



Tithe Farm Lower School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109585
Local Authority BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 288435
Inspection dates 25–26 January 2007
Reporting inspector Raminder Arora

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

Type of school	First	School address	Tithe Farm Road
School category	Community		Houghton Regis, Houghton Regis
Age range of pupils	3–9		Dunstable, Bedfordshire
			LU5 5JB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01582 865047
Number on roll (school)	196	Fax number	01582 865057
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs A Soerenson
		Headteacher	Mrs S Surgey
Date of previous school inspection	7 October 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3–9	25–26 January 2007	288435

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school catering for pupils aged 3 to 9. Most pupils come from the nearby housing estate and several are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Pupils' attainment on entry is below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. A few pupils learn English as an additional language. The school houses a Resourced Nursery facility. There is a local authority children's centre on site. The school has been through a period of many staff changes. The headteacher was appointed in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Tithe Farm is a welcoming place where everyone is treated with respect. It provides a satisfactory education and looks after pupils' personal development and well being effectively. Pupils enjoy school and know how to be safe, fit and healthy. The curriculum is satisfactory overall, but opportunities for pupils to use information communication technology (ICT) are currently limited. This, together with the below average basic skills means that, pupils are not well prepared for their future work lives.

The many staff changes in the recent past have had a negative effect on the school's effectiveness, from which it is now recovering. The leadership team had not operated at full strength for some time and that has affected the standards and the long-term planning of the school. The governors, although committed to supporting the school, are not rigorous enough in their monitoring of the school's work. Indications are that this is now changing and the school has begun to make good improvements since the appointment of the new headteacher. The new leadership team are committed to raising standards and improving teaching and learning. They have begun this process by carrying out lesson observations and providing useful advice to teachers on how to improve their practice. As a result they have eliminated most of the inadequate teaching. The majority of parents are positive about the school. One parent wrote, 'we have been very impressed by the new staff; they are a great addition to the school. Our son has progressed very well since September.'

Teaching in the Foundation Stage is good. As a result, children achieve well in relation to their starting point which is below average overall, but is particularly low in language and communication. The standards remain below average in communication, language and literacy at the start of Year 1. Pupils' attainment is below average by the end of Year 2 and Year 4. Currently, the standards in writing are well below average, and are accurately identified to receive a stronger focus, along with the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall, because most pupils are now making satisfactory progress as a result of the improvements of recent months. Improvements in teaching and the way teachers track pupils' progress mean that teaching is satisfactory and that there is a fair amount of good teaching. The key weaknesses are that more able pupils are not challenged enough in some lessons in order to do better. Teachers have begun to use assessment information effectively but they do not all use it to match work to pupils' different needs. Some teachers provide useful guidance when they mark pupils' work, but marking in the school as a whole does not support pupils' understanding of how to improve.

