

Thornham St James CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105692
Local Authority	Oldham
Inspection number	287300
Inspection date	19 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Mike McLachlan

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	210
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Philip Day
Headteacher	Mrs M Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	11 June 2001
School address	Castleton Road Thornham Royton Oldham Lancashire OL2 6XT
Telephone number	0161 6331578
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school is situated in a semi-rural area of Royton between the towns of Oldham and Rochdale. Children join the school with average levels of attainment and the range of ability has widened over recent years. The number of pupils in receipt of free school meals is well below the national average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. There is a very small but growing number of pupils from minority ethnic groups, although none speaks English as an additional language. The school has recently achieved the Activemark Award and is in the process of applying for the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Thornham St James is a good school with some outstanding features which gives good value for money. Generally, pupils reach standards that are well above average by the time they leave school. In recent times this has represented outstanding progress. In 2006 a number of boys did not achieve as well as expected; consequently overall progress for this year group was good given their initial starting points. Nevertheless, pupils in Years 5 and 6 are on track to reach the challenging targets set for them, representing a return to the outstanding progress of earlier years. Children in the Foundation Stage progress tremendously well because of the high expectations and rich experiences offered.

This is a happy school where pupils clearly show enthusiasm for all it offers. Behaviour and attendance are outstanding. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with much that is outstanding. For example, the pupils' singing of the Lord's Prayer at the celebration assembly was a moving experience for all. While there are many opportunities for pupils to be active citizens, such as on the elected 'eco-council' further opportunities could be provided for pupils to influence more aspects of school life through widening the remit of this group. Pupils have a very good understanding of healthy lifestyles and develop very good skills to support their future schooling.

The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good and elements are outstanding. Good and better teaching is characterised by an excellent whole-school approach to planning lessons, which helps the pupils know exactly what they are going to learn and what the teacher expects of them during the lesson. Relationships between pupils, teachers and assistants are outstanding. Teachers give pupils good advice on how to improve their work and encourage them to assess how confident they feel about what has been learned. However, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to assess the standards shown in their own and each other's work.

A good curriculum and outstanding extra-curricular experiences delivered in a highly stimulating environment ensure that pupils work hard and enjoy their time in school. The outstanding musical experience provided for pupils is one example of the many additional activities on offer. Care and guidance are consistently good and much is outstanding, particularly for vulnerable pupils or those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils feel very safe and happy in school and national expectations for protecting children are met. The school has an effective system for tracking pupils' progress through annual assessments; these could be more effective in identifying potential underachievement if they were made at key points during the year.

The headteacher has made outstanding progress in enabling the staff to respond successfully to the raised expectation for meeting the needs of a wider range of pupils, while retaining the traditions the school has established over many years. This is a very popular, oversubscribed school which has the overwhelming support of the parents and the community. School self-evaluation is robust and accurate if a little modest given the achievements of the school. The school is well supported by the governing body and has the capacity and drive to bring about further improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make more frequent assessments of the levels reached in each year group to identify potential underachievement.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to assess their own and each other's work.

- Provide additional opportunities for pupils to contribute to whole-school improvements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Children in the Foundation Stage progress very well because of the high expectations and rich experiences offered. By the end of Year 2 pupils consistently reach well above average standards. This represents outstanding progress for these pupils. In the Year 6 tests in 2006 overall, girls reached standards that were well above average whereas boys' standards were just above average. This represents outstanding progress for the girls and good progress for the boys given their initial starting points. Standards reached in mathematics and science at the higher levels were well above average. The current Year 6 pupils are on track to reach the challenging targets set for them and many in Year 5 are already reaching the national expectations. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve outstandingly well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Excellent relationships between staff and pupils and the wide range of experiences offered ensure that pupils become mature citizens by the time they leave school. As one pupil said, 'They help you be independent, they don't mollycoddle you here.' The school has recently introduced opportunities for pupils to influence the life of the school and for pupils to take responsibility in caring for each other and the environment. Pupils responded very well to this. Year 6 pupils, delighted to take on the role of 'playground pals', recognised how this contributed to their own personal development. A very good, elected eco-council provides opportunities for pupils of all ages to develop their understanding of democracy and environmental issues and take responsibility for improving the school environment. However, because the focus is on ecological issues this does not yet give pupils a voice on wider aspects of the school's provision. Pupils develop a good understanding of safe and healthy lifestyles through a good curriculum and their involvement in physical activities and interest in healthy eating. Contribution to the many charitable fundraising events and other activities combined with high literacy and numeracy standards enable the pupils to demonstrate the skills needed to move successfully into the next stage of their education and to develop a good understanding of other faiths and cultures.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good and elements are outstanding. For example, planning is exemplary, as are the relationships between pupils, teachers and assistants, and this leads to pupils reaching high standards in their work. High standards of behaviour are expected and pupils respond well to this, working hard and showing delight and enthusiasm as they learn new things. Pupils say, 'Our teachers and assistants are great.' In the best lessons, teachers effectively help pupils to make links between learning in different subjects. For example, in the Reception class children were very excited as they listened to the story of 'The Hungry Caterpillar' while learning about scientific facts and number sequences and deepening their understanding of literary techniques; an impressive achievement for children so young. Occasionally, the more able pupils are expected to complete mundane practice material before

