

St Thomas' Catholic Primary School

Parklands Road, Tean, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST10 4DS

Inspection dates	21–22 June 2016
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and the board of directors work very effectively together. They are ambitious for the pupils and continuously look for ways to make improvements to the quality and breadth of learning.
- Pupils at St Thomas' Primary make rapid progress as they move through the school and achieve highly in all the subjects taught. They are exceptionally well prepared by the time they leave the school to start the next stage of their learning.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are at least good and often outstanding. Teachers and teaching assistants work together in a highly effective way to ensure pupils' progress is rapid.
- Adults expect pupils to do well and encourage them to be curious and motivated learners. They are highly skilled in a wide range of teaching strategies and have excellent subject knowledge.
- The school works very effectively to support all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, the most able, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Personal development is outstandingly well promoted. Pupils feel safe, trusted and respected. They behave exceptionally well and demonstrate high levels of responsibility. As a result, attendance is above the national average.
- Reading is taught exceptionally well. The younger pupils quickly gain the skills they need to be able to decode words and take pride in moving on to harder and harder books. Regular practice and access to a range of interesting texts result in older pupils being enthusiastic, confident and fluent readers.
- Early years provision is outstanding. Adults have high expectations of what children can achieve and children thrive on this. As a result, they make rapid progress and are very well prepared to start Year 1.
- The strong Catholic ethos is exceptionally well balanced with meaningful learning about other faiths and beliefs. This leads to a caring, tolerant and respectful atmosphere in school where everyone is valued for who they are and what they can do.
- The board of directors bring high levels of skill to the governance of the school. They provide a well-judged balance of challenge and support to the school.
- The school is part of the Painsley Catholic Academy. This is a group of seven local schools which support and challenge one another to improve. Their collaborative work has helped St Thomas' develop to its high standard.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further refine the systems and processes for analysing information about pupils' progress so that leaders have the same detailed knowledge about the progress of groups and classes as they do about individual pupils.
- Ensure that high expectations of presentation of work are consistent across the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- St Thomas' Catholic Primary School achieves very high standards of attainment and progress for its pupils. However, there is no hint of complacency within leaders and directors. This is a school that is constantly evolving to ensure these high standards continue and further improve. Leaders and staff are reflective about their work, and their ambition for pupils to be the best they can is almost tangible.
- Leaders have been successful in ensuring that teaching is of a consistently high quality. This is because valuable training and coaching is tailored to the needs of the staff. Best practice from the other schools in the multi-academy company is shared effectively.
- Leaders carefully track pupils' attainment and have developed robust systems to ensure that pupils are rising to the challenges of the recently introduced national curriculum. Systems for tracking progress are not yet as thorough. Leaders and directors are acutely aware of this and have plans in place to address this in the new school year.
- The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) and reading is well led and managed. The leader has a clear view of how successful younger pupils are in acquiring their knowledge about the sounds that letters make. Regular checks on pupils' progress ensure that teaching is consistently of a high quality. As a result, pupils make rapid progress and standards in reading, and pupils' enjoyment of it, are high.
- This school is a highly inclusive place where every child and staff member is valued and their future is invested in. The headteacher, supported extremely well by his deputy, sharply focuses on high academic achievement. In addition, pupils' personal development is a high priority. The school skilfully balances its strong Catholic ethos alongside effective learning about those with other faiths and beliefs. As a result, pupils develop a strong sense of respect for others and are well placed to take up their place in a diverse British society.
- The headteacher has a clear vision for a broad and interesting curriculum that excites and motivates the pupils. This has been achieved. Pupils have access to a broad range of subjects taught in school time and an excellent range of after-school clubs and activities. Particularly impressive is the access pupils have to sporting activities. Clubs and teams are extensive and the school has achieved a considerable degree of success in local sporting competitions. In addition, the curriculum is organised to ensure that pupils benefit from a large number of trips to places of interest and visitors into the school to support their learning.
- The school uses the pupil premium funding appropriately to provide focused support for the small number of eligible pupils. Where this support is not effective, leaders are quick to make changes. As a result, in most cases, these pupils make the same rates of progress as their peers.
- The leader who coordinates provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is knowledgeable about each pupil and the support that is required to enable these pupils to succeed. The highly inclusive nature of the school enables pupils who have disabilities to thrive socially and supports their personal development extremely well. The school is successful in its work with external agencies to support these pupils effectively and ensure that, in most cases, they make good progress.
