



Thornton Hough Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105015
Local Authority Wirral
Inspection number 287092
Inspection dates 10–11 January 2007
Reporting inspector Frank Carruthers

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	St George's Way
School category	Community		Thornton Hough, Wirral
Age range of pupils	4–11		Merseyside CH63 1JJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0151 3363427
Number on roll (school)	136	Fax number	0151 3363947
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Melanie Carroll
		Headteacher	Ms Alison Kershaw
Date of previous school inspection	22 April 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This smaller than average sized primary school is located in a rural village and draws pupils from its immediate area as well as further afield. It has recently celebrated its centenary. Some pupils travel to school by a designated school bus service. Most are White British, a few are from minority ethnic backgrounds but none are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Their needs include severe learning difficulties, speech and language problems and moderate learning difficulties. There are mixed age groups in all classes except Years 5 and 6.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. Pupils make good progress and standards in Year 6 are above average. They enjoy school very much and their personal development is outstanding. They acquire skills of cooperative behaviour, teamwork and self-confidence exceptionally well. They have an excellent awareness of the importance of living a healthy and fit lifestyle. These outcomes, which are the result of good teaching and outstanding care, guidance and support, mean the pupils are very well equipped to move on to secondary education.

The quality of teaching and learning is good in all classes. The curriculum is well planned and enriched by work undertaken in recent years to promote creativity and make clear links between subjects. Progress since the last inspection to improve the quality of teaching and the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has been very good. The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage (the Reception year) are good and help the children to achieve well. However, outdoor provision for the children is limited in nature and scope, and needs improvement.

The leadership and management of the school are good. The recently appointed headteacher has made a good start to her role and is ably assisted by the deputy headteacher and teaching staff, whose managerial expertise promotes school improvement well. There are effective systems to evaluate the work of the school, which have helped staff to identify weaknesses in pupils' performance and address them. Governors fulfil their responsibilities well. They monitor provision closely and there is a good range of expertise among them to support and challenge the work of the senior management. The school has good capacity to improve and gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop outdoor provision for children in the Reception year to enrich their learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good in all classes. The attainment of the children on entry to school varies from year to year, mainly because the size of year groups is small. It ranges from broadly in line with expected levels to above expected levels. An assessment of the current Reception year group, for example, shows attainment is average overall, with strengths in the children's skills of communication, language and literacy and relative weaknesses in personal, social and physical development. Children make good progress in the mixed Reception/Year 1 class and almost all reach the learning goals expected of them by the end of the year, with some working beyond them.

Achievement continues to be good in Years 1 to 6. At the end of both Years 2 and 6, standards have been significantly above average on many occasions in recent years.

A dip in standards in 2005 in Year 6 was partly caused by earlier disruption to teaching but has not resulted in a downward trend. Concern about boys' attainment in writing was raised by staff and has been addressed well. Test results in 2006 for pupils in Year 6 were high and standards in the current Years 5 and 6 are above average. All groups of pupils achieve well, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve exceptionally well in their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They develop excellent relationships with staff and with one another. Older pupils look out for younger ones and are encouraged to take on responsibilities, such as playground buddies, monitors and school councillors. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and levels of attendance are above average in most years, reflecting how much pupils enjoy school. They are very positive about school, as are their parents. A typical comment is, 'My children feel a part of the community, one of which they are extremely proud and also one they are eager to develop in a positive way.'

The school has the Healthy Schools Award and its active promotion of a fit and healthy lifestyle leads to the pupils' excellent awareness of this aspect of their well-being. Pupils have a good awareness of personal safety and there are plenty of opportunities for pupils to have a say in the development of the school. Members of the school council take their roles very seriously and have a clear understanding of how good their school is and what could be improved. Older members write a manifesto for their election and know what makes a good school councillor. All are proud of their contribution to the life and work of the school, such as developing the playgrounds and internal accommodation.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

There are several key strengths of the teaching that promote good learning and achievement. Teachers plan to cater for the needs of the pupils very well, using the recently refined assessment procedures to help them to set challenging work for the wide range of attainment in the mixed-age classes. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and teachers are skilled at asking questions of them. Teachers are aware of the variations in the learning styles of pupils and promote good variety in the activities they set. There is good pace to learning in most lessons, and an example was evident in a Year 6 geography lesson, where the pupils were challenged to view a map and copy sections from memory in a limited amount of time. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and include those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities very well, expecting them to answer questions, give their views and participate fully.

