reception are moved on to harder phonics work more quickly
 - teachers guide pupils' reading choices more closely, particularly for more-able girls
 - teachers keep a close check on how many books pupils read and that the books pupils read are at the right level of difficulty
 - girls are supported to achieve as highly as boys in mathematics.
- Improve leadership and management by making sure that:
 - leaders record their visits to classrooms so that key messages can be used to help all staff to be as good as the very best
 - leaders review how assessment information is recorded on the school's systems so that it provides for swift and easy analysis

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start school with skills and knowledge that are broadly typical for their age in all areas of learning. Good-quality care and skilful teaching ensure that they gain confidence and make good progress in developing their early reading, writing and mathematical skills. However, phonics work is not always at the right level for children's ability, resulting in more-able children not being moved on through the scheme quickly enough. In all other respects, more-able children are encouraged to achieve as well as they can.
- In Reception, there is a careful balance between children developing good personal skills and a desire to learn through enquiry and investigation. Children were seen clearly enjoying working in the vegetable garden, one child commented, 'I am putting the biggest vegetables in first, then the middle-sized and then the smallest.'
- In phonics, pupils in Year 1 are well ahead of other pupils nationally. Pupils listen carefully, learn to say sounds clearly and use their knowledge to spell words correctly. Pupils were able to read and spell 'chemical', 'chain' and 'machine'; they understood that the digraph 'ch' could make three different sounds.
- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 has been above average for a number of years. Pupils build on the firm foundation from Reception and make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This year, the proportion of Year 2 pupils already achieving levels above those expected for this age in reading, writing and mathematics is above average. This represents good progress from their starting points.
- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 has also been above average for a number of years. Pupils' results in English grammar, punctuation and spelling at the end of Year 6 are high, while their results in reading, writing and mathematics are above average. Boys attain exceptionally well in mathematics, with three quarters gaining the higher Level 5 and above. While girls' attainment is above average, fewer girls attained at Level 5 than did boys. In 2013, in mathematics, boys were around one year ahead of girls. This is not the case in the current Year 6, with information showing that the gap between boys and girls is closing; boys are currently around a term ahead in mathematics.
- The most-able pupils make good progress across the school from their starting points. This is because their teachers and teaching assistants give them a high level of challenge in almost all aspects of the curriculum. This year, the proportion of pupils in Year 6 set to attain levels well above those expected for their age is pleasing, with a good number working at Level 6. This represents good progress from their starting points. Progress in reading, although good, is not as quick as in mathematics or writing because, although there are established routines for reading at home and school, the tracking of pupils' reading choices is not as tight as it could be. A scrutiny of reading records, lesson observations and listening to pupils read indicate that some books are too easy and some books are too hard, and that some pupils do not read often enough. Reading areas do not have the prominence that promotes the need for the most-able pupils to read widely.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress from their individual starting points. This is because staff respond well to their needs and ensure that they receive work at the right level.

- The very small number of pupils in each year group eligible for support from the pupil premium are given effective help through a variety of support sessions, individually tailored programmes and good class teaching. In 2012, there was no difference in the attainment of those pupils eligible for the grant and that of other pupils in Year 6. However, in 2013, eligible pupils were a year behind in reading, writing and mathematics. All pupils who were in receipt of the grant attained Level 4 but fewer pupils than their classmates attained Level 5. School assessment information in 2014, shows that more eligible pupils are on track to reach Level 5 and to attain at a similar level to their classmates.
- Pupils are well prepared for the move to secondary education because they receive good teaching and attain well.
- The school is using the primary school sport funding to employ sports coaches. This provides effective opportunities for pupils to experience a wider range of sporting activities, including football, swimming and netball.

