

Thelwall Community Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111168
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	310522
Inspection dates	9–10 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Gordon Alston

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	110
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Colin Daniels
Headteacher	Mrs J Scott
Date of previous school inspection	23 March 1998
School address	Pelham Road Thelwall Warrington Cheshire WA4 2HF
Telephone number	01925 267172
Fax number	01925 861757

Age group	5–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school lies in Thelwall, a residential area on the outskirts of Warrington. It also takes pupils from a wider area, although at present, the school population is falling. Most pupils live in surroundings with no significant signs of social or economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is below average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than that found in most schools. There are a small number of pupils from minority ethnic heritages. In 2007, the school gained the Healthy School award and Activemark award for sport.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'Thelwall is a really great school to come to every day, we love it,' chorused a group of pupils, reflecting the quality of this outstanding school. At its core is the leadership of a highly committed headteacher supported by a very conscientious staff. Her enthusiasm for 'the best we can possibly give the children' is infectious, as is her drive for learning to be enjoyable as well as successful. Pupils' personal development is exemplary and they thoroughly enjoy school; this is reflected in their excellent attendance. Parents are extremely pleased with the education provided. Their feelings are encapsulated in one parent's view, 'Thelwall offers everything you would want from a school, pupils are really well cared for and very well taught. They are achieving well and always happy.'

Overall, achievement in the school is excellent for all pupils, including those with learning difficulties. Children's skills on entry to the Reception year are at the nationally expected level for children of this age. Standards at the end of Year 2 are significantly above average but they are stronger in mathematics and reading, the subjects where boys achieve as highly as girls. The results of national tests have been impressive for several years. Nevertheless, the school is not complacent. This is evident, for example, in its drive to increase the number of pupils reaching the highest level expected of this age, particularly for boys in writing. The focus on improving standards has led the school consistently to exceed its challenging targets.

Teaching is of an exceptionally good quality, enabling pupils to attain high standards. The very good start made in the Foundation Stage is built on most effectively in Years 1 and 2. The exemplary way in which pupils behave and their extremely positive attitudes to learning, are a direct result of teachers' positive management and innovative teaching. Care for pupils is outstanding in providing for both their pastoral needs and their academic guidance. Pupils are encouraged to be independent and to play a full role in the school community. For example, they organise projects to raise money from instigation to completion, often including marketing and budget management. The skills learnt combine with the pupils' high academic skills to ensure they are extremely well prepared for the future.

Another factor contributing to the pupils' outstanding achievement is the stimulating curriculum. Its recent reorganisation has led to subjects being united under one theme, and approaches adapted to include special theme weeks with events linked to those themes. Parents and pupils appreciate the excellent range and quality of the extra-curricular activities provided for the pupils.

All leaders and managers play an excellent role in making this an outstanding school. Self-evaluation is rigorous and the school knows itself very well. Priorities are turned into actions that lead to improvement. Governors are very influential in the school. They have first-hand contact with teachers and pupils and, consequently, are very knowledgeable about what is happening in school. Improvement since the last inspection is very good because of the relentless drive to raise standards. The school is in an excellent position to improve even further and to continue to offer outstanding value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children settle very quickly into the warm and welcoming Foundation Stage. Parents are very happy about the start their children get. They make brisk progress and by the end of the

Reception year, many are working at levels that are in advance of those expected for their age in all areas of learning. Several factors contribute to this success, including very good teaching, an exciting and practical curriculum and a strong emphasis on helping the children to become effective and independent learners. Very good use is made of the outside areas and this is carefully planned into all sessions. Children's personal, social and emotional development is exceptionally good. They are very good at working together and maintain high levels of concentration. The provision is well managed ensuring the children's needs are well met. Staff regularly observe the children's progress and record their key successes, using this information successfully to plan the next activities. The end result is happy, confident children who are very well prepared for the next stage of their education because they have a secure grasp of early reading, writing and mathematics.

