

Thurston Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

School Lane, Thurston, Bury St Edmunds, IP31 3RY

Inspection dates 5–6 December 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils in all ability groups achieve well. Standards are consistently above average by the time they leave at the end of Year 4.
- Most teaching is good and there are some outstanding examples, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Girls' attainment is particularly high in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils behave well. They say they feel safe at school, a view supported by parents.
- The school is improving because the headteacher has focused sharply and effectively on improving teaching and raising achievement.
- Leaders, managers and governors work together well to improve the quality of the education the school offers its pupils.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- While boys' attainment is above average, it is not as high as that of the girls.
- The school's range of reading materials does not appeal sufficiently to boys.
- Pupils do not have enough time to write at length in different subjects, especially on topics that appeal to boys.
- Pupils do not always spend time discussing what they want to write before setting pen to paper.
- Teachers do not always give pupils sufficient time to respond to the comments in their books, so that they know exactly what they must do to improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed eight lessons or parts of lessons, all of which were joint observations with the headteacher. Seven teachers and most support staff were seen working with the pupils.
- The inspector heard pupils read, attended assemblies, and looked closely at examples of pupils' work with the headteacher.
- The inspector looked at a wide range of school documents, including development plans, policies, self-evaluation reports, monitoring files, safeguarding and curriculum materials, evidence of the school's partnership work and information for families.
- Meetings were held with pupils chosen at random. Discussions were held with the headteacher, class teachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor, and a representative of the local authority.
- There were very few responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), but the inspector spoke with several parents in the playground, received three letters and made two telephone calls to parents during the course of the inspection.
- The inspector also considered the 18 questionnaires returned by staff.

Inspection team

Nick Butt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- A below-average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals, and pupils who have a parent in the armed forces serving overseas.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The usual judgements about current government floor standards do not apply, because the school does not have any pupils in Year 6.
- The headteacher joined the school in September 2011. Before her appointment the school had been through a period of uncertainty in its senior leadership.
- The school is being reorganised, and the current Year 4 pupils will remain at the school until the end of Year 6 (in July 2015) rather than move to a middle school at the end of Year 4.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Move teaching from good to outstanding by:
 - giving pupils more opportunities to talk together about their writing before they start to write, so that they are clear about what they want to say
 - making sure that pupils have the time to respond to teachers' comments in their books, so that they know how to improve their work.
- Raise boys' attainment to the same high levels as that of the girls by:
 - giving pupils plenty of opportunities to write at length in different subjects and on topics that boys find interesting
 - increasing the range of reading materials that appeal to boys.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children join Reception with skills and abilities in line with those generally expected. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage because of consistently good and sometimes outstanding teaching. Children enjoy exciting and purposeful activities linked to an interesting theme, such as dinosaurs.
- Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 1 and 2, and standards have been consistently above average in reading, writing and mathematics over recent years. Careful attention to the teaching of reading has made sure pupils are confident in linking the sounds that letters make.
- In Years 3 and 4, standards are also consistently above average because of good teaching and the way teachers encourage pupils to find things out for themselves. Pupils' progress over time from the end of Year 2 to the end of Year 4 is more rapid than that seen nationally.
- The attainment of girls is higher than that of boys. Almost all the pupils identified as having special educational needs are boys, and there is not enough reading material that interests boys. While pupils' writing is generally good, some pupils (especially boys) do not write enough, and the topics for writing do not always inspire boys. Even so, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs achieve well because they are given support that is set at just the right level for them, and staff check how well they are doing very closely.
- Pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium make good progress because the additional funding is spent wisely on extra reading support, help with developing their social skills and more assistance in the classroom. The impact of this spending is that there are no gaps in performance between these pupils and the others in the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- Pupils are keen to learn because teachers make lessons interesting and enjoyable. They ask pupils searching questions to check what they understand and to probe their thinking. They make sure that work is set at just the right level - not too easy or too hard.
- Year 4 pupils were given demanding number problems to solve, which generated plenty of discussion about the best method to use. Skilful questioning by the teacher helped pupils to develop a system for finding a solution.
- Teachers make clear to pupils what they are going to learn and how they will know when they have learnt it. They refer back to what pupils already know, and look ahead to how they will apply what they have learnt in future lessons. This helps pupils to make links in their understanding.
- Children in Reception get off to a good start because of high-quality teaching, which captures their imagination and develops their early learning skills well. For example, children enjoyed taking part in a 'dinosaur' hunt outside, and drew dinosaur footprints on the ground.
- While the teaching of writing is mainly good, sometimes pupils do not spend enough time talking about what they are going to write to get their ideas in order and to bounce suggestions off their classmates. This means they are not always ready to do their best piece of writing.

