

Thurlstone Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106588
Local Authority	Barnsley
Inspection number	309168
Inspection dates	27–28 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Jane Hughes

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	95
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mrs Rebecca Webb
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2003
School address	Royd Moor Road Thurlstone Sheffield South Yorkshire S36 9RD
Telephone number	01226 762018
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school draws pupils from an area of social and economic advantage. A smaller than average proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and speak English at home. Some parents specifically choose to send their children to this school because of the range of support it offers to children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, special needs, gifts and talents. As a result, the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is double the national average. Children's attainment on entry to the school varies considerably from year to year. The school has achieved National Healthy School status and the Activemark. Very low pupil numbers in each year group necessitate caution in the interpretation of published data.

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, described by parents as, 'vibrant, progressive and forward thinking'. It struggles to demonstrate pupils' good achievement through published data and tables because the very low pupil numbers in each year group render comparative data unreliable. The school's good leadership prioritises pupils' social and emotional well-being alongside their academic success. As a result, pupils and parents speak of the school with pride. Pupils learn the true value of teamwork and what it means to be a productive member of a community. The school has improved well since its last inspection. Senior leaders present a clear overview of the school's strengths and development priorities so that everyone works towards the same goals. Stable staffing, well developed leadership and management and strong focus on further improvement provide the school with good capacity to improve.

Pupils' achievement is good. Standards are broadly average by Year 6, although pupils' attainment in mathematics has been weaker in relation to English and science for the past two years. Although the school's current data indicates a narrowing gap this year, there is still work to be done to demonstrate sustained improvement in pupils' mathematical skills. The school is recognised locally for the quality of the support it offers to pupils at either end of the special needs spectrum. More parents choose to send their children here because of this good reputation. This is because skilled teachers and teaching assistants deliver carefully crafted and personalised support programmes in lessons, small groups or one-to-one sessions.

Pupils are excellent ambassadors for the school, both academically and socially. Staff promote pupils' independence exceptionally well so that by the time they leave the school, pupils are confident and useful members of society. Their personal development is outstanding and pupils have a firm knowledge of the components needed for healthy and safe living. Pupils' excellent attitudes to learning and their exemplary behaviour allow teachers to concentrate on developing pupils' academic skills in good quality lessons. First-hand experiences are central to the revised and enriched curriculum and develop pupils' knowledge of the world beyond school. They are equally at ease ordering stock for the tuck shop or drawing up plans for the new school playground. Teachers draw extensively on well established community links. Visits out and sessions with experts in school breathe variety and life into pupils' learning.

Good levels of care, guidance and support ensure that pupils develop into secure and well rounded individuals. Teachers track pupils' progress meticulously so that lessons always present pupils with appropriate challenge. Class teachers identify and address promptly any dips in pupils' performance and this helps to improve their overall achievement. Teachers provide clear guidance to pupils through detailed marking at the end of literacy and numeracy tasks on how to improve their work. As yet, they do not consolidate this learning enough through their marking of other subjects. Parents are fulsome in their praise of the school, commenting that Thurlstone is 'a perfect example of how small can be better!'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

By the end of the Foundation Stage, children are working securely within, and some attain beyond, the goals expected for their age. These proportions fluctuate considerably from year to year as only a few children join the school each year. Some year groups begin with skills below those expected for their age while others are at the expected levels. Children currently

in the Foundation Stage have relatively strong communication, language and literacy skills but a weaker knowledge and understanding of the world. Children get off to a good start and develop their skills well. They settle easily into daily routines because staff prepare a comprehensive induction programme. Teachers' high expectations of children's attitudes and behaviour establish a cheerful but orderly atmosphere from the start. This approach continues throughout pupils' time in school and helps them to squeeze the most from every experience. Their increasing levels of independence and maturity are clear from an early age. They listen very carefully and even within their first term are able to provide coherent feedback to staff about what they have learned and how well they feel they coped with the tasks set. The Foundation Stage is well led. Young children learn very effectively through play, although occasionally staffing levels reduce if an individual child requires one-to-one support with a specific problem. The transition to Year 1 is very smooth and well managed as Year 1 pupils work alongside the Foundation Stage children throughout the day.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics by Year 6.
- Ensure that teachers' marking in subjects other than English and mathematics consolidates the guidance pupils already receive on how to improve these basic skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards fluctuate from year to year because pupil numbers are low. Nevertheless, the good start that children make in the Foundation Stage continues throughout the school. By the end of Year 2, pupils reach above average standards. In 2007, pupils achieved well in writing and mathematics, and exceptionally well in reading. Teacher assessments show that more than double the proportion of pupils reached the higher levels in reading when compared to the national average. By Year 6, standards are average in English and science. Standards in mathematics have been below average for the past two years and the school recognises that there is more to do to raise pupils' attainment in mathematics. Standards overall were lower than expected in 2007 because almost half of the Year 6 pupils taking the tests underperformed due to significant social and domestic disruptions in the run up to and during the tests. The school's own assessments of these pupils' attainments prior to the tests showed a much stronger picture, particularly in their writing. The school analyses the performance of each pupil very closely throughout their time in school. As a result, teachers set and regularly revise challenging targets so each pupil has the opportunity to make maximum progress. This close monitoring applies equally to the significant proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with particular gifts and talents so all individuals achieve their potential.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy school very much as their regular attendance and good punctuality reflect. Pupils say that lessons are fun and sum up their view of the benefits of a smaller school with comments like, 'It's small and quiet - quite a lot of us like it this way!' Pupils' exemplary behaviour and first-class attitudes mean that they wring every last drop of interest and knowledge from each activity. Older pupils provide excellent examples to younger children around school and in family groups at lunchtime. Pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is characterised by the care and kindness, respect and tolerance shown by every pupil in the

