



Thatcham Park CofE Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 135080
Local Authority West Berkshire
Inspection number 294263
Inspection dates 21–22 February 2007
Reporting inspector Richard Hancock

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Park Avenue
School category	Voluntary controlled		Thatcham
Age range of pupils	3–11		RG18 4NP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01635 870950
Number on roll (school)	292	Fax number	01635 870959
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	P Dick OBE
		Headteacher	M Cornwell
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3–11	21–22 February 2007	294263

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school opened in September 2005, following the merger of infant and junior schools. At present on two sites, the school will occupy one site when the current building work is completed. Pupils' backgrounds are very diverse. Most families are of White British heritage but the range of ethnic groups is growing and the proportion of pupils learning English as an additional language is broadly average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is also above average. Attainment on entry to the Foundation Stage is well below average. This is the first time the school has been inspected.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Standards are below average which, from pupils' starting points, represents a satisfactory level of achievement. Standards are rising, but should still be higher, particularly in English and mathematics. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress, as do those who are learning English as an additional language. Pupils make good progress in the Foundation Stage although their communication, language and literacy skills are low compared with those seen nationally.

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory and there are some good features, including good behaviour, that have a positive impact on their progress and sense of well-being. Pupils are adequately prepared for their lives as future citizens and make a satisfactory contribution to the school and wider community. Pupils' rate of attendance is below average, but this is improving and reflects their satisfactory levels of enjoyment.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory because lessons are well organised and cater for the diverse needs of pupils. However, many lack pace which means that pupils do not learn as fast as they need to. Some lessons are good because they have high levels of challenge where pupils learn more quickly.

The curriculum is satisfactory throughout the school because it has a strong focus on the development of basic skills, and is enhanced by good opportunities for pupils to join clubs and to learn from visits to places of educational interest. They also benefit from visitors to the school, whose expertise in areas such as drama and sport helps to extend their learning.

The school's care, guidance and support for pupils are satisfactory. Its systems ensure that pupils feel safe and are well supported. One pupil spoke for many others by saying, 'Teachers are really kind and there is always someone here to help you'. Teachers praise pupils when they do well but do not give them enough guidance on how to improve their next piece of work and this is limiting their progress. Pupils are well looked after in the Foundation Stage.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school has created an environment in which pupils can learn without being distracted. An effective tracking system helps identify pupils' rates of progress and enables the school to direct extra support to where it is most needed. The monitoring of the school's performance has led to some improvements in teaching but its quality still needs to be higher if standards are to rise. Monitoring has also led to improvements in pupils' attendance but is not sufficiently thorough in checking on the progress of some pupils with individual education plans. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and provides a sound basis for its development plans which highlight the right priorities for action. The governing body supports the school well. The school's capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English and mathematics.

