

School Improvement Visit: Summary Report

Name of school	St Thomas of Canterbury CE Primary School (previously Lapford Community Primary School)
Visit dates	17/11/25 to 18/11/25
Consultant	Neil Swait
Key Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The adviser completed a series of learning walks with a focus on inclusion, curriculum and teaching, achievement, behaviour, and leadership. This included visiting lessons, scrutinising pupils' work, and curriculum planning, and speaking with pupils and staff to gather a broad evidence base.• Leaders were engaged in discussions relating to attendance and behaviour, personal development and well-being, inclusion, and the early years, enabling a deeper exploration of practice and impact in these areas.• A range of school documentation was reviewed during the visit, including the SEF, school development plan, behaviour logs and attendance data, to triangulate findings and inform evaluative judgments.

Inclusion

Strengths

- Leaders have established effective systems across the school to swiftly and accurately identify pupils who may have additional needs or barriers to learning. These systems begin in the Nursery and Reception years.
- Leaders set high expectations for the most vulnerable pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, have SEND, or speak English as an additional language. The support provided typically reduces barriers to learning and well-being, enabling these pupils to experience success.
- Leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate support and training so that a graduated approach to meeting additional needs is implemented effectively. As a result, the needs of the most vulnerable pupils are generally well met.
- Leaders hold a precise, well-evidenced understanding of pupils' needs and their progress over time. This enables them to make informed decisions about provision and evaluate the impact of support accurately.
- Pupil premium funding is used strategically and transparently, directed towards actions with the greatest immediate and sustained impact on removing barriers for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders make effective use of the latest educational research to inform their actions. As a result, the additional funding is having a positive impact on the learning and well-being of the most disadvantaged pupils.
- The SENDCo, as part of the school's leadership team, plays a key role in determining and securing appropriate actions and support for pupils with SEND. She demonstrates a detailed and well-informed understanding of the barriers these pupils typically face.
- Leaders work closely and effectively with pupils, parents, and external agencies to ensure they act in the best interests of the most vulnerable and secure the appropriate support without delay.
- Warm, respectful relationships between staff and pupils are deeply embedded across the school. All pupils, especially the most vulnerable, are made to feel valued and included.

Areas for development

- Leaders should strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of the pupil premium strategy to further maximise its impact on learning and well-being and ensure that any remaining differences in outcomes between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils continue to diminish.

Curriculum & Teaching

Strengths

- Leaders hold an accurate, well-evidenced understanding of curriculum and the quality of teaching across the school. They use this insight to prioritise the most pressing areas for improvement and to ensure that actions have clear, measurable impact.
- The school's curriculum reflects the ambition of the National Curriculum and is well structured. Leaders have identified the essential knowledge, and skills pupils must secure and sequence these, so pupils build understanding cumulatively and reach the intended end points.
- Staff typically have the curriculum knowledge, skills and pedagogy needed to teach effectively. Well-designed resources and materials support pupils to meet the curriculum aims. As a result, teaching is generally effective over time and learning is appropriately matched to pupils' prior knowledge.
- Teachers present information clearly, using effective modelling and explanation. Structured opportunities for paired discussion help deepen understanding and develop pupils' ability to articulate and refine their ideas.
- Early readers benefit from well-organised support through a consistent systematic synthetic phonics programme, which offers a clear sequence of learning and expectations, ensuring that pupils get off to an effective start.
- Teachers make effective use of live feedback to address misconceptions swiftly. When gaps in knowledge appear, staff adapt their approaches appropriately so pupils can keep up rather than catch up.
- An appropriate curriculum offer in writing and mathematics helps pupils secure the foundations for future learning. For example, in KS1, pupils typically punctuate sentences accurately, spell common exception words correctly, apply their phonic knowledge successfully and develop increasingly accurate letter formation.
- Support staff are deployed strategically so that pupils access high-quality teaching from their class teacher and develop increasing independence in their learning.
- Assessment is used effectively to identify misconceptions and inform next steps. Leaders ensure that assessment approaches support teaching without creating unnecessary workload.

