

Thurcroft Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106898
Local Authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	287643
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Fiona Gowers

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs F Simpson
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Walker
Date of previous school inspection	21 May 2001
School address	Locksley Drive Thurcroft Rotherham South Yorkshire S66 9NT
Telephone number	01709 542538
Fax number	01709 532122

Age group	3–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average-sized primary school for children aged 3 to 7 years, serving an area with high levels of social and economic disadvantage. Almost all the pupils are of White British heritage and there are none in the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. There is an above average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. There has been a substantial staff turnover in the last two years. The school has achieved 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

'Reach for the stars' is the ethos that permeates through everything at Thurcroft Infant School. The headteacher is an outstanding leader with extremely high expectations. The overall effectiveness of Thurcroft is excellent and standards have improved significantly over the past two years. The school is far too modest in its assessment of how good it is, illustrating its desire to be better still. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good and the school has an outstanding capacity for further improvement. The school is rightly proud of its achievements and invites the local community to 'Celebration Evenings' to share in the success.

Pupils thrive in the extremely attractive learning environment. The school, whilst prioritising the core skills of English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), delivers a vibrant, creative curriculum. As a consequence, pupils are very keen to learn and cannot wait to take part in the very wide variety of enriching activities, such as making mini-beast masks, sending e-mails to Sri Lanka, growing vegetables for the school fair, working with professional musicians and receiving film-making awards at the 'Roscars.'

Care, guidance and support for children are excellent. Pupils feel very happy and secure and are keen to do their very best and become the 'Star of the Day'! Personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils behave very well, showing a high level of care and concern for others. Many parents speak very highly of the school and are very pleased to see their children grow in confidence and do so well. Every child is made to feel they matter. 'My child loves school and is making excellent progress due to the enthusiasm and dedication of her teachers,' is a view shared by many parents.

Maximising the progress made by each child is paramount. When they join the Nursery many children's skills are well below those typical for their age. However, by the time pupils leave school at the end of Year 2, standards are broadly average. Pupils are able to make such outstanding progress because of the very strong teaching and learning both in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. A dedicated team of teachers and support assistants work very well together to deliver interesting lessons where pupils are challenged to think, talk and develop their own ideas. The school, however, continues to find itself in a period of some staffing instability; this has occasionally led to some variations in the quality of teaching, particularly in Year 1. The headteacher has monitored the situation rigorously to ensure this has not had a significant impact on the overall achievement of pupils. Due to this strong leadership children continue to flourish.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning enables all pupils to make the best possible progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Many children start Nursery with well below average attainment for their age. Children are keen to learn and achieve well during their time in the Foundation Stage. From the very low starting point progress is particularly strong in the areas of communication, language and literacy, and personal and social development. This provides a very firm foundation for learning higher up the school. Despite this excellent progress, overall standards are still below average

when children enter Year 1. By the end of Key Stage 1, however, results in the national tests were broadly average in 2006, with more pupils than average achieving Level 3 in writing and mathematics. School results indicate that standards in 2007 show a similar picture. There has been a significant improvement in standards over the past two years with excellent progress made by pupils overall. The school meets the needs of all pupils equally well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Extremely positive attitudes to learning are shown by their high level of enjoyment and interest as they engage in stimulating learning activities. 'Learning is really fun at school,' commented a group of older pupils. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also particularly strong and well supported by cross-curricular topics. Pupils show an appreciation of the lifestyles and beliefs of others through vibrant multicultural topics, such as a 'Taste of India'.

The school council plays a leading role in school life. Members develop important life skills such as listening to others and team work as they carry out this role with great maturity. Attendance is broadly average and staff at school do all they can to celebrate good attendance and punctuality. The school is working particularly hard to limit the number of holidays taken during term time. Pupils clearly know how to stay fit and healthy as recognised in the 'Healthy Schools Award'. They show concern for the wider world, for example by contributing to a book of poems to raise money to rebuild a school in Sri Lanka, in the aftermath of the Tsunami.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Recent improvements in the Foundation Stage ensure very good teaching so children learn exceptionally well in all areas of learning. Staff now track children's progress with much greater precision and identify more clearly what children need to learn. They plan a wide range of stimulating activities with very good attention to how they will aid learning.

