

# Thorpedene Infants' School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115265
<b>Local Authority</b>	Southend-on-Sea
<b>Inspection number</b>	357723
<b>Inspection dates</b>	3–4 March 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Selwyn Ward

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>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	199
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Pam Dewey
<b>Headteacher</b>	Nick Booth
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 April 2008
<b>School address</b>	Delaware Road Shoeburyness, Southend-on-Sea SS3 9NP
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors, who visited 19 lessons taught by 10 teachers. Inspectors spoke with staff, parents and carers, members of the governing body and groups of pupils. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work, the analysis of the tracking of pupils' progress, attendance records, school policies and procedures, school leaders' monitoring records, notes of governing body meetings, school development planning and risk assessments. They also analysed the questionnaires received from staff and 41 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Why have able pupils done less well in writing than in reading and mathematics?
- To what extent are there differences in the performance of boys and girls, and what has been the impact of measures taken to address this?
- What has been the impact of curriculum innovation on outcomes for pupils?
- How has the school helped pupils to overcome potential barriers to learning?

## Information about the school

The school is smaller than the average primary. The large majority of pupils are White British, with an increasing proportion coming from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. None are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. Around a third of the pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, which is high in comparison with other schools. More than 40% of the pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. Again, this is a high proportion. Thorpedene Infants' has several awards including Activemark, Artsmark Gold, Basic Skills Quality Mark and Healthy Schools status. It has also won an award for its modern foreign language teaching. The school is scheduled to expand to become an all-through primary school from September 2011, following local authority plans to close the neighbouring junior school.

A pre-school operates on the school site. Although now managed by the school, it was originally independently managed and is separately inspected.

**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?**

**2**

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

**2**

## Main findings

This is a good school. The headteacher, leadership team and the governing body have an acute appreciation of the school's strengths and its areas for development. Together, they have maintained and built upon the many good features identified in the school's previous inspection. This shows the school's good capacity for continued improvement.

Thorpedene successfully lives up to its motto: 'Achieving, Caring, Respecting'. Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage with attainment that is generally well below that expected for their age. Children are achieving well because they make good progress in the Reception Year and pupils continue to make similarly good progress in Key Stage 1, so that attainment is average by the end of Year 2. This is true for pupils of all abilities and backgrounds. Those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals make much faster progress than pupils in similar circumstances in other schools. The same is the case for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. These pupils do well because, in this caring school, provision for their welfare and support is outstanding. Every pupil's progress is very carefully tracked, with swift and effective additional support provided whenever an individual is identified as at risk of falling behind. In this way, even pupils in potentially vulnerable circumstances are helped to overcome barriers to their learning and to make good progress. High quality welfare arrangements, including systems for chasing up unexplained absences, also contribute to the above-average attendance rates. The school functions as a friendly, harmonious community because pupils from different backgrounds understand the importance of respecting each other.

Pupils benefit from good teaching and a curriculum that is made interesting and exciting. Topics, such as 'robots', that fire the imagination of the boys, have helped them to narrow the gap when, previously, they were out-performed by the girls. Staff motivate pupils to listen attentively and work with concentration, and a key success of the school is the creation of a consistent climate for learning where pupils want to do well. Behaviour is good, so that even those who join the school with emotional and behavioural difficulties learn, and increasingly follow, Thorpedene's orderly routines. In the main, pupils settle to work without fuss, often undertaking activities that are carefully matched to their different capabilities. When teaching the whole class together, however, work does not always stretch the most able. Although almost every lesson begins with the teacher setting out 'learning objectives', pupils are not routinely given appropriately targeted criteria against which those of different abilities can measure their success. The quality of marking is too variable, particularly in writing. Pupils are not always encouraged to check their own and each other's work for spelling and punctuation mistakes. These are among the factors that result in fewer able pupils attaining the high levels in writing that they attain in reading and mathematics.

