

Thomlinson Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112125
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	289182
Inspection dates	22–23 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Pat Kime HMI

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	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	244
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Robert Edgar
Headteacher	Mr Douglas Hardie
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2003
School address	The Goose Market High Street Wigton Cumbria CA7 9PG
Telephone number	01697 342432
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Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is an average sized junior school and most pupils transfer from the associated infant school. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is above average. The school includes a unit (strategic resourced facility) for up to 12 pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties who come from a wide geographical area of west Cumbria. All eight pupils currently in the unit carry statements of special educational needs and follow a modified curriculum. The proportion of pupils taking free school meals is below the national average. A very small number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. There have been several changes of teaching staff since the last inspection and the headteacher was appointed in February 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Thomlinson Junior School provides a satisfactory education and a good quality of care. It is a happy, friendly school where pupils enjoy school life. They particularly appreciate the help and support they receive from staff and the outstanding range of activities beyond lessons. The provision in the unit for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties is outstanding. In the main school, pupils make satisfactory progress in most of their learning but previous underachievement means that some have ground to catch up. The recently-formed leadership team recognises much of what needs to be done. It has the school on the right track and has already had a positive impact. This shows that the school has the capacity to improve.

Standards are slightly above average, though higher in mathematics than in English. Pupils' results in the national tests show improvement over the last two years. However, results in the Year 6 tests in 2006 show that pupils had not made the progress that would be expected from their above average starting point in Year 3, most significantly in English, particularly writing. Matters are improving as a result of a sharper system for keeping track of pupils' progress and setting targets for their achievement in each class. For most pupils, achievement and progress are now satisfactory. That said, underachievement has not been entirely eradicated. For example, some pupils in Year 3 have made inadequate progress in writing this year.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, ranging from outstanding, in the unit, to inadequate. Several of the lessons observed were good but examination of pupils' exercise books showed shortcomings in some teaching. For example, teachers too often accept careless work and the level of work is not always pitched right. The vast majority of pupils are well-behaved and work hard but a small number, notably in Year 3, find it hard to control their behaviour. Teachers' strategies for managing them have not proved fully effective.

Nonetheless, the school generally promotes pupils' personal development well. Pupils respond positively to the school's encouragement of healthy eating and exercise. The house system gives every pupil a voice in the school and an appreciation of the responsibility that carries. Pupils show consideration for others and initiative in raising funds for charitable causes. The school's link with Uganda, which involves staff and pupils, is one of several features which enhance pupils' cultural awareness.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The establishment of a leadership team is a positive development. This team has a clear, shared sense of direction for the school and is keen to move it forward but the plan for improvement is not sufficiently clear and focused to keep everyone on track. Improvements are already evident as a result of the leadership team's work but the monitoring of teaching and pupils' work has not been rigorous enough so has missed some weaknesses in teaching.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' achievement in English, especially in writing.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, particularly by:
 - ensuring that work is matched to pupils' learning needs
 - ensuring pupils are sufficiently challenged
 - improving the management of pupils' behaviour in Year 3.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - more rigorous checking of teaching and pupils' progress

- formulating a clear, prioritised plan of action to support improvement.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils make satisfactory progress. Standards have risen over the last two years and, in 2006, the Year 6 pupils' results in the national tests were above average in mathematics and broadly average in English and science. However, pupils start in Year 3 with above average standards and their gains in Key Stage 2 were less than average. This was particularly so in English where the last three years' results show that pupils have not made the progress they should. The school's records and the work in pupils' books show that most pupils are now making progress at the rate they should. Some, however, have to catch up lost ground. In general, pupils with LDD and lower attainers make better progress in relation to their capabilities and starting points than the average and higher attainers. The school has put additional support into Year 6 to help pupils catch up and its targets for the 2007 tests are for an increase in the number of pupils reaching an above average standard for their age. The progress of pupils in the unit, though in very small steps, is very good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils enjoy school. They spoke with enthusiasm about the opportunities offered, particularly the activities beyond lessons, such as clubs, sport, instrumental tuition and the educational visits which broaden their horizons. Their enjoyment is reflected in the school's attendance rate which is above the national average. Most pupils are very well-behaved and sensible in lessons and around the school but some, mainly in Year 3, do not always behave well enough.

A healthy diet and an active lifestyle are strongly encouraged and pupils apply these lessons to their own lives. They have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and safe.

Pupils benefit from good opportunities to contribute to the life of the school community and to develop independence, a sense of responsibility and the ability to co-operate and collaborate. For example, Year 6 'buddies' have been trained to support younger pupils. Pupils follow the staff's example and show initiative, for example, organising events to raise funds for national and international charities. The personal attributes they develop, along with their academic achievement, prepare them soundly for secondary education and their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are of a satisfactory quality overall. In the main school teaching varies in quality. Much is good but some is inadequate. This was evident from the lessons observed and an examination of pupils' exercise books. Relationships between teachers and pupils are

