

St Thomas's C of E Primary School

Kendal Green, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 5PP

Inspection dates

24 to 25 April 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Skilled and aspirational leaders, including governors, have taken effective steps to raise pupils' achievement across the school.
- Staff provide a warm, welcoming and engaging environment. All pupils are encouraged to follow the school's motto of 'Believe, achieve, succeed'.
- Staff have benefited from a carefully planned programme of professional development, which has improved their teaching skills.
- Leaders have designed a broad, balanced and engaging curriculum. Staff plan a wide range of trips, visits and experiences which develop pupils' knowledge across different subjects.
- Leaders regularly check teaching and learning. However, this monitoring sometimes misses identifying the gaps that pupils have in their learning.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress due to the strong support that they receive.
- Pupils are making stronger progress in mathematics. However, in some classes, recent improvements in developing pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills are not embedded.
- Some lower-ability pupils do not develop sufficient fluency to be confident mathematicians.
- Pupils read with confidence and for pleasure. They develop a good understanding of what they read.
- Pupils gain secure phonics knowledge and skills, which they use well to read and write accurately.
- Pupils write confidently for a range of different purposes. However, they sometimes lack accuracy when using their punctuation skills.
- Staff are vigilant in ensuring pupils' safety and well-being. Pupils feel safe in school. The school's experienced inclusion team provides a wide range of support.
- The early years provision is highly nurturing and purposeful. Staff plan interesting activities and experiences which ensure that children get off to a flying start. They are very well prepared for the challenges of Year 1.
- Pupils' behaviour and personal development are excellent. They develop as caring and thoughtful individuals.
- Pupils achieve well in physical education (PE). They keep very active and enjoy taking part in a wide range of activities and sport.
- Pupils are very proud of their school. They enjoy lessons and their attendance is above the national average.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of monitoring activities so that leaders can use the findings more precisely to identify gaps in pupils' learning.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics further by:
 - embedding recent changes to the teaching of reasoning and problem-solving skills
 - providing more frequent opportunities for lower-ability pupils to develop their mathematical fluency.
- Build on and strengthen improvements in pupils' writing by ensuring that pupils apply their punctuation skills accurately in their independent writing.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and governors have effectively shared their vision for an inclusive and caring school, firmly rooted in the school's Christian ethos. Staff encourage every pupil to flourish and achieve to the best of their ability.
- The skilled and enthusiastic leadership team have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and areas to develop. They use this information well to plan effective training for staff to improve their teaching skills. This has led to clear improvements in pupils' progress across the school. The school community works together harmoniously and shares a determination to raise pupils' attainment further, including in mathematics and writing.
- Leaders make regular checks on teaching and learning, for example checking pupils' work in books. However, these checks sometimes lack the precision needed to identify gaps in pupils' learning.
- Staff feel valued by leaders and appreciate the opportunities that leaders give them to develop their skills. Middle leaders have benefited from a good range of support and training. As a result, they have improved their leadership skills and provide effective support and training for their colleagues in different areas of the curriculum, including art and design, history and science.
- Staff work regularly with leaders and colleagues from other schools and settings. This enables staff to share and enhance their expertise, including in pastoral support, early years provision and mathematics.
- The engaging and enriched curriculum that leaders have planned effectively develops pupils' knowledge and skills across a range of subjects. At the heart of the school's curriculum are each year group's 'promises', which describe the range of trips, visits and activities that pupils experience. For example, in Year 3, 'promises' for pupils include visiting the county show, planning and cooking a healthy three-course meal and completing a low-ropes course. Through this detailed curriculum planning, leaders broaden pupils' experiences and knowledge, and develop their confidence and resilience. This contributes strongly to pupils' exceptional personal development.
- Leaders have established close partnerships with parents and carers, and with the wider community. Parents are welcomed into school and attend assemblies and school events regularly. The very proactive Parent Teacher Association (PTA) works closely with the school to raise funds, including for enhancements to the playground area. Visitors from the parish enhance pupils' learning experiences. For example, in a history topic, visitors shared their memories of post-war rationing.
- Leaders' careful use of funding for disadvantaged pupils enables this group to make good progress in English and mathematics, in line with other pupils nationally. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is in line with other pupils in school, and above that of pupils nationally. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils receive a wide range of support for their emotional well-being.
- The experienced special educational needs coordinator ensures that the additional support provided for pupils with SEND is precisely matched to their needs. Pupils'

barriers to learning are quickly identified and addressed. For example, pupils with reading difficulties are given a range of additional support to improve their learning. Leaders have improved the systems that they use to check the progress of these pupils. They undertake checks regularly to ensure that pupils achieve well.