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

- Accelerate the pace of learning and raise attainment, especially in writing, by:
  - providing more opportunities for boys and girls to practise their writing and mark-making in the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly in the outdoor area
  - setting success criteria in lessons that are matched to the different capabilities of the pupils and which stretch the more able
  - ensuring that pupils routinely check their own and each other's spellings and punctuation
  - making more effective use of 'talk partners' to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills
  - giving all pupils consistent guidance through marking that shows them what they need to do to improve their work.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**2**

Very well targeted support has enabled pupils who need extra help with their learning to make the same good progress as others. Nationally, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals are almost a year behind their peers by the end of Year 2. The gap is very much narrower in this school, with these pupils attaining the same broadly average standards. Pupils listen attentively, even in quite long sessions sitting on the carpet. Their good behaviour and sensible attitudes contribute to their good progress in lessons, and over their time at the school, especially when learning through topics that stimulate their interest. In an English lesson linked to the theme of 'robots', for example, pupils had been excited to watch a clip from the film *Wall-E*, but they quickly settled to task when the teacher asked them to come up with descriptive accounts of the setting shown in the movie. When a boy referred to a 'ginormous pile of junk', the teacher took the opportunity to focus on the appropriate choice of different consonants for spelling the words, while challenging pupils to check out whether or not 'ginormous' could be found in the dictionary. In scribing the pupils' sentences on the board, the teacher made deliberate 'mistakes' with her punctuation, inviting pupils to put her right. Pupils' books, however, show that they do not always take such care to check their own and each other's work.

Pupils have a good appreciation of the need for regular exercise and a healthy diet. They have an equally strong understanding of how to keep safe, including when using the internet. They are enthusiastic about the responsibilities they take on within the school, including as school councillors, and they are taking a growing interest in the wider world beyond school, as evidenced by the effort they have devoted to their homework projects on the theme of Chinese New Year. Pupils' good rates of attendance, progress in key skills and the way they work constructively together all serve to prepare them well for the next stage of their education.

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<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

## How effective is the provision?

What most stands out about provision at Thorpedene is the high quality of the arrangements for pupils' care and welfare. The meticulous tracking of pupils' progress is key to the very carefully targeted support that greatly raises attainment for those who need extra help with their learning and for those in potentially vulnerable circumstances, including children with child protection plans and those who are looked after. The school has taken the initiative in developing provision from which pupils at other local schools now benefit. These include 'The Harbour' nurture group, run in partnership with the neighbouring junior school, which is aimed at raising pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Leaders and the specialist support staff draw well on partnerships with outside agencies to supplement what the school provides.

French has been introduced from the Reception Year and throughout the school, adding an international dimension to the curriculum that is not always seen in provision for pupils of this age. There is also a wider range of clubs and other extra-curricular activities than are commonly available to pupils in Key Stage 1. There is a good take-up rate for these, and they are among the many features that pupils like about school. The good relationships that teachers have with their classes contribute to pupils' enthusiasm in lessons. Pupils are also well motivated by the interesting topics through which staff creatively link subjects together, although these cross-curricular ties are a relatively recent initiative. Teachers frequently encourage pupils to share their thoughts and ideas with a

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'talk partner'. In the most effective lessons, pupils are then asked to report back to the class on what their partner has said. Where this occurs, it provides a strong fillip to the pupils' speaking and listening skills. Often, however, pupils only repeat to the class what they have previously told their partner rather than what their partner has said to them. This does less to promote good listening. Teachers have detailed assessment information that shows them how well each child is doing. They make good use of this when allocating individual and group tasks but they are not always so careful in using assessment information when planning whole-class teaching that ensures that all are stretched. Marking also varies widely in quality, so that pupils are not always aware of what they need to do to improve their work.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and leadership team are rigorous in monitoring pupils' progress and ensuring that support is tailored to pupils' individual needs. This has enabled the school to maintain consistently good rates of progress for all pupils, including the many who need extra help. The school's successes in raising the attainment of pupils in potentially vulnerable circumstances and in reducing the gap between boys and girls demonstrate the impact of its promotion of equal opportunities. Community cohesion is also promoted well. This is very evident in the way in which pupils from different backgrounds get on together and the interest that pupils take in learning about different faiths, including through visits to places of worship.

Leaders closely monitor all aspects of provision, and teachers are given practical feedback that contributes to the shared drive for continued improvement. The headteacher's recent sampling, for example, of teachers' draft mid-year reports indicated that they were not providing enough information to parents and carers on the progress their children were making in literacy and numeracy. Changes were made as a result, and the reports are now greatly improved.

