



Thornhill Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 106849
Local Authority Rotherham
Inspection number 287625
Inspection dates 7–8 March 2007
Reporting inspector Joyce Taylor

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Clough Road
School category	Community		Rotherham
Age range of pupils	3–11		South Yorkshire S61 1TD
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01709 335999
Number on roll (school)	207	Fax number	01709 562759
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs V Whitehead
		Headteacher	Mrs Benton
Date of previous school inspection	8 May 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school takes its pupils from an area of socio-economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and with statements of special educational need is higher than in most schools. More than half the pupils speak English as an additional language. At home these pupils mostly speak Panjabi or Urdu. The school has a higher than average turn-over of pupils and over the past two years there have been numerous new members of staff, including the headteacher and deputy headteacher, who took up their posts almost two terms ago.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Thornhill Primary is an improving school that provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Parents are rightly pleased with the good care and support their children receive; they are happy to leave their children in the care of the school as they trust the staff to them keep safe. As a result of these good relationships, parents strongly support the work of the school and this has contributed to an improvement in attendance, which is now average. Provision in the Foundation Stage is good, better than the school judges; children settle well and learn quickly.

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are beginning to pick up in response to strategies introduced by the new leadership and management team in September 2006. It is too soon for these to be reflected in results in national tests but the signs are hopeful. Standards in English and mathematics remain low at the end of Years 2 and 6, but pupils are now beginning to make good progress from their low starting points. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Initiatives to improve English and mathematics have strengthened provision and all teachers now plan challenging tasks according to pupils' specific learning targets. Close checks on how well pupils are doing help to guide teachers' responses and support staff intervene quickly when progress slips. As a result, progress is now accelerating although overall it remains satisfactory. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because work is closely matched to their needs. Teaching assistants make a strong contribution by expertly supporting individuals and groups of pupils and ensuring their progress is good. Pupils with English as an additional language achieve satisfactorily.

Pupils' personal development is good and some aspects are outstanding. Pupils work quietly and listen respectfully to each other. The school council take its work very seriously. Its members voice the collective opinions of their classmates extremely effectively and it has contributed to several school improvements. The school has a calm atmosphere, which helps pupils concentrate on their work. Skilled staff provide expert guidance to pupils who experience difficulties and help them become successful learners. Initiatives such as the work towards achieving health and fitness awards have helped raise pupils' self-esteem and confidence, and their understanding about healthy living is excellent.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Some teachers are piloting investigative and enjoyable approaches to learning which bring the curriculum alive. For example, learning is extended for older pupils through enterprise activities, where they undertake marketing and raise money for specific projects. As yet, linking subjects to enliven learning is not evident across the school. Infant pupils sometimes struggle to concentrate on some formal learning tasks because they are not given the more active opportunities they need to explore and investigate.

The headteacher has an excellent grasp of how to move the school forward. She works extremely well with pupils, staff and parents in introducing strategies designed to lift the low standards and ensure pupils do their best. Leadership and management are

