

Throckley Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108446
Local Authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	309692
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Andrew Johnson 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	188
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Linda Wright
Headteacher	Mr Colin Lofthouse
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2004
School address	Hexham Road Throckley Newcastle upon Tyne Tyne and Wear NE15 9DY
Telephone number	0191 2675311
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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

Throckley Primary School is set on the western outskirts of Newcastle upon Tyne. The school changed from a first school to a primary school in September 2004 and moved to new premises in March 2007. The headteacher took up his post three weeks before the inspection. There has been considerable staff turbulence over the last year and there are vacancies for teaching posts at the school, including the post of deputy headteacher. The school draws the majority of its pupils from the Newburn ward, which is an area of slightly higher than average social deprivation. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A slightly higher than average proportion of pupils is considered to have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has been recognised for its work through a large number of awards, including Investors in People, Healthy Schools, Eco Schools, International School and the Arts Council Quality Mark. The school supports student teachers from several local universities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

The overall effectiveness of this school is inadequate. For a number of years the progress made by pupils has been too slow and there are few signs of improvement. Pupils achieve standards at the end of Year 6 that are well below average.

The new headteacher recognises the seriousness of the situation and has begun to take appropriate action to improve many of the key areas of the school's work. However, because he has been in post for such a short time, there has been little impact on pupils' progress or the quality of teaching and learning. When children join the school in the Foundation Stage their capabilities are typical for children of their age. They grow in confidence and are well cared for; however, they do not make adequate progress in terms of their literacy and communication skills. In Key Stage 1, all pupils make good progress and achieve above average standards in all the core subjects. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in Key Stage 1. Despite the high standards they reach at the end of Key Stage 1, pupils make very slow progress in Key Stage 2. This means that by the end of Key Stage 2, all groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, reach standards that are well below their capabilities. Current school data indicate that many pupils will underachieve again this year.

There is considerable variation in the quality of teaching and learning, but overall it is inadequate. In particular, teaching does little to aid progress in Years 3, 4, and 5. To some extent pupils make up lost ground in Year 6: however, for most pupils this is too little, too late. Many of the better lessons are found in Key Stage 1 and Year 6. In these lessons, pupils enjoy learning because the activities they are given are challenging and interesting. The atmosphere in these lessons is lively and purposeful, work is planned to meet the needs and interests of each pupil and assessment is rigorous. Teachers work hard, even in the less effective lessons, but their efforts are often misdirected or have little impact on progress. Some teachers spend too much time talking to the whole class, which means that more able children are not challenged by their work. Pupils are generally quiet and attentive, even in the less effective lessons, but on occasions they become bored and fractious.

Pupils usually behave in a sensible and mature way around the school. Bullying is rare, but when it does happen, is dealt with effectively. The exclusion of pupils from school is rare. Attendance levels are below average and declined last year. Authorised absences are particularly high. The school has only recently begun to analyse accurately the causes of low attendance. Pupils say they feel safe in the school. All the appropriate regulations on child protection are adhered to. Children are aware of the need to eat a healthy diet and many take part in energetic activities in the playground, where there is a wealth of interesting play resources.

Since the move to the new premises the number and range of extra-curricular activities available to children has reduced; many pupils are disappointed by this. While the curriculum meets statutory requirements, shortcomings in the monitoring of pupils' work means that teachers do not always plan lessons effectively to make sure that it is matched to each child's capabilities.

A high proportion of parents or carers returned the inspection questionnaire and many expressed concerns about communication with the school. The school did little last year to gather the views of parents. The headteacher plans to extend the work of the school and make better links with parents and the wider community. This is a caring school where every child is valued; however, children are given insufficient guidance and support to enable them to progress well in their learning. Additional support staff are deployed in classrooms to help pupils who are having difficulty with their work, but these staff are not always given sufficient guidance to enable them to work effectively with pupils.

