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Inspection report

Thrybergh Comprehensive School

Unique Reference Number 106956
LEA Rotherham

Inspection number 274583
Inspection dates 11 and 12 May 2005
Reporting inspector Mr J F Gornall HMI

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.

Type of School	Comprehensive	School address	Arran Hill
School category	Community		Thrybergh
			Rotherham
Age range of pupils	11 to 16 years		South Yorkshire
			S65 4BJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01709 850471
Number on roll	623	Fax number	01709 854561
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs S Blakemore
Date of previous inspection	April 2003	Headteacher	Mr D Pridding

Age group	Published	Reference no.
11 to 16 years	24 June 2005	274583

Introduction

Thrybergh Comprehensive School was inspected in April 2003 and criticisms were made of aspects of its work. Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school in November 2004 in connection with the Leadership Incentive Grant, and, as a result of serious concerns, reinspected the school in May 2005.

Description of the school

Thrybergh Comprehensive School is a smaller than average mixed comprehensive school with 623 pupils aged 11 to 16 years. It draws most of its pupils from the Thrybergh area of Rotherham, an area of below average socio-economic circumstances. Fifty per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average. Three per cent of the pupils speak English as an additional language. Thirty five per cent of the pupils have been identified by the school as having special educational needs, which is well above the national average. Of these pupils, 4% have a Statement of Special Educational Need; this figure is above average. The pupils' attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is well below average.

In recent months, there have been changes to the school's leadership. The local education authority (LEA) arranged for a temporary consultant headteacher to join the school in January 2005. The substantive headteacher, who was due to leave the school this summer, left at Easter. One of the two deputy headteachers left the school just before Easter. A newly appointed headteacher has been in post for four weeks. The school is undergoing major building and re-modelling work, resulting in many lessons taking place in temporary mobile classrooms. During the inspection, Year 10 pupils were out of school taking part in work experience activities.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

Thrybergh Comprehensive School serves a disadvantaged community and is undergoing a period of considerable change. There is a new leadership team and major alterations to the school's accommodation and associated resources are taking place. The new headteacher and senior leadership team are committed to school improvement and they have begun to introduce a new direction for the work of the school. However, leadership and management skills, outside the new senior leadership team, are underdeveloped.

The school's difficulties are significant and reflect a legacy of underachievement. From a low base there was some improvement in the school's GCSE examination results in 2004 but the Key Stage 3 national test results did not improve. Standards of achievement are too low. There is too much variability in the quality of teaching and too many of the pupils have unsatisfactory attitudes to learning. Wisely, the school has recently devised plans to broaden the curriculum, recognising that it is too narrow and does not meet the needs of the pupils, particularly at Key Stage 4. Assessment has improved but it remains an underdeveloped area of the school's work. The closure of half of the school to facilitate re-building work has severely disrupted the school's organisation and many lessons take place in temporary classrooms. It is noteworthy that during this difficult time for the school, the pupils' behaviour has improved and is satisfactory.

Improvement since the last monitoring inspection

The inspection of April 2003 required the school to address priority areas concerned with raising standards in examinations and in classwork, the quality of teaching, parental involvement and meeting statutory requirements. There has been reasonable progress in relation to encouraging parental involvement and satisfying governors' statutory duties but limited progress elsewhere. Following the HMI visit in November, the school has responded positively by making changes to its leadership and adopting a more strategic approach to tackling underachievement. However, although these recent changes are positive, there remains much to be done.

Capacity to improve

The recent changes to the school's leadership and management have given the school a new impetus for improvement; there is an emerging sense of shared direction and teamwork gradually building across the school. The outcomes of monitoring and evaluation are beginning to be analysed with the necessary sharpness to effect improvement, particularly in relation to the quality of the teaching and learning. However, these and other changes are embryonic and not yet embedded in consistent practice across the school. It is

too early to say, therefore, whether these positive steps will secure the school's recovery in relation to accelerating pupils' progress and raising their standards of achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

The key priorities for the school's development plan are to:

- raise standards and ensure the curriculum is relevant to the needs of the pupils;
- improve the quality of the teaching;
- improve the pupils' attitudes and their involvement in learning, so that they make better progress;
- continue to develop leadership and management at all levels;
- improve the use of assessment to inform pupils' learning and monitor progress.

