



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
Thorpe CE Aided Infant School

Surrey Education Authority

Dates of inspection: 17-18 May 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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Basic information about the school

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| Name of school: | Thorpe CE Aided Infant School |
| Type of school: | Infant |
| Status: | Voluntary Aided |
| Age range of pupils: | 4 to 7 years |
| Headteacher: | Mrs E F C Nichols |
| Address of school: | The Bence Rosemary Lane Thorpe Egham Surrey TW20 8QD |
| Telephone: | 01932 562329 |
| Name and address of appropriate authority: | The governing body, address as above |
| Chair of governors: | Canon Michael Hereward Rothwell |
| Local education authority area: | Surrey |
| Unique reference number: | 125174 |
| Name of reporting inspector: | Mrs G I Oldham HMI |
| Dates of inspection: | 17-18 May 2004 |

Introduction

1. Thorpe CE Aided Infant School is situated in the village of Thorpe, near Egham in Surrey. The school is small and the 64 pupils on roll live in the village and surrounding area. Most pupils are of white British heritage. Five per cent of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is below the average. Forty two per cent of the pupils have been identified by the school as having special educational needs, which is well above the average. Two pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need. The pupils' attainment on entry to the school is average.

2. The school was inspected in November 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of November 2002. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on three occasions to monitor the progress being made.

4. In May 2004 two HMI inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:

- standards have risen steadily over the last year in the Foundation Stage and in Year 2. Overall, the pupils in these classes are working at the levels expected for their age with some of the more-able pupils achieving well. In Year 1, the standards are lower and the pupils' progress is more erratic, mainly because of the frequent changes of teachers;
 - the pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. They have improved as a result of the higher demands that are being made of them in the lessons and at other times;
 - provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school's Christian foundation is reinforced through the assemblies, and opportunities are provided for the pupils to consider a range of social and moral issues. Relationships are good and the staff provide a positive role model for the pupils to follow;
 - the quality of teaching has improved significantly since November 2002. The effective practice in the Foundation Stage has been sustained and the teaching in Key Stage 1 has strengthened as a result of rigorous monitoring, professional training and changes of staff. In nine of the ten lessons the
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teaching was satisfactory or better, including three where it was good and three where it was very good. In one lesson, the teaching was unsatisfactory;

- overall, there is greater consistency and continuity in the quality and range of the curriculum between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Due emphasis is given to the development of the basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Planning in the reception class and in Year 2 is very good but it is more variable in Year 1;
- the leadership and management are sound. The headteacher has benefited from the well-focused professional support she has received from the local education authority (LEA) and the diocese and her skills have developed well. Throughout a period of staff turbulence she has remained focused on implementing the appropriate actions needed to raise standards and improve the consistency in the teaching. Although a start has been made to delegate areas of responsibility to other teachers, the frequent changes of staff have hindered this process. The headteacher continues to carry too heavy a workload for co-ordinating subjects and the situation is unlikely to be fully resolved until next term when all the permanent teachers are in post. Governance has improved significantly and the governors have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in monitoring the school's work.

Key issues

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- continue to raise standards, especially in Year 1;
- improve the consistency in the teaching by raising the quality to that of the best;
- strengthen the roles of the subject leaders in planning and monitoring aspects of the school's work.

Inspection findings

Standards achieved by the pupils

7. Standards have risen steadily over the past year. Overall, the pupils are working at the levels expected for their age but standards are highest in the reception class and in Year 2, where some of the more-able pupils are achieving well. As a result of past weaknesses in the teaching in Year 1, some pupils are not reaching standards of which they are capable but there are signs of improvement because of changes of staff.

8. The school's provisional results in the 2004 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 1 show a significant improvement over the previous year in the percentage of pupils achieving the expected Level 2 and higher Level 3 in reading, writing and mathematics.

9. In the Foundation Stage, provision is very good. The pupils are making rapid progress and most are likely to achieve the nationally set Early Learning Goals across the six areas of learning by the end of the reception year. Some of the more-able pupils are already working competently within Level 1 of the National Curriculum in aspects of reading, writing and mathematics. Curriculum planning is detailed and thorough and an interesting range of work in the classroom and outside area provides very good opportunities for the pupils to develop their independence and to take decisions. The pupils are eager to learn and keen to talk about the work they are doing. Most pupils use a good range of vocabulary. In one whole-class activity, individual pupils used appropriate mathematical vocabulary to describe the position of different numbers in a sequence and to ask questions of each other. As a result of the strong emphasis that is given to practical tasks, the pupils use and develop their skills in a wide variety of work.

10. In Key Stage 1, the pupils' oral skills are satisfactory in Year 1 and good in Year 2. In this older-age class, the most-able pupils described and explained their work in detail, using a wide range of vocabulary accurately, including words which are specific to individual subjects. Standards in listening vary from good to unsatisfactory. When the teaching was engaging, the pupils listened attentively but a small proportion of the pupils found it more difficult to concentrate in large-group sessions.