- Leaders use the sport premium very effectively to improve pupils' skills, knowledge, health and well-being. Participation in sports and keeping pupils active are a strength of the school. Pupils, including those with SEND, take part in a wide range of activities and events. Many extra-curricular activities are provided by staff and are well attended by pupils. Older pupils enjoy outdoor and adventurous activities, including water sports. As a result of the carefully planned provision, pupils enjoy sport and learn to become cooperative team players who have the skills to work and mix with pupils and adults outside of the school community.
- The curriculum provides pupils with a well-developed understanding of British values, including democracy, the rule of law and equality of opportunity. Pupils value others and respect different opinions. They learn to engage in challenging discussions such as how to reduce the use of plastic. Leaders ensure that pupils develop a detailed understanding of other cultures and religions. This means that pupils are well-prepared to take their place in society as responsible and reflective citizens.

Governance of the school

- The governing body is dedicated and knowledgeable. Governors have a broad range of skills and experience, which have supported school improvement. Governors provide an effective balance of challenge and support for leaders.
- Governors' vision for the school is well-understood. Their ambition to provide an inclusive school where pupils develop as well-rounded and caring individuals is shared fully by leaders and staff.
- Governors know the school well and have an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. They keep a careful check on the difference that staff training makes to outcomes for pupils, including improving attainment in English and mathematics.
- Governors monitor the school's budget carefully and ask the right questions about the impact of spending decisions on pupils' learning, including on disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All statutory checks are in place to ensure the suitability of adults working in school. Appropriate checks are made on visitors when they arrive at the school.
- Leaders, including governors, ensure that pupils' safety is a high priority and that staff are vigilant. They make sure staff receive regular and appropriate training to identify any signs of possible danger or potential abuse. Useful safeguarding information is displayed around the school.
- Leaders have created a very safe and caring environment. Leaders and pupils refer to a 'telling school', where pupils are confident about speaking to a trusted adult if they are

concerned about their own welfare or that of their friends. Pupils value the availability of the school's pastoral support leader to offer guidance and support. Pupils spoken with during the inspection said that they feel safe in school.

- The procedures for reporting any incidents or concerns are very clear and understood by staff. The experienced inclusion team is tenacious in ensuring that any pupils at risk receive the support that they need. The school works very well with parents and other agencies to make sure that pupils are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Staff teach pupils to believe in themselves and to develop as successful and confident learners. Across the school, pupils are cooperative and resilient. Pupils listen carefully to teachers' instructions and they are keen to discuss their learning with adults and their peers.
- Staff have benefited from a wide range of training and support to enhance and develop their teaching skills. This has had a positive impact on the rates of progress that pupils make. For example, in reading, staff have enhanced their knowledge and skills and improved their approach to teaching this subject. Teachers are enthusiastic and reflective. They regularly evaluate their practice. They are keen to improve further.
- Since the previous inspection, teachers have improved their systems for checking pupils' learning and progress, including for disadvantaged pupils. Teachers use this information to plan work that matches pupils' learning needs. Staff use effective questioning to check pupils' understanding and to develop their learning.
- In mathematics, improvements to teaching since the previous inspection are evident. Most pupils have a good understanding of number and their written calculations are accurate. However, some less able pupils move too quickly on to challenging work and lack confidence and knowledge in some mathematical facts and methods. This limits their mathematical fluency and hampers their ability to tackle more complex problems. Most teachers successfully develop pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills by providing pupils with a wide range of activities. Pupils work well together to tackle challenging work and to explain their thinking. In some classes, pupils' problem-solving skills are not as secure. This is because recent improvements to teaching mathematics are still being embedded.
- In English, teachers use a range of challenging, diverse texts and novels to support pupils' learning. Across the school, staff promote pupils' love of reading well. Reading areas in classrooms are bright and attractive and staff give pupils plenty of opportunities to read for pleasure. The school library is inviting and well resourced. It is visited frequently by pupils. The school's 'reading challenge award' encourages pupils to read regularly. Pupils read with confidence and understanding.
- Pupils use interesting and ambitious vocabulary to enhance their writing. They write for a range of different purposes and across different areas of the curriculum, including history and science. Pupils' handwriting is neat and well formed. Teachers ensure that pupils develop a good knowledge of grammar, punctuation and spelling. However, teachers do not challenge pupils to use their full range of punctuation skills when writing independently for different purposes. This slows the progress of some pupils.

