

Thorley Hill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117230
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312538
Inspection dates	13–14 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Norma Ball

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	237
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Smith
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Pepper
Date of previous school inspection	20 January 2003
School address	Park Lane Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM23 3NH
Telephone number	01279 654496
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Thorley Hill is an average size primary school serving an urban area of above average prosperity, but the school receives pupils from a broader social range within the town. The number of free school meals is well below average. The number of pupils who come from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average. Only a very small number of pupils are bi-lingual and this is also below average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average, although the proportion with statements of special educational need is higher than found in most schools.

The headteacher has been in post since September 2006. Also on the site is one of Hertfordshire's Specific Learning Difficulties Bases serving a large number of local schools, and the headteacher has overall responsibility for this base. The school holds the Healthy Schools award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Thorley Hill is a happy, caring, inclusive school in which pupils thrive socially and academically. The vast majority of parents hold the school in high regard. One parent said, 'Thorley Hill is particularly good at building confidence in the children.' Another said, 'A great school with enthusiastic and committed staff.' The school judges itself as good and this was confirmed by the inspection.

Pupils reach good standards in their work which are now above average by the end of Year 6. Good teaching, a curriculum which meets their needs well and the good care and support they receive ensures pupils make good progress. Standards have fluctuated in recent years but have shown steady improvement as a result of a range of successful initiatives introduced by the new headteacher. Careful interpretation of assessment data to track the progress made by pupils and well structured support programmes to identify those who are underachieving is now well embedded in the school. Staff are increasingly confident in planning lessons which have clear learning intentions and are structured well to provide suitable challenge for pupils of different abilities.

Pupils enjoy school and feel secure. As a result of good pastoral work, they behave well and show kindness and respect to others. They have a clear understanding of how to stay healthy and the majority demonstrates good safety awareness. Pupils are enthusiastic to contribute to the school and local community, for example, regular visits from a local day care centre to the school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well so they gain confidence and value and respect the needs of others. Through their charity initiatives, hard work and attainment, and the rich experiences they gain in activities, they are well equipped for the next stage of their education.

All pupils receive good care, support and guidance, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Links with agencies underpin the good care provided in school. Pupils are well taught and enjoy lessons because they are well planned and involve them in interesting work. Pupils receive good academic guidance. This is especially so in English, where targets showing the next steps in their learning are used with great effect. However, the school's marking policy is clear but as yet not used consistently to identify clearly for pupils where and how their work can be improved. Targets to help improve progress in mathematics have just been introduced but are not yet effective in promoting higher attainment, especially for younger boys.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides leadership of a very high quality and has quickly established a culture of self-reflection and improvement in the school with a clear focus on teaching and learning. Prudent financial management underpins all areas of school improvement and so the school provides good value for money. Governors know the school well and offer effective support and challenge in equal measure. Issues identified in the last report have been addressed. The school is not complacent and has a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the school with a range of abilities but most are at the expected levels for their age. They make good progress in all areas of learning, particularly in the area of personal

development. This is because all staff care for children and encourage them to be independent and to take responsibility from an early age. Children settle quickly, follow carefully structured routines and develop confidence. Good links are established with parents so they are kept fully involved in their children's development. The quality of teaching and learning is good, and this ensures that children make good progress. Although activities are appropriate to meet children's learning needs, planning in the nursery does not always focus sufficiently carefully on providing opportunities to make full use of indoor and outdoor learning areas for all children. Good improvement has been made in the Foundation Stage since the last inspection, particularly in establishing a balance between teacher-directed activities and independent activities in the Reception class.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the use of assessment data in mathematics to set clear targets to help promote higher attainment especially for boys in Years 1 and 2.
- Improve the quality and consistency in marking by sharing existing good practice so all pupils understand how they can improve their work and make better progress.
- Improve planning in the Foundation Stage to ensure that the curriculum in the Nursery is structured so that both indoor and outdoor activities are consistently developed to extend learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress in their time in school and by the time they leave Year 6 they attain standards which are above the national average. Standards have fluctuated over the past five years but have improved because of a range of effective initiatives introduced by the new headteacher. A careful focus on phonics and writing has contributed to the raising of standards in English. The school has recently made improvement in mathematics a priority especially for younger boys. Overall girls' performance in mathematics is better than boys. At the end of Year 2, the standards attained in reading and writing are above average and average in mathematics. The impact of this work is not yet evident for younger boys, although inspection evidence indicates that the progress made by older boys in mathematics has improved. The school caters well for pupils who find learning difficult. They, including the higher than average proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need, make good progress because of the carefully structured support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and want to learn so the vast majority attend regularly and punctually. One pupil said, 'I like school very much because you learn more things in every single lesson.' The school is a happy and industrious place in which everyone is valued. Lunch and break times are enjoyable occasions and bullying and name calling are rare. Pupils have a very clear understanding of how to live a healthy life and be safe, although a few who get very involved in lively playground games forget to be aware of the needs of others around them. Pupils have a good understanding of other faiths and cultures and enthusiastically support a school in Uganda. Their views are valued and the work of the school council is greatly respected. A wide range of responsibilities are accepted with pride and older pupils undertake important roles,

