

# St Thomas' CE Infant School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	116328
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hampshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	338794
<b>Inspection dates</b>	23–24 September 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	David Marshall

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Infant
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	135
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Stephen Smith
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Gillian Roberts
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 October 2006
<b>School address</b>	Woolton Hill Newbury Berkshire RG20 9XF
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 10 lessons, and held meetings with the headteacher, teaching and support staff, parents and pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at documentation, including the school improvement plan, the tracking of pupils' progress, provision for those pupils identified as gifted and talented, minutes of governors' meetings and 95 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- Attainment from 2009 teacher assessments ' national tests ' and the level of achievement of the current pupils by checking the school's strategies for assessment and their analysis of progress.
- Is there a gender difference in achievement and progress and how effective have the school's efforts been to analyse any reasons for this?
- The apparent strengths in pupils' personal development and the effectiveness of the school's measures to enhance, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- How well teachers' planning and extra-curricular activities enabled pupils to use their problem-solving skills across the curriculum and contribute to outcomes for pupils and to the development of community cohesion.

## Information about the school

This smaller than average infant school serves the parishes of Woolton Hill and Highclere. It is a very popular school with about a third of the children attending from the nearby towns of Newbury, Thatcham and Hungerford. The school admits pupils from a wide variety of social backgrounds. Almost all are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also below average. The school has Investor in People status and achieved the Healthy School Award in December 2007.

**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: how good is the school?**

**1**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**1**

## Main findings

St Thomas' CE Infant is an outstanding school. One parent summed up the views of almost all by saying, 'Excellent leadership of the school and handling of situations. Staff and headteacher know children very well. Overall an excellent school and very well run. Cannot fault anything.' The highly effective staff team, led by the outstanding headteacher, is responsible for the school's consistent success in providing high quality education. For the last five years, national test results for pupils in Year 2 show them to be achieving outstandingly well. Attainment is significantly above average and, in 2009, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics was very high, as was the number achieving the higher levels. Behind the impressive results are high quality teaching and the outstanding care and guidance that enable pupils of all abilities and backgrounds to make substantial gains in their learning. When children start school, their skills and understanding are in line with, or just above, those expected for their age. By the time they enter Year 1, they have made excellent progress and achieved very well. Standards are consistently above those expected for children of their age. The school's provision for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is exceptional, and as a result, they make excellent progress.

Pupils develop excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural qualities. They respond with great enthusiasm to all the school offers and are attentive and hard working. Even the youngest children have a strong awareness of the part they play in the school. Pupils say that they feel safe and happy, and they also have an excellent awareness of how to eat and live healthily. They are eager participants in all of the school's physical activities. Behaviour from the vast majority of pupils is exemplary and the pupils say that if they have a problem they feel that the adults working with them will sort it out. The school's excellent systems also enable attendance levels to be above the national average. The pupils' well above average skills in all subjects, excellent relationships and enjoyment in working together, prepare them extremely well for the next stage of their education.

The headteacher's leadership is outstanding. The staff's full and shared commitment to meeting the needs of all is at the heart of the school's success. All staff work exceptionally well in partnership with each other and all respond eagerly to new initiatives and responsibility. The school provides a very high level of care for its pupils, and related safeguarding procedures, including child protection, are very good. Health and safety routines and risk assessments are firmly in place and carried out thoroughly and regularly. Pupils' safety and well-being are paramount at all times, ensuring that the school is a very safe and supportive place to be. The excellent governing body is fully involved in the school, challenging decisions and requesting explanations where

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necessary.

The excellent track record of achieving high standards confirms that the school's capacity to improve is excellent. This is also apparent from the fact that the school knows itself very well. All staff are clear about the school's strengths and areas for development because of rigorous self-evaluation. Priorities are sharply focused and staff are held to account in meeting challenging targets. Data analysis, high quality monitoring of pupils' work and lesson observations also provide staff with evidence of where support is needed. These rigorous systems illustrate the school's excellent capacity to continue improving provision and to raise standards even further. All those involved with the school have a determination not to rest on their laurels.