Achievement and standards

In the national tests for 14-year-olds in 2004, the school's results were well below average and placed the school in the bottom 5% of all schools. Results remained broadly similar to the results of the previous year in mathematics and science but they fell in English. The proportion of the pupils who attained at least Level 5, the basic standard expected for the pupils' age, varied sharply between the subjects; in English it was 35%, in mathematics 42% and in science 38%. The proportion of pupils who were assessed by teachers as reaching Level 5 in all other subjects has been well below national figures for the last three years, except in physical education where standards have been above average. In the last 3 years, pupils' progress between the ages of 11 and 14 was in the lowest 5% of schools in England, including those which have a similar level of free school meals.

Standards in GCSE or equivalent examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 rose in 2004; the proportion of the pupils who attained five or more higher grades was 29% and this represented the school's best performance for the past five years. In contrast, the proportion of pupils who attained five pass grades overall fell by 8% to 74%. Six per cent of the pupils gained no passes at any level. Results attained in individual subjects varied. In art they were above those found nationally, in design and technology and French they were close to them, but standards in English mathematics and science were particularly low. The school's improvement at Key Stage 4 has not benefited all pupils; the performance of girls improved sharply but that of boys fell significantly. Overall, standards remain well below those found nationally although broadly in line with schools in a similar social context. The progress made by the pupils between the ages of 14 and 16 was above average, but it was insufficient to redress the poorer progress made between ages 11 to 14; as a result, progress between 11 and 16 overall was very low in comparison to the national figure

In lessons, the standards achieved were generally below or well below what might have been expected for the pupils' ages. Some of the higher attainers, when they were well taught, did better. The standards of literacy were below and, in some instances, well below what might be expected. Most of the pupils have underdeveloped speaking and listening skills and struggle to express their ideas articulately. Written work was often characterised by spelling mistakes and simple grammatical errors and there were few examples of extended writing.

The quality of pupils' learning varies widely across the school but is unsatisfactory overall. The pupils' progress was satisfactory or better in two thirds of the lessons and unsatisfactory in a third; it was good in one quarter. In many lessons, progress was impeded by the pupils' weak recall of prior learning and lack of familiarity with key terms. The main exception was in physical education lessons, where consistently good or very good teaching resulted in challenging activities and good progress being made by the pupils. The most recent assessment data shows that more able pupils in Year 9 have made satisfactory progress in recent months in some subjects, but that progress between Year 6 and Year 8 was unsatisfactory. Many pupils have not acquired the organisational skills to take responsibility for their own learning and lack the confidence to work independently, relying heavily on adult support. Where additional adults were not present or when teaching was lacklustre there was too much underachievement.

Personal development

The pupils' attitudes to learning are unsatisfactory overall. The pupils demonstrated good attitudes to learning in only 9 of the 34 lessons; they were satisfactory in 19 lessons and unsatisfactory or poor in 6. In most lessons, the pupils' lethargic attitudes had to be skilfully, and energetically, overcome by teachers, which took the focus away from the main purpose of the lesson. In all but the best lessons, the pupils' attitudes indicated compliance rather than enthusiasm for learning. In a few lessons, where they were encouraged to work collaboratively, the pupils responded by engaging more positively in their learning. Examination of the pupils' exercise books, including those of the same subject, revealed an extremely varied picture. Some books were in good condition, handwriting and number work were neatly presented and set out appropriately. In other books, the quality of presentation was poor and the presence of graffiti reflected a lack of care and commitment.

Behaviour in lessons and around school is satisfactory; it has improved since the HMI visit in November 2004. The pupils have responded well to the revised code of conduct and in most lessons, the pupils followed their teachers' instructions sensibly. In unsatisfactory lessons where the planned activities did not engage the pupils, they lost interest quickly and resorted to low level chatter and occasional silliness. Around the school, pupils are courteous to adults and visitors. The movement between lessons was, at times, boisterous but managed appropriately by a high level of staff supervision. The school's present accommodation makes transfer between some subject departments extremely difficult for both pupils and staff.