satisfactory overall, with considerable strengths in using information about how well the pupils are doing to plan new learning and speed up progress. This has yet to be reflected in improved standards and higher achievement for all pupils. The strong team spirit is a significant factor in the school's good capacity for further improvement. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English and mathematics across the school.
- Strengthen links between subjects to enrich the curriculum and introduce more investigative approaches to make learning more enjoyable and effective.
- Ensure that infant pupils benefit from a more active and investigative curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children start in the Nursery with levels of attainment that are very much lower than is typical for their age. They make good progress in the Foundation Stage. In Years 1 to 6 pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics is monitored closely and any slippage is quickly targeted. As a result standards are rising rapidly and the school has identified more challenging but achievable targets for pupils to reach by the time they leave Year 6. The school is successfully taking steps to raise achievement. Even so, standards by the end of Year 6 remain low. Pupils learning English as an additional language receive additional support that helps them understand their work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The huge efforts made by staff over the past two terms to help raise pupils' self-esteem have had a big impact. As a result spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Pupils understand the importance of being a member of the community. They enjoy their education and are proud of their school. One said, 'we have many things to be proud of: we're one of the best and we believe it.' Pupils are cheerful and polite and care for others' well-being. They have an excellent understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives and eagerly join in the many opportunities provided for physical exercise. Pupils respond positively to the continuous support and guidance provided by all adults and, as a result, behaviour is good and pupils feel safe in school. The school council provides a strong voice both within the school and the local community. Therefore pupils are beginning to develop the skills of living and working with others. Recent successful action has had a significant impact in improving attendance; this is now in line with most schools and throughout the school pupils are aware of the need to attend regularly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Most lessons provide good opportunities for pupils to share ideas, helping to develop their thinking, speaking and listening skills; their attention is fully engaged and they can often make rapid progress. This good practice is growing across the school, supported through monitoring and evaluation by senior staff. However, some lessons do not have a high level of excitement or drive and teachers occasionally miss opportunities to let the pupils work independently to learn for themselves. Good systems enable teachers to identify and support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teachers are making increasingly effective use of information from assessments, leading to better progress. Additionally, new strategies to encourage pupils to evaluate their own progress are also beginning to have a positive impact on learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The range of learning opportunities is broadening as the school introduces more practical activities into lessons. A focus on extending pupils' skills in calculating is raising standards in mathematics and improved provision for writing has already lifted standards. Art and design tasks, linked to the school's efforts to secure an Artsmark, ensure a wide range of creative tasks are available and pupils reach good standards in their art work. Numerous, and enjoyable after school clubs help extend pupils' skills in areas such as sport, chess and dance. The school is moving towards linking subjects to make lessons more meaningful but this development is, as yet, at an early stage and sometimes the provision for infant pupils is too formal.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. A strong caring and supportive ethos is embodied in all aspects of the school's work, as demonstrated in the recently established and very popular breakfast club. Good procedures and positive relationships at every level ensure that all pupils feel safe and they are very clear where to turn if they need help. The school has recently extended support at playtime and lunchtime and manages behaviour closely. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well through clearly focused individual education plans and well trained teaching assistants. Policies on child protection are thorough and procedures secure. Systems to monitor the pupils' personal and academic development are good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher's leadership is good and some features are outstanding. In particular, her vision and drive ensures essential developments move at a rapid pace. Staff have a clear understanding of what is expected. Nevertheless, leadership and management overall are satisfactory at the present time because many developments are in the early stages and it is too soon to measure the full impact on achievement and standards. A scheme to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning has been introduced, assessment strategies have been developed and parents have become involved in their children's learning. As a result the rate of the pupils' progress is improving. The school's self-evaluation strategies are thorough, they provide a clear picture of how well the school is doing and what needs to be improved. The headteacher's partnership with the deputy headteacher is strong and together they are training senior staff in how to improve aspects of the monitoring and evaluation of progress and to improve the curriculum. Governance is satisfactory. New initiatives to train governors and link them to aspects of the work of the school are strengthening their understanding of their role and enabling them to ask penetrating questions about the work of the school.

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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?	3
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?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
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	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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 for your help when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed talking with you and visiting your classes to see you working. Your school is getting better and gives you satisfactory opportunities to learn. You have a brilliant headteacher and your teachers are very keen to help you learn, but you need to do still better in some subjects. You carry out your school motto, 'be in the right place, do the right thing', very well by settling down in lessons and trying your best. We noticed how well you behaved and how you helped each other. We were particularly impressed with the work of the school council.

We have asked your headteacher and staff to carry on their good work and we have identified the following areas where the school could improve further.

- You need to reach still higher targets in reading, writing and mathematics.
- You need to work more often in ways that show how different subjects link together.
- The way you work in Years 1 and 2 needs to be similar to the way you learned in Reception so you have more chances to learn by finding things out for yourselves.

You are enthusiastic about your school and we hope you carry on enjoying lessons and making Thornhill Primary School a happy place for learning.