



Appleton Thorn Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111138
Local Authority Warrington
Inspection number 288871
Inspection date 8 November 2006
Reporting inspector Jim Alexander

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Arley Road
School category	Community		Appleton Thorn, Warrington Cheshire WA4 4RW
Age range of pupils	4-11	Telephone number	01925 266764
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Fax number	01925 861737
Number on roll (school)	144	Chair	Mr J Warren
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Headteacher	Mrs Jackie Stillings
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This smaller than average sized school serves a relatively advantaged area and is situated in the village of Appleton Thorn, near Warrington. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also below the national average. The majority of pupils are from White British families and a small number are from minority ethnic backgrounds. When they begin school in the Reception class, children's skills represent the full range of ability, although overall are above national expectations.

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 and one in which pupils' personal development and well-being flourishes. Many parents understandably say that they are 'very happy with the school; the standard of teaching is high and children well cared for'. Indeed the school cares for, guides and supports pupils exceptionally well and teaching and learning are of a good quality. Pupils behave extremely well and enjoy school, and consequently attendance is outstanding. They eagerly look forward to their lessons. There is a wealth of enriching activities provided by the school's creative curriculum, which pupils describe as 'fun and exciting'. The high quality artwork around the school and the musical and dramatic productions are a testament to the excellent promotion of the arts. The curriculum is good and well planned and helps pupils learn that subjects are interrelated. They understand that by applying what they learn in one subject this can help them achieve more effectively in another. Year 6 pupils' knowledge of how to find perimeters, for example, stood them in good stead when they were given a problem to solve in the playground.

Teaching ensures that all pupils from Reception right through to Year 6 make good progress to attain above to well above average standards, depending on their starting point when they enter the school. Good questioning, matching tasks well to pupils' needs and the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) exemplify the good teaching. Some lessons positively sparkle with exciting learning. Children in the Reception class, for example, were totally enthralled learning about the festival of Diwali and the story of Rama and Sita, and took part in a wide range of stimulating, carefully planned activities. From the youngest age children are taught successfully to be independent and this helps them in their learning. Teachers' marking of work is helpful to pupils and tells them how they can improve. Pupils explain that when they have a difficulty in lessons 'our teacher will give us an objective, a clear direction to aim for and that helps us'. The school diligently ensures that all pupils, including the most vulnerable and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are fully included in all it provides.

Leadership and management are good. The excellent headteacher, effectively supported by a dynamic deputy headteacher, has created a clear vision which is shared by all. There is a real common sense of purpose among all who lead or manage the school to constantly review, evaluate and improve all aspects of its work. The leadership team has introduced an impressive system to track pupils' progress. They are using this data effectively to check the improvements made in children's writing, but this is not done with the same rigour to monitor progress in reading, mathematics and science. The school is very open to change and eager to enhance its practice by developing strong partnerships with others. Recent developments to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities mean that teachers and effective support staff are continually improving the progress made by these pupils. This work is not yet fully embedded and the leadership team recognises the importance of monitoring the development to ensure its continued success. Provision, standards and leadership in the Foundation Stage are good and work is well underway to further improve the

