

Inspection of a good school: Thropton Village First School

Thropton, Morpeth, Northumberland NE65 7JD

Inspection dates:

14 September 2022

Outcome

Thropton Village First School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

The tranquil, peaceful setting of Thropton Village First school matches the calm, harmonious atmosphere in classrooms and corridors. Forty four pupils and a small staff team, work, learn and play in a warm, welcoming environment. Pupils are happy, they enjoy coming to school and make the most of the safe space that has been created by leaders.

Staff have high expectations for pupils. They expect them to behave well, work hard and do well. Pupils respect staff, they listen attentively and demonstrate exemplary manners. Pupils are kind and thoughtful. Being in mixed-aged classes that include three year groups is not a problem. Pupils manage the situation by being independent, patient and tolerant of others. They know at times they might have to wait for adult support. They are supportive of each other; this helps pupils to make the most of their time at school.

Pupils have been taught about bullying but find it difficult to imagine that it could happen at their school. They are certain that if bullying did occur, an adult would be there to sort things out. Pupils know that there is always an adult available to talk to if they have a worry or a concern.

Pupils are fully involved in the life of the school. House captains and school council members are voted for, enabling pupils to have a voice in school.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders successfully manage the challenge of running a school with two small classes. Careful thought has been given to ensure that pupils receive an ambitious and appropriate curriculum. Leaders skilfully use all the resources that they have at their disposal. For example, meeting rooms, the hall and corridor areas are used throughout the day to provide small group support for different ages when required.

The curriculum has been designed with a three-year rolling programme to manage the logistics of mixed-age classes. This is generally successful as teachers skilfully adapt their teaching to ensure that different year groups access appropriate curriculum content. Sometimes, the curriculum lacks sufficient detail and structure. There are times when pupils learn particular knowledge in a subject and then do not revisit to build on this knowledge in subsequent years. This means that there is a risk that pupils could leave at the end of Year 4 with gaps in their knowledge.

Pupils with special educational needs and or/disabilities (SEND) receive a curriculum that is carefully matched to need. For example, the mathematics curriculum has been adapted for identified SEND pupils. Content has been broken down into small steps. What pupils know is regularly assessed and the curriculum is adapted accordingly. This is helping pupils to achieve well.

All staff have been trained to deliver effective, high-quality phonics sessions. Children in nursery are introduced to sounds and develop an early phonological awareness before moving into Reception Year. Once in Reception Year, children receive a structured phonics programme, where they learn how to say the sounds that letters make and then apply this in their reading. Pupils demonstrate their phonic knowledge well but at times struggle to read the books that they are given. This is because teachers are not matching books to pupils' knowledge accurately enough. This prevents pupils reading fluently and with enjoyment.

Staff use praise effectively to motivate and support pupils' behaviour. Leaders have ensured that pupils understand what is acceptable behaviour. Straightforward reward and sanction systems help pupils to manage their own behaviours successfully.

Leaders provide a range of opportunities and experiences for pupils. Trips to Newcastle, online author visits and careers fairs give pupils opportunities to learn more about the wider world. Leaders have also invested in new texts that teach pupils about diversity, inclusion and relationships.

Leaders have created a school where staff are happy and feel valued. Due to the size of the school, staff have to take on many roles and responsibilities. Leaders are considerate of this and ensure sufficient time is allocated to support workload. Trustees and school academy councillors are an integral part of the school. They provide support with well-being and training. They also hold leaders to account by asking challenging questions regarding the performance of pupils and the curriculum. Trust leaders are keen for Thropton to maintain its identity as a 'village' school. They support school leaders' decisions for what is best for the pupils here at this school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are determined that the culture of safeguarding is one of vigilance and that 'it could happen here'. Although leaders deal with very few safeguarding incidents there is no air of complacency. Detailed records demonstrate how leaders have taken decisive,

appropriate action when required. Leaders successfully work in conjunction with external agencies to support the needs of families and pupils.

The personal, social and health education curriculum is tailored to the context of the school. Pupils are taught about the dangers of being close to a river and how to manage their behaviours in the locality.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the curriculum lacks sufficient detail and structure. This means that pupils may miss out on acquiring crucial knowledge as they move through the school. Leaders should review the curriculum to ensure that the three-year rolling programme enables pupils to revisit and build on their prior learning.
- The accuracy of teacher assessments for pupils' reading is not precise enough. As a result, some pupils are being asked to read books that do not match their reading knowledge. This leads to pupils' struggling to read with fluency and enjoyment. Leaders should review how reading is assessed and make sure that books are carefully matched to pupils' needs.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Thropton Village First School to be good in September 2017.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	145637
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10241378
Type of school	First
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	44
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Simon Taylor
Headteacher	Liam Murtagh
Website	www.thropton.the3rivers.net
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined the Three Rivers Learning Trust on 1 April 2018.
The school does not use any alternative provision

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors did deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. Here, inspectors spoke to leaders about the curriculum and met with teachers from the lessons visited. Inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils.
- Inspectors listened to a range of pupils read from different year groups.

- The lead inspector met with the acting chair of the academy council, the chief executive and chair of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors looked at the single central record and spoke to leaders, teachers, academy council members, and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered the responses made by parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including any free-text responses. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

David Milligan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lynn George

Ofsted Inspector

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