

Thorpe Greenways Infant School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	114778
Local authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	378927
Inspection dates	15–16 March 2012
Lead inspector	Selwyn Ward

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	359
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Matthews
Headteacher	Denise Knight (Acting Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	18 January 2007
School address	Greenways Southend-on-Sea SS1 3BS
Telephone number	01702 464951
Fax number	01702 602161
Email address	office@thorpegreenways-inf.southend.sch.uk

Age group	4–7
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Introduction

Inspection team

Selwyn Ward Additional inspector

Victoria Turner Additional inspector

Nicholas Rudman Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Including learning walks, the inspectors visited 30 lessons taught by 12 teachers, with a particular focus on pupils' writing. Inspectors listened to pupils read, and spoke with pupils, parents, staff, the headteacher-designate of the federation and members of the governing body. The inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' books, school development planning, school self-evaluation, leaders' monitoring of teaching, the notes of local authority advisers and the questionnaire responses of 113 pupils, 17 staff and 134 parents and carers.

Information about the school

This school is much larger than average. Most pupils are White British. Others come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is well below average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is average, as is the percentage of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Of these pupils, most have moderate learning difficulties.

The school has Healthy Schools status and Activemark, Artsmark Gold and International Schools awards. It is part of a hard federation with the neighbouring junior school. The two schools formed a joint governing body in February 2012 and have agreed a joint budget for the coming financial year. The school has had an acting headteacher since September 2010. From September 2012, the acting headteacher will become head of school, with the junior school headteacher taking on the role of federation headteacher.

The Trinket Box Pre-school shares the school site. This is independently managed and separately inspected.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. The reason it is not outstanding is because teaching is good rather than better, and pupils have hitherto made faster progress in Years 1 and 2 than in the Reception Year.
- Pupils achieve well. They make good progress over their time at Thorpe Greenways Infant so that attainment is consistently above average by the end of Year 2. Although the rate of progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage is improving, it has been slower than in Key Stage 1. Able pupils do especially well at this school, with many demonstrating remarkable confidence and competence in their writing.
- Pupils’ consistently good behaviour and their positive attitudes to learning contribute to the good progress they make in lessons and over their time at school. Pupils say they feel safe, and their parents whole-heartedly endorse this view.
- Teachers have very high expectations and they set work that challenges and extends pupils. Occasionally, tasks are a little too challenging and leave some pupils confused. This is the case when activities or the success criteria for the lesson are not matched sharply enough to pupils’ different capabilities. It also occurs when pupils working at different levels are all taught letters and sounds (phonics) together. Marking and assessment are good. Along with the personal targets that every pupil has, these give pupils a clear picture of how well they are doing and what they need to do to do better.
- The leadership team and governing body have not allowed the arrangements for federation with the juniors to distract them from their roles in maintaining the school’s good performance. Leaders’ lesson observations are well focused on pupils’ learning and progress, with points for development that help teachers to share best practice.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By the start of the autumn term 2012, further accelerate pupils’ progress in

lessons by ensuring that activities and success criteria are sharply matched to pupils' different capabilities and all pupils understand exactly what is expected of them.

- By the start of the summer term 2013, consolidate the revision of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum so that children make consistently good progress through the Reception Year and they start Year 1 with above average attainment.
- By the start of the autumn term 2012, review the organisation of phonics sessions so that pupils are taught in groups more closely matched to their prior attainment and all staff benefit from appropriate training in the teaching of phonics.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Most parents say that their children make good progress over their time at the school. Inspectors agree. Children join the Reception Year with skills and capabilities that are broadly in line with those expected for their ages. In each of the years since the last inspection, attainment at the end of the Reception Year has been average, representing satisfactory progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Under new leadership and with new staff, the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum has been revised this year. This has involved an increase in the opportunities for children to learn through purposeful play. As a result, children often now make good progress during their time in the Reception classes. More-able children are being stretched; inspectors saw examples of writing and mathematics in the Reception classes that were much in advance of children's age.

Pupils make good progress in Years 1 and 2, so that attainment at the end of Year 2 has been consistently around six months ahead of the national average. Pupils currently in Year 2 are on track to attain at least as well this year, with more able pupils than previously attaining as well in writing as in reading and mathematics. Pupils are especially keen to write for a specific purpose. Year 1 pupils came up with their own idea of compiling individual brochures to introduce the school to newcomers. Among these, one pupil wrote with accuracy in a fluid script beneath a photo of the acting headteacher: 'This is Mrs Knight. She is the headteacher. Mrs Knight and the other teachers are very friendly. If you get stuck on your work, they are always there to help you.' Like writing and mathematics, attainment in reading is around six months ahead of the national average by the end of Year 2. There are very few pupils in the current Year 2 whose reading has not already reached or surpassed the nationally expected level for the end of Key Stage 1.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are well supported in most lessons and so they generally make similar progress to their peers. Some, and some lower-attaining pupils, make slower progress than others in phonics sessions where they are in groups with activities pitched at too high a level. Where they learn phonics in small groups taught by a teaching assistant, errors can creep in when

staff are not confident in accurately annunciating letter sounds.