already good outdoor learning area. Governors make a very good contribution to the management of the school. They are very supportive of its work, but knowledgeably challenge the senior leaders so that they ensure good value for money. Governors use their expertise well; this is best demonstrated by the support offered as the school has moved forwards in leaps and bounds developing the provision for ICT since the time of the last inspection. This demonstrates that the school has an excellent capacity to further improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use the information from the tracking system to monitor pupils' progress more rigorously in reading, mathematics and science to raise standards further.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good. Children enter the school with above average standards for their age and make good progress through the Foundation Stage. In Years 1 to 6 pupils make good progress in relation to their starting point building effectively on their previous learning as they move through school. At the end of Year 2 pupils' progress in writing is significantly better than expected due to the school's recent focus on this aspect. The 2005 test results demonstrated that by the end of Year 6 pupils reached significantly above average standards in English and science and above average in mathematics. This illustrated the good progress pupils make during their time at the school. The number of pupils attaining the higher levels expected of them in English and science at Key Stage 2 was significantly above average, and above average in mathematics. Analysis of the 2006 test results indicates that standards have been maintained in English and science and improved further in mathematics. Progress remains good. Those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities now make equally good progress as others, in relation to their individual starting points.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Effective links with the local church and events such as the Africa theme week or the annual 'Bawming of the Thorn' in the village do much to support their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils' extremely positive attitudes and excellent behaviour are key factors in their good achievement. Pupils are confident and polite and say how much they enjoy school. Pupils understand how to be healthy and keep safe. They consider that the school listens to their views; indeed, effective use of pupil questionnaires ensures that school life continues to improve for them. Members of the various pupil committees are proud of the work they do and are eagerly looking forward to the 'Go Green' day they are organising. Older pupils learn how to take responsibility for the younger children in the school by becoming play leaders.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good because teachers have high expectations and pupils respond well to the challenges set for them. In the Reception class it is very evident that all staff effectively assess children's needs and plan tasks accordingly to help them learn well. In other classes, teachers use explicit learning objectives and clear explanations to promote pupils' understanding of the purpose and content of lessons and what they are expected to learn. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and encourage very good relationships; this ensures that lessons are positive and productive. The school correctly recognises that it has some excellent practice too and that this is best shared to make further improvements to the quality of teaching. For example, the ICT coordinator supports staff by offering them weekly workshops; this has led to improvement in the provision for ICT and increased staff confidence in using ICT. This has a positive impact in the effective role ICT plays in teaching and learning across the curriculum.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is broad, balanced and rich. Teachers use an exciting range of approaches to make learning interesting and exciting. The provision for ICT, which was judged unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection, is now good. The outstanding strength of the curriculum however is the wide variety of after-school clubs and enrichment activities. Pupils take part in numerous visits and residential trips. One child voiced the views of many in saying: 'What more can our school do?' Effective use is made of specialist teachers from other schools; the good partnership with the local arts college maximises the opportunities available for pupils at Appleton Thorn. From the youngest age, children are provided with a wide range of activities in a well organised and stimulating environment. The provision for outdoor learning in the Foundation Stage is good and development is well underway to improve this still further.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The commitment of staff to pupils' care, guidance and support is a distinctive feature of this good school. The high quality care offered and the development of pupils' emotional well-being underpin the school's strong ethos. Support for pupils' academic progress is good. Adults are available to help and pupils are also encouraged to take responsibility for their own progress. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well cared for and the school is now further developing the support and guidance offered to these pupils. Senior staff are aware that this development will need careful monitoring to ensure its continued success. Procedures for safeguarding children

follow the latest government recommendations, and procedures to ensure everyone's health and safety are robust.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, supported by a dynamic deputy headteacher, provides excellent leadership; together they make an effective team. They have a clear view of the school's performance and a strong determination to take this good school to new heights. They have developed a system to track the progress made by pupils and now have a wealth of useful data. They have effectively used this to monitor progress made in pupils' writing. As yet they have not applied the same rigour to evaluate the progress made in reading, mathematics and science. The partnership with other schools and organisations is good and this supports the work of the school well. Governors play an active role in both challenging and encouraging the school. They manage the budget wisely and to good effect. Teachers take responsibility for specific subjects. The drive and determination that the ICT coordinator brings is ensuring that standards are improving. The recent work undertaken by the mathematics coordinator also typifies this commitment.

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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	1
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	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?	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.

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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making me so welcome when I recently visited your school. I very much enjoyed my day and I would like to share with you those things I thought were really good about your school and what could be done to make it even better.

What I liked most about your school:

- you are very confident, get on well with each other and enjoy sharing your ideas and opinions with other children and adults
- you do well in your work because you try so hard and listen attentively in class
- your artwork is exceptionally good because the school teaches you such a wide variety of techniques really well
- you told me that the wide variety of clubs make school life 'fun and exciting' and I agree
- your teachers are very good helping you to use the skills you learn in one subject to help you do better in another, for instance using what you learn in mathematics to help you solve problems in other lessons
- your behaviour and attendance are wonderful.

Yours is a good school and you make good progress, but to make the school even better I have asked the headteacher and senior staff to:

- use the information they have on how well you learn to help you make even better progress than you do already.

Thank you for helping me with the inspection of your school. I hope that you continue to really enjoy school and do the very best you can.