Areas for development

- Leaders should further strengthen outcomes in early writing by ensuring that:
 - misconceptions in letter size and positioning are addressed promptly
 - teacher modelling of handwriting is consistently precise
- Leaders should continue to refine approaches to adaptive teaching, including through task design, so that the most vulnerable pupils can work consistently and successfully towards the same ambitious end points as their peers.

Achievement

Strengths:

- Children's achievement in the EYFS good level of development (GLD) continues to rise. In 2025, all children were successful in securing a GLD. As a result, over time most children enter KS1 having secured the necessary foundational knowledge in the areas of language and communication, reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils achieve highly in the Year 1 phonics screening check, and most leave KS2 reading fluently at an age-appropriate level.
 - Books provided for the weakest readers closely match the letter–sound correspondences and common exception words they know, enabling them to read with suitable fluency, accuracy, and comprehension.
 - Outcomes in the phonics check have risen from 91% in 2023 to 100% for two consecutive years.
 - In 2025, 89% of pupils met the expected standard in reading by the end of KS2.
- Outcomes in writing, spelling, punctuation and grammar, and mathematics were broadly in line with national averages in 2025, demonstrating generally secure attainment across core areas.
- Pupils typically acquire the essential foundational knowledge they need for future success. Those at earlier stages, read with increasing fluency, spell age-appropriate common exception words, form letters accurately and apply grammar and punctuation with growing confidence.
- Pupils are generally well prepared for the next stage of their education. Their work and responses demonstrate appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding across the curriculum.
- Vulnerable pupils, including those with SEND and disadvantaged pupils, usually make progress that is appropriate to their individual starting points, reflecting effective identification and support.

Areas for development

- Continue to strengthen pupils' secure foundational knowledge across all phases, ensuring that all pupils, including the most vulnerable, are consistently well prepared for the demands of subsequent learning.

Attendance and Behaviour

Strengths

- Pupils demonstrate high levels of self-discipline and commitment to their learning. They are consistently polite, well-mannered, and hardworking, contributing to a positive and respectful school culture.
- Leaders set clear and ambitious expectations for pupils' behaviour, ensuring that positive relationships, well-established routines and understood boundaries shape the school's behaviour culture. As a result, low-level disruption is rare.
- Staff have a precise understanding of the school's behaviour expectations and approaches. Systems for rewards and sanctions are applied consistently.
- Behaviour incidents are logged accurately and followed up thoroughly. Leaders analyse emerging patterns and act swiftly. Sampled logs show a notable reduction in behavioural concerns over time, reflecting effective work to reduce disruption and support pupils with the most complex needs.
- The importance of good attendance is promoted consistently and effectively. Leaders act promptly to address concerns and remove barriers. As a result, overall attendance, including for pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils, comfortably exceeds the latest national average of 95.3%.
- Suspensions and exclusions are used only as a last resort. Leaders implement proactive strategies, such as behaviour support plans, to minimise triggers for dysregulation. Consequently, there have been no exclusions since the last inspection and a significant reduction in suspensions.
- Pupils report feeling safe, happy, and well cared for. They know who they can speak to if worried, and trust that adults will take them seriously. Pupils understand what bullying is and say it is not an issue in their school.

Areas for development

- Sustain the effectiveness of current approaches to promoting strong attendance and supporting pupils with more complex behavioural needs, ensuring that improvements continue over time.

