

Inspection of Thurlow Voluntary Controlled Primary School

The Street, Little Thurlow, Haverhill, Suffolk CB9 7HY

Inspection dates: 21 and 22 March 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to attend their school. They learn well and enjoy their learning. Pupils appreciate the extensive outdoor and woodland spaces. They say this opportunity helps them to widen their understanding of nature.

From the early years, children are well supported by adults to make the right choices in how they behave and treat one another. They also understand that their actions have consequences. Pupils respond well to adults' high expectations. They are kind and show respect for one another and their teachers and staff.

Pupils feel and are safe. Bullying is very rare. If there are any unkind behaviours, adults are quick to sort it out. If pupils have any worries, they talk to their teachers and other adults. Pupils are encouraged to do this from a young age so they learn about managing their worries and emotions.

Pupils are thoughtful and interested in their school and local community. They plan events to raise money for charities, such as supporting people affected by the war in Ukraine. Taking on responsibilities is important to pupils, especially key roles such as taking a lead in collective worship and lighting the prayer candle.

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

Leaders have designed a well-thought-through curriculum. Learning is broken down into small stages that build into more complex learning over time. Leaders have considered the important vocabulary and knowledge that pupils in mixed-age classes need to learn over time.

Staff typically have strong subject knowledge. They know what pupils need to learn. Most of the time, staff identify when some pupils need extra help or additional practice. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to share their learning and think about what they have learned. However, in a few subjects, staff do not check pupils' understanding precisely enough. This means they do not identify when pupils are struggling or need more help as quickly as they could. As a result, pupils' understanding and knowledge are less well developed in these subjects.

There have been recent changes in subject leadership. Where this is the case, the monitoring of these subjects is not as well established as in other areas. As a result, newer leaders do not yet know how pupils are faring in their subjects.

Pupils are exposed to a wide range of texts and reading materials. These are suitably challenging and linked closely to what pupils are learning in their wider curriculum. Pupils learn to read using a phonics programme that is consistently well taught. In early years, children get off to a good start with learning the sounds that letters make. They can blend sounds and read words they have learned. There are a few older pupils who are not as confident or fluent in their reading. While these

pupils have extra reading sessions to catch up, occasionally, this support is not helping pupils to catch up as quickly as it could.

Children in the early years enjoy a carefully designed curriculum. They explore the outside area with excitement and purpose. Adults are skilled at developing children's language. They pose skilful questions and check children's understanding. Children are very well supported to learn how to concentrate and play together kindly.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities typically learn and develop well. They receive targeted support that is effective in helping them to access the curriculum and keep up with their classmates. Skilled adults support pupils who are struggling with their social and emotional needs. This helps to keep pupils focused on their learning and to self-regulate their behaviour.

Pupils have opportunities throughout the day and in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons to reflect and discuss any topics that may affect their emotional well-being. They show a maturity when discussing differences between different people's experiences, home lives, lifestyles and traditions. Pupils benefit from 'themed weeks' and 'special days' when they learn about festivals, historical figures and diversity. Leaders are starting to increase the after-school clubs, trips, visits and opportunities available to pupils even further.

Staff are unanimous in their positive view of leadership with regard to support for their workload and well-being. Leaders have managed change sensitively. They have used the benefits of collaboration of staff across the federation to maximise the expertise between staff.

Governors have maintained the rigour of improving the quality of education while being decisive in their decisions to ensure the sustainability of their small rural school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff have regular training so they are familiar with signs that pupils may be at risk of harm. Staff know how to record concerns. These concerns are followed up swiftly by leaders. Advice is sought as needed. Families appreciate and value this support.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe through the curriculum, in an age-appropriate way. For example, older pupils talked knowledgeably about their learning from a recent visit from the police regarding 'county lines' in the local area. Pupils of all ages understand the risks when using the internet.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Occasionally, the activities provided to pupils who need additional support to catch up in their reading are not closely matched to the current stage of their development. This means that they are not catching up with their classmates as quickly as they could. Leaders must ensure that all interventions are precisely matched to the gaps in pupils' reading knowledge, so they catch up as quickly as possible.
- Some subject leaders are new to their role. They do not know how well pupils are achieving in the areas they lead. Leaders need to ensure that newer leaders know how to check how well pupils are achieving so they can carry out their new leadership role effectively.
- Some staff's use of ongoing formative assessment is less developed in a few areas of the curriculum. This results in pupils' knowledge and understanding being less secure in these subjects. Leaders need to ensure that all staff are able to identify and act to address weaknesses in pupils' learning effectively in all curriculum subjects. Newer subject leaders need to monitor how well pupils are faring in their curriculum areas.

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	124698
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10255089
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	59
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Val Phillips
Headteacher	Sharon FitzGerald
Website	www.htpfederation.co.uk/index.php/thurlow
Date of previous inspection	14 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Thurlow Voluntary Controlled Primary School is part of the Hundon and Thurlow Primary Federation.
- The headteacher, deputy headteacher, special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator (SENDCo) and subject leaders undertake their roles across both schools.
- There is a federation governing body that oversees both Hundon and Thurlow schools.
- There are fewer classes at the school due to a decline in pupil numbers on roll since the previous inspection.
- There is a morning sports club which the school facilitates through an outside provider that pupils can attend free of charge.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the SENDCo, other leaders, staff, pupils, a representative from the local authority, and the chair and five other members of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. In early reading, this took the form of listening to pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to the leaders for PSHE education, the early years, and beliefs, religions and values education.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation form and improvement plan, school policies and minutes from governing body meetings.
- As part of the evaluation of the school's safeguarding processes, inspectors reviewed the single central record, met with the designated safeguarding leads, reviewed safeguarding files, looked at behaviour and attendance records and spoke to pupils and staff.
- Inspectors reviewed the 23 responses that were submitted by parents to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, and considered the 23 free-text responses from parents. Inspectors also considered the 10 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. Inspectors met with a number of pupils.

Isabel Davis, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Nicola Shadbolt

Ofsted Inspector

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