Thurlstone family. Parents speak in glowing terms of how well their children flourish, saying, 'Children respect and look out for one another.' Strongly supportive relationships mean that pupils think nothing of helping each other in lessons or with jobs around school. They become increasingly mature and blossom into very useful members of the school community and beyond. For instance, their first-rate presentational skills and aptitude for teamwork shone through when recently presenting a portfolio for playground regeneration to a bid committee. Their success won £5000 to redevelop the playground. More importantly, these skills are easily transferable and will serve them well in the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers go out of their way to prepare lessons that excite and engage pupils' interest. Lessons swing along at a brisk pace because all adults set high expectations and pupils respond very well to these. Lessons provide challenge for pupils as they practise what teachers and skilled teaching assistants model. Teachers check carefully for remaining gaps in pupils' learning and ensure that pupils have time to consolidate new skills. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and give pertinent comments in lessons. Detailed marking of pupils' extended writing and numeracy work establishes a good dialogue concerning improvement between pupil and teacher. Even so, this comprehensive marking does not extend to other subjects; opportunities are missed to consolidate pupils' basic skills through subjects such as history or science, for example. Parents appreciate that the school espouses, 'traditional values but combines these with modern, innovative and inspired teaching'.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Practical learning opportunities pepper the recently revised curriculum. Although the school is still assessing the impact of these relatively new changes, initial results are favourable. The school's new approach ensures that most topics begin with some form of hands-on experience. As a result, pupils find learning is more relevant and enjoyable. There is careful support for pupils' blossoming creative thinking and independence, important skills for their future success. Pupils engage readily in plentiful opportunities to enhance their academic and social learning. For example, they enjoy learning to play the clarinet, to participate in different sports and to speak Spanish. There is equally good provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, with the latter much improved since the last inspection. The school draws on the deep well of goodwill offered by the community, parents and grandparents. They provide additional skills to enrich pupils' learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All adults show pupils how to respect and care for others. There are appropriate systems to safeguard pupils and to ensure their welfare, health and safety. Pupils say they feel safe in school and know who to go to with any concerns. Everyone knows each other very well. Age groups mix seamlessly, a characteristic that many pupils openly applaud. Increasing numbers of parents sign up for the popular parent workshops. These help parents to support their children's learning at home and move their children's learning on quickly. Representatives of

outside support agencies contribute welcome expertise that benefits, in particular, pupils with specific physical and emotional needs. Conscientious lunchtime staff ensure that pupils eat healthily and are safety conscious. Detailed assessments and tracking ensure that staff offer pupils just the right levels of challenge and support. Pupils know what they understand and can do. Many complete accurate self-assessments on the quirky but much loved selection of underwear-shaped evaluation sheets as lessons end. Feedback to pupils is good with detailed comments in their literacy and numeracy books. Even so, marking in other subjects does not consistently remind pupils of these priorities and so consolidate their basic skills.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides first-rate leadership and an unequivocal focus on improving pupils' achievement and the standards they reach. Her vision drives the school forward and, with the approval of challenging and supportive governors, ensures that pupils do well. The school's self-evaluation is accurate; headteacher, staff and governors know the school well and are determined to improve identified development areas. They work as a strong, self-supporting team and together closely monitor the work of the school. The headteacher empowers all staff very well so they grow in confidence and skills. Governors bring enthusiasm and expertise into school. There are clear plans in place to support the further development of middle leaders and governors while also improving key areas of provision such as the teaching of mathematics. The well organised administrative team ensures the daily smooth running of the school and offers visitors and pupils a warm welcome. Parents sum up the school's approach very well with the observation, 'We, the parents, (and the) children and teachers, are passionate about our school.'

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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?	2
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

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?	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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
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	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

Inspection of Thurlstone Primary School, Thurlstone, S36 9RD

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. You told me that you really enjoy coming to school because lessons are fun. Having watched you at work, I agree with you! Many of your parents also told me how much they appreciate the work of the headteacher, governors and all the adults as they continue to make your school even better.

Yours is a good school. Your first-class behaviour and the way you concentrate so hard in lessons mean that you make the most of every moment in school and make good progress with your work. You all get on so very well together and show great care and respect for others. Such outstanding (the very best) personal and social skills are a great help to you as you make your way in the world. You should be very proud that you are already such helpful and useful members of the school and local community. I was particularly impressed with the way you raise funds for local charities and how you won œ5000 from your Playground Partnership bid. Congratulations and enjoy spending the money! Your teachers make lessons interesting and are keen for you to make a major contribution to your own learning. I have to admit something now - I have never seen 'assessment pants, socks and vests' before! They are a great idea and you obviously make the most of them, recording your assessments at the end of a lesson about what you enjoyed and learned. Good choice of colours too!

One reason for my visit was to see how your school can improve. I have asked your headteacher and all the adults to help you reach higher standards in mathematics by the time you leave Year 6. You can help with this by continuing to listen hard in lessons and by trying your best all the time. You all know how much help teachers give you when they mark your English and mathematics work. I have asked them to make sure that they always give you a point to improve when they mark your work in other subjects too. They spend a long time writing all these messages for you so it is important that you read these carefully and follow their guidance.

Have a wonderful time enjoying your new playground when it is finished.