- Staff use their skills effectively to ensure that pupils gain the phonics knowledge to succeed as young readers.
- Across the curriculum, teachers plan lessons, with a wide range of experiences, to engage pupils and to support their learning, including visits to libraries, theatres and museums. For example, in a Year 6 topic on the First World War, pupils visited the local library to carry out their own research into this period of history.
- Teachers plan work precisely for pupils with SEND. They identify pupils' barriers to learning and provide a range of equipment and resources to support pupils in their learning. Staff work closely together to ensure that the additional support that these pupils receive is having a positive impact on their progress. As a result of effective teaching, pupils with SEND make good progress from their starting points.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress in their learning. Teachers plan support which matches their learning needs, including additional reading with adults.
- A specialist Spanish teacher enables key stage 2 pupils to speak Spanish with confidence and accuracy in pronunciation.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Leaders' determination to place pupils' well-being and welfare at the heart of the school's ethos runs like a thread through the school and its curriculum.
- An atmosphere of kindness and nurture permeates the school. Pupils feel welcomed and cared for. Each week, children are chosen to be 'VIPs' and enjoy taking on additional roles and responsibilities. They are celebrated at the whole-school Friday assembly and develop a sense of belonging to the school community.
- Leaders have planned a broad, balanced and rich curriculum which provides pupils with a wide range of opportunities to develop resilience, confidence and a breadth of knowledge. Through the Year 5 leadership programme, pupils take on outdoor challenges, including map reading, pitching their tents and cooking their own meals. Year 6 pupils value their residential trip to London, including visiting Parliament and taking part in a Shakespeare workshop.
- Staff plan a programme of assemblies which develop pupils' understanding of Christian values and how these can be used in their own actions. The local vicar teaches pupils about their school values, including thankfulness, forgiveness and trust. The school has very close links with the parish church. Pupils visit the church regularly for services and enjoy hosting visits from parishioners to school, for example for a Remembrance event. Such activities contribute very effectively to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils' understanding of British values is embedded through weekly assemblies, where pupils consider questions such as 'Should we give money to homeless people?'. Pupils learn to be thoughtful and to debate difficult topics. They develop the ability to empathise with others, undertake their own research and to consider their own responses to the issues raised.

