

Thatto Heath Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104763
Local Authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	308663
Inspection dates	16–17 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Allan Torr 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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	563
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Stamp
Headteacher	Mrs Ireland
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2003
School address	Hobart Street Thatto Heath St Helens Merseyside WA9 5QX
Telephone number	01744 678710
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors. As part of Ofsted's induction programme another HMI was present observing the inspection.

Description of the school

Thatto Heath is a very large primary school in the centre of St Helens. It serves an area of considerable social and economic disadvantage. Almost all pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. Pupil numbers have increased since the last inspection because of the closure of a neighbouring school in 2005. There has been some significant disruption to staffing over the last few years. The new headteacher, though she held deputy and acting headteacher roles, took up the substantive post, a week before the inspection and two of the five senior leaders took up their positions at the start of September 2007. The school has gained a number of national awards including the Artsmark Gold, ICT Mark and Active Mark Gold.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Thatto Heath is a satisfactory school. Some aspects of its work are good including the care, guidance and support for pupils, the curriculum and pupils' personal development and well-being. There are, however, weaknesses in the progress of pupils in some subjects. Parents and pupils are placed firmly at the heart of this inclusive school. The learning environment is vibrant, well resourced and bright, and reflects the good work produced by pupils as part of the creative partnership. A typical parental comment was: 'Resources are excellent; the surroundings provide the children with a safe environment that enables them to learn and enjoy their time in school.' Within an atmosphere of care, support and concern, staff work effectively to develop pupils' personal and social skills by increasing their self-confidence and self-esteem. The significant increase in pupil numbers due to a local school closure was well managed by staff and these pupils quickly became part of the Thatto Heath family.

Pupils make satisfactory progress overall. They start school with skills that are significantly lower than is typical for their age and make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception). Their progress accelerates in Key Stage 1 because teaching is often good and by the end of Year 2, standards are broadly in line with the national average. Few pupils, however, attain the higher Level 3, particularly in writing. Overall standards in Key Stage 1 have risen for the last two years. In Key Stage 2, pupils make satisfactory progress in English and attain standards that are similar to the national average. In 2007, however, results in the national tests at the end of Year 6 fell significantly in writing and mathematics, and only two out of three pupils attained the level expected for their age. Despite this apparent decline, pupils made satisfactory progress from the standards they had when they started school. Teaching is satisfactory and some lessons are good. Some higher attaining pupils are not challenged enough and lessons are not always based on what they have or have not learnt in the previous lesson. Marking of pupils' work varies. Typically, it is encouraging but does not show pupils how to do better and as a result their progress is sometimes not as fast as it could be.

The school takes good care of pupils and enables them to make excellent progress in aspects of their personal development. Pupils' behaviour in school is outstanding: they are polite, well mannered and during a wet lunchtime they were quiet and self-controlled. Pupils feel safe in school. This is achieved through the school's caring, inclusive ethos and the quick way in which problems are tackled. Bullying incidents and the use of formal sanctions are rare. There are good opportunities for pupils to get involved in the school and local community. The staff work very well with a range of outside agencies to promote pupils' health and well-being. Pupils know what they need to do to be healthy. They make good use of the two hours of timetabled physical education a week, the extensive range of extra-curricular activities and play equipment provided at breaktimes. Pupils develop good workplace skills such as teamwork and cooperation but their development is hindered by limited writing and numeracy skills. By the time they leave school they have good skills in information and communication technology (ICT).

The headteacher provides good leadership and is supported well by her senior management team. She has overseen and implemented successful changes to teaching and learning and to the setting of targets for pupils since she was appointed as deputy headteacher in 2005 and more recently as acting headteacher. These measures are beginning to make a positive difference, but have not yet had a full impact across the school. Leaders and managers at all levels have

an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school. There is good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children enter the Foundation Stage with skills that are well below the level expected for their age, particularly in their language and communication and calculation skills. They make good progress in their personal and social development and in their attitudes to learning. Progress in communication, language and literacy and in mathematics is, however, only satisfactory because at times too little attention is given to developing these skills in all areas of the curriculum. The curriculum is satisfactory and enables pupil to make progress in their physical and their creative development. Children are able to access a wide range of materials and a well resourced outdoor area. Teaching is satisfactory. Resources are of a good quality and are accessed easily and confidently by children who have a free choice in play. Learning through play is not always linked to what the children need to learn and this limits progress. Although teaching assistants are deployed well, they do not use questioning well enough to extend children's skills. The Foundation Stage manager keeps good track of the children's progress, which ensures that individuals are assessed thoroughly but little use is made of this information to improve teaching and learning. Induction procedures into the Foundation Stage are strong and staff show good levels of care and concern. This results in the children behaving well, playing happily, following classroom routines and being ready to learn.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing and mathematics across the curriculum.
- Use assessment and marking more effectively to plan lessons and ensure that pupils make consistently good progress.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage to enable all pupils to make good progress in communication, language and literacy and mathematical development.

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

Children's knowledge and skills when they enter the Nursery are significantly below what is typical for their age. They make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage and good progress in Key Stage 1 to reach broadly average standards. Over the last two years the school has successfully raised standards in English and in mathematics, which were significantly below average in 2005.