Quality of teaching

Teachers have high expectations and pupils are certainly keen to rise to the challenge. Lessons move forward at a brisk pace so that pupils usually get a lot done in the time available. Parents agree with their children that teachers draw on a stimulating curriculum to make learning interesting and exciting. They approve of the way teachers manage classes, with one parent quoting their child's description of their teacher as 'fair, firm and fun'. Because relationships throughout the school are good, pupils like their teachers and they are well motivated. As a result, they grow in confidence and self-esteem, reflecting their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Lessons routinely start with the teacher setting out learning objectives and success criteria, but these are not always focused sharply enough on catering specifically for the full range of capabilities within the class. Because teachers' expectations are so high, instructions to the class are sometimes quite complex. This can result in some pupils being left uncertain as to what they should be doing. In a challenging Year 1 mathematics lesson, for example, pupils were asked to put together combinations of two-, four-, six- and eight-legged creatures who might be entering Noah's Ark so as to make a total number of legs. When given a sheet to complete using a different number from the one shown on the board, one girl spoke up for the pupils on her table in declaring that, 'This is confusing.'

A strength of teaching is marking that mostly gives pupils guidance on how they can improve, although there is not always enough rigour in highlighting spelling errors and slips of punctuation. Pupils all have and make use of personal targets that also help them to move their learning on. A key factor in ensuring that pupils make good progress over their time at school is teachers' careful assessment and monitoring, with individual education plans drawn up and followed for any pupil identified as at risk of falling behind, as well as for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Almost all of the parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire or who used Parent View expressed full confidence that the school keeps their children safe. Parents are positive too about behaviour at the school. Several indicated that they felt they could not answer the question about how bullying is dealt with because they had never heard of any bullying at the school and had no experience of it. Pupils expressed similar views. Although they understand about the different forms that bullying might take, they were firm in their view that it is an exceptionally rare occurrence. Even the youngest children quickly develop a sense of responsibility and concern for others' safety. Reception children, who had already successfully negotiated an obstacle as they moved between outdoor learning areas, spontaneously called back encouragement and warnings to their classmates to 'Be careful guys!'

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They get on well together and

they treat each other with respect. They take a pride in their school and most take a similar pride in their written work. In lessons, pupils are attentive and keen to volunteer answers to the questions teachers pose. Just occasionally, when expected to sit for too long on the carpet, some get fidgety and lose concentration.

Attendance is average but it is improving. Attendance for the first six months of this year was higher than for the equivalent period the previous year.

Leadership and management

The transition towards federation with the neighbouring junior school resulted in an initial period of uncertainty and has demanded much organisational change, including a restructuring of the governing body. Nevertheless, leaders and governors have ensured that this has not been at the expense of provision for pupils and their performance. Equal opportunities are promoted well, so that, for example, there is less difference between the performance of boys and girls than seen nationally. Discrimination is tackled well, including through the opportunities pupils have to learn about different ways of life. Leaders and the governing body have an accurate view of the school. Monitoring of lessons is rigorous, with feedback to teachers that has driven improvement. The most marked improvement has been in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where leaders have embarked on a review of provision that has reduced the previous reliance on formal Key Stage 1-style lessons in favour of increased opportunities for children to learn through well-structured play. This is developing children's sense of independence and inquiry. The changes, however, are as yet too recent to show through in terms of their impact in improved attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. School leaders can point to success in tackling the issues from the last inspection. More pupils are attaining the higher Level 3 in writing and pupils all now have and refer to their individual targets. These improvements, and the sustained above average attainment, demonstrate the school's capacity for continued improvement.

The curriculum is stimulating and includes some stand-out features, but it is good rather than outstanding because arrangements for teaching phonics are not closely enough matched to pupils' different levels of understanding of letters and sounds. Nevertheless, pupils benefit from many memorable experiences that enrich their learning and contribute strongly to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils have the opportunity to learn some simple words in Spanish, with Year 1, for example, writing out *los numeros* in mathematics. The number and range of extra-curricular clubs goes beyond those ordinarily available to pupils in Key Stage 1. The school's participation in the National Gallery 'Take One Picture' initiative has prompted a host of thoughtful research activities among the pupils, as well as artwork of a remarkably high standard. Outdoor learning has become a regular and integral part of the curriculum. During the inspection, Reception children made good use of the attractive and well-designed outdoor areas to learn about shape and to search for and identify mini-beasts. Their use of the outdoor areas gives children a very well-developed understanding of safety, as they discuss and evaluate for themselves potential risks. They spotted, for example, that they must take extra care because pupils from the juniors were playing cricket in the adjoining playground. This involvement of even the youngest children in risk assessment means that the school's arrangements for safeguarding surpass government requirements.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



19 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thorpe Greenways Infant School, Southend-on-Sea SS1 3BS

Thank you for welcoming us when we came to visit, and a particular thanks to those of you who shared with us your views about the school, either by talking to us or by filling in the questionnaire. You told us, as did your parents, that you think Thorpe Greenways Infant is a good school. We agree. It is good because it is well run, the teaching is good and you are all helped to make good progress so that you are ahead of most children of your age by the time you move on to the juniors. We were pleased to see that you behave well and are keen to join in in lessons. That too helps to make the school good and makes it a friendly, happy place to be.

We have suggested a few ideas to help Mrs Knight and the staff make this school even better. We saw that some of you were sometimes not sure what you should be doing in lessons, so we have asked teachers to make sure that the success criteria they give you are always clear and that you are all given activities that help you gain as much as you can from the lesson. Some of you could do better in phonics if the sessions were grouped differently so that you always learnt with others working at the same level. We could see that there have been improvements this year in the way things are organised in the Reception classes, so we have asked the school to build on this so that, in future, children's skills are above average by the time they start in Year 1.

You can help by continuing to work hard and do your best, and by telling your teacher any time you find the work you are doing is too easy, too hard or if you are confused.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly on our visit, and our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Selwyn Ward
Lead inspector

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