In a few lessons, whole-class teaching goes on for too long and pupils lose concentration. This happens more with younger age groups than in classes of older pupils. Teaching assistants are generally very involved in lessons and are especially good at supporting pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but on occasions they are under-used in whole-class introductions to lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

There is a good emphasis on developing core skills in English and mathematics through planning for them in other subjects and through a current initiative to promote skills of writing by reducing the size of teaching groups. A particularly effective feature of the curriculum is the way the staff make clear links between subjects and organise themed days and weeks to explore cross-curricular topics. This promotes the wider understanding of pupils and adds to their enjoyment of school. Some of this work is still in the process of implementation. Education to promote a healthy lifestyle and personal safety is good. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage (the Reception year) is well planned but outdoor provision has shortcomings mainly because of its physical layout and lack of shelter.

Effective use is made of the locality for study and there are valuable residential experiences for pupils. The school has developed strong partnerships with external providers, such as specialist coaches, tutors and high school staff to embellish the curriculum. For example, they contribute well to physical education, instrumental tuition and a modern foreign language (French). A part-time specialist teacher adds further quality to the teaching of art and design to all classes. The school does well to overcome the lack of a playing field so as not to detract from the pupils' entitlement in physical education. There is a popular choir and orchestra as well as a good range of visits, performances and activities outside lessons to enrich the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

These aspects of the school's provision are outstanding chiefly because the staff know the pupils and their families so well. Parents are particularly appreciative of the care and support offered to their children. Comments such as, 'any concerns are always investigated and results reported on' are often typical. All procedures for child protection, the safe recruitment of staff, health and safety, are in place. Relationships with parents and outside agencies are strong and help the school to cater for the needs of individual pupils well. The tracking of pupils' personal and academic development is very good, having been recently refined so that teachers are able to chart the pupils' progress across the core subjects accurately and set challenging targets for them to achieve. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given excellent support, helping them to achieve the targets in their individual education plans.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Since appointment, the incoming headteacher has built on the strengths established by the previous postholder so that the school has continued to make very good progress since the last inspection. The school's procedures of self-evaluation are robust and help to identify areas for improvement. For instance, they have enabled the new headteacher to make improvements to the recording of pupils' progress to help raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve. The deputy headteacher and staff contribute well to this process of school improvement and all are highly committed to doing the best for all pupils, whatever their need. Staff have a clear view of their areas of responsibility and this is an improvement since the last inspection. There is a close match between the school's view of itself and the judgements of the inspection, though in one aspect, the quality of care, guidance and support for pupils, the school's view is perhaps modest.

Governors make a good contribution to the work of the school and an excellent feature is how their skills and interests are linked to individual subjects. The new chairperson has made a good start in her role and governors have a clear understanding of the school's performance through regular contact with school and close analysis of data.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you very much for your help when I inspected your school. Please pass on my thanks to the other children I met and spoke to while I was with you. I enjoyed my visit very much. Now I want to share my views with you.

Your school is giving you a good standard of education. This means that the staff are looking after you and teaching you well so that you can all achieve to the best of your ability.

These are some of the many things that are good in your school:

- the headteacher and staff run the school well and take excellent care of you and help you all to be fit, safe and healthy
- you are achieving well in subjects such as English, mathematics, science and ICT
- your behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding and you are growing into sensible students who want to learn
- the staff make the curriculum interesting for you by planning themed weeks and providing opportunities for you to take part in visits and sports during and after school.

Congratulations. You have much to be proud of!

I have asked the staff to improve the outdoor area for the Reception children so that there is even more of interest for them to do. Perhaps as councillors you might be able to help with these decisions.