The quality of teaching is good

- Evidence from a scrutiny of pupils' work, assessment information and visits to lessons indicate that teaching is good.
- Much of the teaching is lively and engages pupils' interest. In mathematics lessons, pupils immediately engaged in a challenging warm-up activity, which made them think and question each other. This set the tone for the rest of the lesson, during which pupils discussed their learning, helping them to make their own decisions about the most effective method of tackling the work set.
- The teaching of writing is good. The focus on teaching vocabulary choices has been key to pupils achieving well in writing. Other features, which lead to pupils' good achievement in writing, are teachers' excellent subject knowledge and their clear instructions. The high quality of marking evident, across the whole school, also contributes to pupils' good progress.
- In one lesson, for example, the teacher had high expectations of pupils' use of grammar, punctuation and their ability to manipulate language. The teacher effectively guided pupils to produce humorous and persuasive letters in response to the assertion that all 11 year olds should be subject to an 8.30pm curfew.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and what their behaviour should be like. Teachers and teaching assistants use questions extremely well to check pupils' understanding in lessons and create an environment where they are confident to ask for further explanation should they need it.
- Teachers assess pupils' attainment accurately and use their findings very effectively to challenge pupils to achieve well in mathematics and writing. Staff know and respond well to pupils' needs. They use what they know about pupils' learning to plan new work that is almost always suitably challenging. However, the information regarding pupils' reading is not always used effectively to encourage pupils, particularly the more-able girls, to read many different types of books. This slows their progress in reading.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils enjoy lessons, take pride in their work and value what the staff provide for them. Inspectors saw very well presented books and neat, joined handwriting in the majority of books.
- Pupils behave well in lessons, in the playground, during lunchtime and when moving around school. They are courteous, show care and concern for each other and treat both adults and children with respect. Records show that there are few incidents of boisterous play or unkind behaviour. Pupils report that, where they do occur, staff deal with them seriously.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils are taught successfully about healthy lifestyles, avoiding bullying and keeping safe in different situations. E-safety is promoted well. Pupils are less sure how to recognise the difference between being entitled to have a strong opinion on a matter and acting on it in such a way that may harm others. Although actions to keep pupils safe are secure, the school does not ensure that its records of follow-up to incidents are as thorough as they could be.
- Attendance is not yet in line with national figures. The school sets targets for improving attendance but this target is still below average attendance levels nationally. The school also sets a limit for the number of 'lates' within a month to four, when it would trigger a letter home. This means that a pupil could regularly be late, three times every month and no action would be taken. However, the school does much work to improve attendance and punctuality, and both have improved over time.

The leadership and management are good

- Staff are well led by senior leaders and work well as a team. Leaders have an accurate awareness of the strengths and areas to develop. They have made sure that good teaching and achievement have been sustained.
- Systems to link teachers' pay with their performance are in place, with teachers' targets linked to how well pupils achieve. Leaders are aware of the need to update the current policy so that it meets the needs of the new requirements for teachers' pay in September 2014.
- Pupils study a wide range of interesting topics and they are given many opportunities to make educational and residential visits. The range of subjects, after-school activities and the general school environment and ethos support the good promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Each of the four strands is equally well promoted and underpins the pupils' positive attitudes to school and their respect for other people's feelings.
- The pupil premium grant is used well to improve the progress of qualifying pupils by funding them to attend school clubs, trips and on purchasing learning resources for one-to-one or small group support. The school has made appropriate arrangements for spending the school primary sport funding to improve and widen pupils' opportunities to take part in sports activities. Leaders are aware of the need to make sure that this provision is sustainable and that the funding is also used to improve teachers' skills.
- Although senior leaders and those with specific responsibilities check on the quality of teaching in the classroom, much of the information gained is shared informally with colleagues. In addition, the vast amount of information collected in order to track pupils' progress is overly complex and occasionally hinders leaders' ability to synthesise findings so that they can make swift changes should they need to do so.

- The local authority has had minimal involvement in the school, classified as 'light touch' as it is a good school.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are supportive of the school and meet regularly. They are aware of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors receive frequent updates about pupils' performance and teaching in the school. They are aware that some of the information they receive does not always allow them to pinpoint quickly how well all groups of pupils are performing.
- Governors are aware of the use of the pupil premium grant and know how and where the funding has been used. They also know how the school sport funding is being used and its impact.
- They have worked with an external consultant to manage the performance of the headteacher but they do not get updates on the performance of other staff. However, they have an understanding of how under performance would be tackled and the structures in place to reward good teaching. They have ensured that safeguarding arrangements meet the minimum requirements. After five terms of federation, governors have quite rightly decided to conduct a review of their skills, abilities and effectiveness; so that they can be the very best they can be.

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	104363
Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	431533

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	212
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Reverened Nicholas Watson
Headteacher	Helen Morris
Date of previous school inspection	12 May 2009
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