

Thropton Village First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122229
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	359195
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Derek Neil

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Marr
Headteacher	Mrs Sue McLean
Date of previous school inspection	27 September 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. He observed three lessons and three part-lessons led by four staff. He held meetings with a group of pupils, some members of the governing body and some members of staff. He observed various activities throughout the school day, and looked at a range of documents including policies related to safeguarding, assessment data and the school development plan. He also considered 22 parental questionnaires as well as questionnaires completed by pupils and staff.

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

- The attainment of pupils in Key Stage 1.
- The improvements made to the school's care, guidance and support.
- The impact on pupils' achievement of improvements to teaching and assessment.

Information about the school

Almost all of the pupils in this very small rural school are from a White British heritage. The proportions of those known to be eligible for free school meals and of those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are below average.

The school has received several awards including the Eco school silver award and the Basic Skills award, and it has achieved Healthy Schools status. At the time of the inspection, the leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage had long-term leave of absence.

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 which has improved considerably since its last inspection. Parents and carers are understandably delighted to send their children there.

The small numbers in year groups mean that pupils' overall attainment on entry to the school varies. This is also true of pupils' overall attainment when they leave the school, but broadly speaking it has been rising in each key stage and is now above average. Pupils make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and throughout their time in the school to reach these standards, although few reach the highest levels in each key stage. This is because the most-able are not challenged enough in some lessons.

Pupils' personal development is also good. To observe them at lunch and at play is to see how mature, confident and sociable they become. They behave well and treat others with consideration and respect. They make an excellent contribution to the school and local communities, for example, by taking on responsibilities in school or by performing at various events in the nearby villages. They benefit from productive links with other schools which give them a wider experience than they might otherwise get living in a fairly remote rural community. However, they do not learn much about the cultural diversity of British society.

Pupils do well because of imaginative teaching, a stimulating curriculum, which provides a wealth of different experiences, and the careful way the staff assess their work and use this information to help them to improve. All staff know each pupil as an individual and this greatly contributes to the outstanding care, guidance and support the pupils receive.

The school has good capacity to improve. Its good progress in recent years has been due to the determined leadership of the headteacher, whose close focus on the previous inspection report's recommendations has been highly effective. Staff and the governing body share a commitment to continuous improvement and are involved in monitoring and evaluating the school's performance. Although self-evaluation lacks a rigorous analysis to pinpoint exactly where the school needs to improve, it is accurate in its assessment of what the school does well. The school's improvement plan is a detailed document which sets out useful actions for the coming year. However, it does not explain the impact each development is intended to have on the pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further raise attainment by:
 - increasing the level of challenge for the most-able
 - improving pupils' basic writing skills, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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- Improve the way it plans for the future by:
 - evaluating its performance more analytically to identify new priorities
 - specifying in its plans the impact certain actions are meant to have on pupils.
- Develop the pupils' understanding of cultural diversity in Britain.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enjoy their lessons and achieve well. When asked what they like most about school, many rate learning very highly. They pay attention to the teacher, show good levels of concentration and carry out work individually or with a partner sensibly. When participating in a discussion with the whole class they willingly volunteer answers to the teacher's questions. In mathematics, for example, they are all keen to share the strategies they have devised for completing a calculation. Their attitudes to work have contributed to the good progress they make and the rising attainment in the school. Their work is usually neat but its quality is marred for those who have not mastered some basic writing skills such as how to form letters correctly. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of the high level of support they receive in class and the additional teaching they get that is well targeted to meet their needs.

Pupils make a very strong contribution to the running of the school. The school council, for example, has played a key role in determining how behaviour is to be managed, and this has contributed to the good behaviour in lessons and at play time. The school council is currently deliberating how best to use a generous library budget it secured by successfully petitioning the governing body. Pupils feel safe in school and are confident that any rare instances of bullying will be swiftly dealt with. They know how to stay healthy, enjoy playing outdoors and are very active.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
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
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ 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?

Teachers enjoy good relationships with the pupils and know how to get the best out of them. Lessons are planned well; they have clear objectives and imaginative and practical activities designed to ensure pupils enjoy the work and make good progress. For example, when pupils were considering the differences between fiction and non-fiction the teacher asked them to plan a trap for the wolf they had encountered in a work of fiction by doing some research in a factual book about wolves. Teachers assess pupils' progress to establish what they need to learn next. They seek to prepare work at the right level for the different year groups in their class, but sometimes tasks are too easy for the most able. They mark pupils' work regularly and praise what they achieve and write effective advice on how to improve.