Personal Development & Well-being

Strengths

- Leaders have developed a well-structured and effective personal development curriculum, which positively supports pupils' readiness for life in modern Britain and helps them grow into responsible, respectful, and active citizens.
- Pupils demonstrate a secure and confident understanding of fundamental British Values. They can articulate clearly how these values are embedded in the daily life and culture of the school.
- Pupils present as confident, resilient, and increasingly independent young people. They collaborate well with peers, showing compassion, empathy and understanding. Their reflective, considerate approach is evident in their relationships and their wider conduct in school.
- Leaders ensure that pupils have access to a rich range of opportunities beyond the classroom, including the arts, music, sport, educational visits, residential and guest speakers. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about these experiences, which successfully broaden their horizons.
- The school's chosen PSHE/RSHE curriculum is tailored carefully to pupils' needs and the local context. This ensures that pupils develop the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate life in modern Britain with confidence.
- Pupils speak knowledgeably about maintaining a healthy lifestyle, both physically and mentally, and about staying safe online. They understand the features of positive and negative relationships and demonstrate a confident awareness of concepts such as consent, discrimination, and appropriate touch.

Areas for development

- To strengthen the personal development offer further, leaders should:
 - deepen pupils' understanding of the nine protected characteristics
 - extend pupils' knowledge of world religions and faiths and improve their confidence in discussing these.

Early Years

Strengths

- Staff use a clear understanding of children's starting points to shape curriculum design and teaching. From Nursery onwards, gaps in children's knowledge are identified promptly and addressed effectively so children can build secure foundations.
- Adults place a clear and deliberate emphasis on developing early communication skills, including language and vocabulary. Children benefit from a rich range of planned opportunities to talk, listen, and develop early oracy.
- Children, including the most vulnerable, are happy, safe, and well cared for. They develop secure knowledge and skills across the seven areas of learning, appropriate to their age and stage. This is reflected in strong outcomes and the high proportion of children achieving a good level of development.
- Staff are highly alert to the learning barriers faced by vulnerable children. A range of early checks ensures additional needs are identified swiftly and the right support is put in place without delay.
- Leaders ensure that the EYFS curriculum is well structured and sequenced. Key knowledge is mapped clearly across the educational programmes so that essential concepts and skills are taught systematically and in a logical progression.

Areas for development

- To further strengthen the effectiveness of the EYFS provision, leaders should ensure that:
 - activities within the continuous provision consistently have a clear and explicit learning intent
 - the continuous provision is managed effectively so all children, including the most vulnerable, fully engage with the full breadth of opportunities
 - tasks and activities are closely aligned with what children already know and can do, enabling them to build securely on prior learning.

Leadership (including safeguarding)

Strengths

- Leaders are taking effective and sustained action to address historic weaknesses in the school's provision. Their clear, strategic approach to school improvement ensures that progress is both secure and continually built upon.
- Leaders articulate a confident, realistic, and well-evidenced understanding of the school's performance. They know the context, strengths, and priority areas for development. Their improvement plans are purposeful, justified and focused on securing high standards across all key stages.
- Leaders ensure that the school's professional learning programme is closely aligned with the key priorities in the school development plan. As a result, when rapid improvement is needed, such as in managing pupils' behaviour, staff have the skills and expertise required to deliver effectively.
- Staff feel well supported by leaders in relation to their workload and well-being. They report feeling valued and listened to. Staff express confidence that leaders have established robust systems to protect them from bullying, discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.
- Leaders act in the best interests of all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, have SEND or are known to children's social care. They work proactively with families and external agencies to remove barriers to learning and secure appropriate support.
- Leaders make effective use of expertise across the trust, nurturing a culture of mutual support and professional challenge. Staff speak highly of the professional development they receive and the positive impact this has on their classroom practice.
- Safeguarding is firmly embedded in the culture of the school and underpins all aspects of its work. Leaders ensure that staff have the knowledge and confidence to recognise signs of abuse and follow up concerns promptly and effectively.

Areas for development

- Ensure that governors/directors develop a secure working knowledge of Ofsted's renewed inspection framework and understand how the school's performance aligns with the revised expectations.
- Continue to embed leaders' actions so that consistently high standards are sustained across the school, ensuring that recent improvements continue to be consolidated over time.