

Inspection of a good school: St Thomas' CofE Primary Academy

Poplar Drive, Kidsgrove, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST7 4HT

Inspection dates:

6 and 7 December 2023

Outcome

St Thomas' CofE Primary Academy continues to be a good school.

The **executive** headteacher of this school is Catherine Pointon. This school is part of the Three Spires Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Emily Verow, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Lee.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Thomas' CofE Primary Academy is a warm and welcoming school where all staff promote the school's inclusive and Christian values. Pupils say that they are happy and that they feel safe. They are proud of their school and keen to share their learning with visitors.

Everyone involved with the school wants the very best for all pupils. The school has high ambitions for every pupil, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils are keen to find out about new things and contribute well during their lessons. They have positive attitudes to learning.

Pupils are respectful and polite. They look after each other. They know that if they have any concerns or worries, there are adults that they can talk to. Sometimes, pupils choose to access the 'Haven' at break and lunchtimes, where they can play games and chat about their day.

At St Thomas', pupils are encouraged to be courageous advocates, where they discuss big issues and challenge injustice. Pupils also enjoy responsibilities that promote their independence and prepare them for the future. These responsibilities include taking on leadership roles, such as being a prefect and hall monitors.

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

The school has been through a challenging time. Significant staffing and leadership changes have led to an extended period of turbulence. Trustees have appointed a new leadership team and the leadership team has taken determined steps to get the school back on track. Leaders' actions are helping pupils to make the progress they should.

Despite the improvements, some parents and carers have a negative view of the school and feel that communication between home and school could be better. Leaders are aware of this and are working on a number of strategies to build positive relationships.

The school has developed an ambitious, broad and balanced curriculum that sets out the key knowledge and skills pupils should learn from early years to Year 6. The school has also considered the important vocabulary that pupils need to know and remember. Where this is effective, for example, in art and design, the combination of the carefully considered curriculum, combined with the excellent teacher subject knowledge, ensures that all pupils are able to produce work of a high quality. However, the curriculum is not yet having the strong impact that the school would like in all subjects. This is because some staff are not always fully clear about the best ways to deliver the planned curriculum. When this is the case, pupils do not always learn as well as they could.

Reading is at the forefront of the curriculum. Children begin to hear stories and rhymes as soon as they start in nursery. This develops their speech and language well. Pupils enjoy reading books from the school library. Many pupils are excited about new books that the school hopes to add to the library in the new year. Leaders have made recent changes to the way that phonics is taught in school. All staff have had training in the teaching of phonics so that they can support pupils effectively with their reading. They deliver the phonics curriculum well. Reading books are well matched to the sounds that pupils know. Consequently, most pupils learn to read well. However, for a small number of pupils who are at the earlier stages of learning to read, there are not enough quality opportunities for pupils to practise their reading. This slows their learning and hinders their reading fluency.

Pupils with SEND receive good support. The school identifies the needs of pupils with SEND accurately. Staff make appropriate adaptations to the curriculum. For example, pupils with SEND may receive practical equipment to help them to learn or extra adult support. This means that pupils participate fully in lessons, with work and support that is well matched to their needs.

Many aspects of pupils' wider development are well established. Leaders ensure that lessons promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. These lessons help pupils understand how to care for themselves and how to maintain healthy relationships with others. They learn about different faiths and understand why they need to show respect to others. Pupils have a secure understanding of how to keep safe, including when online.

Most staff are proud to work at the school. Staffing changes have impacted on morale but staff express optimism about the future. The trust and local governing body know the school well. They provide effective challenge to leaders. Trustees and governors are strongly committed to improving the school further. They understand their roles well and have the expertise to further improve the quality of education at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, what leaders intend pupils to be taught is not always consistently delivered by teachers. As a result, some teaching does not always have the impact it could. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum in every subject is delivered as intended, so that pupils can build on their knowledge over time.
- The school has not ensured that all pupils get sufficient opportunities to practise their reading. This slows pupils' learning and hampers them from catching up quickly if they have fallen behind. Leaders should make sure that there is sufficient focus on ensuring that all pupils have quality opportunities to practise their reading and develop their fluency.

Background

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

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

How can I feed back my views?

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

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

Further information

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

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

looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	148401
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10294714
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	201
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Lee
Executive Headteacher	Catherine Pointon
Website	www.stthomascofeacademy.org
Dates of previous inspection	3 and 4 December 2019

Information about this school

- This is a Church of England school in the diocese of Lichfield. A section 48 inspection was completed in November 2016. The next inspection is due this academic year.
- Leaders make use of one registered alternative provision.
- The school has a breakfast club and an after-school club operating on the site. This provision is managed by the school.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held meetings with the executive headteacher and other leaders.
- The inspector spoke to representatives from the trust and the governing body.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, and art and design. Inspection activities in these subjects included lesson visits, discussions with staff and pupils, meeting with subject leaders and work scrutiny.
- The inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.

- The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documents, including those related to safeguarding arrangements, behaviour and attendance. The inspector also reviewed the school's development plans.
- The inspector talked to staff about their role in keeping pupils safe.
- The inspector held informal and formal discussions with pupils.
- The inspector reviewed responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including additional free-text comments. They also took account of responses to Ofsted's online staff and pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Emma Gater, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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