positive. The lessons seen were purposeful and pupils got down to work well. In discussion with an inspector, Year 5 pupils were keen to explain that their teachers 'help you if you don't understand, give you a lot of support, encourage you to do your best, and always include everyone'. These pupils said teachers make lessons fun so 'you don't know you're learning but you are'. Year 3 pupils were equally positive about the teaching. However, in this year, behaviour problems are not always managed effectively. In some lessons work was matched well to pupils' different learning needs but this is not always the case. When it is not, the challenge is occasionally too great but more often expectations are not high enough for some pupils and poorly presented or careless work is accepted. Marking is equally variable. Some is very good. It is linked well to pupils' individual targets and makes clear what pupils have achieved and how they could do better. At times, however, marking is too cursory to help pupils improve and occasionally work is not marked. In the unit, teaching is outstanding. Pupils here benefit from close attention from skilled staff and, as a result, they make very good gains in learning which are confirmed by the school's records.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum which covers all that is required. It is planned to ensure that pupils of the same age in different classes cover the same ground. Some steps have been taken to adapt the curriculum to meet pupils' needs. These include trialling setting pupils by ability for mathematics in some years. Nonetheless, such adaptations are not a major feature and opportunities for pupils to use and develop literacy and numeracy skills across subjects are not planned systematically. Provision for pupils with LDD is satisfactory in the main school and outstanding in the unit, which is well-staffed and housed in excellent accommodation. Pupils who are gifted or talented are identified and some additional activities, such as mathematics sessions with teachers from the local secondary school, are provided for them. However, such extra provision is not in place in all subjects. The range of activities beyond lessons is outstanding. Although there is an emphasis on sport, these activities cater for many interests, encompassing gardening, crafts, chess, drama and two modern foreign languages.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is good. Staff know their pupils as individuals and show commitment to their welfare. Pupils know who to turn to if they have a problem and some staff are trained to provide specific support, for instance bereavement counselling. Pupils and parents recognise and appreciate these strengths. The arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements fully and pupils know and understand safety rules, for instance for science and physical education lessons. The school works well in partnership with other agencies to support pupils and promote their well-being. Parents and pupils confirm that bullying is rare but, when it occurs, it is dealt with effectively. This reflects the school's strong, overt anti-bullying stance. Race equality is promoted effectively with key features being the link with Uganda and 'Show Racism the Red Card' in sport. Academic guidance and support is satisfactory. This is because, although teachers help, support and encourage pupils, there are weaknesses in the marking of work and the match of some work to pupils' needs.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

A significant factor in taking the school forward has been the establishment of the leadership team. This has enabled key staff to initiate improvements. It has established a shared sense of purpose and direction for the school and ensured that staff know what is expected of them. The positive impact is seen particularly in effective teamwork and the introduction of an effective, up to date system for keeping track of pupils' progress and setting targets for them. The senior team has a sound overview of how well pupils are doing and, as a result, support has been targeted on those pupils who are not keeping up as they should. The school has benefited from participation in the 'Primary Leadership Programme' and support from local authority consultants which has had a particularly positive effect on mathematics.

Although monitoring of the school's work has improved, it is not yet sufficiently rigorous. Consequently, some weaknesses, for example in the marking of pupils' work and in some pupils' progress in writing in Year 3, have been missed. There is some lack of clarity about immediate and longer-term priorities for school improvement and the plan for this does not identify clearly who is to do what, when and how success will be judged in relation to pupils' achievement.

The governing body fulfils its responsibilities satisfactorily. Governors are committed to the school and support the staff. They are adequately informed about school life and pupils' achievements but are not fully involved in planning for improvement.

Those with responsibility for leading, managing and overseeing the school's work have a broadly accurate view of where its strengths and weaknesses lie but their evaluation of the school's effectiveness was generous.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	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	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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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	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.

Annex A

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	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

24 May 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Thomlinson Junior School, Wigton, CA7 9PG

As you know, Mrs Rotherham and I came to your school to find out how well all the children are learning. Thank you all for welcoming us and helping us, particularly by telling us about your school. I am especially grateful to all the children who talked to Mrs Rotherham and me and told us about what it's like to be a pupil at your school. This letter is to tell you what we found out.

Thomlinson Junior School gives you a satisfactory education and a good standard of care. The provision in the special needs unit is outstanding. The grown ups want you all to be happy and do well. They help you to grow up well. You are sensible and well-behaved. You get on well with each other and the staff and you work hard.

We were pleased to hear that you enjoy school and appreciate the help and support the staff give you, especially if you find it hard to learn. There are lots of interesting extra activities for you to do, like sport, music, drama, and computer club. The children we talked to were very enthusiastic about these and we were impressed by the totem pole you made with an artist. Your attendance rate is higher than the national average. That's good. Keep it up! Your school does a lot to help you keep healthy, for instance providing so many opportunities for sport and encouraging healthy eating.

The staff have started to keep track of the progress each of you is making and your target cards are one way of helping you focus on how you can do better. Most of you are now making the progress you should in your learning but some of you have a bit of catching up to do in order to do as well as you can. I've asked the teachers to help you do better in writing.

There are a few other things your school should do to improve. Staff need to make sure you all have work to do that is hard enough, so you really have to make an effort, but not too hard, and make sure all children behave well in lessons. The senior teachers need to keep an even closer eye on how well you are learning and make sure you all keep up. They also need to get a clearer plan together for improving the school. The school's governors will be able to help them do this. I am sure the staff and governors can make these improvements. For you, the most important things are to do your best in everything at school and to contribute your ideas about how it could be better.

You all have my very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Pat Kime

Her Majesty's Inspector