- Ensure that all lessons have a high degree of challenge.
- Provide regular feedback to pupils so they know what to do to improve.
- Improve the monitoring of pupils with learning difficulties.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The 2006 national test results in Year 6 were below average and pupils underachieved, especially in mathematics. Boys did less well than girls, especially in English and science. Test results in Year 2 were also below the national average in 2006 and there were weaknesses in reading. Current work shows that standards are improving, especially in some lessons in literacy and numeracy where weaknesses have been well targeted but standards are still below average and need to be higher. The gap between the standards of boys and girls is closing. Most pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are making satisfactory progress. Pupils learning English as an additional language are doing as well as other pupils because they are well cared for and supported. Taking account of their starting points, pupils' overall achievement, regardless of background or gender, is satisfactory. Progress is good in the Foundation Stage although standards are still below average by the time pupils move into Year 1.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The personal development and well-being of pupils, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects, are satisfactory. However, there are strengths that contribute to pupils' well-being and ensure that they feel safe in school. In particular, pupils behave well in and out of lessons. They feel secure in school and have a good understanding of how to feel safe. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy diet and they take regular exercise during break-times and sporting activities. Attendance is below average but is improving because of closer monitoring. This reflects pupils' satisfactory levels of enjoyment. Pupils support their local community appropriately through fund-raising. In the Foundations Stage, children's personal development is good. This contributes to the good start they make in the development of basic literacy and numeracy. Across the school, standards in English and mathematics should be higher, although improvements in pupils' progress mean that they are adequately prepared for their future economic well-being. Pupils respond appropriately to the satisfactory opportunities to reflect on emotions such as jealousy. They have a satisfactory knowledge of cultures other than their own.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. All lessons have clear goals, make good use of questioning to keep pupils on their toes and cater for the different needs in the classes. Relationships are good. However, many lessons lack interest and pace and, although pupils make steady progress, standards are still below average. Some lessons have much more challenge, and make use of stimulating activities that interest pupils. Teachers develop pupils' research skills, provide opportunities for them to carry out investigations, often using computers, and encourage pupils to express opinions and present their findings. In these lessons all pupils, including the most able, make much faster progress and standards rise. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are satisfactorily supported by classroom assistants because their individual needs are addressed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. Its emphasis on literacy and numeracy shows it is responsive to pupils' needs. Lessons in personal, social and health education help pupils learn about health and safety. They also develop confidence, independence and the skills of decision-making which are helping to prepare pupils for the world of work. Pupils learn more about the wider community through their involvement in environmental projects. The curriculum is enriched by a variety of educational visits, as well as visitors with expertise in music, drama and sport. Pupils also have good opportunities to enjoy after school activities such as football, netball and gardening. The school has made beneficial changes to the timetable to allow more time for pupils to enjoy the foundation subjects and is reviewing the curriculum to ensure it has higher levels of challenge for all pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The care, guidance and support for pupils are satisfactory. All staff are familiar with child protection procedures and pupils say they can talk to any member of staff if troubled. Links with parents are good. Outside agencies support the school well and ensure the needs of vulnerable pupils are met. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities receive satisfactory support but some pupils with individual education plans need more guidance. Those learning English as an additional language are well cared for. One parent remarked, 'My child started here without English but thanks to the school is now a fluent communicator'. Gifted and talented pupils benefit from a programme of challenging activities. The use of rewards and house points promotes good behaviour. Teachers raise pupils' self esteem by making encouraging comments

on their work but do not give enough guidance to pupils on what they need to aim for and how to improve. There are good levels of support in the Foundation Stage.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has worked well with colleagues to create a calm environment in which pupils can learn. Parents appreciate the way the school communicates with them and the school commands their respect and support. An effective system for tracking pupils' progress has been established and helps the school to know which pupils need extra help. Monitoring of the school's performance is satisfactory. It has led to some improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. The monitoring of the individual education plans of pupils with learning difficulties is not thorough which means that the school does not know if all of them are making sufficient progress. The strengths and weaknesses of the school have been accurately analysed and underpin its development plans which give the school a clear sense of direction. The school has made a start in developing the leadership role of other staff. The governing body discharges its duties well by providing strong support and challenge. The school's capacity for further improvement is good.

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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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA

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	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
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	3
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?	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	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 us so welcome in your new school when we came to inspect it recently. We enjoyed talking to you. You expressed your views very clearly to us and helped us make our judgments.

The school is giving you a satisfactory education. Although the standard of your work is lower than that in most other schools it is rising and the school has some clear plans for raising it further. Your behaviour is good and is helping you make the most of lessons. Teachers are helping you to make satisfactory progress. When lessons are good your progress quickens up and standards rise faster. We are asking the school to provide more of these lessons for you.

It was good to see you enjoying lessons, and learning how to keep safe and healthy. We were also pleased to hear from parents that they like the school so much. We believe it has a strong chance of improving further. In order to do this we have asked your teachers to help you raise standards in English and mathematics, and ensure that all lessons provide you with exciting opportunities for learning. We like the way teachers compliment you when you have done well but we think they could now give you more guidance on what to aim for next in your work and how to improve. Some of you have your own plans to help you meet targets and we are asking the school to make regular checks of these plans to be sure you get the help you need.

We were impressed by your politeness and how cooperative you all were and believe you are able and ready to work with the school to bring about the improvements we are asking for so that the school can really excel.

Best wishes for the future

Richard Hancock

(Lead inspector)