What the school should do to improve further

- There are no major areas for improvement. The school may wish to consider further strategies to improve boys' achievement in writing.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Children enter the school with skills at a level expected for their age and leave having achieved standards which are significantly above average. This represents outstanding achievement over time. For a number of years, progress during Key Stage 1 has been excellent, resulting in Year 2 pupils consistently achieving significantly above expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Results followed this pattern in 2007. Current standards at the end of Year 2 are significantly above average in all tested subjects but fewer boys reach the expected, or higher, levels in writing than in reading or mathematics. The school is aware of, and battling to address this with a number of initiatives such as more role play and writing across all subjects but these have yet to have a significant impact. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do equally as well as their peers due to very effective support from staff.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' confidence and self-esteem improve rapidly because all staff value them as individuals and listen to their ideas. They quickly develop very positive attitudes to learning because it is made so enjoyable. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils are very friendly towards each other and mix very well together, regardless of age or gender. Their ability to organise activities is a strength. For example, pupils used a variety of sources of evidence such as observations, books and internet sites to find out which minibeasts they had collected in the school grounds. Moreover, pupils have a very good knowledge of healthy eating and very successfully grow their own vegetables in the gardening club. Pupils quickly become confident enough to work independently, and rapidly learn to take turns and share resources. They remain very busy throughout lessons, persevering with tasks and responding positively to encouragement and praise. Excellent relationships, friendships and behaviour ensure school is a great place in which to learn.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve exceptionally well because the quality of teaching is consistently good or outstanding across the school. Teachers' very caring relationships with pupils generate very positive attitudes to learning. Their strong subject knowledge, conscientious planning and sensitive questioning ensure that pupils clearly understand tasks. Very good class management and stimulating environments contribute to pupils' enjoyment of learning. Teachers and classroom assistants work very well together to support pupils in their learning. Work is well matched to the needs of all pupils and pupils work hard to reach their targets. These are written in ways which pupils can understand and are regularly reviewed. Pupils record how well they feel they have achieved themselves in their target books at the end of lessons. Teachers check on pupils' progress regularly and use the information effectively to plan suitable work. The usefulness of written comments in marking is excellent and, consequently, pupils receive clear guidance on how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides a rich range of exciting experiences for pupils, starting from the youngest age groups onwards. An increasing focus on literacy and numeracy ensures there are very good links between subjects that promote basic skills very well. The curriculum exposes pupils to the real life experiences. It is greatly enriched with a focus on environmental issues and making an impact in the drive to live in an ecologically sustainable way, which makes learning relevant. Special projects, for example, in science, music and art, give all pupils much to enjoy and especially appeal to the most talented pupils. The curriculum makes a very good contribution to the fitness of pupils not only through physical education, but also through a very wide range of extra clubs and coaching opportunities. In addition there is a wide range of activities other than sports, for example, gardening and computer clubs, dance groups and a host of visitors and visits to inspire pupils. Indeed, Year 2 talk enthusiastically about their being 'away from home with their school' on their residential visit.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Parents are justified in highlighting this as one of the strongest aspects of the school's work. There are many tributes to the excellence of the sensitive and extremely effective support provided for vulnerable or disadvantaged pupils. Teachers are full of enthusiasm and offer much support to the pupils. 'My children have loved their time in school and have developed into individuals we are proud of,' is a typical comment made by parents. The school's arrangements for safeguarding and protecting pupils are fully in place. Systems are rigorous to ensure pupils' very good achievement and they are used effectively to highlight any potential underachievement and to initiate extra support where needed. The school has very successful strategies to try to ensure that all pupils attend regularly, and attendance is almost 97%. Excellent partnerships with outside agencies enhance the provision for pupils most in need of support or improve the provision for pupils with special gifts or talents.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide excellent leadership and set a very clear direction for the school. They maintain very high expectations for standards and the quality of provision ensuring that there is strength in its capacity to improve. All staff members, governors and parents share that vision and contribute fully to the school's continuing success. The school lies at the heart of its community. It is excellent at creating the context in which pupils at all levels are able to progress well, both academically and personally. The headteacher, very well supported by staff, has successfully steered the school since its last inspection and has firmly embedded and improved the good teaching, achievement and quality of care to create an outstanding school. Self-evaluation is rigorous and accurately assesses the school's performance. The school is understandably recognised by the parents as 'a fantastic place for children to be'. Governors understand the school's strengths very well and are equally clear about where the school can do better. They have a clear role in school self-evaluation, and rigorously hold the school to account for its performance.

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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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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	1
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?	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

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?	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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
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	1
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

After spending two days in your school, I want to thank you all so much for making the experience a very enjoyable one. Your excellent behaviour and relationships are a credit to you all.

Well, what did I think after my visit? I hope my report will help them feel all their hard work is worthwhile, because my judgement is that Thelwall is an outstanding school. One pupil said, 'It's a fantastic school - the teachers really make lessons fun and care about you.' Your school is a very caring place. You have a committed headteacher who leads your school very successfully and places your well-being at the centre of all that happens. All the staff make teaching really interesting and also make you work very hard. As a result, you are learning lots in lessons and reach really high standards for your age. They try to make school very enjoyable and exciting with the many visits you go on and lots of visitors to school. I was pleased to see how hard you work, but equally important is how well you all get on. I saw lots of pupils who have responsibilities and do them very well. I was also very pleased to see all the clubs you have. You take regular exercise and sport is important to you.

I'm sure your teachers often say, 'This is really good but you could make it even better if you.' Well, this is what I am suggesting to your school. To be even better, it needs to help more boys to do as well as they possibly can with their writing. The boys can help by really pushing themselves with their writing. I wonder if you can think of ways to get the boys to do even better.