The schools' weaknesses were not fully identified by governors until recently. They have very little input into the self-evaluation process. The 2007 evaluation report was extremely optimistic in its judgement of the school's performance. Governors have not always been in a position to benefit from the training and support offered by the local authority and are not in a position to hold the leadership of the school to account. However, they remain very committed to the school and with the assistance of the new head teacher, now recognise the degree of underperformance present in the school. The new head teacher has not had time to initiate a rigorous process of self-evaluation, but has already identified the main strengths and areas for improvement. Staff believe that the school is moving in the right direction and have a shared confidence in the headteacher. The local authority has assisted the school in improving the rigour of lesson observations. However, there has been too little time to build on these observations and put effective staff development and support in place. Subject and key stage leaders have been largely ineffective and unable to have a significant impact on achieving clear and sustained progress. The school has yet to demonstrate a capacity to improve through significant and quantifiable impact on key aspects of its work. The school is strong financially; however, bearing in mind the inadequate achievement and standards of pupils, it does not give adequate value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 4

Most children enter the Foundation Stage with capabilities that are broadly in line with those expected for their age. They are well cared for. By the end of Reception they grow in confidence and enjoy coming to school. They develop effective relationships with adults and their peers. However, their progress in communication and literacy is slow and they do not develop the appropriate skills to enable them to make a good start to learning in Key Stage 1. Management of the Foundation Stage is inadequate. Approaches to learning have changed several times recently and there is a lack of consistency and clarity in planning, teaching and target setting.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the progress of pupils, particularly in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2, by improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Improve the leadership of the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 2 and core subjects.
- Improve attendance with a particular focus on the high proportion of children who take authorised absence.
- Improve communication with, and involvement of, parents, carers and the community.
- Improve the capacity of the governing body to evaluate the work of the school and hold it to account.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Achievement and standards are inadequate. The majority of pupils do not reach the standards of which they are capable by the end of year 6 because of the very slow progress they make in Years 3, 4 and 5. Children enter the school with a variety of capabilities but most have fairly typical abilities for their age. Although they are well cared for and grow in confidence, children make slow progress in developing communication and literacy skills. However, they make up ground in Key Stage 1 where progress is good. Consequently, at the end of Key Stage 1, they reach standards that are above the national average in all core subjects and pupils with learning difficulties also make good progress.

This positive picture is not sustained throughout the school and in Years 3, 4 and 5 progress is very slow. Although some ground is made up in Year 6, pupils reach standards at the end of Key Stage 2 that are well below average. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels in English, mathematics and science is very low. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not sustain the progress they make earlier in the school. Both girls and boys underperform; however, the progress of boys is particularly slow. For example, in English girls make progress that puts them almost a year ahead of boys. School assessment data indicate that a significant number of pupils will not meet the targets set for them this year. Inspectors observed several lessons in which pupils were making slow progress and this was reflected in the poor standard of work seen in some of their books.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 4

Pupils' personal development and well-being have some satisfactory elements but are inadequate overall. Pupils are polite and behave in a sensible way around the school, although some pupils become easily distracted in lessons and do not always pay attention to their teachers. Attendance levels are below average. Pupils say they feel safe and they are well cared for. Bullying or name-calling hardly ever happens and when it does, appropriate action is taken. Older pupils work as buddies to ensure that no one is unhappy in the playground. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of eating a healthy diet and drinking water. The school council tries hard to make a positive contribution to the school and has some very perceptive views on its strengths and areas for improvement. However, sometimes its views are not listened to. Pupils' participation in sporting or cultural activities is low and children comment that the number of clubs and activities available have reduced since the move to the new building. Assemblies are well organised and interesting. At the end of the school day some pupils are given a time for quiet reflection and calm. Pupils are tolerant of the views of others, and interested in different lifestyles and traditions. There are links with a more ethnically diverse school in Birmingham and the school has recently tried to make links in Kenya which allow children to gain a better understanding of cultural diversity.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Teaching and learning are inadequate overall: however, there are some good and outstanding lessons particularly in Key Stage 1 and Year 6. Where teaching observed was strongest, it was