- Pupils know their individual targets to move up to the next level of attainment, which are displayed on the wall. They often refer to them and discuss them with their teachers.
- Attractive displays that celebrate children's work go arm-in-arm with handy hints on the walls to aid pupils' understanding. This makes the school an interesting place to learn.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and leave helpful comments about the next steps in their learning. However, they do not always give pupils enough time to read these comments and respond to get the most out of them.
- Teaching assistants support pupils well, especially disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Individual plans are drawn up to give pupils the best chance of success, and adapted work is based on these plans. This helps them to achieve well.
- Having listened to pupils' views, the school has changed its approach to homework so that it is much more based on finding things out through topic work, and much less on filling in worksheets. Pupils find this a more interesting way to build on what they are learning in school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils are enthusiastic about their lessons and quickly become absorbed in their work. They behave well, both in class and around the school. Pupils are thoughtful and considerate to one another and polite and respectful to adults. Just occasionally their concentration wavers if the lesson does not fully interest them.
- Pupils say that bullying is not an issue. They are confident that adults will sort out any problems they may have. Pupils have a good understanding of different types of bullying such as cyber bullying and name calling.
- Pupils enjoy taking on additional responsibilities, for example as members of the school council. They help with the younger children, and raise large amounts of money for charity. They feel that the school listens to their opinions when they share them.
- Parents say that pupils are well behaved and feel safe in school. Pupils know all about keeping safe, and find the visits from safety professionals such as railway police helpful. They understand about how to use the internet safely and how to avoid everyday dangers, such as on the roads.
- Pupils' attendance is above average and they arrive on time at school. This is because the school takes a firm line on unnecessary absence and because pupils enjoy coming to school.

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher has set the school on a course of rapid improvement since her arrival, and has won the support of the whole school community. Her focus on improving teaching and raising attainment has worked well. In particular, the headteacher's expertise with data has meant that excellent systems show exactly how well individuals and groups of pupils are doing, and the information is easy for staff to get at.
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- All staff share the headteacher’s vision of helping pupils to achieve their best, and have a very good understanding of what the school wants to improve most. Leaders know the school’s strengths and weaknesses because they check how things are going all the time. They keep a close eye on how quickly the school is improving in line with its plans.
 - Teachers have demanding targets to improve their work, which are linked to the progress pupils make. The school expects good value for money from all its staff, so those who are paid more have to do more to justify the extra expense. In the same way, promotion and pay rises are only considered if teachers’ performance merits them.
 - The headteacher has made sure that all staff receive the training they need to hone their skills, for example in teaching the sounds that letters make and in trying out new approaches to teaching mathematics. Support staff have training to assist them when working with pupils on improving their basic skills.
 - Plans are well underway for the school to become an all-through primary, and the appointment of a deputy headteacher and Year 5 teacher from September 2013 has already been made. The school is taking advice from other schools that are further down the road with reorganisation so that it can gain from their experiences.
 - Teachers make subjects interesting and follow pupils’ interests. They are working to do this even more, so that boys are motivated to write at length on things that really appeal to them, as their writing is not always as good as that of the girls.
 - The school promotes pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Its links with a school in Rwanda and the visit of one of the African teachers help pupils to understand what life is like in another cultures.
 - The school has good relationships with parents and the local church. Parents in the playground were very positive about the school’s work and felt their children were happy and doing well. All pupils are treated equally and discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
 - The local authority has provided good support for the headteacher, especially when she first joined the school. It has given the school useful help in preparing for taking on Years 5 and 6.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors know that the school is doing well and have seen the improvements that have come about since the headteacher was appointed. They understand what teaching is like and are up to speed with how well pupils are doing, both in the school and compared with other similar schools. Governors are kept abreast of the targets teachers must reach and how this links to pay rises. They keep a tight rein on the budget and follow with interest the success of the pupil premium funding in closing gaps in attainment for eligible pupils. Governors visit the school on a regular basis to find out for themselves how things are going, and have spoken to pupils to gather their views. They make sure that they receive the professional training they need to become even more effective. They also make sure that they fulfil their statutory obligations, for example in safeguarding pupils and recruiting suitable staff.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	124715
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	402288

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	143
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Louise Harper
Headteacher	Kathy Lambert
Date of previous school inspection	4 May 2010
Telephone number	01359 230444
Fax number	01359 232729
Email address	admin@thurstonprimary.net

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