

Thornhill Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109504
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	310008
Inspection dates	14–15 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Susan Aldridge

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	204
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Jones
Headteacher	Mrs Julia Lawson
Date of previous school inspection	10 November 2003
School address	Grove Road Houghton Regis Dunstable Bedfordshire LU5 5PE
Telephone number	01582863516
Fax number	01582863516

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Thornhill Lower is an average size school. Most children enter the school with knowledge and skills below or well below those expected for their age. Pupils are mainly of White British backgrounds. The proportion from minority ethnic groups is below average and very few speak English as an additional language. A higher proportion of pupils than average are eligible for free school meals. The percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has increased in recent years and is well above average. The school provides extended services in the form of care before and after the normal school day.

A new headteacher was appointed in January 2007.

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's effectiveness is satisfactory, which is how it sees itself. It provides a satisfactory quality of education and sound value for money. Parents are positive about what the school provides. Children get a good start to their education because the provision in the Nursery and Reception is good. Under the strong leadership of the headteacher, there has been a clear focus on raising standards in English and mathematics in Years 1 to 4. The staff have correctly identified what aspects of these subjects need to be improved and have taken beneficial action. Developments in organisation, staff training and support for pupils who find learning difficult have led to an acceleration in progress made by most pupils. Better uses of assessment have resulted in improved academic guidance for all groups of pupils and an increasing amount of good teaching, helping to boost progress. Nevertheless, teaching and learning remain satisfactory overall, owing to some weaknesses in Key Stage 1. Currently, standards in Years 2 and 4 are below average, although pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Standards are highest in reading and lowest in mathematics in Year 2, where they are well below average. Teaching in small groups is helping pupils to become more confident learners and they are steadily taking more responsibility for their achievement as they become familiar with using targets in English and mathematics.

Pupils' personal development and well-being is good because it is promoted effectively through the curriculum and good relationships that exist between staff and pupils. Pupils enjoy coming to school, where they feel safe. All the required checks are carried out to make sure that staff, volunteers and governors are suitable to work with children. However, the requirement to keep this information in a single central record is not fully met, as the existing record does not include all staff. Pastoral care is good and staff work constructively with parents and external agencies to assure pupils' well-being. Work on the importance of good attendance has reduced absences since the last inspection. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep healthy. They know well how to keep safe and behave well in lessons and around the school. Pupils make a good contribution to school life. They represent the school well in the local community and raise funds for charity. They develop their basic skills and ability to work with others satisfactorily so are adequately prepared for middle school.

All staff have played a part in securing improvements. However, not all subject leaders are equally effective in evaluating improvements and driving standards upward. As a result, leadership and management are satisfactory and the school has a satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Most children enter the Nursery with knowledge and skills below those usually found. Their emotional development and skills in communication, language and literacy are particularly low. Nevertheless, they make good progress and achieve well because of good teaching. In the Reception class, most are set to reach the nationally expected goals, except in communication, language and literacy, an area that many find difficult. Children enjoy learning and settle quickly with the help of very caring adults, who work well together and guide them sensitively. The quality of planning and the use of assessment are good. This means that children's needs are identified quickly and activities are adapted effectively to suit their abilities and understanding. The spacious indoor and outdoor areas are used extensively for educational play activities. The

provision is well led and managed by the Foundation Stage leader who has correctly identified the need to replace some outdated and worn resources.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English and mathematics, particularly in mathematics in Key Stage 1.
- Ensure that all staff with leadership roles contribute effectively to raising standards in their subjects.
- Ensure that teaching and learning are consistently good, particularly in Key Stage 1.
- Ensure that the school complies fully with current Government requirements for safeguarding.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Staff have worked hard to ensure that assessments of pupils' English and mathematics skills are accurate. They are now able to measure confidently the progress that pupils make. The most recent assessments show clearly that a higher proportion than previously are making good progress, although some slow progress remains in Key Stage 1, owing to weaknesses in teaching. Pupils in Year 4 are on track to achieve their challenging targets and the target for reading has already been exceeded. Standards are below average overall, although they are well below average in mathematics in Key Stage 1. Pupils who need extra help with their learning have suitable additional support and recent assessments show that those in Year 4 who are taught in a small group have made significant gains in knowledge.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They grow in self-confidence, form positive relationships with others and are developing a suitable knowledge of the world around them. The headteacher and staff recognise that they have more to do to promote pupils' understanding of cultural diversity, although pupils from different ethnic groups get along well together. Pupils behave well and understand the meaning of right and wrong. They say that they feel safe in school and that there is no bullying. They enjoy physical activities and eat healthily, often choosing healthy snacks and frequently taking part in daily exercises and physical education. Attendance is average and pupils exceeded the targets set for this aspect last year. Pupils make a good contribution to the school community. For example, the school council takes an active part in helping to improve the facilities. Pupils develop satisfactory skills for their future well-being and are keen to take on responsibilities as 'playground pals', for instance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The headteacher has agreed with staff what constitutes good teaching and most staff have responded well, changing their practice to reflect this. Improved arrangements for checking teachers' assessments of work have resulted in greater accuracy about the standards that pupils reach. Many teachers are using this information to plan suitable activities for pupils of different ages and abilities. However, a lack of challenge for higher attaining pupils remains a weakness in Key Stage 1 and insufficient progress is made in some lessons as a result. Teachers invariably

