

# Thomas Harding Junior School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110305
<b>Local Authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	310254
<b>Inspection date</b>	12 November 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Wendy Simmons

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Junior
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	221
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Tim Flockhart
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Gladys Allen
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	28 February 2005
<b>School address</b>	Fullers Hill Chesham HP5 1LR
<b>Telephone number</b>	01494 782211
<b>Fax number</b>	01494 786098

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the school's overall effectiveness and investigated the following issues:

- how well the school uses additional ways to add value to pupils' learning
- how well pupils' personal development is enhanced
- how well information and communication technology (ICT) is used to support pupils' learning.

The inspector gained evidence from lessons and from the school's own evaluations of its work. Discussions were held with staff, pupils and a governor. A range of documentation was evaluated. Samples of pupils' work were scrutinised and the views of parents were gathered from questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

Thomas Harding Junior is an average sized school, situated close to Chesham town centre. Most pupils come from White British backgrounds, although over a quarter of pupils come from Asian backgrounds - often being of Pakistani heritage. A few pupils come from Black Caribbean and Black African heritages. A high proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language and often when pupils join the school they are still developing their fluency and skills in speaking and writing English. An average proportion of pupils receive free school meals. More pupils than is usual have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils' difficulties mostly relate to dyslexia, and moderate learning difficulties. The school has gained several awards including Quality Mark 3, Artsmark Gold and a BECTA award for ICT. The school has accreditation for being a Healthy School.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Thomas Harding Junior School is a happy, purposeful and outstanding school. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds thrive and achieve outstandingly well. Pupils do very well at this school because they benefit from an all-round education, a lively and exciting curriculum and very high-quality teaching and learning. Pupils' personal development is superb. Teachers want pupils to do as well as possible and pupils work hard and behave exceptionally well. There is a strong sense of teamwork and fun. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and they especially like the excellent range of extra activities, clubs and special events. As one put it, 'It's fantastic, you experience new things and teachers go over things if you don't understand them.'

Pupils' moral, social and cultural education is outstanding and their spiritual development is good. As a result, pupils show respect for each other, behave extremely well and are very polite. Pupils say that they love school, and this was confirmed by pupils' many very positive comments. As one said, 'Its really nice here, I have a big smile on my face when I come.'

When pupils join the school their skills are often lower than average. This is especially evident in writing and in their ability to express themselves with clarity. Often, although not always, pupils have had limited experiences outside the home. From this starting point, results show that pupils do better than average in national tests in English, mathematics and science. This level of performance has been maintained since 2006 and was especially impressive in 2007, when standards were exceptionally high. Almost all pupils gain the level expected for their age by the end of Year 6 (Level 4) and a high proportion reach the higher Level 5. The school often performs in the top 10% of schools nationally for helping pupils to make very good progress.

The school's success is a direct result of outstanding leadership. This comes from the very clear leadership of the headteacher and her leadership team. Teamwork is very good and enhanced by leaders' different and complementary skills and different ways of working. Governance is good. Leaders at all levels have very high expectations and understand how pupils learn to best effect. For example, they have excellent knowledge of the subjects that they teach. They ensure that very good links are made between subjects, which makes learning fun and meaningful to pupils. This is especially evident in the very impressive ICT work. For example, pupils make their own films and they are encouraged to learn and research things independently using the 'Virtual Learning Environment'. Staff are always keen to develop and share their skills, and the support for new teachers is excellent.

Leaders have a very good knowledge of what the school does well and where there are areas for development. This is because their monitoring and self-evaluation are very effective. Leaders are ambitious to improve standards even more and with this in mind, they are working on further improvements in pupils' writing. New initiatives are working very well but there is not yet enough time allocated to pupils to write in lessons, so that they can act on the excellent suggestions that staff make on how to edit and improve their work.

Parents have considerable confidence in the school. They note the hard work of staff. As one parent commented, 'The headteacher has the pupils' best interests at heart.' Governors also confirm this when saying, 'There is a commitment to the whole child.'

A few parents identified a greater need for the school to take note of their comments and ideas. Governors have taken notice of this and are working to strengthen further the partnership with parents, for example, by inviting their views at open evenings.

