

Thorn Grove Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117277
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312553
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2008
Reporting inspector	David Herbert

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	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Melanie Blase
Headteacher	Mrs Yvonne Parker-Beeson
Date of previous school inspection	16 June 2003
School address	Thorn Grove Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM23 5LD
Telephone number	01279 653002
Fax number	01279 506078

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Thorn Grove Primary is an average sized primary school serving children from both the immediate area and across Bishop's Stortford. A few pupils come from further away in Hertfordshire and Essex. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. A below-average number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. A quarter of these pupils are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who have a statement of special educational need is below average. Attainment on entry to the Nursery class is broadly average, though is often below average in speaking and listening skills.

The school won the Healthy Schools award in 2007

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Thorn Grove School is a vibrant learning community, where pupils make good progress attaining above average standards. One parent said 'staff encourage each child to feel good about themselves'. Emphasis on building self-esteem is a strength in the school and leads to the pupils' good personal development. They thrive on the positive relationships with other pupils and all adults. Pupils enjoy school, are relaxed and self-disciplined, so their behaviour is exemplary. The school is effective, provides good value for money, and prepares pupils well for the future.

This success is due to good teaching, based on detailed planning and close emphasis on learning priorities. Children start at the school with broadly average attainment, though it is often below average in speaking and listening. The successful emphasis on developing language skills helps them make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes. Good and sometimes outstanding teaching continues this emphasis through Years 1 and 2, giving pupils the language they need to build their writing skills. Because of this, they reach standards that are slightly above average in mathematics at the end of Year 2, and exceptionally high in reading and writing. Good teaching in Years 3 - 6 enables pupils to make good progress and reach standards that are above average. In mathematics, pupils sometimes reach exceptional levels of attainment by the time they leave the school. Pupils with a learning difficulty or disability make good progress as teachers and teaching assistants understand their needs well, and support them effectively. There is appropriate challenge for higher attaining pupils, though the breadth of opportunity for them to use all of their skills is not fully developed.

There is good care, guidance and support for all pupils. Since the last inspection, the school has worked very effectively to provide support for pupils in understanding their next learning steps. Teachers make sure pupils know the 'success criteria' for pieces of work. Increasing use is made of 'talking' and 'response partners' so pupils can discuss their work and evaluate each other's ideas. Marking and assessment are of a high quality throughout the school. The curriculum is good. Literacy and numeracy are central and teachers take opportunities to reinforce this learning throughout the school day. There are many opportunities for pupils to engage in creative activities and teachers make good cross-curricular links. As a result, pupils make good progress in their work and often, very good progress in their personal development. The school has accurately identified the potential to maximise the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance learning further.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and senior leaders have a very precise understanding of the strengths in the school and accurately identify clear priorities for further improvement. Practical and effective improvement strategies are used where they are needed. This includes providing opportunities for teachers to work together as well as introducing specific strategies to address particular issues, like developing writing skills. Successful developments since the last inspection, such as the provision for pupils with English as an additional language, demonstrate that there is good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children settle quickly because of the effective arrangements to help them and their families make a smooth transition to school. Good support from all staff ensures that everyone feels

valued and secure. Close monitoring of children identifies their particular needs so that teachers can plan well-targeted activities. As a result, children quickly develop their confidence, mix socially, work together well and make good progress. There is a good range of adult-led and child-initiated activities during each day, using stimulating indoor and outdoor areas. The headteacher supports the leadership of the Foundation Stage effectively.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the use of information and communication technology to enhance learning.
- Make more opportunities for higher attaining pupils to use their skills creatively across the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make good progress and attain well in the Foundation Stage due to the lively classroom environments and the good focus on building core skills. This continues in Years 1 and 2, where the development of speaking stimulates high quality thinking, and helps pupils write imaginatively. As a result, standards at the end of Year 2 are above average, and attainment in reading and writing is exceptionally high. Although test results fell in 2007 in Year 6, that cohort of pupils had a higher than average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and a high percentage that joined the school during Years 3 to 6. Nevertheless, the vast majority made good progress from their starting points. Attainment in the current Year 6 is above average and pupils are on track to achieve their challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Behaviour is exemplary at all times. Pupils have extremely good attitudes to work and hold their teachers in high regard. They demonstrate excitement and enthusiasm, yet at the same time listen attentively when asked. Pupils feel safe and really enjoy their lessons and activities. Relationships are excellent throughout and the level of care they demonstrate for each other is striking. The active School Council has a very good understanding of the school's policies. They believe that all pupils will take action to prevent occasional bullying and refer the matter to staff if necessary.