As a result of the close work with the local authority, senior managers have made many effective changes in a short space of time, including the improved management of the school's finances. The school improvement plan outlines how the weaknesses will be tackled and what external support is needed. Improvement since the last inspection has been slow due to staff turbulence, but it is satisfactory overall. The school demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve further. It provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards particularly in writing, speaking and listening by ensuring that all teaching meets pupils' needs, especially the more able.
- Improve the use of assessment and target setting so that pupils are clear about how to improve their work.
- Provide increased opportunities for pupils' acquisition of ICT skills.
- Ensure that governors achieve a strategic overview and challenge staff to maintain a rapid pace of improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Given their below average attainment on entry, most pupils make satisfactory progress. Even so, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are still below average by the end of Year 2, and in reading and writing for pupils in Year 4. Recently, standards in mathematics at the end of Year 4 have reached broadly average levels. Writing, handwriting and presentation skills are particularly weak. These weaknesses, along with pupils' limited vocabulary and speaking skills, are being addressed. The measures, such as the use of drama, a phonics scheme and a stronger focus on staff training, are beginning to have a positive impact on standards in writing. In the Foundation Stage, children achieve well in their social development, number and creative skills. By the end of the Reception Year their attainment is still below average in communication, language and literacy. Progress through Years 1 to 4 has been inconsistent over recent years due to a range of staffing issues; however, current achievement, including that of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, is satisfactory overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Behaviour is satisfactory although a few pupils have difficulty in behaving appropriately in some lessons. The staff manage these pupils in a caring and sensitive manner. Most pupils enjoy school and the parents support this view. Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is satisfactory. There are growing links with visiting adults from other cultures and a school in Spain. The school council is very new and yet to have much impact on the school's work. Pupils show awareness of how to be safe, eat healthy food and exercise regularly to keep fit. They talk about things they like about school and aspects they would like to see improved. Pupils say that the school listens to them and things can change, such as the organisation of dinner tables. They raise money for local and international charities. Pupils' below average basic skills and limited opportunities to use ICT mean that preparation for their future economic well-being is inadequate. Attendance is broadly average as a result of the school's efforts to ensure pupils attend regularly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have good relationships with pupils and, in most lessons, plan work that interests them. In the Foundation Stage, a range of well-organised activities and the good use of available resources ensure that children are happy and well motivated to learn. A good feature is the effective teamwork by teachers and well-qualified support assistants, which ensure that pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities participate fully and make progress. Occasionally the teaching, although satisfactory, does not fully engage or challenge pupils, particularly the more able. For instance, the teacher's limited subject knowledge and the mismatch of work to different abilities in some lessons do not motivate pupils or support their acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding. Pupils are not involved enough in assessing the success of their own learning. The quality of marking is variable and does not provide sufficient guidance to show pupils how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets all statutory requirements. In the Foundation Stage, children benefit from an interesting range of activities that promote their learning both indoor and outdoor. The curriculum in the main school is suitably planned to meet pupils' needs. Appropriate attention is given to developing their basic skills and making links between subjects through carefully planned topic work linked to literacy, mathematics and science. However, the opportunities to develop ICT skills are limited and affect pupils' learning. The personal, social and health education programme pays appropriate attention to the development of safe and healthy living. Pupils participate in a range of clubs, for example, football, drama and games, to enliven their learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Pupils say that they feel safe in school. One said that if they are worried or upset, the teachers 'give a private time to talk'. The school meets the expected requirements for safeguarding children and first aid provision is good. There is commitment to inclusion at all levels and effective links are established with a range of outside agencies to benefit pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities and those most vulnerable. There are satisfactory systems for monitoring pupils' academic progress and setting appropriate targets in English and mathematics. Most pupils know their targets, but are not always clear about how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school has begun to show improvements since the appointment of the new headteacher, who is ably supported by the new deputy headteacher and other staff with management responsibilities. There is a shared vision of what to do and how to do it to bring about needed improvements. Systems for monitoring the quality of education provided have improved and this has begun to increase pupils' rate of progress. One parent wrote, 'My son enjoys school immensely and has made amazing progress.'

The governors, although supportive of the school, have not been thorough enough in collecting the information they need to form judgements about the school's performance and hold it to account. However, they are keen and committed to improving their practice. Their training programme has the potential to enable them to have a greater role in shaping the school's future. Under the guidance of the headteacher, the school's self-evaluation is satisfactory, as is the action plan to remedy weaknesses. The school is well supported by parents and benefits from working effectively with other local schools and organisations. The strong commitment from staff to improve standards and the developing role of governors are key measures of the headteacher's determination to help all pupils to achieve their best, with the result that the capacity to improve is satisfactory.

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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?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
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	3
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	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

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?	3

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	3
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	4
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

29 January 2007

Dear Children

Tithe Farm Lower School, Tithe Farm Road, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, LU5 5JB

Following our visit to inspect your school we would like to tell you that we enjoyed ourselves very much. Thank you all for talking to us and sharing your work. We visited to see how well your school helps you to learn. What we saw and heard helped us to decide that yours is a welcoming and friendly school and you enjoy being there.

The things we liked best about your school are:

- Most of you are friendly, polite and helpful and get on well together.
- You are happy at school and enjoy learning, and your parents are very pleased.
- You listen to what your teachers have to say and you are willing to work hard in lessons.
- Staff listen to you and make sure that you are safe and well cared for.
- The headteacher, all the staff and the governors know what they want the school to be like and work together to make it a happy place for you to learn and play.
- You enjoy participating in various clubs and know how to stay fit and healthy.

These are the things that we think would make your school better:

- Teachers need to continue getting better and better at helping you to do your best especially in writing and speaking and listening.
- We have asked the teachers to make sure that they make some of you work even harder and give all of you more information about what you need to do to improve.
- We have asked for you to have more opportunities to develop your computer skills.
- We have also asked your school governors to be better at making sure that the school continues to improve.

We think that everyone at Tithe Farm can work together to do these things. I hope that you go on enjoying all the things you do at the school which help you to learn and be happy.

With best wishes,

Raminder Arora

(Lead inspector)