Leaders recognise that the school does not have extended services, such as a breakfast club. They are exploring how this might be resolved with the local authority, as several parents would value this. Despite this, the daily care of pupils is very good and enhanced by: excellent after school activities; high-quality support for all pupils, especially those learning English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; very good relationships; and effective promotion of health and safety.

The school promotes good community cohesion. This is especially evident in the way that parents have worked with pupils and governors to implement a new, environmentally friendly, local traffic calming initiative. Pupils are helped to explore different faith and cultural values, thus challenging any prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination or bias. Pupils discuss local, national and global issues. The many arts projects help pupils, parents and the community to work together, share their skills, enthusiasms and talents for the benefit of others. Pupils learn to play many instruments and are keen to take part in a very exciting range of dance activities. Pupils enthusiastically share their dance skills with the wider local community, which everyone enjoys.

Teaching and learning are very good, especially in English, mathematics, science and ICT, because the teachers are very knowledgeable and have high expectations for the pupils. They rigorously check pupils' progress and ensure that they receive help if they fall behind or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are very good opportunities for practical work and high-quality independent work in many subjects, especially in science, mathematics and ICT. Pupils are encouraged to work hard and share their ideas with others. Discussion work contributes much to pupils' writing and their understanding of new things. Teachers make effective use of resources to help pupils to learn in different ways; as a result, learning is meaningful to pupils. Lessons are challenging and thoroughly planned. For example, pupils are currently being helped to understand the film based on the book entitled 'The Pianist'. Within this, they are being helped to explore emotions and develop dialogue as part of their writing, while also gaining a greater understanding of life during the Second World War.

In addition to learning basic skills, pupils gain a real understanding of the world in which they live and they make an excellent contribution to the community. This was very evident in their artwork on 'Peace', which is now in Chesham Museum and through their exciting plans to sing at the O2 Arena. Their 'Fair Trade' projects are excellent and help them to understand the lives of others and simple economic principles. Moreover, they have great fun cooking with fair trade products. Pupils take part in regular local art exhibitions.

Pupils keenly take part in many sports and they do well in these, aided by their skills, teamwork and very enthusiastic cheerleading. Sport contributes much to pupils' outstanding enjoyment of school and their very good adoption of healthy lifestyles. In particular, the exciting orienteering activities, involve all pupils in the school in rigorous exercise, teamwork, problem-solving and, great fun! Pupils actively take on responsibilities and pupils and parents commented about the very good development of the school council. The school has a super club for survival skills, which contributes much to pupils' excellent understanding of how to be safe.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Build on the work already started to develop writing, so that pupils have better opportunities to respond to teachers' suggestions about how to edit and improve their work.

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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?	1
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

**Achievement and standards**

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

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<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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
The extent to which 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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1
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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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**

24 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thomas Harding Junior School, Chesham, HP5 1LR

You may remember that I came to your school recently. Thank you for being so friendly. I am writing to let you know what I found out.

You go to an outstanding school. You like your teachers, enjoy working hard and make excellent overall progress in learning new things. Your teachers teach you very well. As a result, you do very well in English, mathematics, science and ICT, so keep up your fantastic work! In addition, you do well in other subjects. There are many very exciting extra activities and clubs, which are very impressive. Well done to you as well for being such respectful, well-behaved and polite children. I especially like the way that you are developing an understanding about the world around you. This is very evident in your artwork on 'Peace', which is now in Chesham Museum. What a super idea to have a club for survival skills and I think your orienteering activities sound great fun. These things help you to be fit, healthy and safe. I was pleased to find out that you do so much music and dance. I especially like the way that you do a 'Fair Trade' project. I was sorry to have missed your art exhibition, although I was thrilled to see the pictures.

Congratulations for taking such an active and important part in the local traffic project, as this benefits the whole community. Sporting activities are very good and are helped by your very enthusiastic cheerleaders!

There is very little in your school that needs improving. This is because your headteacher and deputy headteacher and all of the other adults are always working very hard to make the school as good as possible. Your teachers want even more of you to get to a very high level in writing and I agree with them so I have asked them to:

- make sure that you have plenty of time to improve your writing once teachers have made their suggestions on how you could do this.

Good luck when you go to sing at the O2 Arena. Keep up your excellent health and fitness activities and well done to the school's councillors for their hard work.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Simmons

Lead Inspector