Although the overall level of attendance is satisfactory, the school has good systems to encourage individual pupils to attend well. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. They eat well at lunchtime and fruit and water are readily available to them. The School Council has a real voice in the development of the school, taking an active role in fundraising events, both for the school and for charity. All pupils are able to express their views through the regular pupil questionnaires. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Since the last inspection, the school has worked successfully to promote multicultural learning and to meet the needs of pupils for whom English is an additional language. Better resources and targeted teaching strategies now lead to good progress by these pupils.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are consistently good. Well-planned lessons extend groups of pupils by setting them different levels of activity. There is a lively sense of engagement in lessons. Clear lesson objectives tell pupils what is expected of them, and they rise to the challenge confidently. Teaching is stimulating and often creative, effectively linking learning across different subjects. As a result, pupils enjoy their lessons and strive to succeed. They work very well both independently and collaboratively with partners or in small groups. Exciting projects involve pupils in using computers, but they do not have sufficient opportunities to practise their skills in class. Teaching assistants provide high quality support, questioning pupils well in small group work and guiding pupils with individual needs. This leads to a calm and purposeful climate in lessons, where pupils take responsibility for themselves and apply themselves well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum successfully focuses on smooth transitions between years, the enrichment of cross-curricular work and the development language skills. This has a positive impact on pupils' learning and progress. Very good use is made of residential visits and day trips to enhance learning. The school makes good opportunities to make learning active, as in creating an outdoor theatre space. Whilst the school provides good support for its higher attaining pupils, it does not yet make use of its very effective academic guidance systems to broaden their learning opportunities to the full. This limits the development of these pupils' wider organisational and creative skills across the curriculum. Work is in progress to develop the use of ICT further but detailed implementation plans are not yet in place.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good pastoral care permeates all relationships and supports pupils' personal development well. The parent and toddler group is having a positive impact in enabling parents to help their children make a good start at school. It is also very effectively supporting pupils whose first language is not English. Safeguarding procedures are fully in place.

Academic guidance is good, leading to good progress. There are very effective systems to track and monitor pupils' progress, particularly for those with special educational needs or for whom English is an additional language. 'Waves' of extra support target different levels of pupils' needs. These systems are not yet used to target the highest attaining pupils. In Year 1, pupils know that they are aiming to make their writing 'different' and 'amazing'.

In older classes, specific 'success criteria' in each lesson guide pupils' ambitions. They often assess their own work against these expectations, indicating to their teachers how confident they are with new skills. Teachers then mark work constructively, giving praise and helpful suggestions about pupils' next learning steps.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Senior leaders model very strong practice in the classroom, demonstrating the qualities and improvements that the school is seeking. This guides the induction and development of other staff effectively. Good leadership by the headteacher, assisted by an able deputy, makes for a dynamic partnership. Self-evaluation is detailed and accurate, leading to the identification of clear priorities. The impact of development work is always analysed so that the school can plan its next steps. The school has identified the need to use ICT capabilities to enhance learning further but detailed development plans are not yet finalised. Teachers work well together and are enthusiastic about the further developments they lead. Governors are well informed and closely involved in the school. They ask appropriate questions to hold school leaders to account whilst remaining supportive and check the success of plans. There is no sense of complacency from leaders or governors. Challenging targets consistently drive ambitions at lesson, class and school levels.

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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	1
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

7 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thorn Grove Primary School, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 5LD.

In assembly, you sang: 'When it's a sunny day it puts a smile on your face'. Thank you for putting a huge smile on our faces when you showed Mrs Stopher and I all of the good work that you do in Thorn Grove School. We were pleased to see that you behave excellently and enjoy being together. This means your teachers can get on with helping you to learn. We think that your teachers make lessons challenging and interesting. We like the way that you use your success criteria in lessons and how you think about what you have learned at the end of the lesson. When you talk together with partners and in groups, it helps you share ideas and learn well. We can see that you work hard and make good progress.

You use the computers well and we saw some exciting work going on with them. The headteacher and your teachers are planning to give you more opportunities to use the computers and other technology in your work. We think this is a good idea. We have also asked them to give you new challenges so that you can find more ways to use all your different skills together.

We think that you grow into thoughtful and polite young people. You told us that you like all the different activities that you do in school, and that you like looking after each other.

All the staff and governors are working hard to make your school even better. With your hard work and help, we think that you can achieve this together. Thank you again for helping us find out about Thorn Grove Primary School. Keep on doing your very best and keep enjoying your time at the school.

David Herbert

Lead inspector