



Therfield First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117153
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 279997
Inspection dates 25 April 2006 to 26 April 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs. Georgina Beasley LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	The Causeway
School category	Community		SG8 9PP
Age range of pupils	4 to 9		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01763 287284
Number on roll	53	Fax number	01763 287439
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Miss.Jane Galilee
Date of previous inspection	20 September 1999	Headteacher	Mrs. Linda Meredith

Age group 4 to 9	Inspection dates 25 April 2006 - 26 April 2006	Inspection number 279997
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This very small village school has 53 pupils, all of whom come from White British backgrounds. An average proportion is eligible for free school meals. An average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities, but this proportion is not spread evenly across the year groups. The number of pupils who have been identified as requiring statements for their special educational needs is also average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Therfield First School is a good school, with some outstanding aspects. The inspection confirms the school's view that it is at least good in all respects and outstanding in providing for pupils' personal development, in the way that it cares, guides and supports pupils, and in its leadership and management. It gives good value for money. The small school ethos has helped pupils to make good progress overall. They make a good start in the Reception class. The planned activities are always interesting and sometimes exciting and so pupils quickly develop an inquisitive approach to learning. Pupils are ready to learn by the time they start in Year 1 and most achieve or exceed the goals they are expected to reach by the end of this first year in school. Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 1 to 4 and standards are above average by the time they move to the middle school. Teaching is good and enables pupils to learn effectively. Sometimes, in mathematics, teachers give pupils too much help to solve problems rather than leaving them to find their own ways of working out the answers and then explaining how they got there. This aspect has been identified accurately by the school as an area to develop. Pupils make excellent progress in their personal development because staff give them the support and guidance they need. Excellent relationships build a positive learning climate, and so self-confidence and self-esteem are exceptionally high. Behaviour is excellent. The headteacher's excellent leadership and management have led to impressive improvements in the last three years. She has established a whole school focus on making sure the pupils get the best education they deserve by developing the skills of the staff, parents and governing body team. Staff, governors and parents provide excellent support and make a very good contribution to school improvements. The school's evaluation of how well it is doing is rigorous and accurately identifies what it needs to do to improve. It has excellent capacity to make the further improvements needed to make this an outstanding school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities in mathematics for pupils to find their own ways of working out answers to problems and to explain how they did it.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are rising year on year and progress is accelerating, due to the many improvements put into place over the last three years. Attainment on entry to the Reception class is average overall but it varies from average to above average, depending on the capabilities of the pupils in the very small year groups. Pupils make good progress overall. They make excellent progress in their personal development and quickly develop a love of learning upon which to build as they get older. By the time the pupils start in Year 1, standards are well above average in personal development and above average in all other areas of learning. Pupils in Years 1 to 4 continue to make good progress. Standards are generally above average by the ends

of Year 2 and Year 4. Occasionally they are exceptionally high. However, some pupils do less well in problem-solving skills in mathematics, an aspect the school is already tackling. Boys generally do less well than girls by the end of Year 2. Good support enables them to catch up by the end of Year 4. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities or make good progress to reach standards appropriate for their abilities. Well-focused and relevant support enable some pupils with specific difficulties to make very good progress. All pupils are on track to reach the challenging targets set for them this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy coming to school. Attendance and punctuality are good. All staff set high expectations for behaviour, and guide pupils extremely effectively to reach their personal goals. As a result, behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding. Supervision and care are excellent at all times and pupils know that they should go to an adult if they have any concerns. Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is highly effective. Opportunities to work together in pairs and groups in lessons, and a wide range of playtime toys and equipment provide excellent opportunities for pupils to develop social skills throughout the school day. Pupils contribute extremely well to the school and the community beyond, such as in raising funds for school trips and charities, running stalls and performing at the village fete, learning about life in Kenya and making decisions for school improvement through the School Council. For example, pupils used the suggestion box to initiate a timetable for football so that it did not monopolise others' play space at every playtime. Pupils are very conscious of eating healthily and taking care of themselves because the school constantly encourages them to do so. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to develop the key skills they will need for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are interesting and usually contain some practical activities and so pupils are keen to learn. Teachers share with pupils what they want them to learn at the beginning of lessons so all are clear about what is expected. Relevant questions move learning on at a good rate and are often targeted at individuals to check understanding or to extend thinking. However, teachers sometimes do too much thinking for the pupils in mathematics by telling them how to find the answers to sums rather than give them opportunities to think things out for themselves when solving problems. As a result, some pupils cannot apply skills and knowledge to new situations. Teachers use assessment information effectively to plan work that closely matches the range of ability levels and to agree targets with pupils. Pupils are involved in assessing their own learning and so they know their personal and academic targets well and how to