such as acting as play leaders at lunch times very maturely. Their good social skills, love of learning and the progress they make mean they are very well prepared for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

There is a good learning atmosphere in all classes. Pupils relish discussions, respond to questions confidently and work with equal diligence in small groups or alone. Lessons are well planned with a variety of tasks so pupils remain involved in their work. Assessment information is used with increasing skill to monitor the progress pupils make, but remains an area for the school to improve. Learning support assistants are well trained and work in a strong partnership with teachers to support pupils who need additional help with their learning. The school is focusing with care on ensuring that more able pupils are challenged to do as well as they can. For example, the more able mathematicians in Year 6 have the opportunity to work with a secondary school teacher each week. Termly targets, are used well in English and make clear to pupils what the next steps in their learning are. Targets have only just been introduced in mathematics and are not yet fully effective in improving achievement, especially for boys in Years 1 and 2.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and balanced, and is carefully planned to ensure that coverage is appropriate, and that progression routes are clear. Good links are developing between subjects, adding to the interest in lessons. For example, in Year 3 pupils were linking geographical perspectives on the environment with sculptures inspired by Anthony Gormley. Although pupils' standards of information and communication technology are above average, links in this subject are not as well developed in others. The school is addressing this efficiently through the provision of new laptop computers and a wireless network to promote learning. Themed days and weeks are greatly enjoyed by pupils because they help their learning and provide lasting memories. A wide range of extra-curricular activities and prudent use of links with local schools and the Specific Learning Difficulties Base on the school site effectively extend the learning opportunities of pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff know pupils well and assign a very high priority to their care. Pupils feel confident that they can seek help when they need it and one said, 'You can ask for help and you are never ignored.' Procedures for child protection and pupils' safety are robust. Good levels of attendance are maintained by careful monitoring. Academic guidance is good. The school has a clear marking policy but marking is variable, especially in mathematics, because not all teachers identify carefully how pupils can improve their work. Pupils say that marking is important, not only to inform them how well they are doing but also how they can make better progress, because they want to do well. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language are quickly assessed and a range of effective support ensures they make good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides excellent leadership and within a short period has united all staff in a strong partnership with a shared commitment to improve standards and drive the school forward. She is ably assisted by the deputy head and together they form a strong partnership. Subject leaders are becoming increasingly skilled in directing improvement in their subject areas. A full evaluation of English, for example, has led to the speedy implementation of effective strategies which have promoted good improvements in pupils' achievement and standards in the subject. This process has now been extended to mathematics. The monitoring of performance is good and leads to clear targets for staff which are supported where necessary by training opportunities. Governors are committed and knowledgeable. A good committee structure supports the work of the governing body and governors are both champions of the school and demanding partners.

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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	2
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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	2
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	2

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	2
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

17 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thorley Hill Primary School, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM23 3NH

You may remember that two inspectors visited your school recently. We really enjoyed meeting you, your teachers and other people who work in the school. It was a very busy time for you all; especially those of you in Years 3 and 4 who were very busy rehearsing for your production of 'Splash!', but it gave us a chance to see the school at work and play.

Your school gives you a good standard of education. We identified many good things about your school, such as how well you behave and enjoy your lessons and the way adults look after and care for you. We also learnt that you like to help your school and some of you enjoy taking responsibilities, like being a school councillor or helping younger pupils. You know how to stay safe and healthy and enjoy taking lots of exercise. We also think that your headteacher leads your school extremely well.

Your teachers keep a good check on your progress, make your lessons interesting and help you to enjoy your learning. We have asked them to help you understand how to improve your work by marking it very carefully, so that you can see what you need to do to make it even better. We have also asked that they make sure that you have clear targets in mathematics to help you make better progress, especially those of you in Years 1 and 2. We have asked for better planning of the indoor and outdoor activities for the younger children in the Foundation Stage to help improve their learning.

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and being so friendly. We send you our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Norma Ball

Lead inspector