In Key Stage 2, standards in science and ICT are broadly average. In English, in the 2007 national tests, pupils attained well below the national average, particularly in writing. Although 85% of pupils attained the expected level in reading, only 37% achieved the level in writing. Current standards of writing across the curriculum are not as high as they could be. In mathematics standards have fallen for the last three years and only 65% of pupils attained the expected Level 4. In relation to their low starting points pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 is satisfactory.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the good support they receive, particularly from teaching assistants and specialist teachers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils develop healthy lifestyles through being active at play and lunchtimes, through high levels of attendance in out-of-hours clubs and in physical education lessons. They generally eat healthily, although some lunchboxes contain unhealthy choices such as chocolate and crisps. Pupils take up opportunities to drink water and to eat fresh fruit and healthy snacks provided by the school. They have an excellent understanding of how to lead a safe lifestyle and they show very good awareness of hazards and dangers in school. Pupils say they feel very safe and free from intimidation or harassment and parents agree. Behaviour in and around the school is exemplary; this was apparent at the end of a wet lunchtime when pupils were quiet, and acted very responsibly and purposefully in classrooms. Pupils are polite and well mannered. As an inspector entered the room, for example, one girl gave up her seat immediately, and a boy gave up his so that the girl could be seated and went to collect a chair from somewhere else in the room.

Pupils take responsibility, for example, as 'buddies' for younger children, playground pals and school councillors. They raise funds for local and national charities – for example in a recent pyjama day – and have good attitudes to learning. They are keen to contribute in lessons. Although attendance is satisfactory overall, poor attendance from a small number of families is keeping overall attendance figures slightly lower than the national average. The school is doing much to encourage pupils to attend.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Time is given for pupils to reflect and to appreciate their own and others' work. Good quality work is celebrated around the school, for example in light boxes and on excellent displays. Pupils have a very good sense of what is right and wrong. This is reinforced very well by the learning mentor as well as by administrative and teaching support staff. This has a positive impact on pupils' well-being and their empathy and understanding of people from other cultures. Close links with a multicultural school in Bolton enables pupils to have a good understanding about other religions, beliefs and ways of life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Although the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, teaching in a number of classes is good. Lessons are planned in detail and are well structured but do not consistently reflect pupils' most recent learning. This is sometimes because teachers rely too heavily on programmes of work without adapting them suitably for individual pupils. The result is that pupils make slower than expected progress. There is some good teaching particularly in Key Stage 1 and at the end of Key Stage 2. In these lessons, pupils are active, learning is brisk and exciting, and time is maximised to enable all pupils to achieve well. Interactive whiteboards and other resources are used well to enhance learning. Teachers' relationships with pupils are good and through good questioning skills, they guide pupils well to reach the correct answer

and help to raise their self-esteem and confidence. More able pupils are often not challenged enough.

The deployment of teaching assistants is a strength. In Key Stages 1 and 2, they are skilled and are used well to guide and teach individuals and groups of pupils. Teachers make good use of a range of techniques to check pupils' learning during lessons. They mark pupils' work but this marking too rarely helps pupils to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school is innovative in deploying specialist teachers such as sports coaches. Provision for creative and physical development is a strength and this results in pupils making good progress in art, physical education, dance and drama. Good use is made, for example, of the outdoor staging to enable pupils to extend their communication and acting skills. Opportunities for pupils to extend and use their writing and mathematics skills across the curriculum are limited. In some subjects, the tasks which pupils are expected to complete are sometimes over-reliant on commercial schemes of work, which means the curriculum has not been adapted enough to meet the needs of pupils, particularly the more able. There is an extensive range of out-of-hours clubs and activities which pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 can participate in. Theme days and weeks enliven the curriculum, such as a multicultural week.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school cares for pupils well and has very good partnerships with other agencies and with families. It effectively responds to the needs of those who are vulnerable or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Procedures for risk assessment and child protection are rigorous and robust. Induction into the Foundation Stage and transition procedures between classes are excellent. Teachers receiving a class at the start of a new school year teach with the current teacher to enable them to get to know pupils in greater detail both academically and personally. Pupils benefit from strong links with the local secondary school, for example through the sports partnership. The academic guidance and support provided for pupils is satisfactory. Pupils have targets and most know what they need to do to meet them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

In a short period of time the headteacher has established a clear vision for the school and sharpened improvement priorities. These are shared and understood by leaders at all levels including governors. The senior team is driving the school forward with a focus on pupils' progress in writing and mathematics. Although this has raised attainment at Key Stage 1, the initiatives have yet to impact fully on standards across the school. Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas that need improvement. This is derived from accurate and analytical self-evaluation by subject and senior leaders.

Systems for keeping track of how well pupils are doing are detailed but have not yet impacted positively on standards. Although the school has set challenging targets, these are not widely known amongst the staff. Monitoring and coaching systems are in place to evaluate and improve teaching and learning.

The governing body has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors work in close partnership with staff, particularly the headteacher. They visit the school regularly, are well informed about the school's performance and fulfil the role of critical friends well. They managed the increase in pupil numbers well by increasing the number of teaching and support staff, this minimised disruption to children's learning.

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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	2
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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for your warm welcome when we visited your school to see how well you were learning. It was helpful to hear your views about Thatto Heath Primary. Your work is displayed very well around school which makes it an exciting and colourful place to work in.

Overall we judged your school to be satisfactory and we identified some aspects that were good.

- Your behaviour is excellent, even during wet break when you played so well together - that was impressive!
- The staff take good care of you and you know how to stay safe.
- You use the exciting outside play areas well to keep fit.
- You have a very good understanding about what is right and wrong and about how other people live.

It is good that you go to the clubs and activities on offer. You also know about healthy foods, but we did see some crisps and sweets in lunchboxes, which is not so good!

We have asked the governors, Mrs Ireland and the teachers to do the following things to improve your school.

- Help you to achieve higher standards in writing and mathematics.
- Plan lessons that are based on what you need to learn next so that you make faster progress.
- Improve the way the youngest children are taught so that they make faster progress in literacy and numeracy.

You can help your teachers by telling them if you find the work too difficult or easy, and by trying your very best in all that you do.

We wish you all the best for the future.