characterised by a determination that all pupils should enjoy lessons and make good progress regardless of their starting points. Lengthy teacher explanations to the whole class were kept to a minimum. Explanations, questioning and tasks were matched to the needs and abilities of individual pupils. In these lessons, pupils were given enough time to work either independently or in pairs or groups. The pace was brisk and pupils were fully involved for the entire lesson. However, too many lessons are inadequate and have few of these characteristics. As a result some pupils get bored easily or become distracted and disruptive. In these cases the school's system to promote good behaviour is not always effective. Although all teachers are committed to the school and work hard they have not received sufficient support or guidance on how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The curriculum does not meet the needs of a significant proportion of the pupils. Although statutory requirements are met, lessons are not sufficiently well planned to meet the needs of all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils say that some of their work is too hard and they do not understand it, whilst other lessons are too easy. There are insufficient opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum and an inconsistent approach to marking and support for pupils experiencing difficulties with literacy and numeracy. There is particularly good use of information and communication technology (ICT) in Year 6. Some teachers say they do not feel confident in teaching certain aspects of the curriculum although they have expertise in other areas. Pupils do not participate in sufficient enrichment activities to help them extend their personal and academic development. Pupils occasionally go on visits to places such as historic sites, but for many pupils these trips are not memorable. Visitors, such as sports coaches and theatre groups also come to the school and the school does signpost to pupils and parents activities that are provided elsewhere locally.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

This is a caring school with a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet government requirements. However, care, guidance and support are inadequate overall because pupils' academic progress is not monitored well enough. Most children in Key Stage 2 know what level they are working at but many are unsure what they need to do to reach their targets. Systems for tracking pupils' progress are not used consistently and do not result in intervention to ensure progress is rapid enough. Vulnerable pupils are identified and the school works in partnership with a range of agencies to provide sufficient support for them. Many parents speak highly of the care shown by the school. Support for pupils with learning difficulties varies in its effectiveness. It is particularly strong in developing pupils' confidence but in some cases the identification and support for pupils' learning difficulties is ineffective. The parent support advisor is having a significant impact through supporting children and their parents, although several parents believe that communication about their child's needs could be improved. The school works in partnership with outside agencies, including the Education Welfare Service, and has recently become more rigorous in the way it identifies poor attendance. However, as yet attendance levels have not improved. Pastoral support for children when they start school is satisfactory, as is the guidance they receive in preparation for the move to their next school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

This school has gone through a particularly difficult period since the last inspection, with significant changes to staffing and a move to new premises. During this time leaders and managers of the school have been unable to sustain a satisfactory quality of education for the pupils. A high proportion of their time last year was spent ensuring a smooth transition to the new building; this process is now complete. The building and classroom resources provide an outstanding environment to promote learning, although the school has limited opening hours available to extend its work. The appointment of a new headteacher has had a significant impact already, particularly in the ability of the school to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses realistically. He has already devised a sensible plan for improvement and recognises the urgent need for change. Staff share a feeling of optimism about the future and the local authority is trying hard to provide support necessary to bring about improvement. Governors now recognise that the school has significant weaknesses but are not in a position to be sufficiently rigorous in their work: they are too reliant upon the work of the head teacher and the local authority.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	4
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	4
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	4
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	3
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	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4

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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Throckley Primary School, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE15 9JN

Thank you for being so helpful when I visited the school recently with Mrs Greaves.

We were very impressed by how polite and helpful you were and we enjoyed talking to you very much. The school has a wonderful new building and the classrooms, equipment and playground are excellent. The school is a very caring place where bullying is rare. We also enjoyed meeting Mr Lofthouse and think he has some excellent plans to improve the school. We agree with him that there are some things that need to improve and we have written them in our report.

Your teachers work really hard but there are some things we think could improve and therefore we have decided that the school needs some special measures for improvement. Here are some of the main things that need to be done:

- The progress you make in some lessons could be much better and because of this you don't always reach the standards you should.
- As you told us, some parts of lessons are too easy and some are too hard. We want all the pupils in a class to be able to take part and make good progress.
- Some of you are not enjoying your lessons as much as you should and because of this you don't always behave in a sensible way or try as hard as you can. We hope that you will help your teachers improve this.
- Attendance at the school is below average and needs to improve if you are all going to make the progress you should.

The governors really care about the school and try to support it in everyway they can but we think they could get even more involved in helping Mr Lofthouse and the staff make improvements. Your parents sent us a lot of questionnaires and we read them with great interest. Quite a large number of parents said they would like more information about the school and to get more involved. I know Mr Lofthouse already has plans in place to try to make this happen.

We will be interested in watching what happens to the school over the next few months and hope, with your help, the school will get better and better. Some other inspectors will visit your school to see how well it is improving.

Wishing you all the best for the future,

Andrew Johnson HMI