Governance is good. Members of the governing body visit regularly so they are not just dependent on staff for knowing what goes on in school. The governing body has been innovative in its efforts to better engage parents and to plan for continuity. It has introduced, for example, the option of 'associate governor' status, offering what is essentially an apprenticeship for prospective governors that has enabled them to grow into their role so that they can make a full contribution when they graduate to full governor status. Although heavily involved in the reorganisation plans that are expected to lead to the school expanding shortly to incorporate Years 3 to 6, the governing body has

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not allowed this to distract it from its prime responsibility to challenge leaders over current provision and ensure that all legal requirements are met. These include the arrangements for ensuring pupils' safeguarding. These are especially thorough. For example, the checks on the suitability of adults to work with children are carried out with greater frequency than demanded by the current regulations.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</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>2</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

The strong focus on developing personal and social skills means that children settle quickly and make good progress across all of the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning in this well-run provision. The careful focus on children's progress and subsequent small-group support and interventions result in them starting Year 1 with skills and capabilities only a little below average. Children's early writing skills lag behind other areas of learning, especially among the boys. In part, this is because some opportunities are missed for children to practise and apply their writing and mark-making skills, for example by creating their own labels and notices for the outside area.

The classrooms are stimulating environments for children's learning. Children interact well together and support each other's learning through relevant and confident speaking and role-play skills. They were keen to explain that they were 'going to Mars' on their broomsticks in the recently improved outside areas and how they were 'making spells in the cauldron' in the witches' den. Strong adult support and high expectations ensure that pupils grow in confidence. They develop increasing independence and their behaviour is good.



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

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

## Views of parents and carers

The level of response to questionnaires was lower than average. Parents and carers express generally positive views of the school. A small minority indicated that they were unhappy about behaviour and progress, but inspectors saw consistently good behaviour and judged pupils to be making good progress. Pupils confirm that any incidents of misbehaviour are dealt with promptly and well. A similar minority of parents and carers indicated that they have been unhappy about the information they have on their child's progress. Leaders' monitoring has identified that reports have, in the past, provided insufficient information about progress in English and mathematics. Changes made to the reports for this term have improved on this.

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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thorpedene Infants' 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 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 41 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 199 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	29	71	9	22	2	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	29	71	11	27	1	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	16	39	21	51	4	10	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	49	14	34	7	17	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	19	46	19	46	2	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	18	44	19	46	3	7	1	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	16	39	25	61	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)	14	34	16	39	5	12	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	44	20	49	3	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	34	18	44	4	10	3	7
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	13	32	21	51	6	15	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	19	46	19	46	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	61	12	29	3	7	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 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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## 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 pupils' 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.**



7 March 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Thorpedene Infants' School, Southend-on-Sea, SS3 9NP**

Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming when we came to visit your school. One of the boys in Year 2 asked me at the start of our first day at Thorpedene how I classified the school. He explained that the school was judged good last time and wanted to know if inspectors agreed that that was still the case. It was too soon for me to give an answer there and then, but I can now. I am pleased to say that Thorpedene is indeed a good school! It fully lives up to the 'Achieving, Caring, Respecting' motto, and what especially stands out about your school are the excellent arrangements for your welfare and support. This ensures that even those of you who find learning difficult are helped to do well.

You make good progress from the start of the Reception Year to the end of Year 2 because you benefit from good teaching that makes learning interesting and fun. You enjoy learning through topics which fire your imagination. We could see that in your writing, although sometimes this is let down when you make careless spelling mistakes or forget your capital letters and full stops. You can help to make your writing even better by always taking extra care to check your own and each other's work. We have also asked teachers to be sure always to give you help through marking that shows you what you need to do to improve your work. In Reception, we have asked staff to give the children more opportunities to practise their writing, for example by making their own 'car park' signs in the outside area.

We were pleased to see such good behaviour and how well you all get on together. It is that which makes Thorpedene such a happy, friendly place to be. You work together well, including when sharing ideas with a partner. We have suggested that for this to help you even more, in building up your speaking and listening skills, teachers should more often ask you to report back to class on what your partner has said to you rather than what you told your partner. We have also asked your teachers to challenge you more, especially in lesson introductions, by giving you different success criteria so that this part of the lesson does not become too easy for some of you.

Thank you again for looking after us on our visit, and our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Selwyn Ward

Lead inspector

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