improve. Teaching assistants and specialists from outside agencies provide good support to pupils who need help to learn.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils like coming to school because the good curriculum is interesting. They like music and art best. Links between subjects are good and the many varied opportunities for the pupils to enjoy experiences at first-hand bring learning to life. By increasing the opportunities for pupils to write for real situations or to support learning in other subjects, standards and achievement in writing have improved considerably this year. The school is currently looking at ways to link learning in all subjects to make lessons even more relevant and interesting. Personal, social and health education programmes build the pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem exceptionally well. As a result, they have an excellent insight into their personal feelings and emotions and know how to stay safe and keep healthy and fit. The curriculum builds skills that support the pupils' economic well-being effectively. A wide and varied range of activities and extra-curricular clubs enriches the curriculum extremely well. Visitors into school and trips into the local community and further afield bring added interest and experiences to the pupil's learning. Involvement in the Royston Area Network provides very well for additional curriculum experiences, especially for gifted and talented pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

All staff know pupils extremely well and so understand how best to meet their personal and academic needs. The school uses information from detailed and focused assessments to build up a clear and accurate picture of how well each child is doing and to set targets for individuals to achieve. Care has high priority and rigorous, up-to-date procedures for first aid, child protection and health and safety ensure the pupils are kept safe and are extremely well cared for in school. The school has very strong links with parents and involves them fully in their children's learning. Pupils get off to a good start in Reception because links with the local pre-school and parents help them to settle into school quickly. The school provides well-matched care and support for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities to enable them to make good, and sometimes very good, progress in school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher's leadership is excellent and has brought about considerable improvements in a short time. Working with an effective staff team, the determination to give the children the very best start to their education is driving the school forward. The school's vision for future development is firmly focused on high standards. In all aspects of the school's work, expectations are high but achievable. The school's evaluation of pupils' achievement is very thorough and underpins good quality teaching

and learning. It constantly looks for ways in which it can do better and actively involves staff, parents, governors and pupils in this process. Priorities for improvement are accurate. Targets for judging success are challenging, and action plans are detailed as to how improvements will be achieved. Regular monitoring of teaching and pupils' work and progress identifies accurate areas for improvement and whether the school's identified weaknesses are improving fast enough. Governors, staff and parents give the school excellent support and this strong partnership is raising standards in all aspects. Training opportunities for staff are well focused and have led to improved learning and teaching, especially in the Reception class and in writing, science and information and communication technology. The school is extremely well placed to improve further.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school last week. You all said a lot of good things about your school and I think Therfield is a good school too. You are all doing really well because you work hard in lessons and because your teachers plan some interesting things for you to do. You behave extremely well in school and I particularly liked the way you shared the equipment and space during playtimes. I was impressed with the way some of you politely invited me to go first when you met me in the corridors and the friendly way you said 'Hello'. Everybody I talked to said they are happy to come to school and that they enjoy learning. You know how to take care of yourselves and know that if you have any problem or have some good news to share, you can go to any adult at any time. Your teachers and all of the adults who help you in school are doing a good job. I have asked them to give you more opportunities in mathematics lessons to have a go at working out answers to problems by yourselves first and then to explain how you did it. This will help you when you have to solve problems on your own. Mrs Meredith is an excellent headteacher. She and all the adults work hard to make sure that the school is a happy place where you can all learn and grow into confident young people. I like the way Mrs Meredith, the governors and the adults in school encourage you to be healthy and to keep fit, and how they all make sure that you are safe. I think you make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community by helping to plan the many visits, by raising money for charities, taking part in village events and learning about life in other countries such as Kenya. I hope you will continue to like going to school and wish you all the very best for the future.