11. Standards in reading are satisfactory throughout Key Stage 1. The pupils enjoy reading and use a range of appropriate strategies to tackle unknown words and texts. In particular, the good attention which the pupils gave to punctuation increased their fluency and intonation when they read aloud. The pupils have a sound understanding of how to read an information book and used the contents page properly to locate information.

12. By the end of Year 2, standards in writing are satisfactory. The pupils structured fiction and non-fiction texts with equal skill. Some writing by the most-able pupils was of very high quality. The good links which are made between reading and writing were evident in these pupils' rich and humorous use of language. The opportunities for the pupils in Year 1 to develop their writing have been more restricted and, as a result, the standards are weaker overall.

13. There are effective opportunities for the pupils to develop and learn literacy skills in work across the curriculum. Useful displays and resources, including dictionaries, supported the pupils' attempts to write in all subject areas. Several subjects, in addition to English, are used to teach the pupils to write in a variety of styles and for a range of purposes. Appropriately, the school has begun to plan systematically for these opportunities.

14. Standards in mathematics across the key stage are satisfactory and rising. The pupils' number skills were generally secure and most counted accurately in twos, fives and tens but a few were more hesitant when counting backwards from different starting points. Some of the more-able pupils in both year groups had a good understanding of place value and calculated accurately using their knowledge of multiples of different numbers. The pupils had access to an appropriate range of mathematical resources and these helped the higher attainers to discover patterns in different sequences of numbers while the less-able pupils used the equipment successfully to reinforce their understanding of addition and subtraction involving single-digit numbers.

15. Standards in science are broadly average. The pupils undertake an appropriate range of work covering topics such as the body, the senses and materials but in Year 1 the methods they used to record their ideas did not adequately reflect the needs of the different ability groups. In Year 2, the methods of recording were more varied, and planning and recording sheets were used successfully to help the pupils to organise their work.

The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

16. The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The Christian theme of the assemblies allows opportunities for quiet reflection and prayer and for the pupils to consider a range of moral and social issues. The lighting of a candle and the use of music help to establish an appropriate atmosphere. When the pupils are invited to participate through role play or by leading the prayers, they make positive and mature contributions.

17. All pupils are encouraged to be independent, to care for others and to take responsibility for equipment. In the best lessons, for example in the reception class, the pupils made sensible choices about the resources they needed to use to help them do their work. A range of appropriate strategies is being introduced to raise the status of the oldest pupils and to give them more responsibilities around the school.

18. The pupils' experiences are enriched through links that are made with the local community, visitors to the school and their involvement in a range of clubs. One of the more recently established clubs provides good opportunities to reinforce the pupils' social awareness by focusing on care and concern for the environment, animals and the community.

19. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour have improved significantly as a result of the greater consistency in the quality of the teaching and the higher demands made of them. They are keen to learn and usually concentrate well in lessons. Relationships are good and the adults set positive role models for the pupils to follow. There is a small but significant number of pupils who have behavioural difficulties. The needs of these pupils are clearly understood by the staff, who support them well in lessons and at other times during the school day.

20. The reported attendance rate for the autumn term 2003 and spring term 2004 was slightly below the national figure for primary schools. Appropriate strategies are in place to address the issues relating to the irregular attendance of a small minority of the pupils.

The quality of education

21. The quality of the teaching has improved greatly since the section 10 inspection of November 2002, particularly in the Key Stage 1 classes. This is the result of careful recruitment, rigorous monitoring and effective professional training. The teachers work well together, providing support for each other and sharing their professional expertise. The learning support assistants work effectively alongside the class teachers and give well-focused help to specific groups of pupils. The expertise of some other members of staff is also being used to enrich the curriculum, for example in music.

22. In nine of the ten lessons, the teaching was satisfactory or better, including three where it was good and three where it was very good. In one lesson, the teaching was unsatisfactory. The essential features of effective teaching were: well planned interesting

work; clear learning objectives for the lesson that were shared with the pupils in ways they could understand; brisk pace and high expectations about the quality and quantity of work the pupils should achieve; planned times for the pupils to work together to share ideas; and, opportunities for them to organise aspects of their own work. This last element was particularly apparent in the reception class. In the best lessons, the final plenary session was used well by the teachers to reinforce aspects of the work that had been covered, to check the pupils' understanding and to make links with subsequent lessons.

23. The main weaknesses in the teaching were a slow pace and insufficient match of the work to the pupils' abilities. These features occurred in the lessons taken by the teachers who were new or relatively new to the classes.

24. Good use is made of the accommodation. The classrooms and public areas are well organised. Displays covering a good range of subjects are used successfully to celebrate the pupils' achievements and to stimulate learning. Resources are in good condition and are easily accessible to the pupils. The spacious outside facilities are used well both for recreational purposes and to develop aspects of the curriculum; for example environmental education. Very good quality climbing apparatus has recently been acquired as a result of a significant donation from the parents' association and some external sponsorship.