The school does much to promote community cohesion and works effectively with the local junior school, the church, the many local nurseries and playgroups, and local businesses. Its recent audit, undertaken by governors and staff, is underpinned by a careful analysis of the school's context. While links with the local community are excellent, pupils' awareness of, and preparation for, living and working in a culturally diverse Britain are less well developed. As one of the governors wrote their links with the local community are excellent, but the school needs to enhance their planning to enable pupils to 'look beyond the social-cultural economic group dominant in the school'.

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Enhance pupils' understanding of their place in a culturally diverse Britain and extend the school's provision for community cohesion by:
- instigating the findings of their recent careful analysis
- implementing their twinning plans with schools in other localities.

### **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**1**

Throughout the school, pupils achieve extremely well and are inquisitive learners. All groups of pupils, including the most able and those most vulnerable, make outstanding progress. Extremely effective organisation and very careful assessments enable pupils to make excellent progress immediately they start school. As a result, standards at the end of Year 2 are significantly high and the more able pupils do especially well. Much of the pupils' success in reading and writing is due to the school's strong emphasis on developing speaking and listening skills.

It was impressive to observe, in all lessons, impeccable behaviour and the excellent skills pupils have acquired in working either independently or with their classmates. This helped to create the high-quality climate for learning that was evident in all classes. Pupils' excellent skills in reading, and their very good comprehension, mean that written instructions are quickly understood. Their outstanding skills in speaking and listening, underpinned by a wide vocabulary, help ensure that discussions in lessons are invariably of high quality. These strengths, when combined with pupils' excellent attitudes towards their studies, result in exceptional learning.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Throughout the school

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relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and contribute to the positive ethos for study. As a result, the atmosphere for learning created by the whole staff is supportive and caring. As one parent said, 'St Thomas is a very caring school, there is calmness in the classrooms and a positive attitude for learning for all ranges of ability.' The resulting thoughtfulness and care shown by pupils was evident in the rehearsal of their Harvest Festival in the church. The way older pupils encouraged and applauded the younger ones was very telling. The outstanding care begins in the Reception classes, gives the children a real sense of determining their own way forward, and guarantees their full involvement in all activities. The pupils' very high level of enjoyment in their learning is reflected in their above average rates of attendance and outstanding punctuality.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective is the provision?**

Teaching and learning are never less than good and often excellent. Teachers' planning is exceptional and, in all subjects, firmly based on the use of careful, but simple, assessments. This ensures that tasks are pitched at the right level for all pupils. As an

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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excellent mathematics lesson in a Year 2 class showed, pupils are adept now at finding a variety of ways of meeting the challenges set ' often in ways the teachers had not anticipated. Lessons move forward at a very good pace and pupils' attention is held throughout. The imaginative use of resources, such as the interactive whiteboards, inspires pupils to try their hardest.

High expectations of pupils' behaviour are evident in all classrooms. Teachers and teaching assistants are very skilful at creating a learning environment where pupils are encouraged to think for themselves and work together to meet the exacting challenges they are given. Most marking is carried out with the pupils, and is used very well to give very clear and immediate pointers about what they need to do reach even higher standards.

Academic guidance is outstanding. Pupils' progress is tracked closely and pupils are set challenging, individual learning targets. There are very rigorous systems to check their on-going progress towards these targets. The pupils are further challenged through excellent initiatives such as 'Challenge Thomas' to develop pupils' thinking skills. The challenge display boards are now prominent and well understood by the pupils. A 'Challenge Team' of pupils in each class judges the many responses at the end of the week. Their responsibility is to look at how their peers have approached the challenge and to decide who deserves to be awarded the certificate. The 'Team' is required to give good reasons for its choice, and invariably does.

The staff are constantly refining the curriculum to ensure lessons continue to be as exciting and relevant as they can make them. In particular, they search for different ways to engage pupils and enhance their thinking skills. The lessons observed where staff and pupils were using the TASC wheel (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) techniques were exceptional. To see a large number of Years 1 and 2 pupils thinking and creating the mind-maps for their current topics, and therefore determining what they wanted to learn based on the knowledge they already had, was inspiring. To see pupils engage in WINK (What I Now Know) at the end of lessons was also inspirational. As a result, their motivation to achieve more in future lessons was assured.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The driving force behind the school's success is the very high quality of leadership provided by the senior leadership and governors, supported by good leadership at other

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levels. The headteacher gives outstanding direction for the work of the school and has ensured that significant progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. As a result, pupils now make even better progress and standards have continued to be high.