Similarly, elsewhere in the school, teachers have greatly strengthened the assessment and tracking system to give an extremely clear view of how well pupils are doing. Teachers use this information very effectively to plan lessons with very good attention to pupils' learning needs; consequently, pupils are able to progress at a rapid rate. Clear objectives are shared with pupils so they understand what they are learning. Greater use of targets is helping all pupils to raise aspirations and increasingly make their own judgements of how well they are doing. Pupils identified as requiring extra support are well catered for and as a consequence they also make very good progress.

Throughout the school, teachers and support staff establish very positive relationships that ensure pupils gain self-esteem and are keen to learn. Greater attention to shared approaches to planning and very good classroom organisation is leading to outstanding teaching and learning. Staffing in some year groups has led to some variation in the quality of teaching. However, due to the strong leadership of the senior management team, this has not had a significant impact on the overall excellent achievement of all pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The range of planned activities has been substantially and successfully improved with more attention given to developing practical and creative work. Learning is now very carefully planned with a series of thematic links that greatly aid pupils' understanding and give relevance to their work. This is having a very positive impact on all pupils' achievement. An outstanding variety of extra-curricular activities widens pupils' experiences and promotes further learning. Many of these activities are carefully targeted to support the specific needs of individuals and groups. A number are offered through the extremely good links that the school has established with the wider community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support for pupils are extremely comprehensive. Very good health and safety systems, risk assessments and procedures to keep children safe from harm are fully and effectively embedded in all aspects of the school's work. There are effective arrangements to ensure all staff are appropriately vetted. Very good systems allow Foundation Stage staff to ensure children entering the school are well prepared and settle quickly. There are good links with the junior school to aid pupils moving school. Very strong systems for monitoring pupils' academic achievement give a clear picture of their progress. The information is carefully used to identify and overcome any weaknesses. Consistent approaches to marking and an extremely well developed reward system mean all pupils are really keen to improve further. Many well established systems keep close track of pupils' concerns and very strong links with parents and outside agencies ensure their needs are successfully met. There is well organised and effective support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership in the school is clearly focused on raising standards and promoting pupils' personal development and well-being. The headteacher's excellent leadership has been the catalyst for the rapid rate of school improvement. She has an extremely clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. She is very well supported by her deputy and has very successfully harnessed a very hardworking staff team around a common vision. The needs of the pupils are central and everyone has the opportunity to succeed. The school gives outstanding value for money.

Extremely rigorous tracking systems are used very effectively to monitor progress and to highlight any child not doing as well as expected. As a consequence, standards have improved significantly and children clearly enjoy their time at Thurcroft Infants. Subject leaders regularly review standards in their subjects and identify areas where learning can be enhanced.

School initiatives have improved the quality of teaching and learning overall in the school. Governors are very committed to the school. They know the school very well and amply fulfil their responsibilities. They are extremely supportive and show a very high level of expertise. Through their challenging questions governors are useful critical friends. A very thorough

programme of monitoring and evaluation provides the school with an excellent capacity to improve further.

Annex A

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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
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	3
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	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
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	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Inspection of Thurcroft Infant School, Rotherham, S66 9NT

Thank you very much for being so welcoming when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing you at work.

You told us how much you enjoyed coming to school and we could see how happy you are at Thurcroft Infant School.

Yours is an excellent school. Your headteacher is an outstanding leader and has made sure that all those working in school, help you learn and develop as much as you can and 'Reach for the Stars'!

You should be very proud of how well you behave, because your behaviour is excellent. This means that everyone in school is able to work and play together very well. The adults at school look after you very well indeed and they are very good at giving you the help that you need. Good teaching and your hard work enable you to do really well.

Your headteacher and all the staff make learning fun and you are lucky to have so many different and interesting things to do. We have asked your headteacher to ensure your teachers continue to help you to make the best possible progress.

The inspection team passes on our very best wishes to each of you.