The main strength of the curriculum is the great variety of experiences with which it enriches pupils' lives and helps them find new interests and talents. The school, along with local partners, provides a wide and exciting variety of extra-curricular activities that is particularly impressive for such a small school. Furthermore, it organises an extensive range of visits and visitors, enabling pupils to learn a musical instrument, for example, visit a theatre, or demonstrate their skills in a skipping festival. The school strives continually to improve the care, guidance and support it provides for pupils. Its endeavours to raise attendance, which include the introduction of a breakfast club, have been highly successful. Its systematic arrangements for preparing pupils for the next stage of their

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education ensure that everyone moves up through the school and to the middle school with confidence. Its support for pupils vulnerable due to their circumstances highlights the great store it sets by helping everyone to overcome disadvantage.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has enjoyed considerable success working alongside staff to improve teaching and assessment and to raise attainment. The governing body, which boasts a good range of relevant experience and expertise, has ably assisted in this process. Staff and leaders share a commitment to continual improvement. They are all involved in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school and in planning for it to improve. They have an accurate understanding of the school's quality but the written self-evaluation does not make the most of available data to identify priorities for improvement, nor does the school's development plan specify how its actions are meant to make a difference to pupils.

The arrangements for safeguarding pupils are comprehensive. Two members of the governing body are responsible for checking on safety in school and have prepared written reports with helpful recommendations. This is an inclusive school where staff do their utmost to help all pupils achieve well. They have ensured, for example, that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make as much progress as their peers. School leaders recognise their responsibility to broaden pupils' experience of communities beyond this predominantly White British, small, rural village and have firm plans to exploit links with contrasting schools, including one in Nepal. They recognise the importance of making pupils more aware of cultural diversity in Britain.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Their attainment at the end of Reception varies each year because the size of the year group is small. In the main, they develop skills that are average and sometimes above average by the time they enter Year 1. They settle into class quickly each day, follow well-established routines, and work and play well together. They enjoy the activities and materials that are prepared for them, behave very well, and develop good levels of self-confidence. They feel safe in the welcoming, friendly and secure learning area. The staff provide a well-struck balance of teacher-led and child-initiated activities, suitably tailored to individuals' needs. There is plenty of opportunity for children to work and play outdoors, which children do with relish. Teaching is imaginative; daily plans show that staff cover all areas of learning through a well-conceived range of integrated activities. Staff are adept at asking questions to develop the children's thinking and enhance their vocabulary. They keep them interested when speaking to them as a whole class on the carpet, though on occasion this can go on for a little too long. The robustness of established routines and systems, the close involvement of the headteacher, and the enthusiasm and talent of key staff have ensured that the unit has continued to do well in the absence of the Early Years Foundation Stage leader. However, school leaders are aware of the need to provide continuity and stability if the children are to continue to make good progress.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
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

Most parents and carers responding to the questionnaire were positive about the school. Several provided comments, mostly to praise the work of the staff and the help their child has received. One parent expressed a concern that events for parents and carers were held at a time when it is difficult for some to attend. The staff are aware of this matter and are doing what they can to make it easier for parents to become involved in the life of the school. Another expressed a concern related to one class, but the inspector found no evidence to support this comment during the visit.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thropton Village First 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 inspector received 22 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 47 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	14	64	7	32	1	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	15	68	6	27	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	11	50	9	41	2	9	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	11	50	10	45	1	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	11	50	10	45	1	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	64	4	18	1	5	1	5
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	50	11	50	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	64	7	32	1	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	64	7	32	1	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	50	9	41	1	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	50	9	41	2	9	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	9	41	12	55	1	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	68	5	23	2	9	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).

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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



23 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thropton Village First School, Morpeth, NE65 7JD

Thank you for welcoming me so warmly into your school. I enjoyed watching you in lessons and at play, talking about your school with you and your teachers, and looking at your work. Now I want to share with you what I thought.

You go to a good school. The staff take extremely good care of you and I understand why you say you feel safe there. You enjoy your lessons, for which the teachers plan imaginative activities to help you make good progress with your work. You behave well in school and are very confident and polite when speaking to adults; you should be proud of this. You learn how to eat healthily and take lots of exercise. I was particularly impressed by your prowess with a skipping rope! You make an excellent contribution to society; in particular, the school council has been very effective in securing funding for better facilities. You get lots of opportunities to do exciting things, such as learning to play a musical instrument or visiting the theatre in Newcastle.

There are a few things that would make the school even better. I have asked the staff to help you reach higher standards in your work. I have also suggested a different way for the school leaders to plan their improvements to the school. I know that staff do a lot to introduce you to different experiences in the local villages and further afield. I have asked them to find a way of giving you an insight into the huge variety of cultures and communities that are found in Britain.

Thank you again for helping me so much. It was a pleasure to meet you. I wish all of you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Derek Neil

Lead inspector

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