tell pupils what skills they expect them to develop during the lesson. This helps pupils to take on some of the responsibility for how well they have achieved, playing their part in checking progress for themselves. Most older pupils know the targets that have been set for them in English and mathematics. Staff manage pupils well and pupils work industriously in most lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides an appropriate range of activities, including the National Curriculum requirements, personal, social and health education and religious education. In Years 3 and 4, pupils learn Spanish. Staff are developing the use of themed approaches to learning and links between subjects in order to make learning more meaningful and enjoyable. Teaching about healthy lifestyles and personal safety enables pupils to develop a good understanding of these matters. Plenty of opportunities exist for pupils to take part in physical activities. The school provides a range of well attended extra-curricular clubs, including sporting and musical activities. Fundraising events further enhance learning and pupils particularly enjoy 'Grandparents' Day'. The school's clean, well-maintained accommodation provides pupils with plenty of room to take part in enrichment activities and projects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides good pastoral care for its pupils. Staff know the pupils and their families well. There are suitable arrangements for ensuring the health and welfare of its pupils. However, while the school carries out all the necessary checks on adults to safeguard pupils, it does not record these fully in its single central record. Pupils who require help with their learning are provided with effective support in lessons and in small groups led by teaching assistants. The school works well with outside agencies to provide specialist help for pupils with specific difficulties, such as speech and language therapy. Academic guidance, including target setting for pupils and marking, is developing well, although pupils are not all familiar with their personal targets. Assessment procedures have improved significantly since the previous inspection, thus enabling staff to measure accurately the progress made by pupils, and they intervene to support any who fall behind.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides a strong steer for the school and staff are right behind her in the drive to improve standards. Working together, they have identified the right priorities for the school. The headteacher ensures that staff with leadership roles have the time, skills and resources they need to secure improvements. Leadership roles are shared amongst staff and most contribute effectively, but this is not yet consistent across all subjects and both key stages. Several governors are new and three vacancies are yet to be filled. Between them governors have a range of skills pertinent to their roles, particularly in financial matters. They have successfully converted a surplus in the budget to a sensible contingency and supported the headteacher in settling into the school. They have reviewed the range of their work and rightly drawn up an action plan to extend their role in monitoring and evaluation.

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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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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?	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.

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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?	No
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

16 April 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thornhill Lower School, Houghton Regis, LU5 5PE

Thank you for making us welcome at your school. We enjoyed our visit. A special thanks to those of you who talked to us about school life and work.

We were pleased to hear that you all enjoy coming to school, that you feel safe there and that bullying is not a problem at your school. We noticed that you are well behaved. You also work hard in lessons and try your best. It was good to see you all getting on well together at playtime too. We could see that you are making healthy choices, such as eating healthy food, taking exercise and drinking lots of water. We also found out that you know well how to keep yourselves safe. Those of you that have special jobs, such as being playground pals, do them well and the school council is helping you all to have your say. Some of you also represent your school in competitions and you all welcome visitors to events like Grandparents' Day. You also help others by raising funds. You are improving your English and mathematics skills and learning to work with others and these will help you in the future.

We found that some of your lessons are good, but that in a few the teaching did not allow you to make enough progress. The staff are going to work on this and make sure that they help you to make good progress in all lessons. That way, your English and mathematics skills will improve more quickly and you will be better prepared for middle school. They are also going to make sure that all those who are responsible for subjects take a lead in improving them. You can help by attending school as often as you can, making sure you know your targets and continuing to work hard.

We wish you well in the future.

Mrs S Aldridge

Lead inspector