- The sports funding provided by the government is spent very well. As a result, pupils are active and busy at playtimes and lunchtimes, have a wide range of sporting clubs and competitions to take part in and have high-quality physical education teaching. The impact of this spending is checked carefully. For example, leaders carefully target pupils who have not previously attended a sporting activity to encourage them to participate.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Directors of the board know this school extremely well. They bring a very broad range of skills to their roles. They have secure and effective systems for holding leaders to account for the performance of the school and trigger support when necessary. The link director visits the school frequently to check the attainment and progress of pupils and the quality of teaching.
 - The principal director has an excellent overview of the school and ensures that all statutory responsibilities are met, including those regarding safeguarding and the salary progression of staff.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils' safety is treated with a high degree of importance. Procedures to recruit staff safely are robust. All staff have been thoroughly trained to identify pupils at risk of harm. Any concerns raised by staff are taken seriously, recorded in detail and acted on quickly. Where necessary, other agencies are involved to provide additional support and advice.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Pupils make outstanding progress in English and mathematics because the impact of teaching over time is excellent. Teachers and teaching assistants have very good subject knowledge which they use to good effect to plan learning that seamlessly builds on what pupils already know and can do.
- Relationships between adults and pupils are extremely positive and built on mutual respect. All adults have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Routinely, lessons are planned to provide a high level of challenge. In addition, extra activities are ready to distribute if pupils are capable of achieving more. Consequently all pupils, including the most able, make rapid progress.
- Teachers are skilled at using a range of teaching styles and varied resources to support pupils' learning. Leaders are keen that teaching is typically lively and engaging and is designed to provide high levels of motivation and engagement from the pupils. Throughout the school, pupils have highly positive attitudes to learning and are keen to find out more. Real-life tasks are a regular feature of teaching; for example, during the inspection pupils were creating apps and games in their computing lessons and were writing scripts for radio advertisements in their English lessons. Pupils say these real-life purposes 'bring learning alive'.
- Teaching assistants and teachers work together efficiently. Teaching assistants are deployed carefully to ensure they maximise the progress pupils make. They are well briefed by teachers and as a result they understand what pupils should achieve by the end of the lesson or a sequence of lessons. They are an integral part of the teaching team.
- Adults use questioning effectively to probe understanding and to get pupils to think hard. Adults expect pupils to provide extended answers to explain their thinking by asking questions such as 'Why do you think that?' and 'How did you get that answer?' This supports pupils in their logic and reasoning skills and enables them to be articulate and confident in their speaking.
- Excellent learning habits are developed, starting from Reception where children learn to keep trying, even when tasks are difficult, and take joy from learning to do something new. Children are already making choices and taking responsibility for their learning. This continues throughout the school and pupils universally demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. As yet, the high expectations of presentation of work seen in some classes are not yet consistent across the school.
- Pupils get regular, varied and meaningful homework. They are encouraged to present their work in interesting ways. Pupils showed inspectors the model houses and the volcanoes they had made at home. Their pride in what had been created was obvious. The amount of homework they receive increases incrementally as they move through school, preparing them well for the expectations when they move to Year 7.
- Pupils practise and refine their writing skills in a range of subjects, for example religious education and geography. Their writing in these subjects is of the same high quality as seen in their English lessons. Equally, mathematical skills are used and applied in subjects such as science and computing. This supports the excellent progress that pupils make.
- The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded to the online survey Parent View or who talked to inspectors are very happy with the progress their children are making and the quality of teaching in the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The school is a very caring, welcoming and inclusive place where staff and pupils are valued as individuals. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and very positive. Pupils learn to be kind, respectful and thoughtful. They accept one another's differences and instinctively help one another.
- Pupils, including the youngest children, are confident and articulate and can talk about the importance of learning new things.
- Adults are acutely aware of individual pupils' needs and are swift to provide support when it is required. For example, a group of girls explained their regular friendship group support helps them to get along with one another better.
- Pupils, including the youngest children, are extremely proud of their school. During the inspection pupils were bursting with pride to let inspectors know that the netball team won the league. In addition, they