The administrative and caretaking teams play a central role within the school. Their work is much appreciated. The school knows itself very well and all subject leaders are closely involved in monitoring the school's work, which they do rigorously and with tremendous enthusiasm. Documentation is impressive in range and quality and the evaluation of the school's work is honest and accurate. Procedures for safeguarding are very effective. The outstanding governing body is fully involved in this process, challenging decisions and requesting explanations where necessary. The school is zealous in its efforts to promote equality and tackle discrimination. Everyone is valued and supported to achieve their best irrespective of their social, faith or ethnic group.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>1</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make an excellent start to their education in the Reception classes. The huge level of commitment and care shown by all Early Years Foundation Stage staff is evident in the excellent quality of relationships with local playgroups and nurseries. As a result, children settle into the school extremely well and immediately begin to learn. Their attainment on entry is generally average or above expectations for their age. However, over the last three years the staff have recorded an increasing number of children arriving with lower levels of language and communication skills. Staff get to know all the



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children very well. They make a careful note of all responses and feedback. The information collected about children is used particularly well to ensure that the least able and most vulnerable settle well. Adults have high expectations, provide very clear routines and enable children to build strong, positive relationships.

Careful planning creates a very good balance between formal and creative work and encourages the children to be independent and think for themselves. One parent summed up the success of the Early Years Foundation Stage by writing, 'My child has felt safe, relaxed and positive about his start to school life. A happy beginning.' This level of enjoyment was obvious in all the lessons observed. The delight of the children as they selected and concentrated on one of the many activities related to their harvest festival was particularly impressive. The classrooms are stimulating and resources are used exceptionally well as children move from one activity to another. The outstanding outside area provides the same exciting level of challenge and stimulation. This is especially well used by the staff to provide challenging, and thought-provoking tasks for the more able children to ensure all are able to make maximum progress.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

**Views of parents and carers**

The overwhelming majority of parents who returned questionnaires or who spoke to the inspection team are very happy with the school. They consider that the school has a dedicated team of staff and the headteacher leads and manages the school extremely well. They agree that the school has a very warm, supportive and friendly atmosphere and that their children make excellent progress. Inspectors fully endorse these views. A small number of parents had concerns and constructive suggestions to make and these were discussed with the school. Issues raised covered several areas and in the main related to the individual parent/carer concerned.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Thomas' CE Infant School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 95 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 135 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	60	63	33	35	0	0	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	64	68	31	33	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	36	38	56	59	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	43	45	42	44	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	57	60	34	36	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	57	49	42	44	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	55	58	39	41	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	37	39	50	53	0	0	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	48	51	40	42	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	38	40	49	52	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	31	33	55	58	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	61	64	31	33	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	72	76	21	22	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.

**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.**



Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Thomas' CE Infant School, Woolton Hill RG20 9XF

I am writing to thank you all for making us so welcome when we came to the school recently. We did enjoy our visit. Yours is an outstanding school with many strengths, and we agree with what you told us ' it is a really fun place to learn. Here is a list of some of the things that we think are really good.

- You all make excellent progress in your learning.
- You behave extremely well, get along with each other and feel safe in school.
- You all have very good ideas on how to make things better and the teachers always listen to what you want.
- You have an outstanding understanding of how to live healthily.
- You find lessons interesting and really enjoy school.
- There are plenty of exciting things for you to do both in school and on visits and in clubs.
- The school looks after you extremely well and shows you how to improve your work.
- The headteacher and staff manage the school exceptionally well.

Even in outstanding schools, there are ways of getting better. We have asked your headteacher and staff to look at one way of making a difference to what you learn. We have asked them to make sure you are given the chance to look at and understand about how children and adults live in places that are different from where you live.

Yours faithfully

David Marshall

Lead Inspector

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