- Leaders place a high priority on supporting pupils, including the most vulnerable, to thrive. The school's inclusion team provides a wide range of support for pupils' well-being, including for those with SEND. Additional support from other agencies and professionals is sought by leaders when needed. Staff provide calm areas in classrooms and around school to help pupils to manage their own behaviour and feelings.
- Pupils learn to be active and caring individuals. Older pupils enjoy working with the school's pastoral leader to care for the school environment, ensuring that the outdoor areas are well maintained, neat and tidy. Year 6 pupils relish the opportunity to be role models for younger pupils, for example modelling very good behaviour in corridors and in assemblies.
- Leaders make sure that pupils lead healthy lives in school. Staff encourage pupils to attend a wide range of sports clubs and increase their physical activity. Frequent events and competitions develop pupils' skills and confidence. The whole school enjoys an annual running day around the school grounds. At playtimes, pupils keep active on the well-resourced and spacious playgrounds. Pupils are very proud of their excellent achievements in sporting competitions and enthusiastic in supporting younger pupils in activities. When speaking with inspectors, 'pupil sports leaders' typically commented, 'The best thing about our job is helping others to enjoy sport.'
- Pupils live out the school's Christian identity, generously helping others. For example, pupils regularly organise charitable fundraising events for many charities. Pupil leaders take on responsibility for a wide range of activities, including helping younger pupils and leading sporting activities and events.
- The school's curriculum develops pupils' understanding of other cultures and religions. Pupils learn to value differences, including ethnicities and disabilities. Year 5 pupils enjoy a residential trip to an urban school in Halifax, where they forge friendships and learn about Islam, including a visit to a mosque. The school has established close links with a school in Kenya, and pupils enjoy sending letters to and watching videos from their partner school.
- Staff and visitors provide a range of useful safety advice for pupils and their parents. Pupils learn how to stay safe in the community, including how to avoid danger when cycling on the road. Staff provide regular training for pupils about how to stay safe online.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are extremely polite and welcoming to visitors. Their behaviour in lessons and around school is impeccable.
- In lessons, pupils work with sustained concentration. They are keen to follow the school's motto of 'Believe, achieve, succeed'. They listen respectfully to adults and their peers and contribute enthusiastically to class discussions.
- Pupils try their best with their work and are keen to improve. Staff teach pupils to be resilient learners and not to give up when work is challenging. Pupils typically commented: 'Mistakes are good. They help us to get better at our work.'
- Through carefully planned staff training, the inclusion team has developed a behaviour

policy which addresses pupils' needs and prevents misbehaviour. Pupils have a very good awareness of different forms of bullying. They learn to respect and value others. Pupils report that bullying is rare and are confident that staff deal quickly with any incidents. Staff, pupils and parents agree that pupils behave very well.

- Pupils' attendance is above national averages, including for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. The school's pastoral support leader follows up absences quickly and diligently. Pupils enjoy school and are keen to attend. High attendance is celebrated across the school. The class with the highest weekly attendance is awarded responsibility of the attendance dog, Sam.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Since the previous inspection, pupils' progress across the curriculum has improved. Pupils achieve well and leave the school well prepared for their next stage of education.
- Across the school, pupils make good progress in their reading. They read with confidence, fluency and understanding. Pupils' attainment at the expected standard and greater depth at the end of key stage 1 was in line with the national average in 2018. At the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment has improved convincingly since the previous inspection. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading was above the national average in 2018. Checks on current pupils' learning show that leaders have taken effective steps to ensure that pupils are working at, and exceeding, the school's expected standards.
- The proportion of Year 1 pupils who reached the expected standard in the national phonics screening check has remained above the national average over a period of time. Current pupils use their phonics skills and knowledge effectively in their reading and writing.
- The school's data indicates that pupils' progress in writing has improved across the school. In 2018, the proportions of pupils working at the expected levels by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 rose to above the national averages. Pupils write confidently for a range of purposes. Leaders have taken effective steps to improve pupils' skills in grammar and spelling. However, in some classes, pupils do not apply their punctuation skills with accuracy and precision in their independent writing.
- In mathematics, pupils make good progress across key stage 1. The proportion achieving the expected standard at the end of Year 2 was above the national average in 2018. In key stage 2, attainment by the end of Year 6 in mathematics has risen rapidly. The proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in 2018 was above the national average. Pupils' skills in problem-solving and reasoning have improved since the previous inspection. Most pupils develop fluency in mathematics, developing confidence in number and calculations. However, in some classes, these improvements are still embedding.
- Work in pupils' books and the school's assessment information show that current pupils make good progress across different subjects and year groups. Teachers plan engaging lessons which effectively develop pupils' skills and knowledge over time. For example, in a sequence of lessons in design and technology in Year 2, pupils designed, made and evaluated protective packaging for crisps, which they tested by sending crisps through the

post. They went on to further develop their skills and knowledge by designing, making and testing a bridge structure that would withstand a 15 kg weight.