they reach the more challenging extension work; consequently, their time is not always used efficiently to extend their learning. Teaching assistants confidently support individuals or groups of pupils. Pupils are given good advice on what they need to do to improve. Pupils regularly assess how confident they are in their understanding of what they have been taught, but have insufficient opportunities to assess the standards shown in their own and other pupils' work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school offers a good curriculum with some outstanding features. The teaching of French to all and opportunities to study information and communication technology, in the very good facilities, extend the curriculum well. While there is a strong focus on developing numeracy and literacy, including an emphasis on reading skills in all year groups, the broader curriculum is well developed through art, music, humanities and technology. The good Foundation Stage curriculum would be enhanced by further opportunities for pupils to learn through active play as well as through the excellent structured lessons provided. The extra-curricular programme is outstanding. There are many opportunities for visitors to talk to pupils and for visits, including the much appreciated youth hostel visits in Years 5 and 6. Sporting links with local schools are used effectively to promote friendships between pupils of different cultures. Very high numbers of pupils learn musical instruments and take part in school choirs and concerts. The school was recently chosen to play with the Halle Orchestra at the prestigious Bridgewater Hall, an exciting and uplifting experience for all involved.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care and guidance are good with some outstanding features. This is a happy school where pupils' welfare is paramount. Pupils say they feel very safe and have someone to turn to in the rare event of feeling unhappy. The 'friendship bench' and the Year 6 playground pals are very good examples of the pupils involving themselves in caring for each other. The celebration assembly observed during the inspections was an excellent example of promoting self-esteem and the pupils clearly enjoyed showing off their own achievements and celebrating those of others. The vast majority of parents are very happy with the support their children receive. They are particularly pleased with the opportunities they have to meet teachers informally each day in the playground before school begins. A minority feel that they would like more information about their children's work and that more opportunity should be given for pupils to have a say in the life of the school. The school has good plans in hand to remedy these concerns. The vetting of adults is robust and health and safety issues are taken very seriously. While the school sets challenging targets for pupils and annually monitors progress towards these targets, this is not frequent enough to identify patterns of underachievement during the year. The growing number of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well looked after and parents of these pupils are particularly pleased with the way their children are supported.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good with elements that are outstanding. The headteacher, a long-standing member of the school promoted to the post, has made outstanding progress

in uniting a relatively new team of teachers. The strengths of the school's previous traditions have been maintained while responding to the new expectations of national strategies in primary education, the Every Child Matters agenda and the wider ability and cultural range of pupils who attend the school. With the very good support of her senior team and good governing body the headteacher has been able to establish an ethos where all staff feel valued. Subject coordination is good and developing. Staff new to these roles are given good opportunities to develop their areas of responsibility, knowing they will be well supported through training or the help of more experienced colleagues. Good links with external agencies and other institutions ensure that pupils have enriched curriculum experiences, and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. The school accurately identifies its strengths and weaknesses and robust actions are taken to bring about improvements.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
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?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

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	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

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?	2

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.

Annex A

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	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you very much for the way you looked after me when I visited your school. You were a delight to talk to and you represented yourselves and your school really well. You are a credit to your parents and carers and your teachers.

I think you go to a good school and much of it is very good indeed. I think, because your teachers plan such good lessons for you and they have such high expectations, you respond really well. Your classrooms are exciting places to be and you really show that you enjoy learning.

Because of this, you reach high standards by the time you leave school. I think you are developing your skills in knowing how well you are doing, and are now ready to use them to assess the standards you and your friends are reaching to help you understand the work even more.

I was impressed by the way many of you came up to talk to me when I sat on your friendship bench at breaktime and how delighted you said you were with your school, your teachers and all the extra activities they plan for you. I was amazed by the large number of you who take part in musical and sporting activities. I was particularly moved by the way you sang and the way you were so pleased at the successes of each other at your assembly.

I think you are very grown up by the time you leave school, and you take very seriously the need to be healthy and to be active citizens by taking on responsibilities in school such as the playground pals and the eco-council. I think it would be a good idea if you used the council to look at improving even further the wider life of the school.

I think your school is well led and the headteacher and all the teachers have good plans to make your school even better.

Thank you again for making my visit so enjoyable. I wish you all every success for the future.