are proud because they have a voice in the running of the school, for example introducing a breaktime snack, and they take on a wide range of responsibilities, which they take very seriously.

- Personal development is an integral part of the school's work and is excellent. Through different subjects, trips to places of interest, listening to visitors, assemblies, charity work and making links with the community, pupils learn to be highly respectful, tolerant and thoughtful. For example, the 'mini-vinnies' recently planted window boxes for elderly members of the community.
- Pupils have a sound understanding of what constitutes bullying, including racist and cyber bullying. In addition, pupils understand how to keep themselves safe in a range of circumstances, including when they are online.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils move around the school extremely calmly and sensibly and speak to one another and to adults respectfully and politely. They demonstrate impeccable manners without prompting and they show high levels of self-control.
- Pupils behave well because they want to rather than because they have to. They have high expectations of themselves and of one another. Their behaviour is equally good when they are not directly supervised. This is because adults have high expectations and are effective in teaching the pupils the reasons for and the importance of positive behaviour.
- Pupils feel, without doubt, that they are safe and well looked after at school. They trust adults to sort out any worries or difficulties they may have. They are unequivocal that there is no bullying in the school. Parents support this view.
- Pupils really enjoy school and as a result they attend regularly and on time. Attendance rates are above the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- Achievement is outstanding because pupils make consistently rapid gains in their learning as they move through the school. As a result, they leave the school with standards that are well above those seen nationally. In 2015, at the end of Year 6, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in writing was above the national average and was well above this measure in reading and mathematics. In addition, a large proportion of pupils reached the higher level 5 in all three subjects. Inspection evidence shows that pupils currently in the school are on track to reach similarly impressive standards.
- Children in Reception get off to a flying start. As a result of outstanding teaching, children make rapid progress from their starting points. For the last two years, the proportion of children reaching the expected standard by the end of the early years has been well above the national average. This trend is set to continue this year. Leaders correctly identified a gap between the attainment of boys and that of girls. As a result of their actions, this gap is reducing.
- The teaching of phonics is highly effective and pupils make rapid gains in their reading. Pupils have frequent opportunities to read. They enjoy books and are encouraged to read regularly at home. As a result, pupils develop fluency and their comprehension is strong.
- Pupils are articulate about their learning. They can hold sensible and mature discussions about what they learn and collaborate with one another well. They have excellent attitudes to learning and this supports the rapid progress they make.
- There has been a specific focus on the attainment of the most able pupils during this academic year. As a result of precisely targeted interventions and high levels of challenge within lessons, these pupils make fast progress.
- There are small numbers of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. These pupils are well known to staff, and effective and additional support is provided in class and in small-group or one-to-one learning. These pupils, in most cases, are making the same progress as their classmates. Where progress rates are slow, additional targeted support is provided, tailored sharply to their needs.
- Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their transition to secondary school, not only in terms of the standards they achieve but also in their personal development and attitudes to learning.

Early years provision

is outstanding

- Children start early years with skills and abilities which are typical for their age. As a result of excellent teaching, the proportion of children who leave the Reception class with a good level of development is well above the national average.
- Adults have exceptionally high expectations of what children can achieve. Adults are highly skilled at intervening in children's learning and play in order to further their learning and enhance their skills. They play and work alongside children to encourage them to explore and practise new skills. They observe them carefully and develop activities according to their interests.
- Adults have created well-organised, vibrant and fun spaces in which children can learn and play. Toys and equipment are plentiful, of high quality and capture the interest and imagination of the children. Children are able to concentrate on tasks and activities for extended periods of time and move from one activity to another without wasting time.
- The early years outdoor learning area is used effectively by the children. Construction areas, mud kitchens and a soon-to-be-opened new learning space called the 'learning lodge' inspire children to explore and play.
- Children are eager to learn and they behave exceptionally well. They feel safe and well cared for. This is demonstrated in the very positive relationships with the staff and their confidence when talking to familiar and new adults.
- Assessment of children's learning is rigorous and accurate. It is used well to design and plan activities that capture children's interest and build effectively on what they already know and can do.
- As a result of their time in Reception, children make exceptional gains in their learning. Consequently, they are very well prepared to face the challenges of Year 1.
- Discussions with parents and comments on the free-text responses on Parent View show that parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the work of the staff in early years, feel involved and are pleased with their child's progress.
- The current early years leader is new to post. She has quickly gained an accurate understanding of the provision and together with the class teacher is ensuring that children make rapid and sustained progress.
- Leaders and early years staff are constantly refining their practice and the learning environment in order to maintain the highest standards of provision. Children are excited about the imminent opening of the new 'learning lodge'.

School details

Unique reference number	138726
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10011183

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	223
Appropriate authority	The board of directors
Chair	John Pennington
Headteacher	Antony Wretham
Telephone number	01538 722378
Website	www.st-thomas-tean.staffs.sch.uk
Email address	office@st-thomas-tean.staffs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- St Thomas' Catholic Primary School converted to become an academy on 1 September 2012. When its predecessor school, St Thomas' Catholic Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good. It is part of the Painsley Catholic Multi-Academy Company. The principal director is the headteacher of the high school, Painsley Catholic College, and is a national leader of education.
- The governance of the school is provided by a board of directors. The chair of directors is a national leader of governance.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is well below the national average, as is the number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The pupil premium funding is additional funding provided by the government for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is very low, well below the national average.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons; some of these observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their learning and their attitudes to and opinions about school. Inspectors observed pupils at playtimes and lunchtimes and as they moved around the school. One inspector heard pupils read and talked to them about the books they enjoy.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' workbooks from all year groups. A wide range of documents were also scrutinised, including information relating to attendance, behaviour, safeguarding, pupils' progress and the checks made on the quality of teaching.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and other staff with specific leadership responsibilities.
- Meetings were held with the principal director of the Multi-Academy Company.
- Inspectors evaluated 58 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke with parents and carers at the beginning and the end of the school day.

Inspection team

Rachel Howie, lead inspector

Jonathan Keay

Ben Cox

Her Majesty's Inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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