- Pupils' attainment in science has risen in Year 2 and Year 6. Pupils make good progress in this subject, developing knowledge and skills and the ability to carry out investigations and tests.
- Pupils with SEND make good progress in their learning. This is because leaders keep a careful check on provision to ensure that the learning activities that teachers plan precisely match the needs of these pupils.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress by the end of Year 2 and Year 6, in line with other pupils in school and nationally. Additional support is put in place to ensure that these pupils develop their skills, knowledge and confidence effectively.
- Pupils leave the school as resilient, confident and thoughtful learners.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- The indoor and outdoor learning areas are a hive of activity, where children happily play, explore and learn. Nursery children settle quickly into well-established routines and play and learn successfully alongside older children.
- Most children join the Nursery and Reception classes with skills and knowledge that are generally typical for their age. As a result of skilled teaching and effective leadership, children make very strong progress. The proportion reaching a good level of development is considerably above the national average and increasing. This is also true for the proportion of children who exceed the early learning goals by the time they leave Reception. Teachers prepare children very well for the challenges of Year 1.
- The leadership of the early years is strong. The early years leader shows determination and ambition for every child to succeed.
- Staff make regular checks on children's learning in Nursery and Reception. They use this information to plan enjoyable and challenging activities to develop children's skills across different areas of learning. These carefully planned activities closely match children's individual learning needs. Early support in areas such as communication and language mean that children settle quickly and are ready to learn.
- The spacious and well-resourced classroom areas provide children with a vibrant learning environment. Leaders meticulously plan activities across different areas of learning to develop children's skills and engage their interest. As a result, children play and learn with sustained concentration and enthusiasm.
- Staff take every opportunity to engage children in learning. They use questioning skilfully to develop children's understanding and to encourage them to think about what they are doing and to talk about their ideas. During the inspection, a group of children were experimenting to find out the distance that toy cars travelled down a range of ramps. Through questioning and discussion, a teaching assistant enabled the children to use equipment to mark and measure distances.
- Classroom reading areas are cosy and inviting, containing a wide range of attractive books. Plenty of different texts are available in the different areas of learning. Leaders ensure that children practise their reading skills often. In guided reading sessions, staff

check children's understanding of new vocabulary. Children develop as confident readers.

- Staff are skilled in teaching phonics and help children to use this knowledge in their early writing. Teachers plan engaging activities to make sure that children enjoy writing and write frequently. For example, during the inspection, children were writing recipes in the outdoor kitchen area and were encouraged by a teaching assistant to use their phonics knowledge to spell out their chosen words.
- Children's behaviour in the early years is outstanding. Leaders and staff provide a warm, nurturing and calm environment where children learn to play calmly and use equipment safely and sensibly. Children listen carefully to adults and quickly follow instructions.
- Leaders make sure that statutory welfare requirements are met, and that staff strictly adhere to the school's safeguarding practices and procedures. Leaders provide a safe, secure and stimulating environment which allows children to thrive.
- Leaders have established very strong links with parents and involve them in their children's learning. Parents' workshops in areas, including reading and writing help parents to know exactly how to support their children in their home learning. A useful home school reading record is used by staff to exchange detailed information about children's learning.
- Leaders ensure that children make a smooth and successful transition to Year 1.

School details

Unique reference number	112322
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10087838

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	186
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mick Brookes
Headteacher	Maggie Cole
Telephone number	01539 737 373
Website	www.stthomasschool.org.uk
Email address	admin@stthomas.cumbria.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 to 14 December 2016

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND support is above the national average.
- The school has opened a Nursery provision since the previous inspection.
- As a school with a distinctive Christian ethos, the school was last subject to a Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) in November 2014. At that time, the school's distinctiveness and effectiveness as a Church of England school were judged to be good.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes. Some sessions were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- An inspector met with four representatives of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body.
- An inspector talked with representatives of the local authority.
- The inspectors met with groups of pupils and talked with pupils in classes and around the school.
- An inspector listened to a small number of Year 2 and Year 6 pupils read.
- A range of pupils' books was scrutinised.
- Inspectors spoke to a number of parents and took into account 36 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including free-text responses.
- Inspectors took into account 18 responses to the inspection questionnaire for school staff and 17 responses to the inspection questionnaire for pupils.
- Inspectors met with teachers, including middle leaders and senior leaders.
- An inspector met with the school's inclusion team.
- The inspectors scrutinised a variety of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, minutes of governing body meetings and records relating to pupils' attendance. A range of documentation regarding safeguarding was also scrutinised.

Inspection team

Elizabeth Stevens, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Moor

Ofsted Inspector

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