25. Overall, curriculum planning is detailed and thorough. The good quality planning that was apparent in the reception and Year 2 classes is becoming more evident in the Year 1 class. As a result, there is greater consistency, continuity and progression in the work between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. The staff meet regularly to discuss planning issues and this is helping to ensure consistency in the coverage of the curriculum. Due emphasis is given to developing basic literacy and numeracy skills and the pupils have more opportunities to use and apply these in their work across subjects. Although there is a scheme of work for information and communication technology (ICT) there is more to be done to ensure that the pupils' ICT skills are developed systematically throughout the school and across subjects. However, a start has been made. In the reception class a range of ICT was used well to develop the pupils' mathematical understanding and to extend their knowledge of different parts of the world.

26. The systems for recording the pupils' attainment and tracking their progress are bedding down well. Class teachers are making better use of assessment information to plan the work in the core subjects. Some assessment practice is very good. In the reception class, annotations by the teacher in the pupils' books provide a powerful indicator of progress, while in Year 2, the pupils are told in advance which aspects of their writing will be assessed. More recently, the record of achievement profiles have provided good evidence of the impact of the teaching on the pupils' learning. This has enabled the headteacher and the governors to address successfully the slow progress that was being made by the pupils in Year 1 and, as a result, to make some staff changes.

27. The provision for the pupils who have special educational needs, those who are higher attainers, and the travellers is satisfactory and has improved significantly since November 2002. These different groups of pupils benefit from the better planning and teaching across the school, as well as from targeted additional support, but there is more to be done in using the current assessment tracking systems to monitor their progress. All the pupils who have special educational needs have individual education plans and the best of these include very specific learning targets and review dates. The parents are properly

informed and involved in the review process. The school's policy for special educational needs is in need of revision and the policies for race equality and provision for the gifted and talented have not yet been endorsed by the governors.

Leadership and management

28. The leadership and management of the school are sound. As a result of the professional support the headteacher has received from the LEA's link adviser and diocesan consultant, her skills have developed well. She has a good understanding of the strengths and weakness in the school's work and provides the staff with a clear steer that is focused on raising standards. The outcomes from monitoring the teaching and the learning have been used well to shape the way the professional training for the teachers and the learning support assistants is planned and also to address the weaknesses in the teaching that previously existed in the lower part of Key Stage 1.

29. Since the school became subject to special measures, there have been a number of changes in the teaching staff. This has slowed down the pace at which the roles of subject leaders could be established. The headteacher continues to carry too heavy a workload for co-ordinating subjects but this has been necessary in order to ensure the school's progress is maintained. Recently, one teacher has been given additional management responsibility. This is a positive development for easing some of the day-to-day pressure on the headteacher's time but it has not been possible to address all the issues of subject management. These are unlikely to be resolved until next term when all the permanent teachers are in post.

30. As a result of the well-focused support and training given to them by the diocesan consultant, the governors' skills and their understanding of their roles and responsibilities have improved significantly. The headteacher keeps them well informed about the school's work, particularly the quality of the teaching and learning, and the governing body has worked well with the school to bring about the necessary staff changes. The monitoring group is pivotal in keeping the implementation of the action plan and its impact under close review and helping the headteacher and staff to determine how subsequent work is planned.

Implementation of the action plan

31. The inspection report of November 2002 required the school to address eight key issues. Good progress has been made on improving: the quality of teaching; the pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development; the quality of learning experiences and curriculum planning; the provision for the pupils' spiritual moral, social and cultural development; and, the quality of staff relationships and teamwork. Reasonable progress has been made in raising standards, improving the provision for the pupils who have special educational needs, the higher attainers and the travellers and, improving the role of the subject leaders.

32. The consultants from the LEA and the diocese have provided a good range of support that has strengthened many aspects of the school's work, including curriculum planning, the provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and governance. These consultants have helped the headteacher and the governors to implement a range of monitoring and support strategies that have effectively addressed the areas of weakness in the teaching. Some staff changes have occurred as a result. These changes have

had a positive impact on raising standards albeit not at a consistent rate and there is more to be done to accelerate the progress being made by the pupils in Year 1, particularly the more able.

33. In this small school, all the teachers need to take responsibility for several curriculum areas but this has not been possible because of the number of staff changes. This has hindered the development of the role of subject leaders.

34. There is a positive ethos in the school. Relationships are good and the staff have worked successfully to develop a consistent approach to improving the pupils' attitudes and behaviour.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in November 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in May and October 2003, and in February 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the section 10 inspection report.

In May 2004, two HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Ten lessons or parts of lessons, two assemblies and four registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunch times and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the class teachers, the chair of governors, the chair of the monitoring group and representatives from the LEA and the diocese. Informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of November 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