The school is much more settled. The number of referrals for disruptive behaviour has decreased significantly. Most staff are clear about the importance of consistency in managing behaviour and apply the school code effectively. The school rewards good behaviour and conduct through its valued points system, which is linked to visits and awards. The number of fixed term exclusions has fallen significantly, assisted by the development of an externally funded school centre and the learning support unit which offers alternative provision for those pupils who are most at risk of exclusion.

Levels of attendance remain unsatisfactory; the current 2004-05 figure is 90.5% compared with 90.6% in 2003-04. The school works hard to rigorously monitor attendance, to celebrate good attendance and intervene where absence is a problem. Unauthorised absence during the spring term was high at over 3%. Support from the education welfare service is satisfactory. Punctuality to school and to lessons is variable but satisfactory overall. The school has not sufficiently explored the links between attendance and the type of curriculum offered to the pupils, particularly at Key Stage 4.

Provision for the pupils' moral and social development is satisfactory, but for their spiritual and cultural development is unsatisfactory. Clear guidelines help the pupils know right from wrong. The school council offers opportunities for a small number of pupils to learn about decision-making and social responsibility. Small groups of Year 8 pupils contributed well to the year assembly giving drama presentations which conveyed a strong moral message on the theme of tolerance. The pupils are encouraged to participate in a range of lunchtime clubs, sporting and drama activities and residential trips abroad. However, the pupils have few opportunities to make a personal response or to enjoy their learning wholeheartedly in lessons and the opportunities for reflection are limited. Opportunities for pupils to develop an awareness of cultures other than their own are limited.

Quality of provision

The quality of the teaching was unsatisfactory overall. It was satisfactory or better in 24 of the 34 lessons; it was good or very good in 12. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has slightly improved on the figure of 35% reported by the senior management team following their internal review of teaching in March 2005. There was a wide variance in the quality of the teaching within the same subjects, including English, mathematics and science. In contrast, teaching in physical education was consistently of good quality. Due to examinations taking place, no lessons were seen in art.

The effective teaching was characterised by thorough planning, enthusiastic delivery and a clear focus on the intended outcomes for the pupils. The pupils were encouraged to participate actively from the start in effective lessons. As a result, time was well used and a variety of activities further motivated the pupils and maintained the momentum in learning. Teachers regularly checked that the pupils understood what had been taught and knew what to do next. In these lessons, teachers had a strong command of their subject and worked with energy and commitment to ensure that the pupils made as much progress as they could in the available time. In the best lessons, sharply focused peer and self-assessment was structured through effective questioning by the teachers; in a physical

education and an English lesson the teachers deliberately taught the pupils techniques for group learning and interaction. Similarly, in good technology and science lessons, the pupils were encouraged and expected to use technical language to extend their understanding and reinforce learning.

In just under a third of lessons, teaching was unsatisfactory because expectations of what pupils should achieve were too low, planning was superficial and work was seldom planned for pupils of differing abilities within the class. Lessons started slowly and proceeded at a leisurely pace. The pupils were not challenged to achieve their best. They were expected to listen for long periods and teachers' questioning relied on single word responses with little attention to encouraging reasoned responses. There were too many examples of mundane, time-filling activities, such as the copying of learning objectives with insufficient attention to what they actually meant and the mechanical completion of worksheets. The net effect was that some pupils became increasingly bored and this placed a strain on relationships.

Assessment procedures have improved but remain an underdeveloped area of the school's work. Systems for monitoring and analysing examination results are satisfactory with some emerging strengths. The school has an extensive database which it is using to monitor and analyse pupils' progress. This information is discussed with the teachers. However, it is not being used consistently in planning learning for the pupils, with the result that too many pupils are insufficiently challenged and make too little progress. Few pupils have any understanding of personal targets and many lessons do not conclude with an effective assessment of the learning that has taken place. Moreover marking is inconsistent; sometimes it provides helpful guidance on how work can be improved, but at other times it is merely cursory. Homework is regularly provided in most subjects but the tasks set vary in quality.

Provision for pupils who have special educational needs is unsatisfactory. Although some pupils were well supported by teaching assistants in lessons, many teachers did not refer to information about special educational needs when planning lessons. Many do not have ready access to information about the pupils in their classes. The quality of individual education plans is varied, but unsatisfactory overall; they do not provide sufficient information about the specific nature of pupils' learning difficulties in order to provide guidance to teachers. The co-ordinator of special educational needs maintains sound records of pupils' recent progress in literacy, such as reading comprehension and spelling, but there is no equivalent information regarding numeracy and the school lacks an overall analysis of pupils' progress.

The curriculum is too narrow and rigid, particularly at Key Stage 4; it is unsatisfactory overall. The school has recognised this and has reviewed its current provision and put in place innovative plans to broaden the curriculum for the next academic year to better meet the needs of the pupils. This includes the appointment of specialist teachers, for example, in drama and the introduction of optional courses. The headteacher is keen to promote opportunities for vocational and work-based courses and to explore flexible strategies in relation to how the pupils approach their work. There is a very good range of out-of-hours activities available for the pupils.

Accommodation is unsatisfactory but this has been recognised and significant re-building work is taking place at the school. In effect, half of the school has been closed off for building or remodelling work. The ensuing disruption caused to the pupils' education is significant. The temporary classrooms are noisy and cramped. Regular break-ins have resulted in interactive whiteboards or overhead projectors being frequently stolen.

The school is making good efforts to involve parents, some of whom remain reluctant to engage with the school. Letters are regularly sent home informing parents about the life of the school. A home-school agreement has been developed and is used to clarify responsibilities for all concerned. The role of parents is clearly outlined in the school's prospectus and a partnership approach between home and school is encouraged. Recently the headteacher made a presentation to parents setting out his aims for the school. The head of department for physical education reports very good support from parents for the many sports and leisure activities that take place out-of-hours.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are unsatisfactory because the school has not addressed with sufficient rigour the pattern of underachievement that has existed for some time.

The recently appointed headteacher, in a matter of weeks, has had a marked and positive impact on the school's strategic direction, rightly bringing an increased focus on improving performance at all levels, but particularly in the classroom. He has built upon the effective work begun in January 2005 by the consultant headteacher and senior members of staff. The new senior leadership group are committed to school improvement and much clearer about the school's strengths and weaknesses in teaching than was the case at the time of the HMI visit in November 2004.

These and other positive changes are relatively new and are not embedded in effective practice across the school. Some of the middle leaders have identifiable strengths and capabilities while others need support. There is a need for continuing professional development at all levels of management in order to increase the speed at which action is taken to eliminate weaknesses, particularly in the quality of the teaching and learning.

The headteacher is supported by the governing body. The chair of governors is knowledgeable and incisive. She, and the other members who make up the governors' monitoring committee, ask challenging questions and are increasingly holding the school to account. Minutes of the governors' meetings indicate statutory responsibilities are met.

However, there are issues concerning the school's financial situation. The new finance officer for the school reports an accumulated underspend in 2004-05 in excess of £400,000. Approximately a third of these funds are sensibly earmarked for refurbishment costs related to the school's new accommodation. The resulting balance is difficult to reconcile when set against the inadequate level of resources in some areas of the curriculum and equipment in classrooms. The headteacher is appropriately developing a financial strategy to make better use of the funds available.

The LEA identified Thrybergh as a school causing concern in November 2003, six months after the school's previous inspection. The LEA is playing an important part in supporting the school, through the provision of consultancy on a broad front and in monitoring progress on a regular basis. It has also brokered links with other schools including supporting the use of opportunities provided by the Leadership Incentive Grant. The LEA has supported the governors well and helped to ensure continuity in the school's leadership.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

Thrybergh Comprehensive School was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in April 2003. The inspection was critical of some aspects of the work of the school including low standards and teaching.

The school was visited in November 2004 by two HMI in connection with the Leadership Incentive Grant. This visit raised serious concerns about the quality of education provided by the school.

In May 2005, three 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.

During the visit 34 lessons or parts of lessons, 3 tutorial sessions and an assembly were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, a number of senior staff and middle managers, the chair of governors and representatives from the LEA and informally with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the areas of weakness identified in the inspection report of April 2003 and the serious concerns identified by HMI in November 2004.

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